

# Examiners' Report Summer 2009

GCSE

## GCSE English (1204)



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## GCSE English: 1204 1A

Training and Advisory visits took place mainly during the autumn term. There was a lot of very positive feedback from these; many teachers commented on how helpful they were in helping them apply the marking criteria and thus establish accurate levels of assessment, and, also, how effective the tasks themselves were. Moderation visits, which have to occur after the marks have been submitted and focus on actual candidates, were both more difficult to arrange and more formal in nature, but moderators reported that there were relatively few problems with these and that, in the main, they were well received. There were a few exceptions. It should be noted that any centre, entering any number of candidates, may be subject to a moderation visit.

Teacher assessment during the visits was usually accurate and closely referenced to the marking grids, with an overall tendency to stringency at the top end of attainment range and leniency at the bottom. However, centres, entering relatively few candidates, often within a narrow range or with special difficulties, sometimes found it difficult to pitch marks at the correct level. Candidates in one centre were not helped by the fact that they had not undertaken any speaking and listening work during Year 11 and thus found it difficult to adapt back to its demands. It would be wise for teachers to incorporate an element of speaking and listening in all activities throughout the GCSE course. Moderators noted that some centres were making quite strenuous efforts to encourage their students in the use of Standard English in formal contexts.

Most centres welcomed the fact that visiting moderators brought activities with them. These were mainly well trialled small group discussion tasks, which involve a considerable degree of spontaneous speaking and listening. These work well throughout the range; it is not uncommon for very able candidates to fulfil the A\* band descriptors within a 15 minute group discussion. Centres often express surprise at how positively and capably their candidates respond to this kind of task. Centres should consider incorporating more opportunities for spontaneous talk in their work schemes. The dangers of over prepared speaking and listening work are similar to those of scaffolded coursework; it can limit the attainment of the best candidates, who are constrained by a script, and can also impair the work of less successful candidates who rely on prepared material which they do not fully understand.

The quality of record keeping continues to improve. On the visits, most centres presented detailed departmental records, some of which were impressive in scope. There was abundant evidence of internal moderation and, also, fewer examples of incomplete records. Overall, the records indicated that centres relied on a varied range of tried and trusted activities, which fulfilled the specification requirements and addressed the assessment objectives.

Overall there was a pleasing sense that candidates were growing in confidence and competence in this component, and that teachers were managing it very effectively indeed.



## GCSE English: 1204 1B

Candidates had again been well prepared for this component, engaging successfully, in the reading units, with a wide range of challenging texts and tasks and, in the writing unit, demonstrating a variety of writing styles within the assignment choices.

The quality of teacher assessment remained high and the vast majority was within an acceptable level of tolerance. Most individual units, and sometimes the top sheets of folders, were copiously annotated by teachers, with references to the marking criteria. In many cases there was evidence of a thorough internal moderation process.

Task setting posed few problems. Most tasks addressed both the specification requirements and the assessment objectives. The best phrased topics allow candidates to engage with them at an individual level and to demonstrate attainment throughout the marking grids. There were some concerns. The "one task fits all" approach limited candidates at both ends of the ability range. Some reading tasks (for instance character studies) were more suited to literature and failed to allow students to address the assessment objectives for English. There were doubts too about reading tasks which did not allow candidates to show their study of whole texts. Empathetic tasks should not be used for the reading units as these cannot be squared with the assessment objectives.

Most centre administration was very good and posed few problems. The most common complaint from moderators was about the occasional centre's failure to submit Coursework Authentication Sheets for each candidate in the sample or to include the folders of the centre's weakest and strongest candidates in addition to the requested sample.

But these reservations fall beside the positive achievements of coursework, especially the high quality of the work submitted by the majority of candidates. Moderator Reports are full of references to good practice and impressive candidate performance. The overall quality of personal writing was high and the level of engagement with reading texts, including perennial favourites like 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Romeo and Juliet', was impressive.

### 1B (Written Coursework)

#### Personal and Imaginative Unit

It is difficult to do justice to the full range of writing submitted for this unit and some of the best units were superbly crafted. The overall standard of writing was good; most work was structured and expressed carefully with appropriate attention paid to technical and grammatical accuracy. There was plenty of evidence of a wide and appropriate range of imaginative and reflective writing, with crafting for deliberate effect and for specific audiences. The writing unit was often the best piece in the folder and thus lifted the overall score of the folder. Overall the best responses were those which derived from personal experience; candidates obviously enjoyed the personal engagement involved in this kind of writing and there were some excellent, moving autobiographical units, often based on life changing moments; in this genre, the "Day in the Life..." format still produces good work, throughout the range, allowing candidates to use voice and tone in individual ways. There was also considerable variety in the narrative approaches, the least successful probably being those which re-hashed the plots of Hollywood blockbusters; 'The Assassin' units also looked rather tired.

