



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
GCSE**

SUMMER 2019

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?!=en>

Online Results Analysis

WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.

Annual Statistical Report

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

Component	Page
COMPONENT 1	1
COMPONENT 2	8
COMPONENT 3	17

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1

General Comments

Section A

The reading material was from a short story by Helen Simpson and it focused on the difficulties faced by a young married couple with children. The story explored the relationship between the parents and their feelings and frustrations as they faced the challenges of parenthood. In some ways it was a story very much of its time, showing a young couple trying to define their roles in the family unit, but the candidates seemed to engage with it and grappled with the subtleties of the situation rather well.

Attempt rates for all Reading questions were close to 100%, with the exception of Question 0.5 which was slightly lower. However, this was because of timing issues rather than the accessibility of the question itself. Candidates do need to try to ensure that they don't spend too long on the 5 mark Reading questions at the expense of the 10 mark Reading questions.

Section B

This section gave the candidates a choice of four titles and all of them offered opportunities to write from personal experience or to create imaginative fiction.

I mentioned in my last report that most candidates do try their best to produce a narrative which has some detail and substance. However, some are too brief and thin to develop convincingly and often they provide limited evidence on which to base a fair assessment. There is nothing to be gained from writing endlessly and aimlessly but examiners do need enough evidence to inform their judgement. There is no need to overwhelm the examiner but the narratives should have some substance and development. The suggested length is 450-600 words, which is approximately 2-3 sides of writing, and candidates do themselves no favours if they are significantly above or below those parameters.

In an examination which covers the whole of the ability range, it is inevitable that there will be examples of continuous writing which lack substance and technical accuracy is still an issue for many candidates across the range of ability. Inconsistency with tenses is becoming a particularly serious problem for far too many candidates, many of whom are perfectly competent in most aspects of writing.

However, a lot of experienced examiners commented that the overall standard of the writing seemed better this year. The titles probably helped to give the writing a sharper focus but it is pleasing to be able to report that there was more quality in the writing, particularly in terms of content. Some pieces were really outstanding.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q 0.1 This question, worth five marks as usual, focused on the opening section of the passage and required the candidates to identify both explicit and implicit ideas and information.

The question asked for a list of what was learned about Jonathan in the specified lines and, to some extent, the candidates could simply locate facts about him. Marks were available for a straightforward and clear selection of relevant points but there were opportunities here to make inferences and comment on Jonathan's character. Bullet points are acceptable in response to Question 0.1. However, it is also perhaps worth repeating that bullet points should be coherent in themselves and should not rely on the examiner's knowledge of the text.

The first and obvious point to make was that Jonathan moaned about everything taking so long and later he also complained about the mess. These simple facts prompted some candidates to make inferences about him being judgmental or lacking understanding. He seemed demanding and unsympathetic to his wife's situation. He claimed it only took him five minutes to get ready and that he had changed a nappy. It was fair enough to suggest that he was self-righteous and thought wrongly that he 'did his bit'. He shouted at his wife and scowled grimly at the discarded toys, perhaps showing his angry, irritable and rather intimidating personality. He struggled with Lorna over one of the toys. Jonathan wanted things to run smoothly and efficiently and he became exasperated and bad tempered when things fell short of his expectations. Other inferences were possible but they needed to be precise and convincing. For example, some argued that he felt unappreciated and that seemed fair enough.

The overall mean mark for this question suggests that it was not quite as straightforward as it had been in previous examinations, but it did discriminate well. There was plenty to say about the character but some candidates were imprecise, overstated their comments or relied on information from the introduction. More successful responses selected five relevant details from the lines given, focused clearly on Jonathan and dealt with information quickly and efficiently.

Q 0.2 This question also involved the opening section of the story but changed the focus to initial impressions of Frances and the skills required for assessment objective 2.

