

Examiners' Report November 2008

IGCSE

IGCSE English Language (4355 1F, 2H & 03)

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4355 1F & 2H IGCSE English Language

Paper 1F

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-6

The passage studied in Section A was a news story detailing a Day in the Life of a Proud Paramedic. The passage was accessible to candidates with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Questions 1 and 2 provided a useful lead into the passage and focused upon selection and retrieval of information. Question 3 was particularly well answered with many candidates having a clear understanding of the chronology of the rescue and the actions of the paramedic. Questions 4 and 5 were more challenging and required candidates to exercise skills of inference and deduction. A number of candidates struggled to recognise some aspects of the paramedic's character such as that he was devoted and committed to his job, clearly hard working, modest and a loving family man. Question 6 is the highest mark tariff question on section A and focuses upon the writer's technique. Weaker responses repeated some aspects of the action from the text but offered little in terms of technique. Candidates scored highly if they were able to pick out relevant examples of language usage, such as the use of emotive language or the eyewitness accounts, and were able to explain how the writer used features such as these to maintain the interest of the reader.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 7

Section B is based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology, Taking on the World. Most candidates seem to have knowledge of the text and had some understanding of Ellen MacArthur's character and what she did. Stronger responses were those that focused directly upon the question about Ellen's character and used the bullet points to support comments on her character. Some responses dealt with each bullet point, but did not use them to draw out points about Ellen's character and as a result produced answers that lacked cohesion and focus. Candidates should be reminded to focus upon the question at all times as this is what the mark scheme is focused upon and details the sort of content that examiners are looking to reward. Better answers made perceptive points about her character and were able to pick out key points of language to support their comments. Weaker answers produced narrative responses or failed to focus upon the question at all.

Question 8

The writing task in Section B is related to the subject matter of question 7 and asked candidates to describe a time in their own lives when they had shown bravery of some kind. This question was accessible to all candidates and many wrote movingly about experiences that they had had. Weaker responses often communicated at a basic level with limited organisational skills, seldom splitting their work into paragraphs and often presenting incomplete ideas or ones that were difficult to follow for the reader. Better responses demonstrated an ability to write succinctly and to demonstrate the skills of writing organisation, composition and effect.

Section C: Writing

Question 9

This was question which was accessible to almost all and appealed to candidates and their intrinsic knowledge by asking them to write a letter to a student who was new to their school or college. Stronger answers were able to convey a sense of clarity of content and communication whilst weaker responses could be brief and were often confusing in that

the they sometimes fell back on simply listing subjects or features, or assumed some knowledge that had not been shared with the reader.

Paper 2H
Section A: Reading

Questions 1-4

The passage studied in Section A was a persuasive text advertising a holiday destination, particularly aimed at families. The passage proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Question 1 was a single point answer that most candidates were successful with and provided a useful lead into the passage. Question 2 was generally well answered though it was important that candidates chose activities as being either restful or lively as they were presented in the text and not simply as they perceived them to be, such as cycling on a "quiet cycle trail" which is seen in the text as relaxing rather than lively or energetic. Question 3 asked how the holiday environment is presented as being healthy. The most explicit references to healthiness in the passage are concerned with food, which many candidates referred to. Other answers made a good case for the natural world being contrasted with the world of urban pollution. In these instances it was important to explain the link to health rather than assume that this was clear if the answer dealt with "nature". The key discriminator is the higher mark tariff question 4 and its focus on the writer's technique. Weaker responses recognised some aspects of the holiday experience but were unable to explain the key relationship between writer and reader and the manner in which the writer had tried to persuade parents to book a holiday. Some answers clearly had a predetermined set of language features that they were looking for, such as rhetorical questions or figurative language and were able to find these, but were less successful in relating them to the audience and the intended effect of the writer. Candidates need to be clear that asserting something is so, even with a supporting quotation does not make it so; thus answers that began, "Parents are persuaded because it says ..." were not credited with offering an analysis of the writer's techniques, merely with recognising that certain parts of the text were more overtly persuasive than others. The best answers were those that recognised a range of persuasive techniques being deployed: appealing to the inner child, to experience adventure again; the guilt of parents in seemingly not providing memorable experiences for their own children or the appeal to both luxury and budget-minded parents. The key is the quality of the evidence-based explanation that is presented.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

