

Examiners' Report November 2008

GCSE

GCSE English (1204)

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1204 2F & 4H GCSE English

Introduction to Papers 2F and 4H

The papers proved to offer an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected, except that there were very few responses at the upper end of the Higher Tier range.

In Reading questions many candidates were willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers and how to present evidence. As in previous series, there is still a need to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'),

It remains the case that, if candidates paid greater attention to certain basic elements, they could often improve their performance significantly. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- In Section A, some candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Candidates should appreciate that **their response should be equally balanced between the 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-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

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. The level of comment on language was a key discriminator. In the questions where a second poem had to be selected to go with the named poem, a discriminator was the ability to make a choice that could be justified clearly in relation to the specific demands of the question - or indeed the ability to choose any second poem at all. Many scripts showed reasonable understanding of content. However, when it came to handling language and technique answers became less clear. Most candidates could "spot" features but not comment fully on them.

Question 1

Question 1 discriminated well. This was a popular question, with a range of responses within the expected limits for this Tier. Better answers contrasted the descriptions of the deaths in a detailed way - noting the focus of both poets on the face of the dead person, the calmness of the first death and the violence/horror of the second. However, there were weak answers which failed to grasp the situation in 'Death in Leamington' and hence did not deal effectively with the onlooker's reaction. Similarly, in 'Dulce...' not all appreciated the haunting effect of the sight on the onlooker.

Question 2

Question 2 also had a good range of responses, with the stronger answers exploring the range of emotions on both poems and making appropriate choices for the second. Q2. 'The House' was regularly teamed with one of the Heaney poems or 'Half-Past Two'. There were generally reasonably exemplified accounts of the set poem, and pleasing attempts at contrasting the negative memories at the start with the more positive mention of the piano at the end. As with Q1, candidates focused on the first bullet, the memories, at the expense of the poet's feelings about them. Less successful answers revealed widespread confusion about the child's situation in 'The House' and did not attempt to compare the childlike view and description with that in the second poem.

Question 3

Question 3 also differentiated strongly, depending on how well candidates understood the content and context of the two poems. While some candidates dealt well with both poems, others wrote more successfully about 'Still I Rise' than 'Not My Best Side', where weaker responses described the maiden in terms of a stereotype, instead of noting her unexpected strength. A number of weaker answers confused the maiden's account with those of the dragon or the knight, simply working through each stanza, without distinguishing the three voices. The better answers showed a sound grasp of Angelou's speaker and interpretation of her character, with a pleasing focus on the way the language revealed this. On less successful responses, there was limited understanding of the social history/situation of black Americans and the issue of race, with a fair amount of confusion on 'slavery'.

Question 4

On Question 4, the choice of second poem often had a strong bearing on the quality of the overall response. The set text was regularly paired with one of the Heaney poems, and this led to some quite successful answers, with reasonably sustained interpretation. Less effective answers ignored the question's theme of 'change' and chose less appropriate poems. They also frequently contained evidence of some confusion over how to interpret the text.

Question 5

Question 5 received few responses, and these were of variable quality. However, it discriminated clearly, and enabled better answers to show a sound grasp of both poems. There was often sound and detailed linkage of the thistles of the title with the ideas of warfare and military issues. Weaker responses revealed less understanding of the poet's concern with time, history and the way the plants reflect human characteristics. 'A Blade of Grass' proved difficult for weaker candidates: answers often noted how little description was actually given, and the situation confused the writers.

Question 6

Question 6 was well done by some of the small number of candidates choosing this question: 'Wind' was usually paired with 'Storm', sensibly and with sound results. Less strong candidates tended to write about the first bullet, rather than the main thrust of the question - people's reaction to the natural events.

Section B

The use of textual evidence was a key discriminator.