The first point was that Frances did not bother to respond to the criticism from her husband and most candidates concluded that she seemed resigned or used to this sort of attitude. She was clearly struggling to cope and the writer described Frances as 'sagging' with the boredom and effort of getting everything ready for a morning out. She was also 'fed up' with having to plan everything and not always prepared to suffer in silence. She could be sarcastic and show some spirit but she was also emotionally fragile and vulnerable, saying she would cry if he shouted at her.

She seemed chronically tired and the writer suggested that fatigue 'wore her down'. She also felt the 'loss of freedom' which having children had created and seemed to feel overwhelmed by the demands of parenthood.

The question is only worth five marks and the best answers were not too long but showed clear understanding of the character of Frances with a relevant selection of supporting textual detail. Most candidates judged the length of their answers sensibly to reflect the fact that it was a five mark question. Candidates should be familiar with the demands of a 'what impressions' type question now and generally the candidates handled this question well, commenting on what happens as well as the language used by the author. However, a small minority carelessly misread the question and wrote about Jonathan.

Q 0.3 This question involved reading a significantly longer section of text and placed the emphasis clearly on the relationship between Jonathan and Frances and how the writer had shown their relationship. This question also assesses AO2 and the rubric tried to push the candidates to look closely at what the characters said and did and the writer's use of specific language.

I have pointed out many times that too many candidates make the issue of 'how does the writer' too complicated and get lost in unconvincing assertions about the effects of sentence structure, punctuation and 'short syntax'. I can only repeat that the best way to tackle this type of question is to link comments to evidence and to embed any relevant terminology in a systematic exploration of the text. It is not helpful to start with the alleged effects of literary devices, and searching for devices should not be the focus of the candidates' responses. The text and what happens in that text should be the centre of the reader's attention.

Those who chose to track the text could start with the fact that they went out together as a family and Jonathan seemed to be considerate and even caring when he took the noisy children out of the cottage so that Frances could spend more time looking around on her own. However, Frances's reflection on how 'blessed' it must be in a convent where 'all was silence' showed some of the underlying tension in the relationship. This stress in the relationship was also evident when Jonathan announced that he had bought a book to read in a 'spare moment'. The exclamation 'Spare moment!' showed the irony in her tone but she was not openly hostile and went on to suggest that he looked 'lovely' reading to Lorna and sitting with the baby on his lap. This comment was open to some interpretation and her wish to be the one coming home from work to be pampered was revealing. Jonathan was quick to point out that he didn't get that and the writer used italics for emphasis. The dialogue showed the couple exploring their relationship and there was a strong sense of disillusion in her comments about the falseness of fiction.

The writer then used Jonathan's reflections on the development of their relationship. He suggested that before they had children they were 'well-matched' but that Frances had felt 'as if she were drowning' when their first baby was born. The second baby had been 'like a wave that overwhelmed her' and the writer described Jonathan as 'ineffectual' but 'sympathetic'. This seemed to be a key phrase in showing the relationship as he felt sympathy but simply did not know how to help.

The dialogue then made her grievances very clear as she expressed her feelings of being 'shattered' and 'never alone.' Jonathan tried to defend himself from the accusation that he allowed her to shoulder responsibility for home and family on her own but she pointed out that his efforts were like 'a favour' and only for a short time anyway. She complained about her loss of identity and how trapped she felt. Some candidates felt that Jonathan emerged as rather self-justifying and self-pitying when he claimed that it was 'not easy' for him either and his 'murmured' analysis of his wife's situation was not followed by any constructive suggestion.

However, he 'reached out his hand' and they embraced and hugged tightly. Most candidates saw that there were stresses and strains in this relationship but they also saw that Jonathan and Frances were still a loving couple who had feelings for each other but were struggling to make their relationship work.

The overview and detail were often subtle, but the writer effectively used action, dialogue and tone to show the relationship between the couple, whilst the structure of the argument allowed readers to see both sides of the relationship.

