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In English Language A (4EA1)

Paper 01: Non-fiction Texts and Transactional
Writing

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Introduction

As a result of disruption to the summer 2021 exam series, there was a second November series of the International GCSE English Language Specification 4EA1. This examination paper is Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing which is sat by all candidates.

The paper is organised into two parts.

Section A, worth a total of 45 marks, tests reading skills and is based on an unseen passage and a text from the International GCSE English Anthology with a total word count across the two extracts of approximately 2000 words. In this series, the unseen extract was adapted from *Helicopter Hero*, an article in which the writer, Debbie Schipp, describes how helicopter pilot, Jason Laing, has helped to rescue many climbers from Mount Everest. The Anthology text was the article *Explorers or boys messing about? Either way, taxpayer gets rescue bill* by Steven Morris, in which the writer gives an account of how two explorers are rescued after their helicopter crashes in the Antarctic. Candidates are advised to spend about 1 hour and 30 minutes on this section.

Section B, also worth a total of 45 marks, offers candidates a choice of two transactional writing tasks. A particular form will always be specified and for this series the two tasks were to write a speech giving views and opinions on television or to write a leaflet giving advice to young people on how to choose a career. Candidates are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

This has been yet another year with many difficulties and challenges and examiners felt that candidates entered for this series should be commended for their commitment to their studies and that the dedicated determination of teachers to ensure their students were well-prepared should also be recognised. The paper was well received with examiners commenting on how the unseen text matched well with the Anthology text, was accessible to students of all abilities and provided ample material for the comparison question. It was clear that many candidates engaged fully with both texts and responded with interest and enthusiasm.

There was evidence that candidates had been well-taught for the examination, with most of them attempting every question, but they should be reminded to read all the printed instructions on the examination paper very carefully and follow them precisely.

Section A

Questions 1-3 are based on the unseen extract and are all assessed for **AO1**: Read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives.

Question 1

This question, which tests the skills of selection and retrieval, is intended to serve as a straightforward way into the paper and the vast majority of candidates were able to select two apt words or phrases that described the pilot, Jason Laing. There were a number of possible choices; all were chosen but the first two points were those mostly commonly made.

The given line references for the question were 10-12. A few candidates selected references from outside of these lines; candidates are reminded that the given lines could come from anywhere in the passage.

A very few candidates simply copied out the whole of the given lines and could not be awarded any marks as no selection of relevant material had been made. A small number of candidates used their own words such as 'brave' to describe the pilot, rather than choosing words/phrases from the text. Some candidates offered explanations of the words/ phrases selected but this is not a requirement of the question and time could be better spent on other questions.

Question 2

This is a 4-mark question that requires candidates to interpret information, ideas and perspectives. For this examination they were asked to look at lines 36-44 and describe Jason Laing's memories of the 2015 earthquake. Examiners noted that most candidates knew what was required and were able to identify the relevant information in the text. There was a good range of possible points that could be made and most candidates achieved full marks; in particular they picked up on the fact that villages had been destroyed, that Laing helped to rescue many people from the mountain camps, that he went to Lukla to give assistance and that he stayed there for a few days. Some candidates were more focused on the feelings Laing went through (with some believing that he rather than the landscape was devastated") instead of the events he was involved with and others gave their own response to the events described.

Candidates need to follow the instruction "**In your own words**" and again in this series examiners did feel that some candidates were struggling to do so. There were also a few who included some analysis of language and structure, an AO2 skill that cannot here be rewarded, and whilst some were still able to make a range of different points, others spent too long exploring just one or two ideas or became side-tracked into offering their own opinions about Laing's actions.

Examiners reported that the most successful approach employed by candidates was to make four clear and distinct points. However, it is important to remember that the question asks candidates to "describe" and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at length, it is not acceptable to simply list very brief points. The response should be written in full and complete sentences that clearly show understanding and secure interpretation. A few candidates did not achieve full marks because they provided an overview of the whole extract and did not focus on the question or the given line references; quite often candidates included line 35 as part of the extract.

Question 3

This is the final AO1 question; it is worth 5 marks and, like Question 2, requires candidates to show their understanding of the text by selecting and interpreting ideas, information and perspectives. For this examination, they were asked to explain the problems faced by rescue pilots using lines 58-67.

