GCSE

English Language

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J355**

OCR Report to Centres

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Language (J355)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

A651 Extended Literary Text and Imaginative Writing

There was a clear sense and much supporting evidence of a greater degree of maturity in the work submitted this time compared with the two previous sessions in January and June 2011. Candidates had been thoroughly prepared for both the reading and writing and there was much insight and originality to enjoy. There was pleasing evidence that the words of the previous Report to Centres had been heeded, especially in the following areas:

- the variety of approaches to the extended literary text piece: a greater range of texts was represented and a greater variety of responses to them
- the encouragement of candidates to focus on the relevant segments of texts (or individual poems) that had especially appealed to them or which, in other ways, they felt comfortable responding to and writing about
- the practice of candidates thinking, drafting and re-drafting in the course of the controlled assessment so as to make best use of the very generous time available and yield a fresher, more immediate response
- an insistence on briefer, more focused and concise pieces of personal and imaginative writing.

The administration and organization of the moderation processes appeared in all but a few cases to have been rigorous and efficient and in almost all cases the rank order was correct. The area of greatest uncertainty is the differentiation between Band 4 and Band 5 in both segments of this Unit. Centres are encouraged to seek guidance on this and other related issues from the many available OCR resources.

There is still some slight uncertainty about the annotation required. Besides the cover sheet and any other separate papers (many centres use an individual copy of the band descriptors to show how each candidate's marks have been derived), there should be, on each page of the script, comments which are brief, clear and non-repetitive to show how and where the marks have been derived. This applies especially to the marks given for AO4/3 in the writing tasks. This is after all an English Assessment: candidates whose English language skills are very limited will not score very highly for this AO.

It is extremely pleasing to see that the opportunities which controlled assessment affords candidates for spontaneity, inspiration and originality are being realised.

Extended Literary Text

Although most responses are still on "Of Mice and Men", a wider range of texts was represented. There were responses on Owen, Duffy and Armitage; on "Macbeth", "Julius Caesar" and "Romeo and Juliet"; "Tsotsi" and "To Kill a Mockingbird". It was pleasing see centres submitting work for the first time on "Pride and Prejudice".

Whilst the textual study is essentially the same and in a sense has always been the same, the approaches required are essentially different for A651 and for whichever of the English Literature Units the text is doubling. This is especially true of texts used here and in A663 Prose from different Cultures. The requirements for the extended study are a well-argued personal response to the task and text, supported by evaluation and understanding of language and structure and with relevant quotations and comparisons (within novels and plays, rather than across more than one of them).

Context relating to social, cultural and historical issues is not required as such, as it is in A663. Candidates should be advised that they need to separate these references and focus on using them to develop responses in the A663 examination, as opposed to the work here. A little of it may inform stronger candidates when they broach the writer's perspective, which is a strand in the band one and two descriptors. But perspective is not context. What is wanted is a consideration of where the writer stands in relation to the themes, characters and ideas s/he presents. Harper Lee's perspective in "To Kill a Mockingbird" is one which saw racism as an abomination: not, for example, as an historical investigation into the Ku Klux Klan.

Candidates should be encouraged to be concise in what they say and ensure that a consideration of the language of the text supports their response consistently. It is much better, in most cases, to take three or four "choices and decisions" in "To Kill a Mockingbird" and develop these into a detailed consideration of the novel, than to try and shoehorn in every moment that might fit the task. Above all else, a repetition/summary/paraphrase of the narrative line of the text is not required and will not gain a great deal of credit.

Personal and Imaginative Writing

"Trapped" and one of its satellite companion tasks is still the more popular of the two tasks offered, although relatively more candidates than previously chose to write about a challenging journey. It is pleasing to see that on both tasks a less directly literal and more non-literal and metaphorical approach has been encouraged. Some centres took a thematic approach to one or both, giving students a starting point and then allowing them to develop their work in a wide variety of ways.

Where there was a link between the two tasks it was often accomplished with skill, ingenuity and interesting complementarity. However, it is equally important to note that once a genre has been selected or decided upon it is crucial that it is sustained consistently. Talks that become essays and leaflets that become sagas cannot be generously rewarded.