Question 7 was a question which proved difficult for weaker candidates, who clearly had not acquired a thorough grasp of the narrative of the two stories in advance of the examination, and consequently struggled with the amount of text. However, a minority of more successful responses dealt well with the lives - and plights - of the two women, writing with sympathy as well as understanding. In 'Country Lovers', where there was a sound grasp of content, candidates were able to relate to the unfairness of the apartheid system towards black people, and women in particular, and there was a sense of outrage at the way in which the system favoured Paulus. Similarly, some candidates were able to see that cultural expectations denied Veronica the opportunity to escape her hard life in the way Okeke had done. However, such comparisons were difficult for weaker candidates, who at times failed to see that Okeke, in 'Veronica', was a man or that Thebedi had married a black man because of the impossibility of a life with Paulus. Use of the textual evidence was another discriminator, in that weaker responses made little reference to the texts or understood the way in which each writer used language to achieve effects.

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 little development of ideas.

Question 8

Question 8 was a question where there was no obvious 'framing' of the answers to fit the specified 'website', but many candidates wrote interestingly and often humorously about themselves. Most were happy with the way others responded to them, and on occasion were happy to be loners. Better answers explored the meaning of 'being an individual' and why sometimes it is important to be 'one of the crowd'. Weaker answers simply followed the bullets, showing little variation in sentence structure (most beginning with 'I').

Question 9

Question 9 discriminated sharply. A number showed good imagination and the ability to create a strong narrative line. There were some very graphic descriptions of armed robberies and large numbers of balaclavas, hoodies and scars. Many, however, were unable to sustain believable time frames for their accounts, or believable first person narratives, the events often continuing the day after they were witnessed, or out of sight of the 'eyewitness'. At the less successful end, a lack of basic punctuation also marked many

narratives, which at best lacked crafting, and at worst reflected serious weaknesses over the conventions of written English.

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

Question 1

This question produced responses of widely varying success. Most candidates were able to access this question successfully although some made quite a small number of points about one or both poems and there was a great deal of feature-spotting. Some candidates' responses seemed to show quite a reasonable understanding of 'Yellow' and 'Half-past Two', but weaker ones paid scant heed to the wording of the question and so made little reference to the child's imagination. The quality of the answers was quite often unbalanced, in that candidates showed a much more secure grasp of one poem than the other. Reproduction of practised answers abounded, focused on different topics. Analysis of language tended to be weak and commentary rather over-simplified.

Question 2

Question 2 also discriminated through the precise focus of the question. A weakness among a few candidates was that they did not focus on the phrase "a strong sense of silence" and wrote generally about mood and atmosphere, sometimes choosing a second poem that was not particularly appropriate. Candidates generally showed quite a good understanding of 'Death in Leamington', but some struggled with the choice of a second poem: some chose 'Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom', 'The Send Off' or 'The House' but then found it hard to write about silence. More successful responses dealt with 'The Darkling Thrush' or 'Hide and Seek'.

Question 3

Question 3 elicited many very good responses. Among weaker candidates, there was a tendency to miss part of the question, the requirement to "link a sense of place...". The better candidates offered very thoughtful responses to both poems and many students demonstrated a good understanding of both. However, some were able to write much more confidently and successfully on one poem than the other and so the quality of their response lacked balance. Responses to "An Unknown Girl" were often surprisingly weak with few candidates producing strong answers.

Question 4

This question offered good discrimination; in general it was dealt with well, with the range of quality dependent on the closeness with which text and language effects were analysed. Most candidates chose "Digging" to compare with "Follower" and this clearly worked well, although occasionally weaker candidates did not distinguish the three generations clearly or failed to refer explicitly to the second sentence, simply writing about "relationships between individuals". Knowledge and understanding of the poems were generally sound, but many found it more difficult to comment effectively on the language used in 'Digging'.