In Question 3, candidates are told that they "may support" their points "with **brief** quotations" and many did so to good effect. Examiners reported that while most candidates achieved at least 3 marks, with many achieving the full 5 marks, there were some who did not base their answers on the correct part of the text with many starting at line 52. Successful candidates often worked methodically through the set section of the text identifying key points; the most commonly-made points were the fact that rescue pilots have to consider "the limits for the performance of the helicopter", that helicopters lose power if flown too high, that weather can cause problems, that pilots have to wear oxygen and that people rescued may speak another language.

Many candidates adopted the very successful approach of making five clear points, sometimes set out separately on the page, written in full and complete sentences and supported by relevant brief

quotations. Some expected long quotations with no comment to act as evidence of their own understanding but answers including overlong quotations very rarely gained full marks.

There is no need for comments on the language used in the quotations, but examiners noted, as with Question 2, that a small number of candidates spent time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which again, they could not here be credited and which may have led to a disproportionate amount of time being spent on the question.

The best answers used a good balance of short quotation and some interpretation, paid attention to how many marks the question is worth and made five clear and discrete points.

Question 4

This question is on Text Two, the Anthology text, and is assessed for **AO2**: Understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. It is therefore a more challenging and discriminatory question and is worth 12 marks divided over five levels.

In this examination, candidates were asked how the writer, Steven Morris, uses language and structure in the extract *Explorers or boys messing about? Either way, taxpayer gets rescue bill* to convey his impressions of the two men.

This piece contains a wide range of features of language and structure as exemplified in the mark scheme, but examiners were advised that these are just examples of possible points that could be made and instructed that they must reward any valid points that candidates make that are securely rooted in the text. There does not need to be an equal number of points on language and structure, but both should be addressed as, indeed, they were by nearly all candidates. It was evident to examiners that most candidates had a secure knowledge of this text and could approach the question with confidence. Many started with some analysis of the title and picked up on what they perceived to be the writer's mocking and biased view of the two men.

Examiners commented that the majority of responses offered at the least some understanding of the text though there were a few candidates who simply copied out chunks of the text without comment for which they could not be awarded any marks. At the lower levels, candidates described and made general comments on the text with, at times, limited focus on the question although most were able to say that the explorers were presented as 'childish' or 'immature'. At this level some candidates offered a straightforward narrative account of the text with some vague observations such as "the writer used a whole bunch of grammatical structure which makes it even better". Mid-level candidates tended to work through the article methodically, made a sound range of points and selected apt textual references for support, but often did not move on to analyse closely the impact or connotations of individual words and phrases or fully consider the effect of the structural features. The most successful responses engaged with the text with real enthusiasm, analysing for example the 'cartoonish imagery' and considering how the structure of the piece, with its use of the thoughts and opinions of a range of people along with accounts of previous unsuccessful expeditions contributed to a negative opinion of the two men. Examiners noted that where candidates performed particularly well, they were able to discuss the tone of the article effectively. At this level, candidates were discriminating in their use of quotations, linking different parts of the text.

Some candidates tended to spend too long on unnecessary introductions and conclusions that simply repeated the points already made; the focus should be on making a range of relevant points, not simply reiteration. There is no requirement for any comparison with Text One in this question.

Question 5

This question provides the only assessment in the specification of **AO3**: Explore links and connections between writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed.

This question is the most demanding of those in Section A and, with 22 marks distributed between five levels, carries almost half of the total marks available for reading so it is extremely important that candidates allow sufficient time for a developed response. Perhaps because of time constraints, there were a few candidates who did not attempt the question and thereby missed the opportunity to gain a significant number of marks. Careful time-management is crucial for success in this examination and candidates should factor in time to plan with care the points that they wish to make in order to ensure that they have a wide and balanced range.

Examiners recognise the challenge of the question and it was pleasing to note that nearly all candidates achieved some degree of success with one examiner noting that "most candidates recognised the requirement to compare the texts and made an effort to do so". There was little evidence of planning, but candidates should be advised that a plan can be very helpful because it can aid them to move towards a more exploratory approach based on key elements of similarity or difference rather than producing an explanatory, chronological approach to the texts.