Sub-sections, segmentation and paragraphing are very important: comma spliced work that lacks any clear variety, linking or compartmentalization will, again, not be rewarded highly. Longer essays by weaker candidates still show a greater likelihood of a breakdown of coherent grammar and syntax.

Much of the best work had been subject to much individual contextualization and development; candidates had been given freedom to write at very different lengths and in very different styles for each of the pieces. This is good practice but the inherent danger is that the shorter piece will lack overall shape and may not have as fully a realized conclusion. It is also often marked by a well-developed sense of an audience and pleasure in producing what is entertaining and absorbing for the reader.

A652 Speaking and Listening and Spoken Language

Section A – Speaking and Listening

General comments

With many centres choosing not to enter candidates at this stage, the entry was, as expected, fairly small. With changes to the terminal rule, centres may use any of the Controlled Assessment units for final assessment, so centres are deferring their entry for this unit until later in the course. However those centres that did enter candidates early will profit from centre specific feedback to confirm or modify the centre's practice.

Task setting

The requirement is to cover the three contexts familiar to many centres from the legacy specification. However, there is the new requirement of the "real-life context in and beyond the classroom". This is not an extra, but must be included as an aspect of any one of the basic three contexts, at the discretion of a centre and as appropriate to the situation. It was clear from this entry that centres are adapting and developing new activities to take this requirement into account. The "real-life context" is more than just subject matter which has to extend beyond the classroom: it is a matter of purpose and audience. Successful tasks for this requirement often linked it to the drama-focussed context or to role play of some form: mock interviews, reality shows and government think tanks, for example. Where centres adapted tasks for the individual extended contribution, candidates presented a talk to the class as representatives of charities or the 'audience' became a real-life context, such as government representatives, or groups of teachers/parents. For the group activity, to give their discussion a real-life purpose, students were often asked to consider issues as members of the Student Council. Some centres were able to give their candidates an actual "real-life context": presentations to parents and governors, or Heads of Year. These were often, but not exclusively, centres with a small entry, and there is, of course, no requirement to bring in outside visitors to satisfy this requirement. A few centres still set tasks for real-life context which were not valid, for example general discussions on attitudes to war, various social and moral issues, or a "talk to the class" on work experience. Most of these tasks, with a minor alteration in terms of purpose or audience could have been adapted to fulfil the requirement properly.

For further support and guidance to fulfil the demands of the "real-life context", attention is drawn to the Training and Guidance DVD issued to centres in September 2011, which carefully explains whether or not each activity featured can be deemed real-life context. There is also a guidance document on the OCR website, and the Controlled Assessment Consultancy is always available to centres who would seek further advice on individual tasks. Through the consultancy, a centre's tasks may be validated.

There was evidence that centres are setting much more suitable tasks for the drama focussed activity and there were much firmer links to the assessment criteria for this context. Where tasks were based on drama or other literary texts, many centres had given candidates much more freedom to explore and adapt language in the creation of their roles: a reality TV show based on literary characters, for example. Performing a scene verbatim from a play (usually a Shakespeare play), without any adaptation, does not allow candidates the opportunity to meet the marking criteria, and the vast majority of centres had avoided this approach.

Few centres linked Speaking and Listening activities with work for A652 Section B: Spoken Language; those that did tended to explore the language of an interviewer. It is hoped that as centres get used to the new specification they will take the opportunity of using Speaking and Listening to help prepare candidates for their Controlled Assessment task on Spoken Language.

Record keeping

A key part of the process is record keeping. Centres are advised to maintain on-going records for all candidates, perhaps making use of a centrally held database of marks for candidates, with written comments. These procedures are good practice because they help to prevent problems arising from staff absences or changes of staff, for example. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used for assessment. The OCR Controlled Assessment form covers all the necessary elements required by the external moderator.

Centres must remember that candidates' record sheets form a vital piece of evidence in the moderation process. If there is a lack of detail in the description of activities, or if comments on performance have been "lifted" directly from the band descriptors with little or no linkage to individual candidate achievement, then it is extremely difficult to carry out the moderation of a centre. It is also important that all the staff within a centre adopt a common approach to filling in the assessment forms and that good practice is shared. Comments on the forms should aim to explain the marks awarded to the moderator, not offer feedback to candidates on their performances.