This was probably the most challenging of the reading questions and it prompted a wide range in the quality of responses. Only some candidates really grasped the chronology of events in this part of the story. Some responses were rather unfocused and drifted into individual character study or the relationship between Frances and the children. Some found relevant details but lacked a coherent overview. That said, the best answers were outstanding and showed insight and maturity.

Q 0.4 This question was in two parts, but it allowed credit to be given for understanding of Frances's thoughts and feelings as well as for understanding how the writer had shown her thoughts and feelings. The wording of the question offered the candidates a structure and it was clearly sensible to track this section of text, identifying thoughts and feelings and supporting and commenting through reference to the detail of the text.

Frances felt a 'rush of affection' as she watched her husband and children on the beach. However, she wanted to be alone and she felt 'free' as her eyes adjusted to the 'long view'. She seemed to experience a sense of perspective and the writer seemed to suggest a wider significance to that moment of looking beyond the immediate situation. The writer showed her feelings of love for her family as she described Frances finding it 'satisfying' and 'delightful' to watch her family together but she also revealed that Frances thought that she had not needed children to feel 'the concentrated delight of life.' She felt that her sense of fulfilment in life had not depended on having babies but had been there to start with.

As she walked higher up the beach near the cliffs which contained traces of the prehistoric, Frances felt a sense of pride and achievement in having brought two children into the world. She 'dawdled with deliberate pleasure', savouring the moment and perhaps the feeling of contributing to the long process of life and death.

When she returned to her family, she reassured Jonathan that she would not abandon them and kisses him 'lightly' but she insisted that she was not 'the same girl' as she used to be. She knew that time and children had changed her.

At the end of the story Jonathan reflected on the passing of time and the mystery of human existence and Frances's feelings were shown by her action as she scooped up her daughter and held her 'gently' in her arms.

This question offered plenty of scope to select and comment and had just enough subtlety to stretch and challenge candidates. The omniscient author told the reader some of what Frances was thinking and feeling but action and dialogue were also used here. One strand of AO2 requires candidates to comment on and analyse language and the choice of language, particularly the adverbs, offered plenty of opportunity to select and analyse relevant parts of the text.

Q 0.5 This question required the candidates to range across the whole text and evaluate Jonathan in his roles as father and husband. In response to a question that assesses AO4, it is vital to establish a coherent stance and it was difficult to argue convincingly that Jonathan was either perfect or a complete failure as a father and husband. The candidates could put the emphasis in different ways but the evidence was mixed and the reader's perception of the character developed and changed as the story progressed to its conclusion. The best approach was to follow the narrative structure as that allowed the candidates to see how the writer manipulated the reader's response to the character.

At first Jonathan seemed judgmental and rather selfish as he seemed to expect Frances to do everything and then complained when she struggled to cope. He seemed to be demanding and self-righteous and he shouted, scowled and complained about the constant mess. He seemed insensitive to his wife's feelings and was described as 'ineffectual' when she was struggling to cope with the responsibilities of having children. The initial presentation of the character seemed mostly unfavourable and anything he did to help seemed grudging and minimal.

As the story developed, the presentation of Jonathan was more complex and the reader's response was more balanced. Jonathan's actions and the argument between Jonathan and Frances allowed the reader to understand both points of view.

For example, he took them on a family outing and took the children outside to let Frances explore Hardy's cottage in peace. When he sat the baby on his lap and read to his daughter, the writer seemed to paint an attractive picture of his relationship with the children. Some candidates accepted his view that his life was not exactly easy. Most felt that he was too insensitive to his wife's problems but it could also be argued that he showed some understanding. He claimed that he did his bit but some argued that he was too self-justifying and only 'doing his duty'. It was possible to argue that he was taking advantage of Frances's devotion to the children but the writer also showed them falling into each other's arms and hugging tightly. It was not easy to pick a way through the complexities and contradictions in this part of the story but the better candidates sustained a coherent argument.

