

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2010

O Level

O Level English Language (7161)

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General

All three extracts proved to be accessible to the majority of candidates although each contained a considerable amount of detail and a large element of nuance. There is some evidence to suggest, overall, that the standard of candidates' written language continues to improve, although some examiners commented on the need to improve tense and subject-verb agreement. The standard of spelling was particularly high.

I feel I have to repeat my comment from the last (and previous) series: "it is important to stress that candidates should read the question paper very carefully. In particular, the rubric requiring **own words** indicates that very careful consideration should be given to clear understanding and reworking of the extract under consideration. Direct lifting from passages is not rewarded."

Section A

Questions 1 to 3

These did not present any significant difficulties for candidates

Question 4

This highlighted the need to read the rubric and for candidates to answer the question in their own words. All too many used the words of the passage and often the only answer offered was that treasure hunters "make a lot of money". The full implications of the title were rarely thought through.

Questions 5 and 6

Candidates deserve credit for unpicking the details of the relevant passages and answering concisely. Even so, some did not clearly distinguish between treasure-hunters and archaeologists in their answer to question 5

Question 7

This provided problems for a few candidates and proved to be a particularly discriminating question. The need to find own words for a series of actions was challenging but some candidates diminished their chances of scoring all 4 marks by focusing on Butcher's reactions **before** he realised what he had found.

Question 8

This question demonstrated the need for candidates to read the rubric very carefully. Far too many proceeded to answer a question that was not asked, often assuming that they were expected to express and explain a preference for one or other of the passages. That question has been set in the past but the wording of question 8 does change and on this occasion candidates were asked "how each writer shows approval or disapproval [of the people who discover treasure] through the style and expression used". This was a reasonable question directing candidates to look at the force of words and expressions used in all three passages. Unfortunately, too many did not read it, or chose to ignore it.

Section B

Question 9

Most candidates are now showing they are aware of the comments in my report on the last series, namely:

“Centres will have noticed, over recent examination series, a relaxation in the need to observe a word limit. Candidates are now **advised** to keep to an approximate number of words. This is to encourage planning for question 9 and careful time management for the whole paper. It is also meant to help candidates to avoid using time unproductively in counting words and, most significantly, to avoid compromising the force of their written pieces by crossing out swathes of material that are often an integral part of their answer. Candidates should be encouraged to plan, of course, and to put a clear line through their planning. On the other hand, they should not go back through their work chopping out words and phrases just to stay inside a word limit which no longer exists.”

Although the substance of a candidate’s answer is provided by the material in the passages, it is disappointing when candidates simply copy out whole sections from the three texts. The best answers were from candidates who had read the question carefully, addressed all elements of it and included a substantial amount of indicative content in their answer. The least successful were by the significant number of candidates who ignored the question completely and produced a narrative about finding treasure.

Section C

Question 10a

This was the most popular of the question 10 choices and a number of examiners commented on the accuracy of spelling and punctuation in many of the responses. This was counterbalanced by comments about poor expression and insecure control of agreement. It is important that candidates try to avoid cliché and banality in their narratives, especially if they aspire to access the higher mark bands which seek to reward originality. It was pleasing to read the work of candidates who interpreted the “lucky find” as the discovery of a friend or a quality which added something of value to their lives, rather than antique treasure.

Question 10b

This was the least popular of the question 10 choices. Those that attempted it were forced to think very carefully about a serious matter and the results were often interesting and carefully argued with some original ideas.

Question 10c

Although there was some incidence of pre-prepared accounts of school outings, this question also provoked some genuine enthusiasm and excitement in many candidates. As always, total engagement with a question 10 task makes for lively and convincing writing.

O Level English Language: 7161 Grade Boundaries

Paper No	Max Mark	A	C	E
01	100	69	49	37

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

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