

Examiners' Report January 2007

GCE O Level

GCE O Level English Language (7161)

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General Comments

Candidates related well to the two passages linked by the theme of jealousy. They obviously tried really hard to get to grips with the questions, making useful notes before answering questions 9, 10 and 11. The number of prepared essays continues to fall though a few on 11a- The Unexpected Gift- showed very tenuous links to the title. Similarly it was good to note fewer prepared phrases appearing in response to question 9 where candidates were asked to compare the two passages, with reference to content and language.

Section A: Comprehension

Q1

Most candidates scored at least one mark. Some stopped too soon, after making just one point, while others talked of Maria “executing elaborate moves with ease” when this referred to her later life. The key point was that Maria achieved a high degree of skating skill **at such a young age**. Two marks would have been gained if the whole of paragraph one had been copied. The two correct ideas would have gained the marks before the irrelevant final part of the last sentence had been reached. The most succinct answer was “While young, she had mastered the difficult moves” in lines 2 and 3, which received the 2 marks.

Q2

Many scored the full 2 marks here correctly identifying the two important events though some included Maria becoming a star or meeting Andrei, not recognising the passage of time in the third and fourth sentences of paragraph two

Q3

There were still several candidates who ignored the instruction to use their own words, although it was in bold print and underlined. Own word questions seek to test the candidates’ knowledge of English vocabulary; hence, in lines 10 and 11, the candidates needed to show they understood words such as “exquisite”, “capacity”, “acclaim” and “rave”. . While the first two words quoted were known by a number of candidates, few showed acquaintance with the last two. There were, however, some excellent answers written in a paragraph or presented as separate points. For example, a gloss on sentence one in the third paragraph, such as, “Maria’s beautiful dancing won her high praise and fame”, scored the full 3 marks.

Q4

This question was well answered with candidates commenting on the lovely dress Andrei gave to Maria and Andrei’s constant watching of Maria’s skating. A few scored a point by mentioning how Andrei “grew to love Maria’s slender body”. Points were lost if candidates simply said that Andrei gave Maria a dress, without showing how special it was (line 17); or if they said Andrei watched Maria, without the fact that it was her **skating** he watched and that he watched it **at every opportunity/ day after day**.

Q5

Like question 3, this question required candidates to use their own words as far as possible; so candidates lost marks for lifting whole phrases such as “take a rest from dancing”, “his face twisted in annoyance” and “prefer it to be with someone else”. Unlike in question 3, candidates were told to make only **three** points. Examiners, therefore, marked only the first three points offered. Very few candidates scored full marks for various reasons. Some did not **explain** how the reader knew Andrei was jealous but simply described what Andrei did, such as watch Maria dance with another man, without giving his reaction. Others misread sentences and said that Andrei wanted Maria to give up dancing completely, when in line 31 it states that he wanted her to stop “for a while”. The point most often gained was from line 38 where we are told that Andrei would rather see Maria dance with someone other than Pierre.

Q6

Candidates of all abilities did well on this question with lively personal responses to the difficulties facing Maria and Andrei. Most remembered to make a choice and Maria won most sympathy. Candidates felt Maria should be allowed to pursue her great talent without the unnecessary jealousy of her husband. They pointed out that Andrei admired Maria’s dancing from the moment he saw her and knew, before he proposed marriage to her, that she danced with Pierre and would be spending a lot of time with him. There was some sympathy with Andrei having to watch her in the arms of another man for so long. Candidates said that Andrei was right to feel his wife did not give him enough time and would not go on a sightseeing tour with him. Many score 3 or 4 marks for this question. Those who scored fewer marks tended to retell the plot without commenting on how the characters behaved. Those scoring 5 or 6 marks made observations based on specific parts of the text and presented a reasoned response.

Q7

Several candidates lost a mark, or even two, because they missed the significance of the word “**precise**” in the question. Often the first point offered was that a person may feel jealous if he sees someone do better than him. This was a **general** point and so did not score. As the question asked for only **two** reasons this meant that there was now only one point left to score. If candidates had ignored the second sentence in paragraph one and copied the third sentence, which contained **precise** reasons, they would have gained full marks.

Q8

Many scored 2 or 3 marks but few managed the full 4 marks. It was pleasing to see candidates observing the word limit of 5 words per point. The most common extracts selected to suggest jealousy were “green-eyed monster” and “green with envy”. Frequently “eaten up by jealousy” was offered but as this phrase contained the word “jealousy”, which candidates were asked to explain, it could not score. Some lost out by giving incomplete quotations, such as “crave”, which alone did not indicate jealousy. (“crave his success” was required). Another error occurred when a few candidates showed they were confused by the wording of the question and tried to give synonyms for “the same as” then “strongly suggest” then “being jealous” and finally “Jealousy”.

