

Examiners' Report

IGCSE English Language (4355)

June 2006

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE 4355, CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Paper 1F.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-6

The passage studied gave advice on choosing a pet and proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. The lower mark tariff questions provided a useful lead into the passage and were generally done well. The key discriminator was the focus on the writer's technique in question 6, with some candidates being able to explain how the writer's use of certain words and phrases, such as the inclusive use of "we" at the end of the passage, have a persuasive effect upon the reader.

Section B: Reading and Writing

This section continues to be a challenge to some candidates in terms of managing their time. However, many centres have clearly focused on the challenges of this section and many candidates balanced their time well, producing a succinct yet detailed reading response followed by a writing response that is sufficiently detailed and lengthy as to have a structure and paragraphs, and yet clearly not as extensive as that in Section C.

Question 7

This was based upon the pre-prepared passage from the Edexcel Anthology, *I Never Though I could be this Lucky*. Almost all candidates seemed to have some knowledge of the passage and were able to articulate their views on her character. Stronger responses were those that were able to focus upon the language used and how that is used to build a sense of character. It may be useful for candidates to consider that the bullet points are not free-standing items to be addressed independently, but are to be considered as a scaffold or structure that will enable them to better answer the actual question which is, "How does the writer encourage us to admire Karen Darke?" Better answers did this whilst weaker responses only partially addressed the bullet points or narrated aspects of Karen's life.

Question 8

This produced a strong response from most candidates, with many choosing to use the stimulus of the passage to write about a wedding, or many others writing about recent birthday celebrations. The question specifically asked candidates to *describe* and so it was a feature of better responses that they engaged the interest of the reader by considering them and their standpoint at all times, tailoring their descriptions appropriately. Weaker responses often assume a shared knowledge that is not common, or they narrate incidents rather than describe.

Section C: Writing

Question 9

The idea of being in charge of their school or college clearly appealed to all candidates, meaning that there very few who did not have views to share with the reader. The better responses were those that were clearly able to describe the nature of the changes that they proposed, often with a well-considered justification. Despite the fact that the letters covered different aspects of school life, better responses were able to develop a sense of textual cohesion presenting the letter as a single entity, rather than a series of unconnected bullet points. Weaker responses were often brief and listed things that they would do rather than fully describing them.

Paper 2H

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-3

Despite the fact that the vast majority of candidates are not actually car owners, the passage proved to be stimulating and engaging for all. The first question was a useful lead in with question 3 being the key discriminator. Some candidates would be advised to pay particular attention to the use of bold text in the questions, which are used by the examiner to help the candidate by focusing their attention on important aspects of the question. Those candidates who, therefore, only provided one suggestion for question 1 and did not provide three arguments for AND three against in question 2 need to ensure that they do not disadvantage themselves by failing to read the questions carefully. Most candidates responded well to questions 1 and 2, but few gained high marks on question 3. Candidates need to use the mark tariff to help them judge the amount of detail that a question asks of them and tailor their response accordingly. A number of answers were brief and lacking in detail. Weaker responses tended to simply repeat what the arguments were whilst stronger answers genuinely focused upon aspects of technique, which is what the question asked for. These answers were able to recognise the use of humour, the use of emotive language to be dismissive or inflammatory on different occasions and the different ways in which the writer develops a persona that is seen to be likeable and trustworthy.

Section B: Reading and Writing

The comments made about this section in the report on 1F also apply here.

Question 4

This was based upon the pre-prepared passage from the Edexcel Anthology, *Shopping for Romanian Babies*. Almost all candidates had some knowledge of the passage and were able to select aspects of the passage to write about. Stronger responses were those that were able to focus upon the question and explain how the writer uses language to develop a sense of sympathy in the reader. Candidates were able to refer to a range of techniques, such as the use of emotive the language, the contrast between the “clean-smelling” offices of the European Union and the cold and smelly orphanages and the use of statistics to shock. Weaker responses focused upon a much narrower range of points or failed to explain the writer’s technique, simply citing things in the passage that made them feel sad.