It is a centre's responsibility to ensure that moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records, with all sections completed and marks/arithmetic checked to eliminate mathematical or transcription errors.

Thankfully the majority of centres provided all the necessary information, with well-presented records, often word processed, and it was only a minority of centres that had to be reminded of their responsibilities.

Application of the Criteria

The starting point for this must be achievement as set against the performance criteria, fixing first on the band and then on a mark within the band range. Comments on achievement on candidates' assessment forms should make reference to the band descriptors and give a mark out of 40 for each separate context. The final mark is based on a mathematical calculation; the three separate marks totalled and divided by three. Centres are advised to check the final calculation carefully, as mistakes were discovered by moderators. Importantly, no assumptions should be made as to a link between bands/marks and grades.

Good practice in awarding marks balances strengths and weaknesses and does not just reward strengths. An explanation is given, for example, as to why a candidate on a borderline failed to achieve the next band. This aspect of the application of the criteria is particularly important where there is bunching of marks, to distinguish separate performances.

Internal Standardisation Procedures

Good practice is to use cross moderation of groups, joint marking exercises, reorganisation of groups for assessment and department Inset training using filmed evidence, provided by OCR. Centres are reminded that it is essential that all staff assessing Speaking and Listening watch and discuss the DVD issued to centres on an annual basis.

The majority of centres had secure and often very rigorous procedures in place; but again, worryingly, a minority of centres had to be reminded of their responsibilities. Centres must have procedures in place to ensure that internal marking is standardised and that a reliable rank order of marks is sent to the moderator. Importantly, the internally set standard is judged against the agreed OCR standard by the use of filmed assessments from OCR. Internal standards are confirmed by visits to centres. Some centres are failing to judge their own standards against those on the OCR DVD. Where centres had used the DVD to train staff, it was apparent in their task setting, in their understanding of the real-life context and in their justifications of the marks awarded.

Administration

The administration of this unit, once again, could have been smoother. It is essential that centres acquaint themselves with deadlines and procedures.

Time was wasted and the moderation process protracted, by moderators having to chase centres for samples and forms that should have been sent with the mark sheets. Some centres are waiting for moderators to select the sample. For this unit the sample is centre selected and the sample of candidates' records (seven per teaching group), together with the moderator's copy of the mark sheets, a signed Centre Authentication Form and a completed Internal Standardisation Record should all be sent to the external moderator by the published deadline – 10th January or 15th May.

It is vital for the smooth running of the process that instructions regarding procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties in a centre, especially where some aspects are to be completed by colleagues who are not subject specialists.

Attention is drawn to the OCR website for instructions, a checklist of what to send, and copies of all relevant forms; this is in addition to the paper versions sent to centres. The DVD issued to centres in September 2011 has a section entitled Administration, with very clear instructions to centres.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to those who got it right and enabled moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

Attention is strongly drawn to OCR's Training and Guidance DVDs for this unit, issued to centres each September. These will build up to provide vital support for all centres, in assessment and task setting. The DVD issued in September 2011 paid particular attention the demands of the real-life context, and to appropriate task setting for drama-focussed activities. Future DVDs will focus on other areas to give centres a comprehensive set of guidelines and support.

As centres become more familiar with and confident in applying the new performance criteria, and in task setting to meet the new requirements, this unit should develop into a real success, with opportunities for candidates to achieve.

Spoken Language

General comments

This was the second entry for this component and, once again, centres had paid careful attention to the specification and guidance available. Candidates were well prepared for the controlled assessment and the rubric was adhered to in all cases. Only tasks A1(i) and A1(ii) were seen in the moderation sample, due to the relatively small entry.

Centres had made good use of the opportunity to contextualise the task and often set titles which encouraged candidates to concentrate on a particular aspect of the texts/data, enabling them to focus their analysis effectively. Most centres had made use of the texts supplied by OCR; where centres had chosen their own, they had made appropriate choices which clearly engaged candidates and provided the opportunity to meet the assessment objectives. When centres select their own spoken language texts for candidates, it is particularly helpful to the moderator if a copy of the transcript and/or a reference to where the text can be found online is included with the sample.