### **1203 Different Cultures and Traditions**

Most responses were again based on a relatively few texts: 'Of Mice and Men' (focused mainly on the theme of loneliness or the American Dream), 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and short stories from the Edexcel Anthology. Most titles were phrased in a way which allowed candidates to write about the text's cultural background and to explore the writer's use of language, but some were narrower in scope and seemed to be essentially literature tasks. Short stories (typically being linked with the theme of racism or gender) worked well for less successful candidates but there was a tendency to paraphrase or narrate rather than analyse.

### **1204 Media Texts**

In general the units submitted for this unit were high in standard. A range of film, newspaper and television texts was used, and typical tasks included comparative studies of broadsheet and tabloid coverage of the same story; detailed comparative analysis of television and press advertisements; individually directed studies, for instance into the portrayal of students in the media, and of prisoners in films; a comparison of the presentation of ethnic characters in television soaps, and so on. The most successful centres had taught candidates how to write analytically about the techniques of their chosen medium and to choose their own examples, producing fresh and often insightful writing.

### **Shakespeare**

Most centres used 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet' as the basis for studies and there were some detailed and engaged responses. At the lower ends of the attainment scale the focus was mainly on film, with sometimes scant reference to the text, and studies of individual scenes, but there were also some good units on these plays, demonstrating detailed analysis of language with attention to stagecraft and to the play as a whole. At the upper end of the attainment range candidates offered original ideas and interpretations. At this level the selection of texts was very wide and included 'The Taming of the Shrew', 'Othello', 'The Tempest' and 'Hamlet.' Task setting at this level was often excellent (for instance asking students to consider Hamlet's relationships with women, bearing in mind the cultural context of the time, or to consider whether a text (for example 'The Merchant of Venice') was still relevant for modern audiences and allowed candidates to access the higher bands of the assessment criteria. The weakest task setting included the setting of a single scene for commentary without allowing candidates to comment on the whole text - as the specification requires. Occasionally centres used inappropriate empathetic tasks, which are incompatible with the assessment objectives.



### *Introduction*

The papers again offered an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected, with a number of impressive scripts that showed a high quality of engagement. At the lower end of attainment the tendency to cover only one poem when two are required continues to be a feature of some candidates' responses, although this has been mentioned regularly in Examiners' Reports. On occasion, candidates' responses to the Reading questions again gave the impression of being somewhat unprepared, especially on Question 7. However, it was pleasing to note some outstandingly good responses on this question. There were still some instances where candidates covered only one 'Different Cultures' short story.

Both on poetry and prose, candidates showed themselves willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers. The extent to which they did so successfully was a key determinant of their overall success. Many candidates supported their comments by quoting textual evidence, producing responses which were at best well-focused as well as full of insight. As was stated last year, there is still a need in some cases to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'). Examiners note that there are candidates who have learned a number of technical terms and are often able to give appropriate examples, but that they do not always look for how observing such an effect contributes to their understanding and appreciation of the text or how such examples are relevant to the question set.

Examiners' reports again comment on the positive candidate responses to the Writing question set, with candidates often revealing subtle and varied writing skills.

Again it is worth repeating some general comment from previous reports, since examiners referred frequently to the same issues. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- In Section A, candidates should appreciate that their response should be equally balanced between two poems, whether the second is named or is one of their own choosing. A simple plan covering both poems, is a good way of ensuring that they do not simply forget that they are asked to write on two poems, as sometimes seems to happen.
- There remains widespread confusion over the difference between poems, plays and stories, with candidates frequently mixing the terms appropriate to each genre, such as 'stanza' and 'paragraph' and 'poem' or 'play' for 'prose'.
- Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black ink.
- The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is stressed annually. Some candidates have acquired the skill of leaving sufficient time to look over their writing and make improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all.

## Paper 2F

### Section A (reading)

#### Question 1:

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. Many candidates, however, wrote on 'Where the Scattering Began' (Q1) in a way which demonstrated limited grasp of the context of the characters. Candidates often showed a reasonably sound grasp of the poems' content, but where they failed to offer comment on the poets' language they performed less successfully, with this aspect of the response proving, again, a critical discriminator. In the questions where a second poem had to be selected by the candidate to go with the named poem, the quality of responses depended to a considerable extent on the ability to make a sensible choice that could be justified clearly in relation to the specific demands of the question. Mostly, candidates chose appropriately, for example 'Hide and Seek' made a good pairing for Q2 and 'Warning' did so for Q4.

It was again noticeable that the relatively small proportion of entries on the *Nature* poems were often of very good quality, and showed that the powerful language and imagery in these poems could elicit a strong and personal response.

#### Question 1

This question discriminated well, with weaker candidates showing a poor grasp of the situation, especially in 'Where the Scattering Began' - some thinking that the author was frightened of the strange people of foreign origin. The better responses dealt well with contrasts between the writers' heritage and their experience of life in the UK. In general, 'Wherever I Hang' was tackled better than 'Where the Scattering Began' and some picked up on the fact that just because the country left was sunny it was not without drawbacks - especially, the presence of rats. Language analysis often consisted simply of picking up on 'foreign' words. A few thought that 'Wherever I Hang' was written by a small child ('me people, me land, me home'), rather than recognising that the language was an interpretation of a Caribbean way of speaking.