The conclusion of the story seemed to put some emphasis on Jonathan's positive qualities as both husband and father. When Frances walked alone on the beach, the writer showed Jonathan playing with the children in a relaxed and apparently comfortable way. When she returned from her walk, Frances kissed him and assured him she would not abandon them but, more subtly, the lightness in the mood and tone suggested the strength of their relationship. Jonathan expressed his appreciation of the miracle of giving life to children and it was difficult to argue overall that he was totally insensitive or self-regarding.

As I said earlier, it was hard to make a convincing case for Jonathan as either a saint or a monster. The evidence was definitely mixed and the writer did not present him as perfect. However, he also seemed to do his best in his way.

In the end the candidates had to use their judgement to decide where to place the emphasis in their argument. They clearly were interested in the character and overall the responses to this question seemed better than they have been in previous examinations, which is evidenced by the slight increase in the mean mark for this question compared to last year.

Q 1.1 (a) Write about a time when you broke the rules.

This title clearly suggested writing about a moment of rebellion and, although it was a first-person narrative, it did not have to be based entirely, or indeed at all, on real events. Some of the narratives were sometimes forced or unconvincing but most were coherent and often they had the ring of truth.

(b) The Wedding.

This title was a very popular choice and it allowed a wide variety of approaches from the comic to the tragic. There were a lot of straightforward accounts of wedding days but there were also jilted brides, reluctant grooms and embarrassing relatives. It was often a pleasure to read these responses and they were often entertaining.

(c) A memory of primary school.

The opportunity to write about a memory of primary school was too good to miss for many candidates and this was also a very popular choice of title. Some were rather unfocused but the best had an anecdotal quality and a sense of authenticity. Some were rather uneventful memories but most did pick an incident or occasion which was genuinely memorable. This title offered the opportunity to write from real experience and it was very successful at all levels of ability, not least because the candidates had some convincing material to work on. The best responses were often amusing and invariably used close observation of detail and character.

(d) Write a story which ends: ... and that was the worst job of my life.

It is sometimes difficult to structure a narrative to a given conclusion but this was relatively successful as it was quite straightforward to see where the narrative had to go. Any job which proved unattractive for any reason was an acceptable choice. Some were unconvincing or lacking in clear structure but most were perfectly valid. Perhaps, out of all of the options, the attempts to be imaginative in response to this title and write about conflict or crime were generally less successful than those which were on real experience of actual jobs in restaurants, petrol stations and shops.

Overall, the quality of candidates' narrative writing is improving and there is a definite upward trend. Teachers have clearly worked hard with candidates on this aspect of the paper and many examiners commented on how much they enjoyed reading the various responses they saw.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates should read the text and the questions closely and carefully and underline the focus of the question.
- Candidates should respond to the text in front of them and avoid a prepared approach which involves looking for certain literary devices.
- Comments and inferences should be linked to textual evidence.
- It is usually sensible to track the text methodically.
- Candidates should take a coherent stance when responding to the evaluation question.

In the writing section:

- Whether writing from the imagination or from real experience, candidates need to ensure there is enough detail and development of plot and character to give their work a feeling of authenticity.
- Candidates should aim to write a brief plan before starting their narrative in order to improve its direction and structure.
- Candidates should try and establish a relationship with the reader/engage the reader via devices such as asides, statements, questions, humour, a distinctive voice etc.
- Most candidates need to pay more attention to technical accuracy and should try to leave five minutes at the end to proofread their narratives.
- The inability to control tenses continues to be an issue. When candidates start writing in a particular tense, they should try to use that tense consistently unless there is a valid reason to switch between tenses.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2

General Comments

Section A

One of the reading texts for this examination was a newspaper article about the rescue of 33 Chilean miners in 2010. This was a story that gained worldwide media attention, partly because the miners had spent 69 days trapped deep underground, and partly because the rescue operation was 'flawless', with all of the miners brought safely to the surface. The other reading text was an account in a Victorian magazine of a mining accident in which all eleven miners, trapped underground for 7 days, were successfully rescued. The two accounts gave candidates the opportunity to explore the details of the accidents and subsequent rescues in some detail and to consider the ways in which the writers captured the drama of the situations. The materials seemed to be accessible and engage the interest of candidates, many of whom were prepared to comment at length on the hardships faced by the Chilean miners or the uncertainty about whether the Victorian miners would be found alive. The percentage attempt rates across most reading questions was close to 100%. However, as in previous years, the attempt rate dropped slightly on Question 1.6 as some candidates struggled to manage their time effectively.