In assessing candidates' work, teachers made careful and detailed reference to the marking criteria, demonstrating how they had been applied. The criteria were used well and centres demonstrated a good understanding of the standards. In the few instances of generosity of marks, this tended to be where candidates' analysis of the detail of the text needed to be further developed in order to meet the criteria for the marks awarded.

The completion of the documentation was, in all cases, accurate and clear and enabled the smooth running of the session. Once again, centres are to be commended for their diligence in this. It would be much appreciated if centres could ensure that the candidates' work is securely stapled and the Controlled Assessment Form (GCW328) attached to the front.

Spoken Language of a Public Figure: Barack Obama

Centres approached this task well and candidates generally had a clear focus for their study, for example, how Obama seeks to engage and persuade his audience. All candidates were able to identify the rhetorical devices used as well as the impact of some paralinguistic features, for example, the impression of confidence given by his control of pauses. The strongest responses analysed how speeches had been structured to guide the audience response and examined how particular patterns of language were used, eg the placement of positives and negatives, the use of figurative language and of historical references.

Some candidates chose to compare one or more speeches to Obama's use of language in a less formal setting; comparison is not a requirement of this component but candidates often made use of it in illuminating their analysis, recognising, for example, the fact that while the interview cannot be scripted ahead of time, certain responses were clearly prepared.

Spoken Language of a Public Figure: Eddie Izzard

This was a challenging task and one with which candidates had clearly engaged. Most candidates responded to Izzard's stand-up routines and were able to discuss patterns in the way he creates humour, for example the use of anomalous registers in imagined situations and surprising combinations of images. Some candidates chose to compare Izzard's language in two different contexts and where this was the case, the choice of the second text was important. Where this worked well, candidates discussed how language was used to define a persona appropriate to the context. Some candidates, in their attempts to discuss the impact of choices, needed to distinguish between purpose and context with more clarity, for example, when Izzard was running, some candidates talked about how he chose his language to make him sound tired/breathless when it was the fact of his being tired/breathless which influenced his language.

Spoken Language of a Public Figure: Jeremy Paxman

Most candidates who responded to this task considered the ways in which Paxman sought to position himself relative to the interviewee and in some cases compared the language and tone used to address Baroness Amos and Dizzee Rascal. The most successful responses identified and then exemplified and analysed the patterns/strategies used. Some candidates approached the task by recounting the stages/exchanges of the interview and commenting on each. This tended to produce rather long and repetitive responses and restricted the depth of the analysis.

A680 Information and Ideas

Foundation Tier

This report might be usefully read alongside the Teacher Guide for A680, which can be found on the OCR website.

The question paper proved to be accessible and of an appropriate level of demand for the tier. Candidates clearly engaged with the reading material: Text A on the effects on young people of excessive mobile phone use; Text B on young people's 'slavish' use of electronic devices. The two Writing questions proved to be equally popular.

The majority of candidates have been clearly prepared for the format of the foundation tier question and answer booklet. As pointed out in previous reports, the spaces provided for answers reflect the relative weightings of questions. It was encouraging to see some candidates use one of the three pages provided for the Writing answer for effective planning. Some candidates preferred to use bullets and others mind maps for their planning; such strategies enabled them to give proper consideration to both the content and organisation of their answer.

Candidates should not try to squeeze writing into the margins nor should they write on pages that say 'PLEASE DO NOT WRITE ON THIS PAGE'. If, for any of the questions, candidates feel the need to write more than the space in the booklet provides, they should do so on additional sheets of examination paper which bear their name, candidate number and relevant question number. Additional sheets should be attached to the booklet by means of a treasury tag.

Individual Questions

Section A – Non-Fiction and Media

The majority of candidates used the relevant text in responding to Questions 1 and 2. There were, however, instances of some candidates introducing their own opinions. Candidates should be reminded that both these questions are tests of reading, and even brief asides giving their own views about the topic cannot be rewarded.

Question 1

1(a) – 1(c). Question 1 begins with a number of questions requiring short responses.. The space for answers is deliberately restricted, to signal to candidates the relative brevity required in their answers. Selective copying is acceptable for these questions, though verbatim copying of excessive chunks of text is not. Candidates need to read the question carefully, as clear directions are given about the specific parts of the text from which the answers should come. Some incorrect answers were the result of not reading the question with sufficient care. For example, 1(c) spaces were provided to record a cause and an effect. Clearly these responses are not interchangeable.