### Section B (writing)

#### Question 2

There was a good range of responses, with the stronger responses dealing well with the importance of time in the two poems written about and selecting relevant language examples, especially the personification of the clock and the 'compound' words in 'Half-past Two': " 'Gettinguptime', 'Timeyouwereofftime' and 'tvtime' suggest that the child... can only tell the time when an action occurs... When these things don't happen the child was lost." Most responses chose 'Hide and Seek' for the second poem, because of its strong focus on 'time'. There was some imbalance in a number of responses, with candidates at times dwelling mainly on 'Half-past Two'; however, where they wrote at length, they sometimes offered excellent analysis for this level. Other poems selected also included the element of time passing, but in some cases this was not brought out fully enough.

### Question 3

This question also differentiated strongly, depending particularly on how well candidates understood the nature of the decision-making in 'An Unknown Girl' - whether that of having her hands hennaed or her resolve to maintain a contact with her roots. Many candidates found this difficult, some thinking that it was a love poem, with the writer yearning for the girl. The extended metaphor in 'A Road Not Taken' was mostly grasped, with some candidates commenting interestingly on how the poet felt about the choice he made, including different interpretations of the 'sigh', and how things would have been different had he made the other choice.

### Question 4

In response to Question 4, the choice of second poem was usually a suitable one (most often 'Warning'), but occasionally a less well-chosen poem made it difficult for candidates to develop a response on strength of character. Among less successful candidates, there was a tendency to over-reach the evidence and therefore produce somewhat speculative comments. The brevity of 'I Shall Paint My Nails Red' was perhaps one reason why candidates indulged in speculation about the woman's age, state of mind or health. On 'Warning', a few thought the author was already an old woman, which hindered their understanding. There were a number of thoughtful responses for this level, with candidates able to work systematically through the text of 'I Shall Paint My Nails Red' and comment relevantly on each line: one candidate wrote that being a 'survivor' "... gets the readers thinking she is unstoppable"; another commented on the use of 'because' at the start of every line: "It is used to show excitement".

### Question 5

This question received responses of variable quality, from a limited number of candidates. The more successful responses were sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of the stag in 'The Stag', as was the candidate who wrote: "How terrible that the animal [stag] was chased till he 'dropped into strange country', was lost from his own surroundings to be hunted by 'blue horsemen who 'pulled aside the camouflage of their terrible planet'". Many also understood the childish lexis and excitement of 'Iguana Memory': 'like big big lizard'. Better responses picked out examples of emotive language to support their interpretation. The length of the former poem was both a barrier for some and an opportunity for more detailed comment for others.

### Question 6

There were relatively few responses, but the question offered good scope to candidates who understood the two chosen poems well, and the evocative language of 'The Storm' in particular enabled the more successful candidates to show how the writer achieved his effects. For example, one candidate wrote "The writer makes you aware of people's feelings of helplessness because you can't control the storm, you can only wait and hope that it goes away." This poem was coupled with a variety of others, usually with reasonable success.

### Section B, Question 7

Question 7 had some responses which were limited as well as others which were well-developed and showed a sound grasp of the situations and characters of the two mothers, giving appropriate examples to support points made. Some candidates did little more than retell the story, commenting on the women's characters almost by accident.

Most candidates were able to show at least a basic grasp of the situations and characters. The better candidates picked out that the two women were motivated by their strong beliefs. They sometimes explored the apparent contradictions between Ines the devoted mother and respected, kindly, eminent citizen and the cold-blooded revenge killer she became (one wrote “but this is a genuine act of revenge for her son who she loved dearly”), as well as considering the cultural imperatives to which both she and Manak’s mother were responding. Some candidates commented on how cold and unfeeling Manak’s mother is: “the only thing she cares about is getting a grandchild”.

### **Section C**

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): weaker candidates often failed to communicate in well-constructed, comprehensible and accurate English, as well as tending to write only briefly and with few ideas. Both tasks elicited a range of responses from the thoughtful and developed to the cursory and staccato.

#### **Question 8**

Question 8 was a question where candidates varied in their capacity to give explanatory reasons for the chosen jobs. Better responses, however, were marked by clear evidence that candidates had thought seriously about the sort of work which was suited to their ability and temperament: one candidate wrote, on working with young children: “Children are the future to this world and you have to embrace that”. However, some responses were often unrealistic or unsupported, providing just one or two sentences based on the bullet points in the question.

#### **Question 9**

Question 9 discriminated sharply: responses falling short of the criteria required for the higher marks often did little beyond listing the bullet points, perhaps with a simple supporting statement; the stronger responses, however, elaborated their ideas effectively and in particular were able to look at both the advantages of money and its dangers and limitations. The best responses were those which had a clear register for a talk to the class and a sense of purpose. For example, one candidate started with: “What does money mean to you? Is it a way of fairness and survival? Or a way to ultimate happiness? Or just some paper and metal? It is potentially all of them.”