Section B is based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology, Impact Alert - Asteroids. Almost all candidates seem to have knowledge of the text and were able to recognise some presentational features that the writer has used to make a difficult subject accessible to a general reader. Stronger responses were those that recognised the many ways in which the writer had made key language choices that were intended to improve access to the material for non-specialist readers, such as the use of expert witnesses give clarification and opinion. Better answers made perceptive points about the writer's technique and recognised the variety of methods, such as the fact that the writer does use technical scientific language at times, such as "seismic" or "tsunami", whilst at other times he deliberately uses non-technical expressions, such as "dinosaur-killer" or "lump of rock." The better responses were those that focused closely on the question and offered explanations as to why this was the case. Weaker responses often recognised some features, such as the use of bullet points or sub-headings, but were unable to explain clearly and with a wide range of supporting evidence. It is worth noting for a small number of centres that the term figurative language does not mean that the writer used figures or numbers to convey his ideas, as was suggested by some candidates.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was directly related to the subject matter of question 5 and asked candidates to write a letter to the government. This was accessible to all candidates with all candidates able to offer their views. Weaker responses often communicated at a basic level with limited organisational skills, seldom splitting their work into paragraphs and often presenting incomplete ideas or ones that were difficult to follow for the reader. Better responses demonstrated an ability not just to present their own views but also to argue and persuade with skill and sensitivity using a wide range of language features.

Section C

Question 7

All candidates felt able to write about the apparent choice between personal happiness and worldly success. Weaker responses were often brief and tended to be limited in their ability to communicate, often listing what they wanted to be in a repetitive manner that failed to engage the interest of the reader. Such answers often made limited use of sentence variety and seemed to have given no thought as to how their writing might be structured. They tended not to recognise the needs of the reader and at times assumed some understanding of people or place that the reader could not have shared. More able responses were those that demonstrated a clear sense of form and audience and were able to engage the reader in their thoughts about success and happiness and what the two meant to them.

It should be noted that in a formal piece of writing such as this candidates should be discouraged from using slang such as "kids". Teachers should also be vigilant and correct candidates who are increasingly joining the indefinite article and other short words together to produce such neologisms as, "alot", "interms of" or "alittle". All of these featured in the papers marked in this session and all were marked as incorrect.

4355 03 IGCSE English Language

The paper worked well. The range of attainment reflected a very disparate candidature. There were very few weak scripts.

Overall the answers suggested that candidates had been well prepared, perhaps even over prepared, for the examination. This was particularly apparent in responses to the reading question, which were often knowledgeable but not particularly well focused. Candidates need to be able to write spontaneously in response to the actual questions. Those who came to the examination room with prepared essays fared noticeably worse than those who answered the questions (whether for reading or writing) as they stood.

Responses to the writing questions overall showed that candidates could write clearly for specific purposes (for example a letter) and, where necessary, for a specific audience. In particular, many candidates had clearly been taught to use verbal linking devices (“Firstly/secondly/finally/therefore/moreover”) to help structure their ideas in argumentative or persuasive writing, and these helped to produce more effective answers.

Because of the disparate candidature it is difficult to generalise, but the following features are all key indicators of success in examination answers. For the reading question it is important for candidates to focus on the question, to develop a thorough answer and to support points by apt quotation. In responses to the writing question, candidates should take care in expression to ensure idiomatic clarity, in correct spelling and punctuation to ensure precise communication, and in presentation to ensure legibility.

Examiners have noted that answers which are prefaced with a plan (however fragmented) often have more clarity and fluency than those without one.