Section B

This section invited candidates to tackle two writing tasks. The first was a review, for a teenage magazine, of a book, film or TV programme that had been enjoyed, along with reasons why others of a similar age might also find it appealing. The second task was to write a letter to the school/college headteacher who had decided that there should not be an end of year prom or party on the grounds that it would just be an excuse for some students to show off in an expensive way. Both tasks gave good opportunities for candidates to write for clearly specified audiences, the first requiring sufficient detail for the reader to gain some understanding of plot and characters, and an explanation about why the book, film or TV programme was enjoyable. The second task required some shaping of arguments about why a prom or party was not just an opportunity to show off in an expensive way, but it also required some thought about the tone to adopt and how to present the arguments in the most convincing way. The suggested length of these tasks is 300-400 words, approximately 1.5 - 2 sides of writing, but significantly shorter responses on either of these tasks were often limited in terms of range, detail or development. The percentage attempt rates for each of the writing tasks were identical, suggesting candidates had engaged with both tasks and had tried to complete both in the time available.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q 1.1 This first question followed a pattern seen in previous examinations of three one-mark questions that asked candidates to identify particular details from one of the texts, in this case the newspaper article. These were straightforward 'search and find' questions targeting this strand of AO1, but it was important to read the question carefully. A very small number of candidates failed to focus on the correct text and gained no reward, but for most candidates the questions afforded the opportunity to become familiar with the text and the events of the mining accident and rescue. The first part of the question simply asked candidates to give the nickname of the rescue capsule and as this was mentioned in the first paragraph of the article, it was unsurprising that most could easily find the correct detail: Fenix 2. The second part of the question asked candidates how the miners let the rescuers know they were still alive. Where candidates read the question carefully and correctly, locating the correct information was not difficult. The account made it clear that when the rescuers' drill broke through the ceiling of the miners' shelter, the miners were able to attach a message to the drill to let them know they were all still alive. However, some candidates failed to gain a mark because they lost sight of the question. Examiners saw details such as "for two days we heard drilling" or responses focused on the rescuers: "The rescuers' drill broke through the ceiling of the miners' shelter." The importance of reading the question carefully was of even greater consequence when candidates had to shape an answer to the final reading question (1.6) but even here, the loss of a mark or two in this first question will have impacted on some candidates' overall grade. The third part of the question asked where the men had been taken once they had been brought to the surface. The text explained that all the miners underwent exhaustive tests in Copiapo hospital and whilst the vast majority of candidates saw the link between the rescue and being taken to hospital for tests, there were some who incorrectly offered 'Chile' or 'town square.'

Q 1.2 Having had some opportunity to become familiar with the newspaper article in answering Question 1.1, this question now asked candidates to explore how the writer, Jeffrey Brown, tried to show how hard it was for the trapped miners during their ordeal underground. This question assesses AO2 and the focus is on 'the craft of the writer'. The question invited candidates to consider the hardships the miners endured and the ways in which they were presented by the writer.

It has been pointed out in many previous examiner reports that the best way to tackle this type of question is to work methodically through the text, selecting appropriate evidence and detail and, where appropriate, commenting or exploring the impact of the detail along with the way in which the evidence or detail has been presented by the writer. More assured readers were able to comment on relevant details, suggesting the impact this had on the clarity of the picture presented of "the long ordeal underground." As one example, some candidates simply recognised that the miners had to spend most of their time in "a dark, small shelter" and contented themselves with simply accumulating a few details such as this in their response, but with little comment. However, having spotted this appropriate detail, many then went on to suggest that living in such conditions would have been cramped and claustrophobic, whilst others pushed on further to explore the writer's use of the adjectives 'dark' and 'small' to consider how these details made absolutely clear the harshness of their surroundings, particularly because the writer had chosen to draw a comparison of their shelter as "the size of a one-room apartment" to add emphasis to his description. It was the quality of the exploration of such details that marked out the most successful responses.