Common weaknesses in candidates’ writing remain: poor structure and inadequate paragraphing; lack of clearly written and punctuated sentences; frequent errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and ‘phonetic’ spelling. It is still the case that careful attention to editing would improve the technical accuracy of candidates’ work and, with 8 of the 25 allotted marks going to Assessment Objective iii (a third of the marks), this is an important consideration.

## GCSE English: 1204 3F

The weakest part of most answers, particularly in the Foundation Tier, was the comment on the bullet point relating to the writer's use of language, which addresses a key assessment objective. Many candidates spent too much time on the other bullet points, compounding the problem by summarising or describing content rather than analysing the way it was presented.

Candidates in both tiers recognise differing purposes and audiences for writing and the vast majority try to address these in their choices of words and sentence structures. Some candidates, however, are much less careful in the correctness and precision of their expression. This kind of laxity typically characterises the work of mid range candidates, particularly in terms of orthographical errors; the random use and misuse of capital letters was also noticeable.

### Paper 3F

#### Section A (reading)

##### Question 1:

The passage was accessible to candidates and most seemed to engage with it; one commented *"I enjoyed reading the story and I was very amused at the same time."* Candidates also empathised with both the children and the managers and understood why they behaved as they did. They were less good at conveying what made the passage amusing, and the comments on language (often implicit) were the weakest aspect of responses. At the lowest level of attainment candidates responded personally, typically expressing shock at the behaviour of 1950s children and adding that it would never happen now. Moving up the scale of attainment were those who showed some understanding by summarising or paraphrasing the passage or describing what happened. More successful candidates addressed each bullet point and made an appropriate comment on it, with textual support. The strongest answers attempted to address the question and to comment on the writer's use of language for comic effect; the best comments were on the use of exaggerated language (some candidates used the word *hyperbole*), the image of "swarms" of children, the cartoon like presentation of the managers, and the mock scientific descriptions of pea shooters.

#### Section B (writing)

##### Question 2:

This was the most popular question in the section. The situation was one that candidates accepted, or had experienced, and the idea of a letter to the manager did not seem inappropriate to them. Most showed a grasp of appropriate form, but it was odd that some started their letter with *Dear Sir* when the question specifically indicated a female manager. The strongest responses put an emphasis on structure and clear paragraphing and also on linking arguments effectively; some candidates also incorporated ideas and evidence from the passage to good effect. Some used quotations, with mixed success, in a style more suited to a news report. More thoughtful responses included topical points, for instance that it made little financial sense to impose a ban in a recession. The use of an appropriate tone and register was a key discriminator. Weaker answers were often very colloquially expressed, almost as if they were speaking on the phone to the manager (*"There kids what do you expect..."*), and were sometimes abusive and threatening;

stronger letters acknowledged that the manager had a point. It was interesting to note that a significant number of candidates supported the ban.

**Question 3:**

This was a less popular question, but it produced some thoughtful responses mainly from candidates at the higher end of the ability range. It allowed candidates to draw on their own experience and this was reflected in generally clearly focused and structured responses which offered sound advice, with sensible comments on topics such as communication and trust. Answers were often detailed and developed and expressed in an appropriate style and register.

**Section C (writing)**

The two questions in this section were equally popular.

**Question 4:**

This question produced answers of significant quality at this level. It clearly tapped into a subject that candidates were both interested in and knowledgeable about. The most successful responses were thoughtful, balanced and developed. Most candidates also structured their responses with some care and provided evidence from their own experience for their ideas. Weaker answers tended to be those which adhered very closely to the bullet points, so that they read like a list of independent, if generally relevant, notes, rather than a clearly developed commentary. At the lowest level candidates simply expressed a personal opinion on the subject with no attempt at objective evaluation of the pros and cons.

**Question 5:**

This again was a question which was well within the experience of candidates and produced lengthy, developed answers. The weakest answers depended heavily on poorly structured personal narratives with very little analysis; more successful answers recounted the events.

## Introduction

The papers again offered an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected, with a number of impressive scripts that showed a high quality of engagement. At the lower end of attainment the tendency to cover only one poem when two are required continues to be a feature of some candidates' responses. On occasion, candidates' responses to the Reading questions again gave the impression of being somewhat unprepared, especially on Question 7. However, it was pleasing to note some outstandingly good responses on this question. There were still some instances where candidates covered only one 'Different Cultures' short story.

Both on poetry and prose, candidates showed themselves willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers. The extent to which they did so successfully was a key determinant of their overall success. Many candidates supported their comments by quoting textual evidence, producing responses which were at best well-focused as well as full of insight. As was stated last year, there is still a need in some cases to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'), a practice which has been commented on before in these reports. Examiners note that there are candidates who have learned a number of technical terms and are often able to give appropriate examples, but that they do not always look for how observing such an effect contributes to their understanding and appreciation of the text or how such examples are relevant to the question set.