1(d). Examiners saw a range of responses to this question. Successful responses were clearly focused on the question, showed evidence of the use of own words and included a range of relevant points. The best answers demonstrated a sustained focus on the 'effects' of excessive mobile phone use on young people. Less successful responses tended to list mechanically points made in the passage, without achieving a clear focus on the key word 'effects'. Weaker responses introduced material that was not actually relevant to the question, for example, details of the research given in the passage. The weakest responses lifted chunks of material from the passage, sometimes indiscriminately, with little attempt to tailor the material to the question or gave their views on the topic.

Question 2

Most candidates took note of the relative weightings of Questions 2(a) and 2(b) – 6 and 14 marks respectively. Candidates who use a continuation sheet for Question 2(a) run the risk of under-performing in Question 2(b). Indeed some who wrote excessively for 2(a) did not write enough for 2(b). Candidates should be reminded that there is no requirement to be exhaustive in their answers. Effective selection and pertinent comment are common requirements in these two part-questions.

2(a). Successful responses identified specific features and commented on particular effects they create for a reader. For example: 'The cartoon shows a baby on a computer typing its first word. This is humorous but also quite worrying, showing the idea that younger people get into technology too early in their lives'. Some responses pointed out the incongruous nature of the photograph when considered alongside the text. Stronger comments on headings considered the effect of particular words. For example: 'The phrase "slavish use" is worrying because it makes you think the technology is controlling young people's lives'. By contrast, less successful answers took refuge in generalisations: 'the heading is really big, catchy and stands out'; 'the picture is big and very colourful, and will make young people want to read the paper'. Candidates who generalised tended to write a lot for little reward.

2(b). Successful responses provided clear evidence of an ability to analyse, commenting specifically on the ways in which information and language conveyed the worries some people have about young people's use of electronic devices. Only the strongest answers demonstrated a critical understanding of the effects of particular words. For example: 'The phrase "like a drug" shows just how addicted young people are to social networking. This idea of a drug-like addiction would certainly be alarming to parents.' Thoughtful, personal comment on the effects of a few carefully-selected words is a better strategy than a mechanical listing of words or devices (eg 'They use a simile "like a drug".').

Some less successful responses tended to supply unsubstantiated assertions such as 'The writer uses emotive language'. Sometimes terms were deployed but not meaningfully: eg 'There are declaratives/connotations/imperatives'. Generalised comment such as 'the writer uses negative words' should be developed by reference to specific words and the particular negative effect created. The quality of analytical comment is a discriminator for this question, and in preparing for this question candidates should be given opportunities to articulate how and why particular words are effective.

Section B – Writing

Questions 3 and 4

The following, taken from last June's report, is relevant too for this session: 'Most candidates engaged successfully with their chosen task, which were of roughly equal popularity. There was little evidence of rushed final answers. All candidates should be encouraged to adopt the effective planning strategies evident in many of the more successful responses. In these, candidates had taken time to produce a plan, usually in the form of a bulleted list or mind map. It was noticeable that these candidates went on to produce writing which was on the whole clearly and engagingly expressed and also carefully-structured. There was often a purposeful introduction and interesting development leading to a satisfying conclusion. Those who did not plan tended to produce writing that was rambling and repetitive, with little focus on the actual question. It was not surprising that those who wrote at excessive length often made the greatest number of spelling and punctuation errors.'

Candidates should be discouraged from using additional sheets for the writing: the desired outcome is quality, and not quantity of writing. Some examiners felt that responses might usefully spend the last minutes of the examination checking what they have written rather than continuing to write until the end of the exam.

Successful responses showed evidence of a conscious shaping of material to engage the interest of readers. In these responses vocabulary, language devices and varied sentence structures were used to achieve deliberate effects. However, a number of candidates would benefit from targeted revision in a number of key areas: effective paragraphing, accurate sentence divisions and correct use of upper and lower case letters.

For Question 3, content was generally sound and, at times, both developed and illuminating. However, only the strongest responses kept the audience – parents – firmly in mind. Candidates were generally able to draw on their own experience of social networking, though some candidates relied too heavily on the content of one or both of the Reading texts.