It was an article that was rich in detail and it presented lots of opportunities for candidates to select and probe this appropriate detail. Brown begins his article by describing the behaviour of the miners upon reaching the surface: “some cried, others prayed and wrapped their arms around their wives and children.” Some candidates suggested this outburst of emotion amply illustrated both the relief they felt at their release but also suggested the hardships of their entombment underground. Brown tells his readers that no human had previously spent so long underground and survived but it was the details of their time underground and the way Brown presented them that gave candidates good opportunities to show their skills as critical readers. In addition to telling readers about the shelter the miners spent their time in, he reveals they endured “sweltering 120° temperatures”, having to drink “filthy water”, existing on a near-starvation diet of ‘just two spoonfuls of tuna, half a biscuit...’ every two days, increasing darkness as their helmet lights faded and significant weight loss. Each of the details gave opportunities for some more extended exploration and those candidates who did this gained good reward. Other candidates commented on the way Brown used the first-hand account of one miner to explore the mental challenges the men faced, explaining that the miners feared rescuers had abandoned the attempt to free them, some of them writing about the impact of Mario Sepulveda’s phrases such as “had all but given up” hope of rescue, and which had led them to “joke darkly about eating each other.” Many candidates recognised the sense of despair the miners would have felt that had led them to write “farewell letters to loved ones.” Even when it was clear that the rescuers were working to free them, Brown makes it clear that the trapped miners had to work to assist the rescue effort in what were very tough conditions, working in “stifling heat and long eight-hour working shifts” but also knowing they had to exercise regularly in order to squeeze into the rescue capsule.

Those who tracked the text carefully were able to select and comment analytically on a wide range of detail and gain good marks. Where appropriate, they took time to focus on the language used by Brown, commenting on words such as ‘sweltering’ and ‘stifling’, although some candidates commented on the factual tone adopted by Brown in most of the account and the way that details of the miners’ hardships were concentrated in specific paragraphs.

Unfortunately, some candidates saw this question as one in which ‘feature spotting’ was the key, and they usually noted that the writer used some facts and statistics. They pointed out that there were 33 miners trapped, they were 600 metres underground and they were trapped for 69 days. However, in terms of how this addressed the question, it gave candidates little reward unless the fact or statistic happened to be worthy of greater exploration. As I commented in last year’s examiner report, searching for ‘features’ usually meant that careful exploration of the text was the casualty and for those candidates who searched for ‘the rule of three’ or tried to explain that the writer’s use of dashes emphasised the miners’ hardships, there was very limited reward.

This was a question which proved to be accessible to almost all candidates and almost all attempted it. It proved to be a good discriminator, rewarding highly those who tracked the text carefully in order to select a wide range of appropriate details and then make perceptive comments. Weaker responses tended to be limited in range and/or analysis but virtually all candidates found some appropriate details to include in their responses. The very best pieces were thorough, detailed and perceptive, showing good understanding of how the writer captured the hardships endured by the trapped miners.