Examiners' reports again comment on the positive response to the Writing tasks set, with candidates often revealing subtle and varied writing skills. One commented that it was "a real pleasure to mark" many of the responses.

It is worth repeating some general comment from previous reports, since examiners referred frequently to the same issues. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- In Section A, candidates should appreciate that their response should be equally balanced between two poems, whether the second is named or is one of their own choosing. A simple plan covering both poems, is a good way of ensuring that they do not simply forget that they are asked to write on two poems, as sometimes seems to happen.
- There remains widespread confusion over the difference between poems, plays and stories, with candidates frequently mixing the terms appropriate to each genre, such as 'stanza' and 'paragraph' and 'poem' or 'play' for 'prose'.
- Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, preferably, or blue ink.
- The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is stressed annually. Some candidates have acquired the skill of leaving sufficient time to look over their writing and make improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all.

## Paper 4H

All questions discriminated well, and contained responses covering the full target range of grades (as well as some which fell outside that range).

### Section A

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. All questions elicited some exceptional answers, in which candidates revealed a level of understanding and interpretation of outstanding quality, with detailed analysis of language effects and sometimes employing (with apt examples) technical language such as asyndeton and metonymy. Such maturity of response contrasted with other responses where the grasp of meaning was insecure.

In general, responses conformed to patterns established in previous years. This section again produced much excellent writing, with many candidates responding maturely to the poems and engaging thoughtfully with the texts. The sensitivity of their interpretation was often impressive. Many made a very good attempt to show how the poets' use of language enhanced the meaning of the poems. Even less strong candidates were usually able to pick out some poetic devices, such as alliteration, and offer examples. This suggested that teaching has often been successful in encouraging such comment. Examiners once again noted that candidates were generally capable of an individual response, geared towards the demand of the question – although some answers plainly demonstrated the effects of strong teaching which could on occasion seem over-directive.

### Question 1

Question 1 discriminated well, since less successful candidates showed a lack of full grasp of the poem 'Where the Scattering Began'. There were also some unsubstantiated comments on 'Lucozade', whereas the better responses dealt well with feelings and concerns, both of the sixteen-year old child of a sick mother and of the narrator of 'Where the Scattering Began'. Less successful candidates tended to offer a general criticism of 'Lucozade' or focused on the mother rather than the daughter, giving little of the daughter's feelings apart from the fact that she was scared that her mother was going to die. However, one candidate wrote: "The simplicity of the language makes the child seem more vulnerable". On 'Where the Scattering Began' several scripts included a brief history of the slave trade and how the ancestors of the people in the poem had been brought to London against their will, rather than commenting directly on the language and effects within the poem. There were relatively few excellent responses, but those there were showed a very mature grasp of the situations.

### Question 2

This question also had a good range of responses, with the stronger answers making appropriate choices for the second poem to go with '*From War Music*': very often this was '*Dulce et Decorum Est*' because of the linking theme of war; however, other choices, including 'Brendon Gallacher', worked equally well except where candidates failed to deal sufficiently with the idea of a 'vivid' picture of characters. Candidates did sometimes penalise themselves by choosing a second poem that offered little relevance to the terms of the question: it is difficult to focus on the central character in 'The Darkling Thrush', for example. On the first poem, candidates often enjoyed the comparisons made between the slow-witted Ajax and the nimble Hector. This question was often the choice of better



candidates and answers reflected understanding of the texts and appreciation of the language in which they were expressed.

### Question 3

Question 3 was done extremely well by many candidates, who were able to focus on characterisation of the named characters. A differentiating feature was the degree to which the central characters were kept central in the responses, since less successful responses tended towards an inclusion of extraneous material without showing its connection. Good responses were wonderfully sensitive to the natural imagery ("bird breaking the darkness", "spring water" etc) with one candidate likening it to an epiphany. A surprising omission in some responses, however, was to the nature of the 'miracle': perhaps this was simply taken for granted; at any rate, a number of candidates stopped consideration of the first poem half-way through and avoided commenting on the 'miracle' itself. Several candidates, despite the wording of the question, seemed uncertain who the labourer actually was, confusing him with the "chestnut-haired boy" or, in one case, the narrator. In 'Digging', a key element of the best responses was the way in which they commented on the imagery and language used in describing the father and grandfather. Several candidates created difficulties for themselves by struggling to find similarities between the two poems, although they were not required to do so: "The silence of the labourer... is similar to 'Digging' in that all the central characters are silent to begin with".

It may be helpful for Centres to advise students to avoid speculation that cannot be supported by the text. For example, remarks that the labourer was traumatised because of the Aberfan disaster, that he was still shell-shocked from the war or that he had been struck dumb because of some kind of horrific accident in his youth cannot be justified from the text and divert attention from more relevant avenues of analysis.