At the lower end, candidates tended to list techniques such as "Text One has a simile, whereas Text Two doesn't" or make obvious comparisons for example "Text One talks about one pilot, Text Two talks about two", "both are about disasters". Often these responses became narrative, sometimes with greater emphasis on one text (to examiners' surprise this was often Text One) leading to a lack of balance. Candidates at this level were generally able to draw a few links between the writers' ideas and make some straightforward comments about language and/or structure. Some candidates copied out over-long quotations whilst a small minority used no supporting textual references; these answers tended to be more list-like and often went little further than mere identification. Examiners noted that a few candidates made quite extensive reference to the italicised information, often copying it out as an introduction to their answer; this cannot be rewarded as it does not provide evidence of understanding. The more successful responses focused almost immediately on comparing specific details of the extracts and looked at the writers' perspectives as well as their ideas and balanced their points, confidently interweaving thoughts on both texts with exemplification and exploration of ideas. One examiner commented: "Where candidates performed well they had taken an evaluative stance, understanding and comparing how each writer viewed the actions of the pilots." Many of these candidates talked about the reverence shown by the writer in Text One and how she portrays Laing's actions as heroic and contrasted this with the sarcastic and scornful tone shown in the second article which suggests the writer felt disdain towards the two men.

The most assured responses included astute analysis of language, purpose and tone with one candidate concluding their response effectively by stating that "in the endings of the texts both writers use the indication of 'home' to signify the end of the article as a structural and linguistic technique". The range of comparisons, depth of comment on both ideas and perspectives and the use of appropriate references were all discriminators. One examiner reported that "the Level 5 responses were stunning in the depth and breadth of their analysis and comparison".

There are different ways to approach this question, but examiners noted that the most successful responses made each point a valid and appropriate comparison with supporting references from both extracts; this led to the balance required for marks within Levels 4 and 5. Feedback from

examiners suggested that use of references was variable and might be a useful area for future focus. Some candidates use references within an almost entirely narrative response and offer no real comment, others select relevant quotations but then do little more than paraphrase them rather than offering any further explanation or expansion. More successful responses were able to select pertinent words within the lines being discussed, embed them effectively within their own sentences and, if looking at language features, offer some astute analysis.

Section B

Candidates are required to answer just one writing task but it carries half of the total marks available for the paper and so they must ensure that they allow sufficient time to plan and organise their response.

There are two assessment objectives for writing.

AO4: Communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences. (27 marks spread over five levels)

AO5: Write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. (18 marks spread over five levels)

Question 6

This question, asking candidates to write a speech in which they expressed their views and opinions on television, proved to be the more popular writing option and elicited a range of interesting, thoughtful and self-aware responses which examiners enjoyed reading.

There were some responses where the required form was not evident but examiners noted that the vast majority were able to write in an appropriate format and acknowledged the conventions of a speech often opening with engaging statements, for example: "Hello everyone, thank you for deciding to hear my opinion on the disaster invention, also known as the television, and I hope you understand and enjoy". An awareness of the conventions of the given form helps candidates to make appropriate language choices which will lead to apt register and tone.

Candidates covered a range of ideas with many using the contrasting statements given in the question as stimuli. Many candidates drew on recent personal experience and made reference to how important television had been during the Covid-19 pandemic. One examiner reported that candidates "talked about the importance of television in providing education during the pandemic, as well as how it was a vital source of company and entertainment" and further noted that "it was a very interesting topic, and the range of experiences of 'lock down' across the globe was evident in these responses".

At the lower levels candidates tended to look systematically at the pros and cons of television but did not develop points or clarify their opinions. More successful responses considered a range of ideas and were persuasive in their views often using personal experience, for example, "I would not know half as many useless and entertaining facts if I didn't watch any TV" and light touches of humour such as "my little cousins can speak more Spanish thanks to 'Dora the Explorer' than I learnt after two years in school".

Middle-achieving candidates tended to work methodically through the bullet points of the question and did not consider using the range of rhetorical features which might have helped to make their

piece more engaging. One examiner was impressed by the quality of higher-level responses which were “engaging, lively and very sophisticated in all aspects”. Candidates producing such work demonstrated a skilful command of language and often focused on complex ideas which allowed them to reach the top levels of the mark scheme as one wrote so powerfully: “I appreciate the knowledge of the rest of the world, but I am so often overwhelmed by a hopelessness borne from being unable to help. The sensationalism with which the news on tv is framed is designed to create strong emotions but what for? What can we do about the war? About poverty? About whatever other horrific thing the news presents to us, offering no closure, no helpline we can call to donate, not even a suggestion.”

