

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)

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Paper 1: Reading and Writing (4357/01)

General Comments

On this paper the reading sections are drawn from authentic texts with very little adaptation and the writing sections aim to provide candidates with opportunities to write texts, which they could genuinely be called upon to write in their learning lives.

The candidates on the whole performed very competently on this paper. The written work was of a high standard and showed clear evidence of preparation and practice prior to taking the examination.

Section A

For this section candidates were asked to read *'10 Great gifts for your Child'* taken from The Independent newspaper. Candidates were asked to identify the Sections (A- H) containing the information listed in questions 1 to 10 by marking X for the correct answer. It is important that candidates read the questions before starting the task, so that they are aware of the key points that they will need to identify in the text in order to carry out the matching exercise. Candidates should follow the instructions for completing the task carefully as they will not be awarded a mark if their selection is not clearly indicated.

Section B

In part 2 candidates were given a text to read which was adapted from the University of Surrey webpages. The text is of average length for this question paper and it has been divided into 2 sections. Candidates were asked to answer 15 True/False /Not Given questions. As in part 1 candidates need to read the questions very carefully and identify the main points before going back to the text to locate the information and then to decide whether the information in the question is True or False according to the text. In the Not Given option the candidates have to determine whether the information in the question is given in the text. The not given questions are related to the information in the text and so candidates have to analyse the text quite carefully to determine whether the information they are looking for is there or not.

Section C

In this part candidates had to read the text *'HOW DOES THE SUN SHINE?'*, adapted from www.SPACE.com and answer 15 sentence completion questions based on information in the text. As in part 2, the questions will have been paraphrased and reflect information given in the text. It is essential that candidates read the questions carefully and highlight key information, which will lead to locate the relevant information in the text and to find the answers, which will complete the questions. Candidates must keep their answer to the number of words indicated in the instructions to the questions. It is important to train candidates to find their answers in the text. They are not expected to formulate their answers or to transform information given in the text.

Able candidates performed very competently on all three reading sections. Weaker candidates however tended to leave questions unanswered or provided answers that did not occur in the text.

Section D

In this section, candidates were expected to write a report to be published in their school magazine on the advantages and disadvantages of leaving school at 16 and the advantages and disadvantages of staying on until 18. Candidates had to complete the task in 100-150 words. Candidates were also asked to give their preference for the school leaving age. It is essential that candidates address all aspects of the bullet points within the word limit. Candidates are given some background information, which they can incorporate into their report however they should try to use their own words and phrases. The task itself requires the candidates to provide their own views on the subject.

Overall the task was performed well. Able candidates suggested clear advantages and disadvantages in the report and very many had strong views on the subject. Weaker candidates found it harder to provide clear organised thoughts on the subject and in some cases overlooked bullet point 3. Many candidates also did not complete the tasks within the required word limit and were penalised for this.

Many candidates provided their answers in a variety of formats and some presented the task as a speech, a talk and letter - some candidates seemed confused by the task and were unclear between school/college/ leaving ages and university entrance criteria. Candidate who considered register and audience were not penalised for the format.

Section E

In this section candidates were asked to write a letter to a friend in another country, thanking them for a recent visit (by the candidate) and asking them to forward something they had forgotten to take home. This task has 3 parts and all parts must be completed within 100 -150 words. Candidates on the whole found this question the most accessible. They had many things to say about why they enjoyed the holiday and overall they found it easy to structure and organise their response with a good understanding of the conventions of letter writing. However, because this question was the most accessible, many candidates tended to write more than was necessary and did not complete the task within the word limit and were penalised for this. It is important for candidates to keep their responses focused and relevant to the task and not digress. There were also many incidences of 'text' language being used by candidates.

Section F

Many candidates answered this question to a very high standard and clearly understood summary techniques. As in previous sessions, candidates who copied large sections from the text were penalised, as were those who included irrelevant information. Candidates need to hone their summary techniques and need more preparation/practice in answering this type of question.

All candidates should be given the skills they need to proof and check their work at the end of each section. It is essential that they reread what they have written to make sure that they have addressed the task set and to correct any minor errors they find.

Paper 2: Listening (4357/02)

Background on the paper

The listening paper is divided into three sections. In this session, the first section was a monologue by a principal of a school on the arrangements for sports day. Candidates were required to complete sentences based on the information provided. In the second section, candidates listened to a dialogue between a radio interviewer and an Antarctic explorer. Candidates were required to answer multiple choice questions. In the third section, candidates listened to a monologue on emotions and how to manage them. Candidates were required to complete summary sentences based on the talk.

General Comments

Generally candidates did well or very well on this paper. Marks tended to be in the mid-teens to mid-twenties range. Each part of the paper presented challenges for the candidates. Candidates found Section B of the paper the easiest and Section C the hardest.

Detailed comments

There were two general types of questions on this paper: multiple choice and sentence completion.

Multiple Choice

As a rule, candidates followed the instructions given in the rubric for this type of question.

Sentence completion

Generally these questions were well attempted, although there were some candidates who did not adhere to the word limit given in the rubric. Two issues arose out of questions which require candidates to provide the word or words for the answer themselves.

Spelling

This proved to be a problem for some candidates. The general rule applied during marking was that if the answer adversely affected communication, candidates were not awarded a mark. Candidates were not penalised for misspelling a word if it sounded like the target word. For example Q 2 (answer (small) plastic sheet), a spelling such as 'sheete' was accepted. However, if the word sounded like a different word or was a different word (e.g. Q2 plastic seat), candidates were not awarded a mark.

Grammar

In a few questions e.g. Q26 (answer positive things), candidates were required to complete a sentence using the correct grammatical forms. Although these forms were given in the recording, many candidates made errors in their answers. These were the most demanding of all the questions on this paper.