### Question 4

On Question 4, the choice of second poem often had a strong bearing on the quality of the overall response: a choice of 'Follower', so that candidates were comparing Heaney's vivid reminiscences of childhood in contrast with his father's ageing, often worked particularly well. Sometimes, however, the choice of second poem meant the focus on family relationships was lost. There were some excellent explorations of the tensions in Fanthorpe's description of her father - the blend of admiration, sympathy and resentment: one candidate wrote "On closer analysis, we can see that she only feels as she does because, inferably, for the first time in her life she has control over their relationship and is able to actually form one." These contrasted with some answers which described the old man's former and present state clearly enough, when writing on 'Old Man, Old Man', but did not home in on the relationship between parent and child, or deal with important lines such as 'not good with daughters' or 'disinherited children'. Several scripts found it necessary to extract a moral that they thought the poem provided: "Even though there are hardships, at the end of the day your family is going to be there for you every step of the way". "We must cling to our family as they are the only ones to support us". "Everyone needs to be loved and families should stay together."

Candidates who chose 'Once Upon a Time' as their second poem found it difficult to focus on the 'wide range of feelings' required by the question. They were clear about the fact that the father envied his son's outlook on life and disliked his own but seldom went beyond this. A few less successful candidates penalised

themselves by choosing 'Mirror' since this did not lend itself to the terms of the question and the answers produced were merely a synopsis of the poem.

### Question 5

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen. Those who take this selection often justify their choice by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

Question 5 received responses of variable quality. Less successful candidates struggled to explain the situation clearly, especially in the poem 'The Horses', which not all understood: they sometimes failed therefore to show fully how the writers in both poems demonstrate the ways in which war affects both humans and animals within a changing landscape. Better answers showed a good grasp of the 'post-catastrophic' situation of the survivors and the imagery in 'The Horses' (eg "the poem suggests we have to use the 'strange horses' once again in order to cleanse and wake the world. They are shown as representing hope, 'their coming our beginning'"). They also appreciated the writer's reflection on the rat's easy shuttling between the opposing lines in 'Break of Day in the Trenches', responding thoughtfully to its impartiality: "Rosenberg shows us that war shifts the hierarchy of life, making vermin more powerful and man helpless".

### Question 6

Question 6 received some very effective responses, especially where candidates placed 'Keeping Orchids' alongside 'The Flowers' in a thoughtful way to look at the two very different mother/daughter relationships. There were some particularly effective analyses of the symbolism employed in 'Keeping Orchids' and the effect of the violent images (eg 'cutting the stems with a sharp knife').

### *Section B, Question 7*

Question 7 received many detailed and excellent responses, with 'Country Lovers' often selected as the second story because of its obvious thematic links to 'The Gold Cadillac'. Successful candidates were able to link the idea of racial prejudice within the Southern states of the USA to that which was endemic to the apartheid of South Africa at a similar period. Many candidates gave historical references to racism and the various acts in law which brought about eventual change in attitudes to race. Other choices were possible, but candidates who selected 'Veronica' or 'A Stench of Kerosene' often did not make a well-focused response on prejudice or, in some cases, misunderstood the context, for example by thinking the male narrator in 'Veronica' was a white man (confusion, perhaps, with 'Country Lovers'); others, however, appreciated that gender stereotypes and expectations could also be a powerful source of prejudicial behaviour.

### Section C

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): less successful candidates often failed to communicate in well-constructed, comprehensible and accurate English, as well as tending to write only briefly and with little development of ideas.

As in previous years, this Section produced some of the best answers from many candidates, who often respond to the tasks with passion and commitment. Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 8, which shows that many candidates respond very effectively when invited to use their imagination and write with descriptive detail.

## Question 8

Question 8 was a question where candidates' capacity to adopt an appropriate register was well tested: many appeared to enjoy the challenge offered by a competition entry to write in their most evocative manner, employed subtle and flexible vocabulary to conjure striking visual effects, and sometimes using the view as a springboard for a personal viewpoint on the environment or society. Many embraced the full range of linguistic conventions to enhance their responses.

Examiners were intrigued by the different approaches adopted. One wrote: "Amongst them all I enjoyed a surreal view from a tower block, a gypsy mobile home, a prison cell and a holiday villa that was so beautifully described that I googled the place name in the hope I could book a holiday!" Another commented: "It was a delight to find some original perspectives: a view from a car window in Egypt; the view of a dummy in a shop window; a suicidal person's view of the city from the top of a tall building; the view from a train window contrasting the grey of the city and the colour of the countryside; looking from a position of unhappiness on to a happy family (or vice versa); the view from an apartment window in an Asian city over wealth and poverty or a view of the soul through the metaphorical window of the eyes." One candidate dealt with the view from the computer program 'Windows' and offered a fantastic insight into how society's view of the world and technology changes with the click of a mouse, compared with the view from a traditional window.

Candidates deserve credit for so convincingly evoking such vivid views from their place in an examination hall. Many wrote about idyllic country or garden scenes, although many of the more interesting essays were about street or urban views - human activity added interest. Where candidates strayed too far from describing a real or imagined view, they sometimes lost focus and slipped into rather more general narrative description. Descriptive effects, though often excellent, were not always quite so well judged: an examiner was diverted by the image of "the emerald blue of the sea". There were a few candidates who misinterpreted the question and wrote the advert for the competition, rather than an entry.