There were interesting and thoughtful responses to Question 4. Stronger responses were clearly heartfelt and unashamedly honest about their feelings and relationships. Some candidates explored at some length the personal qualities that made their friends admirable. Less successful responses were rarely able to do this, but instead reminisced about shared experiences, opting for narrative rather than a mixture of description and explanation. There was repetition of simple and underdeveloped points such as 'He is always there for me' and 'she makes me laugh'. Some struggled to develop explanations of why they admired their chosen person and lapsed into basic descriptions of hair, eyes and clothes.

Higher Tier

General comments

Overall, candidates responded well to this paper and found the subject matter engaging and both the reading material and questions to be accessible. Only a very small number failed to produce responses of at least satisfactory length to all four questions. There was a larger entry for the paper than has been the case in previous sessions with the result that there was evidence of achievement at all levels and certainly more examples of high level responses than has been the case previously. It would appear that Centres, in particular those new to OCR, are now becoming more confident in their entry policy and there were many fewer candidates optimistically entered for the Higher Tier paper when Foundation Tier would have been a more suitable option. Assessors also were of the opinion that the extra maturity resulting from taking the examination in Year 11 was significantly to the candidates' benefit.

Responses to the reading tasks in Section A indicated that almost all candidates had a clear understanding of the main points of the two reading passages although there was also evidence that a full understanding of the requirements of the questions was less secure – further details concerning this point will be covered in the following section of this report. It was encouraging to note that despite the requirement to answer two questions on the first passage (with the obvious implications for time allocation), most candidates produced full length answers to the question on the extract from *A Walk in the Woods* most of which were of equivalent, if not higher, standard to their response to Question 2. As has been the case in previous sessions, the writing tasks in Section B often led to candidates producing their best work and many responses to both tasks were a pleasure to read. It should also be noted that the writing responses were generally better focused and more tightly structured than in the past; candidates and their teachers have clearly taken notice of the advice given in last summer's report to spend no more than 50 minutes on this section of the paper.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A Reading

Question 1

The day I survived a very grizzly bear attack.

Using details from the article, **outline concisely***:*

- *what you learn about black bears*
- *the different thoughts and feelings Guy Grieve experiences during his encounter with the bear.*

Use your own words *as far as possible.*

It is important for candidates to remember that this is a summary question and is, therefore, primarily a test of retrieval skills. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the content of the passage but only a small number focused their responses clearly on the specific topics stated in the rubric to the question, with the result that they did not illustrate the overview of the subject matter required to access the highest mark bands that their understanding suggested was within their reach. The most successful responses to this task were sub-divided to focus on the two key aspects of the task (what is learnt about bears and the thoughts and feelings of the writer), avoided the inclusion of irrelevant details and unnecessary comment and showed clearly that the passage had been understood through a judicious use of the candidates' own words. Less successful responses tended to write at length, without clear focus on the requirements of the task, and to include unnecessary comment about the writer's use of language and the effects of the photograph which were more appropriate to an answer to Question 2. Such responses usually gave evidence that the passage had been understood although they seldom contained sufficient overview of the material and the task to achieve a mark any higher than in Band 4. The least successful responses revealed only a limited understanding of both passage and task and tended to consist of first person narratives containing advice on how to escape from a predatory black bear, usually – but not in all cases – with some awareness of the content of the passage.

In general, Assessors were of the opinion that although there were some very good answers indeed, this was the question that offers most scope for improvement in the performance of candidates. As mentioned above, this is a summary question and candidates are encouraged to acquire a reliable summary-writing method. In future papers, as in this one, Question 1 will always identify a specific area or areas of the passage for candidates to summarise. A recommended approach to answering it successfully is to read the passage carefully, focusing on and making notes of the points directly relating to the elements identified in the question, ensuring that the full range of these elements is covered and then reorganising these points into an appropriate order. Once this has been done, then candidates should attempt to write their own version of the specific required aspects of the topic, using their own words sufficiently to show that they have understood the original but not attempting to find substitute words of their own for every expression in the original, as this approach can result in a distortion of the points originally made.