Question 5

This produced a strong response from most candidates, with many choosing to write about issues such as racism or world poverty, whilst others focusing upon more local issues such as bullying in school. Better responses were able to control their outrage and consider how best to express themselves in a way that would most effectively communicate their feelings. Such responses considered aspects of paragraphing and sentence structure as well as the use of appropriately emotive words and phrases. Weaker responses often assume a shared knowledge of their issue that was not necessarily shared by the reader or narrated incidents rather than describing issues and solutions.

Section C: Writing

Question 6

Television is clearly something that all candidates felt able to write about, and this question produced many lively and engaging responses. The better responses were those that demonstrated a clear sense of audience and focused on the purpose of explanation, developing wide-ranging and detailed explanations. Weaker responses were often brief and focused on responding to the perceived unfairness of parents and teachers in their accusation, rather than addressing the question and explaining why it is so appealing to young people.

Paper 3

The paper worked well. Both questions were accessible, except to a few candidates, who seemed to be approaching the Question 1 passage without any preparation or study. These either attempted a paraphrase of the poem or transcribed sections of it.

The writing questions also seemed to provide a reasonable range of attractive options to candidates. Most answers were fully developed and relevant.

Overall the standard was better and more even than last year. The vast majority of students had been well prepared for both questions with the assessment objectives clearly in focus.

Question 1: Reading

This produced clear, developed answers throughout the range. It was clear that most students had been carefully prepared and the majority of answers showed a good grasp of the passage. Most responses demonstrated an ability both to read with some insight and to analyse how Owen used language to convey his message.

The bullet points worked very well, helping students to structure and develop their answers. They also provide a hierarchy of attainment. Most candidates could make useful comments on Owen's description of the soldiers, clearly bringing out the wretchedness of their physical state and the conditions they were facing. Most also grasped the horrific aspects of the presentation of the soldier's death; fewer were able to show how Owen presented the soldier's death as futile and accidental, the inverse of heroic. (Some were under the mistaken impression that more than one soldier died in this incident.) The last two bullet points proved the best discriminators. Candidates, who understood the impact of the death on the "helpless" narrator and the complex nature of the relationships between him and the friend he addresses, and the "children ardent for some desperate glory", scored most highly. The weakest candidates completely misunderstood the poem and argued that Owen believed that, despite the horror, dying for your country was indeed "sweet and fitting." Slightly higher up the ladder of attainment were those who reproduced teacher notes or points from the Students' Guide without clear reference to the question. The best candidates focused, as the question required, on Owen's use of language throughout their answers and were able to bring out the ironies of the poem.

Candidates are required to refer closely to the passage in their answers. Most attempted this but with varying degrees of success. Many had grasped the 'point, example, explanation' approach, but fewer were able to use this to develop a coherent and cohesive answer. The best candidates deftly wove brief illustrative quotations into their answers, whilst weaker candidates used lengthy quotations, accompanied by generalised comments.

Question 2: Writing

Question 2 produced sound answers throughout the range. All options were answered by significant numbers of students, but the most popular was (c) "The Perfect Day." Most candidates seemed aware of the importance of fulfilling all the assessment objectives and wrote clearly, appropriately and accurately. The biggest areas of concern were overuse of local idiom rather than Standard English, the use of 'text' forms ('u' for 'you' and so on) and, in the case of candidates whose overall command of English was clearly strong, careless spelling and punctuation.

Option (a)

There were some very strong answers - both in favour of the idea and against it - from candidates who faced the prospect of being "called up" in this way. Some saw it as a necessary inconvenience; others viewed it as a life enhancing experience, whilst some thought it was a complete waste of time and a needless interruption of career or education. More successful answers also made comments on public service as an alternative to military service and integrated these ideas into their argument. Very few considered whether (as indicated in the question) young women should also be made to do this kind of service. This might have provided a fruitful field for extending essays for many candidates. Some answers balanced the options, rather than argued clearly for one side.

Option (b)

Most candidates showed a good grasp of letter style and structure. Centres are free to teach whichever letter format they prefer, but should note that there is no approved way of doing this. Examiners expect a salutation ('Dear (Friend)' not 'To Whom It May Concern') and a subscription (for example, 'Yours'). More successful candidates were able to develop their advice in a clear and helpful way, adopting a conversational style and a friendly tone which was sensitively tailored to the recipient. Some weaker answers only dealt with one option (the job or education) or misunderstood the question, by offering advice on how to cope with a specific job.

