

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

GCSE

GCSE English A/GCSE English B (1203/1204)
Paper 1B Reading and Writing

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Publications Code UG023801

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GCSE English 1203 & 1204

The external moderation process went very smoothly. The vast majority of folders were well presented, addressed the requirements of the relevant specifications adroitly and were sensibly assessed, sometimes bearing evidence of detailed internal moderation by the centre. There was little need, other than in very exceptional circumstances, to adjust centre marks.

Comments on the individual units follow. Overall the standard of task setting remained high, and most tasks allowed candidates to fulfil the various assessment objectives. In general, too, tasks had been tailored to the individual candidate's capabilities, allowing each to attain an appropriate level of success. There were few incomplete folders throughout the range, including the lowest level of attainment; this demonstrates how seriously both centre and candidates take coursework. This pride was also often reflected in the neatness of the presentation of the folders.

Administratively too there were relatively few problems, though moderators noted that some centres failed to follow the instructions concerning the necessity for authentication statements for each candidate, and to include the folders of the candidates with the highest and lowest scores in the centre with the requested sample. A few centres sent incorrect mark sheets to the moderator; discrepancies of this kind have the potential, if undetected, to cause serious problems.

Overall the quality of the coursework folders this year reflected the level of commitment with which both candidates and teachers approach this component of the examination.

1B (Written Coursework)

Personal and Imaginative Unit

This was often the highest scoring unit in the folder, sometimes reflecting an overall centre strength. There were examples of strongly imaginative and reflective writing, and much evidence of conscious crafting for deliberate effect; the awareness of audience was often sustained. There was a preponderance of narratives, some following a given structure to create suspense or atmosphere, but occasionally there were some very effective experimentations with narrative structure. This kind of innovative approach is particularly suited to coursework. As always, there were strong responses from candidates writing about personal experiences, including autobiographical reflections on life-changing moments, favourite pastimes, and influential people. There were also some very creative empathetic responses to the texts used for reading units, including Shakespeare. There were inevitably some weaknesses; for instance, it is difficult to see how a 'work experience report' can provide a ready opportunity for writing "to explore, imagine, or entertain" and one moderator felt that such a topic "did not allow an able candidate to show his/her talent." Overall, however, there was a pleasing variety of work presented for this unit throughout the ability range; at the top end there were many well crafted pieces, demonstrating originality of approach, register and voice.

1203 Different Cultures and Traditions

Overall this was the more successful of the reading units, with candidates throughout the range showing a strong awareness of whole texts and of distinctive cultural settings; their engagement with texts and social background was clearly evident. Task setting was invariably good and allowed candidates to address both the writer's craft and the distinctive setting of the text. Most units were based on 'Of Mice and Men' and often focused on the theme of loneliness or the 'American Dream'. Candidates of modest ability produced some engaging work on "how Crooks' room reflected his position in 1930's society" and a question about symbolism in the novel produced some excellent essays from abler candidates. Responses to 'To Kill a

Mocking Bird' were also good and most tasks provided candidates with opportunities to show analytical skill and engagement with the distinctive features of Maycomb society. There seemed to be fewer responses this year to the short stories in the Edexcel Anthology but, where centres had used this option, the resulting work was often good. Weaker responses to this unit tended to rely too heavily on teacher notes, on film versions and on generic historical and social comments; responses were also sometimes limited by a failure to address the writer's use of language.

1204 Media Texts

As with specification 1203, this tended to be the stronger of the two reading units. There was a variety of approaches, including studies of advertisements, reportage and film. Typically candidates were asked to compare two advertisements, for instance charity leaflets, or a broadsheet and tabloid reports of the same event. There was some enterprising broadening of scope in instances where centres asked candidates to compare the use of techniques in differing media, for instance the reporting of the same event in a newspaper and on television news, or a print advertisement and a television one. The most successful centres had clearly encouraged candidates to evaluate the distinctive media features of their chosen genre, and allowed them to choose their own examples; this resulted in fresh, insightful writing. Another successful topic required candidates to consider the presentation of gender in advertisements. Whilst there was much personally engaged and strongly analytical writing produced for this unit, there were also weaker responses, usually where candidates responded personally to media without showing much awareness of the distinctive features of the chosen genre; for instance some candidates wrote reviews or promotions of films without offering any consideration of cinematic technique or language.

Shakespeare

The overwhelming majority of students studied 'Macbeth' or 'Romeo and Juliet' for this unit, but there were also responses to a wide range of other plays, including 'The Merchant of Venice', 'Much Ado about Nothing', 'Othello', 'Richard III', and 'Henry IV parts 1 and 2'. In general tasks enabled candidates throughout the range to express personal opinions about their chosen text, but the most successful were formulated in such a way as to encourage candidates to engage the whole play, without slipping into narrative, and to consider Shakespeare's use of language. Amongst topics that produced strong responses, moderators noted the following: "Benedick's changing attitudes to love in 'Much Ado about Nothing'" and "The role and significance of Mercutio in 'Romeo and Juliet'". There is a danger in setting questions based on a single scene or speech, because these can be very limiting, especially to abler candidates. If, however, candidates are advised to ensure that they refer to the whole play in their responses, this can be a very productive approach. For instance the question 'What do we learn about Romeo from his final speech in the play?' provided a sharp focus for some candidates and stimulated them to study the language of the speech in detail and to explore the rest of the play. Weaker responses focused too much on film versions and some tasks were so limited (for example 'The role of Juliet's father in 'Romeo and Juliet'') that they did not allow for any depth of response.

GCSE English: 1203 Grade Boundaries

Option 1 - 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 2 - 1A, 1B, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
82	72	62	52	41	35

Option 3 - 1AT, 1B, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 4 - 1A, 1BT, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 5 - 1AT, 1BT, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 6 - 1AT, 1B, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
82	72	62	52	41	35

Option 7 - 1A, 1BT, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
82	72	62	52	41	35

Option 8 - 1AT, 1BT, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
82	72	62	52	41	35

Note: Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

GCSE English: 1204 Grade Boundaries

Option 1 - 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
58	46	34	23

Option 2 - 1A, 1B, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
86	75	64	53	42	36

Option 3 - 1AT, 1B, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
58	46	34	23

Option 4 - 1A, 1BT, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
58	46	34	23

Option 5 - 1AT, 1BT, 2F, 3F

C	D	E	F
58	46	34	23

Option 6 - No Candidates

Option 7 - 1A, 1BT, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
86	75	64	53	42	36

Option 8 - 1AT, 1BT, 4H, 5H

*	A	B	C	D	E
86	75	64	53	42	36

Note: Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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