## Question 9

Question 9 discriminated sharply: answers falling short of the criteria required for a higher grade were disappointingly thin or unconvincing in their explanations; far more often, however, candidates elaborated their ideas in a highly convincing way, identifying experiences which had clearly meant a great deal to them and from which they had learnt much. Use of narrative techniques such as direct speech helped the more engaging answers, whereas less successful answers presented bland lists of tasks, with their reflections often sounding like something taken from a job application or CV. Good responses often had a strong sense of personal voice and were well-structured, with a clear sense of cohesion. For example, one candidate wrote of an arduous hiking expedition: "Fun? This was torture. Nevertheless it was worthwhile torture. My mind had been stimulated rather dramatically, and the joys of actually completing the journey were met by emotions of anguish, grit and determination." The range of such experiences was impressively wide, underlining not only what a variety of opportunity is offered by educational institutions, including work experience, but also how many young people take advantage of youth movements and societies within the wider community. The informative nature of the task tended to lead to many straightforward retellings with little in the way of any enhancing of style, resulting in a rather limited range of language being employed. However, it was an approachable task for those who did not wish to attempt the creative writing

alternative. A number of candidates wrote of travel abroad, where they had learned how privileged their own lives are, and many wrote about various sports coaching activities.

As with Paper 2F, weaknesses in candidates' writing sometimes remain: poor structure; lack of clearly written sentences; errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and 'phonetic' spelling. The use of paragraphs was often insecure and many students need to pay more rigorous attention to the importance of the full stop. **It remains the case that careful attention to editing would improve the technical accuracy of candidates' work and, with 8 of the 25 allotted marks going to Assessment Objective iii (a third of the marks), this is an important consideration.**

## GCSE English: 1204 5H

Both papers were successful in engaging and stimulating candidates.

The quality of linguistic analysis in the best of the Higher Tier responses to the Section A passage was very high indeed, but the weakest part of most answers, particularly in the Foundation Tier, was the comment on the bullet point relating to the writer's use of language, which addresses a key assessment objective. Many candidates spent too much time on the other bullet points, compounding the problem by summarising or describing content rather than analysing the way it was presented.

Much of the writing at Higher Tier was very good and some of it exceptional. Candidates in both tiers recognise differing purposes and audiences for writing and the vast majority try to address these in their choices of words and sentence structures. Some candidates, however, are much less careful in the correctness and precision of their expression. This kind of laxity typically characterises the work of mid range candidates, particularly in terms of orthographical errors; the random use and misuse of capital letters was also noted.

### Paper 5H

#### Section A (reading)

##### Question 1:

The passage was accessible and the topic of extreme weather conditions engaged candidates. Most seemed to enjoy reading the text and some commented to this effect.

The more perceptive candidates understood and explored the contrast between adult and child perspectives in the passage, and made much of this in their analysis of the ways in which Bryson conveyed meaning through language. At the top end of attainment, the most successful responses showed a grasp of the humour, in particular the sharp irony of Bryson's voice in the short, closing anecdote and statement. Competent responses in the mid-range picked up the unpredictability of tornadoes and the more obvious points of contrast (e.g. *cosy tranquillity/wild frenzy*). Less successful candidates gave more straight forward responses, focusing on the key features of tornadoes and illustrating "the extraordinary power and danger" of tornadoes without commenting on how this was conveyed by use of language; such answers tended also to misinterpret the differences in reactions between the generations.

The passage was rich in linguistic features (particularly hyperbole, metaphor and simile) and candidates, throughout the higher tier range, identified these and commented on them with varying degrees of understanding; in particular the similes provoked much analytical comment. Most candidates conveyed the effect of the comparison "*like a billion hornets*" clearly, but the phrase '*killer apostrophe*' produced some very thoughtful analysis; it was understood by most as a vivid visual image, but some added comments on its appropriateness to the narrator - as a child, as writer - and more subtle readers brought out the paradoxical combination of a homely image and violence, and one candidate also saw its movement in a contrary direction ('*from right to left*') as particularly indicative of the tornado's unpredictability. The apocalyptic imagery also produced some perceptive comments.

The extent to which the writer's use of figurative language was explored was a key discriminator. Less successful candidates identified the key features, in particular the use of powerful adjectives and adverbs, but tended to use technical terms imprecisely or in a confused way (for instance personification, juxtaposition and pathetic fallacy); mid range candidates were usually able to link 'feature spotting' with apposite point making; the most assured responses skilfully wove technical language into detailed and often sensitive interpretations.

The references to "*Bud's wooden leg*" were also revealing. Less successful, literal responses missed the humour; better responses acknowledged it, without being able to explain how it was comic; the most successful talked about irony, "black humour" and, particularly, the complexity of the impact of the final sentence, in which the adult writer provides a kind of comment on his experience as a child (one candidate defined this as a "*role reversal with his father and grandfather.*")

### Section B (writing)

The two questions in this section were equally popular.