Questions 5 and 6

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen, and there is, it appears, some inbuilt discrimination simply through the choice of 'Nature', which many Centres do not appear to consider. Those that take this selection often justify their response by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

Section B

Question 7

Question 7 elicited responses of very different quality. In particular, the higher quality responses were those which engaged thoughtfully with the issues raised in the stories. At the lower end there were some candidates who only wrote on one story. This was quite a challenging question. On the whole it seemed that many dealt more successfully with 'Country Lovers' - often when writing about 'Veronica' there was a tendency to retell the story and forget to focus on the question. There was regularly evidence of confusion over Okeke, with a significant minority of candidates apparently convinced that this character is female. Some also interpreted the word 'environment' in a very narrow way and tried to focus their entire answers on the natural environment described in the stories and this rather limited their comments on 'cultural background to events'.

Section C

Question 8

Question 8 evoked answers of widely differing quality, and hence was clearly an effective discriminator. Some less successful responses found it difficult to move beyond talking about horror films. However, a significant number produced thoughtful and well-balanced essays, mostly adopting an appropriate style and register even where the writing skills were often not very strong. There was much use of rhetorical questions and some candidates made effective references to a range of television shows to illustrate their comments. A few strong responses were marked by the convincing adoption of an angry 'voice' to show outrage at the damaging effects of violent scenes. Interestingly, most responses thought there was too much violence and some drew thoughtful conclusions as to the effect on society as a whole. Some responses showed an ability to construct a well-argued article with an understanding of how to be effective. Weaker candidates tended to produce rather brief answers, failing to plan adequately and maintaining a rather narrow focus: the lack of breadth of treatment and of development of ideas were thus clear discriminators. A few lost focus on 'Violence on Television' and wrote in more detail about violence in films and computer games. Accuracy was a problem for many who struggled to spell correctly and mark sentences with full stops. Punctuation for a significant proportion consisted of one or two marks only.

Question 9

Question 9 distinguished between those answers which were limited and pedestrian, offering little beyond a list of basic points, and those which conveyed a reasonable range of their own ideas clearly. Although most candidates adopted an appropriate tone and register, there were some responses where the style was probably more suited to a spoken report. Better candidates offered ideas which were appropriate as well as quite effectively organised & structured, developing views of how the library of the future should reflect the needs of new generations and becoming more of a community centre.

1204 3F & 5H GCSE English

Paper 3F

Many of the introductory comments about Paper 5H also apply to this paper. Most attainment was within the notional 'D' grade.

There was clear evidence that candidates had been carefully prepared for this paper. In responses to the reading question many candidates developed useful answers using the point/evidence/comment approach, though there were concerns about the degree of focus on the question. In the Section B writing responses it was clear that students had been taught to use discourse markers ("Firstly/ secondly/finally/therefore/moreover") to help structure their ideas in argumentative or persuasive writing, and when used appropriately, these helped to produce more effective answers. Such responses may become mechanical, but when candidates did not use linking devices, responses lacked a sense of sequential development. Candidates were less inclined to use other rhetorical devices (for example rhetorical questions, varying sentence structure for effect and so on) for effect. Much writing was unvaried and lacking in individuality. Answers which were individual – even if not always entirely appropriately so – stood out as exceptions. In Section C there was much that was descriptive or narrative in responses which should have been analytical in approach; the writing for this section needs to be more balanced and objective to address the triplet verbs.

Finally, one examiner noted that answers which were prefaced by a plan (however simple) tended to be more coherent and developed, and thus more successful.

Section A

Most candidates recognised and engaged with the situation, described in the extract from Frank McCourt's book 'Teacher Man', of a teacher facing his first lesson with teenagers. Whilst the situation was grasped, understanding was more shown in personal response than in commentary. Most candidates used the point/evidence/comment approach with some effectiveness, but some answered in a generalised way which failed to address the specific wording of the question. Close reference to the passage was sometimes lacking and, when appropriate quotations were used, these tended to be too long and not always clearly in support of the point being made; the most secure referencing tended to be to the beginning of the passage. Candidates also at this level tend to regard the bullet points as separate questions rather than as stimuli to address the central concerns of the actual question. Those bullet points which related to content were handled best. The weakest feature of answers was the level of response to linguistic features, though many commented clearly on the use of American slang. Weaker candidates also struggled with the humour.