Question 1: Reading

Candidates had been well prepared for the reading question (Question 1) and most seemed to know Marcia Douglas’s poem very well. Answers tended to be brief, perhaps because the text was a poem, but they were usually to the point. A key discriminator, however, was the extent to which candidates focused on how the writer created a sense of a special occasion; some candidates wrote answers which were either very generic (answering the question “How does the writer interest the reader?”) or were more appropriate to the question set on this text in a previous series. The bullet points worked well to direct attention to the key aspects of creating a “sense of a special occasion” in the text. In more successful answers the level of linguistic analysis was good; in weaker responses this element amounted to little more than feature spotting.

Question 2: Writing

The writing questions also worked well and each was answered by significant, if not equal, numbers.

2 (a)

Candidates engaged strongly with this question. Students seem universally concerned with green issues and are clearly very well informed (and well taught) about them. Some of the best responses came from candidates from districts where there were very serious environmental problems, especially those concerned with water quality. Most candidates showed a good grasp of what was appropriate for a letter in terms of style and format; some, however, struggled with the idea of writing a letter to a newspaper editor. Stronger answers were well structured in paragraphs, sequentially linked, and thoroughly developed; ideas to resolve the problem were also presented clearly.

2(b)

The topic of school uniform is a not unfamiliar one, but this question produced some very sound and sometimes surprisingly passionate responses. Opinion on the topic was distinctly polarised and there tended to be an international division in response between UK based candidates who, in the main, tended to be averse to school uniform and those from other countries, who were often strongly in favour, arguing from the perspective of security, respectability and corporate identity. Most candidates developed their argument well, linking points and supporting them by evidence from the press and their own experience. Most also coped well with the context of a classroom debate; some of the most successful responses attempted rhetoric. Less successful candidates sometimes misinterpreted the word 'script' in the question to mean a play and produced dialogues or playlets.

2 (c)

This question produced the weakest answers. The more successful candidates wrote (often movingly) about a special occasion in their lives and gave clear expression to their thoughts; the least successful either wrote a descriptive account or twisted the topic to fit an unconvincing narrative, which in some instances suggested a prepared story which had been committed to memory. Stronger responses were more focused on the candidate's feelings about the special occasion and his or her subsequent evaluation of what happened, making a clear distinction between the experiences of the past and the reflections on them now.

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 1**Papers:**

03 WRITTEN ALTERNATIVE

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr	100	55	43	31	19	7
Lwr	56	44	32	20	8	
Cum %	20.8	58.3	87.5	100.0	100.0	100.0

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 2**Papers:**

04 WRITTEN COURSEWORK

05 SPEAKING & LISTENING CSWK

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr	100	57	44	31	19	7
Lwr	58	45	32	20	8	
Cum %	27.8	72.2	83.3	88.9	100.0	100.0

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 3**Papers:**

03 WRITTEN ALTERNATIVE

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Upr	100	73	65	57	50	39	33
Lwr	74	66	58	51	40	34	
Cum %	2.2	8.0	25.4	50.0	83.5	92.9	100.0

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 4**Papers:**

04 WRITTEN COURSEWORK

05 SPEAKING & LISTENING CSWK

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Upr	100	77	68	59	51	40	34
Lwr	78	69	60	52	41	35	
Cum %	3.8	26.9	65.4	92.3	100.0	100.0	100.0

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 5**Papers:**

04T TRANSFERRED WRITTEN CSWK.

05T TRANSF. SPEAK. & LIST. CSWK

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr	100	57	44	31	19	7
Lwr	58	45	32	20	8	
Cum %	69.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

IGCSE English 4355 - Opt 6

Papers:

04T TRANSFERRED WRITTEN CSWK.

05T TRANSF. SPEAK. & LIST. CSWK

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Upr	100	77	68	59	51	40	34
Lwr	78	69	60	52	41	35	
Cum %	.0	.0	.0	.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

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