Thoughtful and thorough note-making is very much the key to success in this task (and Assessors noted that candidates who scored most highly had usually taken the time to make such notes). Candidates should not be over-concerned about this being a time-consuming process. Section A tests *reading* and it is, therefore, important that time is spent in practising this important skill. A fully successful response to Question 1 in this paper could have been written in no more than 200 words, to include about a dozen focused points, as long as these were evenly distributed between the two elements of the question. If candidates have made sufficiently detailed preparatory notes (and, therefore, have a clear idea of what they are going to include in their final response) it should not take them very long to write it.

Question 2

The day I survived a very grizzly bear attack

How does Guy Grieve use language to make the account of his encounter with the bear so terrifying?

In your answer refer closely to the passage.

Whereas the key word in Question 1 is *what*, that in Question 2 is *how*, and it is important that candidates keep this clearly in mind when writing their responses. This particular question required a specific consideration of how the writer's use of language made his experience with the bear so terrifying. The most successful responses focused consistently on these two aspects of the question, identifying appropriate quotations from the passage and then explaining how the writer's choice of words succeeded in conveying the terrifying nature of his experience. An example of this was the candidate who selected the phrase '70-stone killing machine' and then went on to comment that the phrase suggested that the bear was 'devoid of emotion, and completely intent on its purpose'. Such a comment shows a clear appreciation of the effect of the imagery used by the writer. Less successful responses tended to identify appropriate examples of language use, for which they were credited, but did little more than attempt to analyse at best, with comments such as 'the writer is terrified here and we know this as he repeats the word 'terrified'. This shows that he is terrified.' The least successful concentrated mainly on identifying figures of speech such as alliteration and the rule of three in 'slowly, sedately, stealthily' and then making pre-prepared comments such as 'and this draws the reader in and makes them want to read on' without making any reference to the requirements of the question.

Overall, Assessors commented that most candidates attempted to write analytically about the passage and to show an awareness of how the writer's use of language in particular conveyed his feelings during the episode described. There were some very good responses which remained clearly focused on the requirements of the task and included perceptive appreciation of the writer's skills. At the other end of the scale, there were a small number of responses that did little more than write a general summary of the passage with very little reference to the question, but these were encouragingly few. By far the majority of responses were placed in the Band 5 – Band 3 range and the following comments are intended to provide advice to future candidates as to how they might ensure that their performance in similar questions reaches the upper end of this range, at least.

One of the main criteria for the Band 4 category is that a response contains 'appropriate supporting references' and 'an attempt to analyse' whereas to achieve a mark in Band 3, it is necessary for a candidate to use 'careful supporting references' along with 'some analytical comment'. Although some responses consisted of little more than generalised attempts at analysis, without any supporting references or quotations (which kept them to Band 5 at best), most candidates successfully identified some appropriate or careful supporting references. What differentiated those achieving Band 3 marks and above was the quality of the attempt at analysis. A response containing fully apposite quotations is likely to achieve a Band 4 mark; however, if there is only limited explanation of these quotations (such as 'this show that the appearance of the bear was terrifying') then there is no reason to move the response into a higher band. However, an attempt to consider the impact of a chosen quotation, in particular by exploring into the implications of the language *within the context of its use in the passage* is likely to result in the response moving into a higher mark band. It is not necessary for candidates to write at great length when answering Questions 2 and 3 (time restraints do not encourage this) but it is important that they select three or four fully appropriate quotations or references to illustrate the points required in the question and then explain as fully as they can how these examples convey the particular aspect of the writer's purpose which the question identifies. It is not necessary for candidates to hunt out and identify by name various linguistic devices used by the writer: what is far more important to the process of achieving a good mark is that they can explain convincingly the *effects* of those devices on the reader.

Centres should also be reassured that although the question referred candidates to the writer's use of language in particular, full credit was given to those candidates who made convincing analytical comments about the contribution of the photograph and also of the information ('70-stone') and other presentational features contained in the passage.

Question 3

A Walk in the Woods

How does Bill Bryson make the account of his experience in the woods so entertaining?

In your answer, refer closely to the passage.

Much of what has been said about Task 2 – especially the comments about focusing clearly on the wording of the question – applies equally to candidates' performance in response to Task 3.