Some candidates did not seem to have read the whole passage. Practice in speed reading might be helpful. Candidates might also be encouraged to read the passage, paragraph by paragraph, making very brief notes on each bullet point, before starting to answer the question.

Section B

Question 2

This proved to be the more popular of the two questions in this section and answers were well focused and relevant. Candidates had useful advice to give (indeed some responses provided a very useful guide for trainee teachers!) and sometimes used the content of the question 1 passage to provide a contrast or exemplify a point. Most responses were

reasonably clearly expressed and structured advice in a helpful, if somewhat mechanical way, often using the bullet points as a basis for paragraph topics. Weaker responses tended to produce a narrative, and often very personal response, which did not really answer the question. Some candidates found it difficult to view the situation from a teacher's point of view and at times this confusion was obvious.

Question 3

The topic of the London Olympics engaged and stimulated candidates and strong, sometimes impassioned, views were expressed on it. As with the companion question on Higher Tier, opinion was split, though most felt that the effect of the 'credit crunch' meant that, at the very least, Olympic plans should be scaled down. Most candidates showed a fairly sound grasp of purpose and audience and wrote in an appropriate letter style and format. Candidates are increasingly able to link and sequence argument in a logical, if (at this level) modest way. In less successful responses, argument was much less effectively presented, with unfocused paragraphing and poor sequential linking.

Section C

Question 4

This was answered by fewer candidates than question 5 but the question stimulated some developed and engaged answers, which showed some capacity to analyse. The extent of the focus on the triplet verb was a key discriminator; weaker responses tended to be either descriptive or narrative and did not really effectively **analyse** why the lesson was enjoyable and memorable.

Question 5

This question produced the best responses in the paper and clearly caught candidates on something of a raw nerve. The candidature was split between those who took the quotation as an insult (typically seen as the comment of a biased pensioner, though it actually comes from an official report) and those who thought it was true; either way, the commentaries were quite well developed and a key discriminator was often the extent to which candidates were objective in their approach. Again less successful answers were largely descriptive, with even some narrative accounts. When candidates are asked to "agree or disagree" with a viewpoint, they should always support their ideas with evidence and reasons rather than just express or, worse, assert their opinion. Balancing points for and against, before giving an individual opinion, is also an approach that works well in this section.

Paper 5H

The candidature was relatively small, but larger than last year.

The question papers proved accessible and there were few problems. The majority of responses demonstrated features within the C/D range of attainment.

As with specification 1203, the level of response overall suggested that candidates had been well prepared both for the reading and the writing questions; in particular the majority had a clear idea of writing for a specified audience and purpose. In some instances more care in terms of expression would have benefited candidates; typically 'u' and lower case 'i' still occur in answers in place of the full pronoun, despite the formality of the examination context, and the warnings in examiners' reports. The presentation of answers could also sometimes be improved - in a few cases the handwriting was almost illegible and in others the response was structured in a way which suggested rough notes. More successful responses were often prefaced by a plan which had provided the basis for a clearer, more confident answer.

Section A

The Michelle Hanson newspaper article on the impact of the 2012 London Olympics on her local allotments clearly engaged the candidature, who for the most part showed a sound understanding of the topic and her point of view. The passage was challenging, but proved straightforward enough to provide plenty of identifiable features to comment on. (It was surprising, however, how many candidates had not read the italicised introduction and assumed the author was male.) The bullet points directed attention towards the key components in her attempt to persuade readers. Most candidates commented fully and relevantly on the first three bullet points and demonstrated a sound grasp of the content of the article. The depth of their analysis of the writer's use of language was a key discriminator. Most candidates were able to identify the main features of the language (the use of hyperbole, minor sentences, questions and so on) but fewer related these to the actual question. More successful answers commented in some detail and depth on the use of language and how it was used for particular effects, and, in particular, began to explore the writer's use of rhetoric and imagery to demonise the developers (an urban paradise threatened by "monsters.") Stronger answers also commented on the emotional and patriotic tug of the allusions to wartime and the reverential references to the founder of the allotments. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the passage or focus entirely on the content, and treated the bullet points as sub questions, occasionally making very generalised comments on the language. Some of the weakest even extended their answers by reproducing the glossaries of difficult words given at the end of the article.

