

# Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCE O Level

GCE O Level English Language (7161/01)

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers.

Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel's centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information please call our Customer Services on + 44 1204 770 696, or visit our website at [www.edexcel-international.org](http://www.edexcel-international.org).

Summer 2007

All the material in this publication is copyright  
© Edexcel Ltd 2007

## General

The two passages proved accessible and provoked responses which were engaged and often very personal.

Overall, candidates showed that they understood how to approach the range of tasks. There was a tendency to repeat points in answers to different questions. One essential skill examined in section A is the ability to pinpoint exactly what a question requires and to present it concisely.

## Section A

### Q1

Candidates gained marks for writing that Howard wrote an SOS message in the sand with his feet and most were able to develop their answer to point out that he renewed it at night or after the tide had obliterated it. Very few misunderstood, although some stated that he **found** the letters or wrote a letter explaining his position.

### Q2

The second part of the question '**Why did it take three days before you were found?**' was missed by a minority of candidates. This required candidates to comment on the fact that Howard's friends in Broome did not expect him back early and therefore omitted to raise the alarm. Most candidates pointed out that he became stranded but some failed to state the obvious - that he was **alone, lost** and in a **remote** area.

### Q3

The best answers were those which focused clearly on **aspects of his personality** and not merely descriptions of his behaviour. Responses which gave evidence from the final paragraph, as asked in the question, were more focused.

### Q4

The three marks here were given for literal information - that Pi **came round/realised** that there was a **tiger** in the **lifeboat**. Majority of candidates answered this question well, but a minority paraphrased **I woke up and realised that there was someone strange next to me**.

### Q5

Most candidates were able to point out that the voice was that of Pi himself, expressing it in a range of permissible ways, eg **his inner soul, his heart, his conscience**. The second mark was given for something similar to **will, determination** and the third for **fight to survive, not to give up**. Most candidates understood this fully and the question was generally answered very well.

### Q6

Few candidates missed the point of **Q6(a)**; the three different ways of responding to life or death situations are clearly signalled in the passage and there was no need to do other than lift them directly into the answer. **Q6(b)** presented a few more challenges. The emphasis was on **what motivates Pi** and the answer was **his inner voice** and an **appetite**

for life. The danger for candidates was the temptation to give answers which were not sharply focused on the idea of motivation.

#### Q7

It was pleasing to see that most candidates understood the basic needs of this question. The vast majority chose one passage above another, explaining their view as to which central character was more heroic than the other. Even so, the highest marks could only be accessed by those who commented on the **language** of the two passages. Commenting on the newspaper style of passage one (with interviews and a more “distanced” approach) and the internal ponderings of passage two (with a more intimate register) would have been more sufficient. Less successful were those answers that claimed one passage or the other contained similes, metaphors or some such literary devices but failed to identify them or comment on their effects.

There was considerable engagement with one or other of the passages, many candidates commenting, for instance, on the age of Pi relative to themselves. Others commented on the unique predicament in which Pi found himself, concluding either that it was implausibly unrealistic or so threatening as to require the highest order of heroism.

#### Section B

#### Q8

This was a most demanding question. Marks were given for relevant content, style and approach, and quality and accuracy of expression.

The content was clearly provided by the two passages and candidates need not have sought for original material and ideas. Those that did were not always able to think their way into the situation described and sometimes included advice that was not always realistic or practical. For example, potential explorers were sometimes required to walk with laptops, radios and umbrellas or, for those who might like to travel more lightly, merely mobile phones and sunblock cream.

Good responses made good use of material from the passages and commented on the need for optimism and resilience as much as for tools, physical sustenance and material objects.

Focus on audience was crucial and many candidates were able to strike an appropriately familiar tone. Others made good use of the format appropriate for a school magazine, utilising bullet points and other presentational devices that were entirely acceptable to this task.

The majority of candidates worked hard to present their answers within the word limit.

#### Section C

#### Q9(a)

This question provoked some enthusiastic responses. It is clear that many candidates have close relationships with their computers and mobile phones. The most engaging responses were those that sought to explore the wider value of these devices and some candidates were thoughtful enough to consider their shortcomings and potential dangers. Many were able to support their preferences with salient examples from their own experiences (eg the use of a mobile phone in an emergency).

It was refreshing to come upon the occasional essay which took a more original standpoint, perhaps extolling the virtues of face to face communication or even body language.

#### Q9(b)

This was by some way the most popular choice in this section and candidates chose a variety of scenarios for their stories about **survival**. Frequently, there was a tendency to choose a plane crash or a shipwreck as the central event. All too often, perhaps, there was a failure of empathetic engagement with such a situation: usually written in the first person, narratives often involved loss of life or limb with little concern for the likely emotional, or even physical, consequences.

It is worth emphasising to candidates that the internal lives and thought processes of characters in a story are often more engaging to the reader than a sequence of actions. This might encourage candidates to think more about human responses, avoiding the temptation to produce sensational and unrealistic narratives which owe more to certain types of movies and computer games than they do to thoughtful writing. It may not always be the case that it is better to write about what you know, but a little general knowledge might have helped to avoid some bizarre images such as lions and tigers rampaging across the Sahara and hundreds of airline passengers evacuating their plane by parachute.

Even so, there were a number of survival stories which rang uncomfortably true, particularly those that drew on the experience of tsunamis or earthquakes. Other, mostly successful, scenarios dealt with the daily struggle for survival of underprivileged or disadvantaged members of society.

#### Q9(c)

Examiners frequently commented on how much they enjoyed answers in response to this question. Candidates were inclined to write from the heart about places they knew well and for which they had great affection. There were some superb evocations of tranquil retreats contrasted with colourful, bustling centres of activity and noise. It is perhaps not so paradoxical that pieces of descriptive writing were able to say so much about the personalities of their authors, often with very positive and life-enhancing results.

## English Language, 7161 Grade Boundaries

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Lowest mark for award of grade	68	61	54	49	44

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



Further copies of this publication are available from  
Edexcel Regional Offices at [www.edexcel-international.org/sfc/schools/regional/](http://www.edexcel-international.org/sfc/schools/regional/)

For more information on Edexcel qualifications, please visit [www.edexcel-international.org/quals](http://www.edexcel-international.org/quals)  
Alternatively, you can contact Customer Services at [www.edexcel.org.uk/ask](http://www.edexcel.org.uk/ask) or on + 44 1204 770 696

Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales no.4496750  
Registered Office: One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH