

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

O Level

O Level English Language (7161)

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O Level English Language 7161 01

The two passages on which the questions were based proved to be accessible to all but a very small minority of candidates had some problems judging the tone of Passage One.

One of the keys to understanding and correctly answering questions 1 to 7 is to clearly differentiate between those questions which ask for the candidates' own words and those which do not. Some candidates expend considerable amounts of time and energy trying to find synonyms or synonymous phrases when the question does not require them to. These questions (1, 3, 6 and 7 on this particular paper) test the ability of candidates to retrieve the relevant information from the passages and, often, present that information as a series of separate points. The phrasing of this information doesn't need to be changed unless the question demands it.

Conversely, candidates must recognise the questions which ask them to use their own words (2, 4, and 5 on this paper). These questions test the candidates' versatility in understanding and using the language and they should make every effort to find synonyms or synonymous phrases. It is recognised that some more technical words are not easily substituted, however, and examiners are instructed to be tolerant when this is the case.

Question 1 presented few difficulties except to the small minority of candidates who assumed that the writer was literally standing at the open door of an aeroplane. This was also true of questions 2 through to 7. It was pleasing to see that the large majority of candidates were adept at locating the information required although, some thought that regurgitating learnt material in an exam room whilst suffering from an overdose of caffeine qualified as "fun" (question 3a).

Question 8 proved, as usual, to be a strong discriminator. Candidates cannot expect to access the higher level of marks unless they make specific and supported reference to details of style in the passages. A number of examiners noted that there had been a significant improvement in the answering of this question and it was clear that a number of centres had, commendably, been teaching candidates exactly what to do to gain high marks. This involves detailed comment on such things as the use of figurative language, or the tone of a passage. Full understanding was displayed by those candidates who, for example, recognised the humour of Passage One and were able to present an example of it. Candidates who made exaggerated claims for a particular preference without adequate justification fared less well. (For instance, one candidate wrote that "the diary didn't have a title but the article had a really eye-catching and amazing title".) Similarly, it is not enough to say that the language of a passage is "captivating" or "excellent" without being able to invoke an appropriate illustration. However, it should be noted that candidates can prefer either of the passages over the other as long as their choice is supported by specific reference.

Question 9 is probably the most demanding on the paper. Candidates have to represent information in their own words as far as possible and in a tone appropriate to the nominated audience. The quality of written English has to be equal to the task and happily, over recent years, fewer candidates have been unnecessarily distracted by feeling

they have to keep within a set number of words. However, a significant number forget they must structure their work in paragraphs. It would also be helpful if centres would advise candidates not to present their work in columns when asked to produce an article: it is inappropriate in an exam, never adds value to the work and makes life more difficult for examiners.

A number of examiners commented on the improved standard of written English seen in answers to question 10. Answers were more evenly spread over the three options this series and candidates applied a range of approaches to all three. One examiner wrote of answers to 10c: "the feelings that friendship encourages were clearly felt and often quite movingly expressed". On the other hand, a disturbing tendency was noted by a significant proportion of examiners that some centres were sending candidates into the exam armed with learned passages which they duly reproduced regardless of relevance. The same few paragraphs of descriptive writing appeared over and over again. It is difficult to understand what candidates or centres hope to gain from this approach. Candidates can gain no credit for writing that is clearly not their own and are likely to be denied access to the higher mark ranges due to lack of originality.

Grade Boundaries

Paper No	Max Mark	A	B	C	D	E
01	100	67	60	54	49	45

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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