Overall, candidates responded well to the Bryson extract. Many appreciated the humour contained in the account and it is a comment on their responses to the passage that most candidates scored as well or better on this question than on Question 2. Although there were some questionable interpretations of what made it entertaining (it is unlikely, for example, that the author's reference to the weather being warm enough for him to sleep in his underwear was intended as nothing more than a piece of circumstantial detail) most candidates clearly appreciated the contrast in the reactions of the writer and his companion. The most successful responses clearly depicted the humorous contrast between Bryson's mounting hysteria and Katz's laconic and increasingly sarcastic ripostes. Similarly, there were convincing explanations as to how the tension of the account was emphasised by the use of the single word paragraph, 'Bear!' and how this was effectively undercut both by the writer's reference to the occasion when a skunk had sounded like a stegosaurus and his description of the inadequacies of his knife and torch and how this strand of the account was reduced to absurdity by Katz's offer of nail clippers as a weapon followed by Bryson's witheringly sarcastic comment about pedicures which was finally capped by his companion's insouciant response. Although not all candidates explained their reaction to the episode in quite such detail there was clear evidence that many appreciated the entertaining nature of the account and how this was achieved both through structure and language; as one candidate perceptively commented about the writer's language towards the unknown creature: "'Please withdraw'; this suggests that Bryson is an alien in the wilderness as he uses the language of a scholar to a dumb creature, assuming it has knowledge of human etiquette."

As a footnote, it was interesting that no candidate commented that one of the key factors contributing to the enjoyable nature of the account was that, from the very fact that it was written in the first person and in the past tense, the readers were aware from the start that, whatever the mysterious beast was, both characters survived the encounter!

Section B Writing

Question 4

'Be Prepared'

Write a magazine article, giving information and advice about how to prepare for a particular activity; for example, a camping holiday, a foreign visit, a work experience week etc.

OR

Question 5

Things that go Bump in the Night

Write about some of the things that you found confusing or scary when you were younger and explain how you feel about them now.

Candidates apparently found both tasks to be fully accessible and responded well to both of them. As has been the case in previous series, many candidates performed at higher level in their answers to this Section than to the reading tasks in Section A. There was a fairly even distribution between the two tasks, with Question 5 being slightly more popular. In answer to Question 4 most candidates wrote about the suggested topics, with work experience and holidays being the most popular. Question 5 opened up a wider range of responses, and some of these were very engaging, mature and thoughtful, with many accounts of being scared of the dark and of monsters under the bed/wardrobe.

Although Question 4 tended to be answered usually in a very straightforward style there were, nevertheless, some strong individual responses which brought a quirky and entertaining tone to the task, therefore 'showing off' a mature manipulation of language, eg, 'Holidays. The one chance you and your family get a year to completely exhaust any tolerance you might have had for one another'; or, 'Always remember on a camping trip that Organised Chaos is better than mere chaos.' As well as a large number of accounts dealing with camping holidays or trips abroad there was also much sensible advice offered, very often in a lively and sparky tone, on preparing for exams, a new baby, the 2012 Olympics – and, in one case, the end of the world!

Question 5 demonstrated candidates' abilities to write clearly and, at times, with some imaginative crafting. The most successful responses were highly sophisticated and tended to focus on one or two particular fears as opposed to listing all the childhood fears the candidate had suffered from; darkness, death and clowns appear to be the most common. Some responses were highly sophisticated, expressive and enjoyable to read. By far the majority of responses were clearly personal, autobiographical accounts rather than attempts at fictional recreations; candidates benefited from taking such an approach and in relishing the opportunity to open up about irrational and unusual fears that they had experienced.

Nearly all candidates wrote responses to the Writing Task of adequate length; although some lost control of structure through attempting to write at too great length, it would appear that most had taken note of the comments in previous reports about excessive length and had tried hard to tailor their material to fit the time available.

As always, the standard of performance in the AO3 iii element varied; the most successful responses contained a wide range of accurately controlled sentence structures with correctly spelt, apposite vocabulary and sophisticated and confident use of punctuation. Less successful responses showed particular uncertainty in sentence separation and imprecise use of punctuation devices such as the apostrophe. Assessors expressed some concern about uncertain paragraphing even in scripts that, in all other areas, were of a high quality; candidates for this examination in future are reminded of the importance of careful planning of their writing and the need to paragraph their accounts in order to communicate their points clearly to the reader.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning
Telephone: 01223 553998
Facsimile: 01223 552627
Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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