Question 7

This task instructed candidates to write the text of a leaflet that gives advice to young people on how to choose a career. Whilst fewer candidates chose this task, one examiner commented that “candidates from a wide range of abilities responded well to the challenge of offering careers advice”. At lower and mid-levels candidates tended to use the bullet points to help structure their answer and ideas were fairly straightforward, looking at various factors that should be taken into consideration such as salary, job satisfaction, qualifications needed. More successful responses focused securely on the given audience of young people and addressed them convincingly, for example: “Never be too scared to ask for help. As young people, you might be quite naïve to the professional world and about certain career paths, but through the assistance of school counsellors and career aid sessions or seminars, young adults like yourself can be bestowed with knowledge, facts, details and personal experiences from adults and professionals, giving an insight into the negatives and positives of life in that field of work”.

At the lower levels, there was often no real sense of organisation, with errors in sentence structure and syntax that sometimes led to a lack of clarity and coherence. Good responses explored a wider range of ideas, for example “firstly, you need to ask yourself what type of person you are” and others considered the impact of Covid-19 on career prospects. Making a plan seemed to help candidates achieve a cohesive and well-ordered response.

Again, it was noticeable that less successful responses demonstrated limited awareness of form and audience with little to indicate that the intention was to advise in leaflet form. Sub-headings and the occasional use of bullet-points were employed to good effect in more successful answers.

Final comment on the writing questions:

To achieve the highest level in AO4 writing needs to be ‘perceptive’, ‘subtle’ and ‘sophisticated’ and there should be a clear focus on the appropriate form. For AO5, candidates should consider the ordering of their ideas, write in clear paragraphs and aim to link them effectively. There needs to be accuracy but also a ‘strategic’ use of an ‘extensive vocabulary’ and an assured and controlled use of a range of sentence structures “to achieve particular effects”. Candidates should not avoid using an ambitious vocabulary because they fear making spelling errors. Those who did achieve higher-level marks frequently opened their piece with an intriguing question, a powerful statement or a short sentence and proceeded to explore and develop their ideas with fluency, clarity and enthusiasm. Candidates are advised that colloquialisms such as ‘gonna’ and ‘wanna’ should only be employed in direct speech. They should also avoid writing solely in upper case as this does not allow them to demonstrate an awareness of the correct use of capital letters.

Candidates must ensure that they do not rush the writing task, allowing time both to plan and to proof-read as unforced errors in grammar and spelling can lead to lower marks. Examiners

commented that where there was evidence of planning, this often led to a clear and effective structure and greater textual cohesion and accuracy

Concluding advice

Candidates should:

- be provided with plenty of opportunities to practise reading and responding to unseen passages under timed conditions
- be aware of the different assessment objectives to ensure that they focus their answers specifically on the different question requirements
- highlight the relevant lines for Questions 1-3 in the Extracts Booklet
- use the number of marks available for Questions 2 and 3 to suggest how many clear and discrete points they should make
- not spend time analysing language in answers to Questions 1, 2 or 3
- answer Question 2, as far as possible, in their own words and aim to offer some interpretation
- offer some interpretation of the text in Question 3 and not simply rely on quotations to make the points without comment
- underline or highlight the key words of Question 4 so that answers are appropriately focused
- consider the effects of language and structure features within the context of the given extract in Question 4 rather than offering generic explanations
- select appropriate references from the whole extract that fully support points made in answer to Question 4
- make a range of comparative points in Question 5 and link elements such as content, theme, tone, purpose, narrative voice, language; points should be balanced across both texts and supported with relevant quotations or textual references
- references should be selected carefully and some exploration of these should be attempted
- take time to make a brief plan for the higher tariff questions (5 and 6 or 7)
- give careful consideration to the given form and audience for the writing task and use these to inform register and tone
- try to use a wide vocabulary and varied sentence structures
- aim for a structured, cohesive and complete piece of writing
- allow time to proof-read their writing response in order to achieve the highest possible degree of accuracy
- read all instructions carefully
- attempt every question

