

# Principal Examiner Feedback

## Summer 2010

GCSE

GCSE English B (1204)  
Paper 5H (Higher)

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## GCSE English 1204 5H

### Section A (Reading)

#### Question 1:

With few exceptions, candidates of all abilities understood the passage from Yasmin Hai's memoir, engaging with it and attempting to comment on its effectiveness; most wrote in some detail on all the bullet points. More successful candidates identified the key themes and commented sensitively on issues of divergent cultures, Englishness, and the role of women, particularly as wives. A few exceptional answers were able to relate the passage to its historical time (1960s) and make perceptive comments about the view of society presented and the use of outdated language (e.g. the 'moving staircases'). At all levels of attainment there was much, mostly sympathetic, discussion of the husband and his relationship with his wife; many candidates picked up the use of the word "study" in the first paragraph to define his role as that of teacher, and quoted the mother's final statement "he knew he would die early...He was preparing me for life in England" as evidence for the positive nature of the relationship; one candidate identified the main theme of the extract as 'love'. Some candidates were confused by the tone of the passage, but most grasped the humour of the situations (especially the reaction of the wife to the behaviour of English women) and the best candidates commented on the irony, for instance of the bus-trip "ordeal". The level of comment on language was, as ever, a key discriminator. At the lower end of the ability scale, candidates found it difficult to write about the writer's use of language. Most were able to pick out at least some of the key features (dialogue, hyperbole, rhetorical questions) but terms were often muddled or misapplied, or examples were given and identified without further comment. More successful answers tried to explain how these features engaged the reader and there were some useful comments on the ways in which the wife's naivety, bewilderment and distress were brought out (for instance in the sequence of questions she asks herself about English women, the description of the short bus trip as "the equivalent of going to the moon" and the way she was "clutching tightly to the shilling fare"). Some relatively weak candidates were unsure whether the extract was autobiographical, biographical or fictional, but for some this complexity provided a challenge to which they responded. A few very able candidates analysed the structure perceptively, commenting in particular on the shifts in tense as the daughter told a story, set in the past, through the medium of her mother's conversation in the present. They also commented on the ways in which the daughter's presentation shaped the reader's reactions.

### Section B (Writing)

#### Question 2:

The most successful candidates were able to engage fully with the question and include detailed elements of advice in a lively style. The majority of candidates concentrated on school routines (often with a particular focus on lunch), weather and transport, but stronger candidates addressed customs and attitudes in some depth and detail. Weaker responses were often characterised by a focus on 'informative' writing and an unremitting concern for mundane detail, including the school timetable, canteen meals, even detention systems, but gave very little 'advice'. There were some very sophisticated answers which were irreverent and witty in tone; at the other end of the scale were responses which were little more

than drafts for leaflets, sometimes with an emphasis on design features which had little to do with written expression, the key focus of the marking grids.

### Question 3:

Candidates engaged powerfully with the topic of celebrity. Many offered very strong opinions and argued their points of view thoroughly and with some passion. The majority, also, thought it a basic human right that celebrities should enjoy the same degree of privacy as private citizens and expressed, perhaps surprisingly, considerable sympathy for them, though some felt that, as celebrities sought publicity and lived by it, they had no right to complain. There was a variety of approaches. Some candidates attempted a balanced discussion, developing their ideas logically and supporting them with reasons and specific evidence to a measured conclusion. Most, however, adopted a more emotive approach, using persuasive techniques, including rhetorical questions, to reinforce their ideas. In general strong feelings produced engaging writing. Most candidates seemed to be at ease with this kind of writing and understood what was being assessed; even at their most passionately involved, they realised the need to present clear arguments.

### Section C (Writing)

#### Question 4:

This question also inspired some very confident responses. Many candidates were well versed in the kind of writing used in website reviews and attempted to emulate or imitate it in their own responses. The best were well structured and adopted and sustained an appropriate style; they were informative, enthusiastic and thorough. Less successful responses, very much in the minority, simply described or promoted a product but did not analyse or evaluate its merits and demerits. A range of products was reviewed, from the latest electronic devices and mobile phones (examiners became experts in Blackberries and ipods) to potato cutters and ballet shoes.

#### Question 5:

This question tended to produce fairly predictable responses and candidates struggled to make it engaging to read, many resorting to a list-style approach, with a paragraph allotted to each item. Pragmatism was central to most choices, and mobile phones, cash, Oyster Cards, i-pods and family photos dominated. Although most candidates suggested valid reasons for taking the items ('so I can call my friends'), many failed to analyse why they were important to them. The most successful responses included either detailed analytical reasons for their practical choices, or featured more special, personal items, which gave more fertile scope for analysis (e.g. a teddy bear, younger siblings). A few candidates took 'Imagine' literally and wrote a story, usually focused on the drama of leaving the house rather than on the key clause in the question "analyse fully the reasons for your choices."

## 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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