Q9

Many candidates focused well on the similarities and differences between the two passages noting the common theme of jealousy being treated in two very different ways. It was often stated that while the first extract was a narrative with fictitious characters the second was a much more formal piece of writing by a professional person whose judgment and advice could be relied on. The tendency to retell the content at some length is still prevalent. This scores very little if the candidate does not give some evaluation of what was written but merely repeats it. Furthermore it takes up valuable time which could more profitably be spent on the subsequent questions. There were some excellent answers, though most fell in the 3-4 mark band. This was because too often points were made without explanation. It was particularly the case with comments on language and style, though it was encouraging to see an increased number of candidates attending to style as well as content. Generalised statements that say "the language of passage two is easier than passage one" or "the paragraphs are good" cannot be credited as they could apply to many extracts and do not show an understanding of the pieces on jealousy. Able candidates said that descriptive language used to describe the dress with "shimmering diamonds" (passage one) helped them to imagine the dress or the phrase "green-eyed monster" (passage two) vividly conveyed the damage jealousy could cause in a person's life. These comments succinctly illustrated the candidate's personal response to the writers' language and showed an appreciation of language used to create a particular effect. Furthermore the candidates were offering brief quotations, as the question required. To sum up, candidates need to make an observation such as "passage two contains interesting facts", and **follow it up** by explaining what these are. One wrote "the doctor's advice on how to face jealousy and overcome it, such as accepting it is a normal human emotion, will help me in my life". This personal response rooted in the text shows that the candidate has understood the purpose of passage two and is able to explain why passage two holds more appeal.

Section B: Summary

Q10

Candidates did well on this question and wrote with enthusiasm, and sometimes humour, to advise a friend of how to minimise the dangers caused by jealousy. Content points were scored with ease, some candidates gaining the full 14 marks! Many explained clearly what jealousy is, by drawing on the first paragraph of Passage 2. In response to the second bullet point, most gained 3 marks by lifting or glossing the opening sentence in paragraph 2—"Jealousy, however, can cause illness, destroy lives or even bring about an early death". Some, however, missed the idea in line 14 that jealousy can make you unappreciative of the good things in your life. Much good advice was given on how to overcome jealousy but there was confusion in the reading of line 20, which says that jealousy is not evil, nor is it a crime. Candidates sometimes overlooked the opening of this sentence—"It would be wrong"—which led them to state the opposite to what the passage says. There was a more than the usual number of candidates who exceeded the 220 words allowed. (Examiners stop marking at the end of the sentence in which the 220th word occurs.) Some repeated themselves or introduced anecdotes which were not in the passage.

Weaker candidates often did well on content but lost marks on expression and accuracy. Where the candidates copied large sections of the passage, only 3 or 4 marks were gained. Errors in verb forms and idiom were frequent. On occasions

the adjective “jealous” was used as a noun or even a verb. Examiners were impressed by the way candidates of all abilities achieved a friendly and positive tone in their letters, with marks in the 4 to 6 range not uncommon. However, while some letters began and ended with a good sense of audience, the main section was too impersonal. It was important to sustain an encouraging tone throughout the letter to help the friend combat jealousy. Phrases and clauses such as “Now, my friend” or “Do you agree?” in the body of the letter showed the examiner that the candidate was clearly focussed on the task.

Section C: Essay

The most popular essay was 11a- The Unexpected Gift. Candidates generally structured the narrative clearly and paragraphed the piece adequately, though some only introduced the idea of a gift at the end as an afterthought. The most common gifts were mobile phones, jewellery, and cars. There were some very lucky candidates, if the story was based on the truth! Some gifts were abstract, such as good health, a family reunited, or even death. Others involved an ironic twist in the story, where a suspicious ticking box turned out to be an alarm clock. The adjective “unexpected” was ignored by some and marks were lost. For example, one story told of preparations for the arrival of a new baby who unexpectedly arrived at the due time!

Almost as popular as 11a was 11b, where candidates wrote a story about a relationship damaged by a disagreement. Once again, narratives were well constructed and had a sense of place and character. Direct speech often enlivened the plot and paragraphing helped to lead the reader through the story. Many stories hinged on the break up of a partnership or marriage, caused by a third party. Sometimes the stories rambled on so that the impact of the loss was not conveyed effectively to the reader. Trivia, such as what a character had for lunch, deflected attention from the crucial episodes in the narrative. Not all stories, however, dealt with broken relationships. There were accounts of jealousy or rivalry, on the sports field or in the classroom, which led to a physical or emotional fight and a lasting, sometimes lifelong, separation.

Essay 11c, which asked candidates to discuss whether or not we should show our emotions to others, was the least popular of the three topics but was sometimes well answered with both sides of the argument being considered and a conclusion saying that it very much depended on circumstances. It was felt that if we never shared our feelings with others our actions could be misconstrued but there were times, as when a friend asked an opinion on an item of unsuitable clothing they were wearing, when greater tact was required! Some candidates introduced brief anecdotes to illustrate occasions when it was advisable, or inadvisable, to show emotions and these added impact to the argument

Examiners enjoyed reading the essays and were impressed by candidates who wrote to the topic in a clearly structured response. Answers considerably over 400 words sometimes failed to engage the reader and technical errors increased as the candidate grew more and more tired, thus losing marks. Conversely, able writers were able to sustain the reader’s interest and maintain accurate English for 500 or more words. Common errors were switching from past to present tense in a sequenced narrative, incorrect agreements and poor use of English idiom. The verbs “said”, “told” and “asked” were confused and speech was not always well paragraphed. The best candidates wrote with great flair and showed confident mastery of the English Language.

Grade Boundaries

English Literature (7161)

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Lowest mark for award of grade	64	55	47	43	38

Note

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

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