Advice To Centres

It is recommended that centres prepare candidates for the listening examination by familiarizing them with the style of the tests and with the types of questions they can expect to find on the paper.

Candidates should make good use of the time before the tape is played to predict possible answers and consider the context when providing their answers.

Candidates should be advised to follow the instructions in the rubric when answering questions and to adhere to the word limit.

Candidates should consider the grammatical fit of their answers in sentence completion questions.

Candidates should consider the spelling of words when providing their answers.

Paper 3: Speaking (4357/03) (Optional endorsement)

This speaking examination is in three parts and lasts about 12 minutes. Each candidate is interviewed individually by an interlocutor. All of the interlocutor's questions are scripted. The speaking examination is recorded on cassette tape or disc and assessed by an examiner.

In Part 1, the candidate is asked a set of questions on a familiar topic. This part of the exam lasts about 3 - 5 minutes. In this session, the topics were television, the weekend, sports and games, and music.

In Part 2, the candidate is given a task card and speaks at length (about 2 minutes) on the topic on the card. The candidate must answer the specific question mentioned on the task card. The candidate has 1 minute to prepare what s/he is going to say. In this session, the topics were learning a language, the shopping facilities in your town, studying at university and life in towns and cities.

In Part 3, the candidate discusses in more depth issues related to the topic used in Part 2. This part of the exam lasts about 3 - 5 minutes.

Generally, the candidates responded well to the topics in this session. Some candidates found Card Three (university) more challenging, although others stated that this topic was appropriate as they were just making decisions about going to university. This topic was regarded as the most difficult of the four available. Card Four (life in towns and cities) was not often selected by the interlocutors. Some of the concepts in the questions (gap year (Card Three), high street (Card Two)), sometimes needed explaining to candidates.

Generally, the candidates performed well on this paper. They responded well to the structure of the test and seemed engaged by the content. The topics were ones which were generally familiar to them and they could call on their life experience to answer the questions. Card Three (university) was the only topic which was outside the experience of a few candidates.

The paper is designed to become increasingly difficult and this proved to be so for less able candidates who struggled the most with Part 3.

Candidates seemed well prepared for the test and knew what to expect.

The performance of the interlocutors is improving with each series; however, there are still problems which need to be highlighted.

Interlocutors

Although most of the interlocutors conducted the examination appropriately, there were others who did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. All of the wording and questions were provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet some interlocutors did not keep to the questions both in Part 1 and in Part 3.

Those interlocutors who did not follow instructions did not appear to grasp the thinking behind the structure and purpose of each section of the test, and when they deviated from the script it made the task of the assessor more difficult

In Part 3, several interlocutors did not ask questions in groups as indicated on the frame card but selected questions somewhat haphazardly. The questions in Part 3 are grouped together thematically and aim to become increasingly difficult. This allows candidates to build on their ideas as this part of the test progresses.

In Part 3, several questions had a follow-up question to encourage candidates to talk more. Some interlocutors failed to ask the second part of the question, and this prevented candidates from developing their ideas more fully and thereby displaying their ability to use more complex language. A number of interlocutors did not ask an adequate number of questions in Part 3; this also prevented candidates from displaying the full range of their language abilities.

Other observations concerning interlocutors

1. Some interlocutors needed to prepare more for the examination and have a clear idea of how the exam was organised and what the questions were.
2. Some interlocutors invented their own questions and/or commented on candidates answers. In such instances, this was to the detriment of the candidate.
3. Some interlocutors used a limited number of frames or tended to ask male candidates questions about sports and games and female candidates questions about shopping. Interlocutors should use all the frames provided.
4. Some interlocutors used words of encouragement such as 'that's good' and 'that's very interesting'. These should be avoided as they may mislead the candidates about their performance.
5. Some interlocutors did not give candidates' time to formulate their response to a question or paraphrased the questions before they were asked to do so by the candidate. On occasion, interlocutors provided vocabulary or even ideas when candidates faltered, not allowing time for candidates to overcome difficulty independently.
6. Some interlocutors gave more than a minute's preparation time. For reasons of fairness, all candidates should be given the same amount of preparation time.
7. Interlocutors needed to listen to what the candidates were saying to avoid irrelevant or repetitive questions from being asked.
8. Interlocutors needed to check whether a suitable recording of the candidate had been obtained before dispatching the tape for assessment. On occasion, blank discs or partial recordings were sent for assessment.
9. There were several instances where the interlocutor switched off the recording during the one minute's preparation time. The Instructions for Conduct of Examinations clearly state that this must not happen.

Candidates

If a candidate is speaking quietly, the interlocutor should ask her/him to speak up.

Equipment

Some of the recordings were of very poor quality and it was hard for the assessor to hear what candidates were saying. Sometimes there was a lot of machine noise, particularly when the recording level was set too high. On occasion, the interlocutor was more audible than the candidate. This could be due to two factors: the position of the microphone and/or the volume of the recording. It is recommended that the equipment, recording quality and level as well as positioning of microphone be checked carefully before the start of the examination to ensure that the best possible recording of the candidate is obtained.

Room

The room selected for the examination was not always a quiet one, and many distracting noises can be heard on the tapes. Some candidates were also distracted by people moving in/out or around the exam room. This situation is always disadvantageous to the candidate and must be avoided.

Mobile Phones

Interlocutors should remind all candidates to switch off their mobile phones before entering the exam room.

Statistics

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Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Lowest mark for award of subject grade (Paper 01 and 02 only)	87	77	67	57	50	43	37	31
Lowest mark for award of grade for Paper 03, Speaking (optional)	19	17	14	12	10	8	6	4

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