#### Question 2:

The two quotations worked very well in stimulating some very engaged answers. Most candidates answered the question and, ultimately, gave their opinion, though there were various ways in which this was done. There were strong advocates for both sides of the argument. Many 'green' arguments were put forward, but there were also (in keeping, perhaps, with the "credit crunch") expansive and convincing arguments in support of the second quotation, much of which centred on "*it is not proved/agreed by all scientists*" and "*that the Earth is amidst change and flux.*"

Most candidates were knowledgeable and well versed in this topic. The most thoughtful responses in particular showed a grasp of the issues at a global level, whereas less successful responses tended to confuse argument with advice, and to comment on little beyond the more immediate, local issues, for instance of a poor local bus system.

Stronger answers were precisely focused in argument, soundly structured and well expressed, with assured use of appropriate vocabulary. Command of expression sometimes defined attainment; responses could be ambitious in expression but lacked precision and some candidates allowed their emotions to run away with them, using colourful but confusing language, including mixed metaphors (e.g. *Global warming is a problem which will snowball upon on us.*) Similarly, statistics, expert evidence and interviews were used to give more authority to the discussion, often to good effect but sometimes their use was unconvincing and vague, and served only to undermine the argument (for example *From 1993 to 2009 there has been around a 40% increase in climate change.*)

#### Question 3:

This was also a popular and well answered question and provided a useful alternative for those who were not interested in global warming. It tended to attract less able candidates. Most responses showed a sound grasp of an appropriate letter form. The openness of the question meant that few candidates were deterred by the subject matter, advice ranging from local train journeys to travel to Australia.

Advice, for the most part, was clearly given and ranged from the very practical (if not entirely wise) - *"keep your luggage secure with padlocks and always use an address label in case it gets lost"* - to vague warnings of the dire consequences of talking to strangers in foreign lands (including Scotland.)

There were some good responses; the most successful were well structured and, especially, showed a command of appropriate tone and register, with a friendly and informal beginning and ending (e.g. *"Please listen to some of my advice - I strongly recommend it! Have a good holiday and I'll see you soon..."*), but incorporating precise and sometimes uncomfortable advice. Less successful responses tended to be very formal in tone and (as with question 2) offered well intended but implausible statistics (for example *"there has been a 6% increase in missing people when they travel abroad"*) as evidence.

### Section C (writing)

The two questions in this section were also equally popular.

#### Question 4:

This question produced a wide range of responses and, from an examiner's point of view, discriminated particularly well. As with question 3, the more the candidate wrote from direct experience (for example encountering a herd of bullocks during a Guide trek), the stronger the answer.

The question specifically required the candidate to analyse. Less successful responses tended to be narratives, often of a rather unconvincing kind, especially those based on the supernatural or fantasy. More successful responses addressed the question more directly and provided both analysis and reflection. Some were based on family trauma, including divorce and serious accidents. Some candidates wrote powerfully about various kinds of betrayal, but in some instances the experience was too raw for candidates to write effectively. There were some very good responses at the higher end of the ability range which used structural and linguistic devices to excellent effect to convey and comment on experiences. One candidate wrote wittily about the loss of her mobile phone - *"my baby, my world...I feel completely incomplete"* - whilst another deconstructed the question to write (brilliantly) about coping with *strange and unexpected examination questions* and analysed her thoughts on choosing this option and reflected on the process of writing her response to it, as she wrote it.

#### Question 5:

"How to achieve success" was a topic which candidates had clearly considered in some depth in school or college, as well as independently through the influence of their favoured celebrities and of television programmes, especially 'The Apprentice.' Sir Alan Sugar was the man of the moment.

The most successful responses focused on defining or analysing success, which was almost uniformly seen in terms of material and career gain. The prerequisites for its attainment were pondered very seriously. These were often broken down into an extended list of key constituents - motivation, hard work, perseverance, being prepared to fail, family support and so on - almost becoming a formula. One or two candidates argued the necessity of being worldly wise, even to the extent of cheating.

The magazine context stimulated abler candidates to produce some very effective journalistic pieces, often both perceptive and entertaining. Lower down the attainment range, there were more formulaic and error prone responses, perhaps induced by the pressure of time; weaknesses included the misspelling of *success* and its compounds and the inclusion of the word several times in the same sentence (e.g. *If you want to be successful, you must have the different skills to be successful and to take the right steps to earn success.*)



## GCSE English: 1204 Grade Boundaries

### Option 1, 3, 4 & 5

1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING

1B READING AND WRITING

2F THE CRAFT OF THE WRITER

3F UNPREPARED NON-FICTION(F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G
Lwr	58	46	34	23	12

### Option 2, 6, 7 & 8

Papers: 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING

1B READING AND WRITING

4H THE CRAFT OF THE WRITER

5H UNPREPARED NON-FICTION(H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	85	74	63	53	41	35





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