Section B

Question 2

This topic sprang directly from Michelle Hanson, the influence of which was apparent in the many responses arguing against spending money on the games. The two contrasting quotations worked well and helped to polarise argument; competent cases were made for each side and there were many strongly engaged answers. Fears for the effects of the recession coloured many arguments and most argued that the money would be better spent on improved health facilities, and support for families and the unemployed. However, there were also those who argued from both an economic and patriotic perspective in favour of the Games. In general, candidates showed a capacity to develop and structure an argument, linking points effectively and logically; points were supported by personal experience and reference to the Chinese Olympics. Few candidates seemed to know much

about the legacy plans other than the biased presentation of facts in the article. As a result of this, perhaps, there were very few arresting answers.

Question 3

This was the less popular question in this section. Those who chose it showed a reasonable grasp of what was appropriate in the context and were at ease with writing an 'on line' article. More successful responses detailed clear and helpful advice on what could be done individually (including recycling, responsibility or litter, walking/cycling rather than going by car and so on.) Less able candidates struggled with both the context and the content, producing unfocused, sprawling responses.

Section C

Question 4

This produced some very lively and engaged responses. Most candidates reacted very strongly to the suggestion that they were in any way unfit, unhealthy or unhappy, but a significant minority agreed with the statement; both sides argued from personal experience and through anecdote. Taking it too personally weakened some responses; often the assumption was that the statement came from a biased older person, whereas in reality it was drawn from the conclusions of an international study. Candidates need to be reminded that a commentary should be balanced to be effective. Many answers, however, were sufficiently objective and developed to be convincing. One of the weaknesses in writing responses still tends to be carelessness in spelling and the use of texting forms. In these responses the spelling of 'britian' (sic) was more often the rule than the exception and there was frequent use of the lower case 'i'.

Question 5

This also produced some sound answers. The topic was relevant to candidates and the context one which they grasped with some ease. Most balanced the pros and cons of school trips effectively and maintained an appropriately formal tone, style and format to suit the context. A strong element of persuasion came into many letters but not usually, in more successful responses, at the expense of a capacity to review both sides of the argument. Personal experience was often effectively cited to support the points made.

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 1

Papers:

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr	100	56	44	33	22	11
Lwr	57	45	34	23	12	
Cum %	6.1	53.1	81.7	94.8	98.6	100.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 2

Papers:

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)
- 5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Upr	100	85	74	63	52	40	34
Lwr	86	75	64	53	41	35	
Cum %	.0	.8	16.4	77.9	93.4	97.5	100.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 3

Papers:

- 1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		56	44	33	22	11
Lwr	57	45	34	23	12	
Cum %	.0	66.7	88.9	88.9	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 4

Papers:

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		56	44	33	22	11
Lwr	57	45	34	23	12	
Cum %	.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 5**Papers:**

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)

3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		56	44	33	22	11
Lwr	57	45	34	23	12	
Cum %	4.5	75.0	86.4	97.7	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 6**Papers:**

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1B READING AND WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	F
Upr	100	85	74	63	52	40	34
Lwr	86	75	64	53	41	35	
Cum %	.0	.0	.0	.0	100.0	100.0	.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 7**Papers:**

1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	F
Upr	100	85	74	63	52	40	34
Lwr	86	75	64	53	41	35	
Cum %	.0	.0	.0	.0	100.0	100.0	.0

GCSE English 1204 - Opt 8**Papers:**

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	F
Upr	100	85	74	63	52	40	34
Lwr	86	75	64	53	41	35	
Cum %	.0	6.9	13.8	27.6	79.3	79.3	.0

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