Option (c)

This was the most popular choice. The degree to which the candidate was able to involve the reader in the story was a key discriminator. Many used dialogue and direct speech to create a more dynamic impact. The weakest responses re-told learnt or prepared stories, adding a final, unconvincing twist to address the title. Other responses narrated romantic and all-too-predictable stories of proposals (partners-to-be were invariably perfect specimens) or wrote about birthdays which the candidate had completely (and implausibly) forgotten, only to be rewarded at the last minute with the car of their dreams and/or a surprise party attended by all their friends and relatives. More engaging answers saw the opportunities for irony and exploited them to the full; for many "the perfect day" turned out to be anything but ideal. Candidates taking this approach were more likely to be able to access the higher band descriptors, which require assured and sophisticated control of text structure.

Component 4: Written Coursework

This was the second year of the specification and there was a strong sense that centres were becomingly increasingly comfortable with the requirements. Attainment levels were higher, reflecting the nature of this year's candidature.

The assessment objectives were met in almost all cases and there were very few infringements of the specification. Topics were well chosen, many following the guidelines given in the Teachers' Guide and training material. Occasionally there was a pleasing sense of fresh, sometimes original work, especially in the writing unit.

The standard of centre assessment - often supported by precise teacher annotation - was also improved, and rank ordering was sound within centres. Few adjustments to centre marks were needed. On the whole, however, centres tended to award marks too generously, if within acceptable limits. Centres need to be aware that only a few indulgently marked folders within a sample can trigger centre wide adjustments. A typical rogue folder of this kind has a reading unit, consisting of a side of generic analysis of a single text, which is given marks in the C band and above, coupled with a writing unit, with endemic omission of apostrophes and the misspelling of key words, which is awarded marks in Bands 4 or 5 of the second marking grid.

The topics for the Personal and Imaginative writing were often challenging and produced powerful responses. Reading units were less individualised, but generally characterised by thoroughness and a focused attempt to address the assessment objectives. In some instances the same task was used centre wide, whilst in others candidates were given a choice. While both systems were successfully implemented, the latter approach offers more opportunities for both abler and weaker candidates to show their individual capabilities.

Though the specification allows for only one text to be studied, this approach makes it more difficult for abler students to access the higher band descriptors. Most texts can be linked productively with another text in the Anthology.

Administration was almost universally good. All centres submitted their folders on time. Many sent more folders than were necessary. As already noted, many were carefully annotated with close reference to the grids.

Overall the folders were a tribute to the hard work and commitment of candidates and the professionalism of their teachers.

Unit 1 Reading Unit - Response to Section B of the Anthology

'Dulce et Decorum Est' was again the most popular text. This was sometimes linked with other texts with a war theme.

More successful approaches used precisely phrased topics, providing candidates with a way into the text and opportunities for giving essays a more personal edge. More able candidates in general were better served by comparative topics linking two texts, for instance contrasting the presentation of civilians in wartime in 'The Last Night' and 'Refugee Blues'. There was also some useful comparative work based on 'The Necklace' and 'The Arabian Nights.'

Less successful approaches involved generic titles ("Write about any text in Section B, showing how style fits subject matter.") and heavy dependency on notes from the Students' Guide.

Unit 2 Writing Unit - Personal and Imaginative Writing

There was a huge range of lively writing, including description, narrative, travel writing, autobiography, and a few discursive essays. Most topics had been tailored to the individual candidate; in a few instances candidates even added footnotes explaining why they had chosen a particular topic and how they had approached it. There was also evidence that candidates had been encouraged to write in innovative ways, for instance in the narrative of an incident from three different perspectives. Many pieces were extensions of the texts in the Anthology in the form of diary entries or stories based on a quotation or theme.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE 4355, GRADE BOUNDARIES

Unit/Component	Maximum Mark(Raw)	% Contribution to Award
Paper 1F	60	70
Paper 2H	60	70
Paper 03	30	30
Paper 04	40	20
Paper 05	40	10

Option 1: 1F, 03

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Mark				60	46	32	19	6

Option 2: 1F, 04, 05

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Mark				58	44	30	17	4

Option 3: 2H, 03

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Mark	80	71	62	53	41	35		

Option 4: 2H, 04, 05

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Mark	81	72	63	54	41	34		

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