Q 1.3 This third question now turned candidates' attention to the second text, 'Extraordinary Rescue.' 'The pattern of questions, with short one-mark questions preceding a more demanding question on each text is now well-established and gave candidates the opportunity to gain an overview of the text, with three questions. As with Question 1.1, it was important to read the question carefully and those who failed to do this usually struggled to gain full marks. The first asked what caused the coal mine to collapse. Most candidates correctly identified the cause as "the roof supports that were much too weak..." Surprisingly, some candidates failed to identify this as the cause, instead writing about the effect: "a sudden collapse of the earth". The second part of the question asked for a detail from the text that showed the rescue attempt never slowed or stopped. Again, with a little careful reading, most candidates were able to find evidence of this in the final sentence of the third paragraph, "...day and night the work proceeded with increasing desperation." Other candidates noted that in driving a new rescue tunnel, whenever one man tired, his place was immediately taken by another, ensuring the work never slowed. Either was acceptable and gained the mark. Some candidates lost the focus of the question and wrote about how the "frantic work... commenced..." rather than continued; a quick check on the question would have directed these candidates to the correct detail. The final part of the question asked for evidence that suggested to the rescuers that the miners were still alive and in the fourth paragraph readers were told the rescuers first heard "sounds from within" like the tapping of hammers, and then the voices of the trapped miners. Most candidates correctly located this information and it prepared them for the following question on this text.

Q 1.4 This question now asked candidates to consider the 'Extraordinary Rescue' text in greater detail. The question was posed in a way that has been used in previous papers on this specification: candidates were presented with a statement which they had to evaluate, using evidence from the text to support their assertions. They were asked to consider how far they agreed with the statement that "...the writer gives the impression that the accident was so serious that the trapped miners would not be found alive." They were directed to base their responses on the first three paragraphs of the article. Although the question was designed simply to allow candidates to offer a view based on the text, a careful reading suggested that at different times following the accident the initial pessimism about any positive outcome did give way to some hopes that the miners would be found alive. Tackling the question successfully meant carefully tracking the order of events and where appropriate, commenting on the possible outcome. Almost all candidates found this to be an accessible question, judging by the way they were prepared to offer an initial view. Whilst some agreed entirely with the statement, others were more circumspect. Some went to great lengths to explain why they 'partially agreed with the statement', even being prepared to tell the examiner exactly what percentage agreement they had with the statement.

Most candidates were clear that the seriousness of the accident became clear from the opening lines of the passage and they frequently quoted details such as "a sudden collapse of the earth", "the enormous weight" of the earth that fell and the tunnels the men were working in being "instantly filled with the falling earth and rock." The selection of relevant detail gave authority to any view expressed about the men's chances of being found alive, and good candidates also noted the "violent blast of air" that meant the men were instantly in total darkness. Whilst weaker readers usually began their responses by using the textual details quite well, they sometimes lacked the ability or willingness to continue to track the details in order to sustain or develop their viewpoint. In some cases, weaker candidates confined most or all of their answer to the details in the first paragraph, with limited attention on the subsequent paragraphs.

Stronger responses saw that the reaction of relatives to news of the accident suggested a desperate outcome and many noted that their “dreadful cries” implied their expectation that their loved ones would not be recovered alive. Others saw in the way that work was suspended, and workmen rushed to participate in the rescue attempt as a possible sign of hope for the trapped miners. The final sentence in the second paragraph was interpreted by some as signalling that a negative outcome was likely, whilst others suggested the sentence implied that there was a chance the men were still alive. This rather more positive view was bolstered when, in the third paragraph, plans for driving a new hole to reach the men were agreed. Again, some candidates took the view that as this was described as “the only hope of saving the men”, it pointed to a probable negative outcome, especially when it meant cutting through “100 yards of solid coal.” Others explored the same sentence but instead suggested that any ‘hope’ for the miners meant the rescue might be successful, and these candidates then focused on how the writer described the rescue effort, commenting on how the “frantic work” that had been “instantly commenced” could lead to a positive outcome. Candidates who noted the unrelenting efforts of the rescuers, their places taken by others as they tired, saw hope as “the hole became a tunnel” and they laboured “day and night” to get to the trapped men. However, even candidates who were prepared to see a possible successful rescue recognised in the final part of the sentence the “increasing desperation” with which the rescue proceeded and saw that, “hope of saving the men diminished with every day that passed.”

There were real opportunities to look at the details in the text and arrive at rather different viewpoints, and examiners were always prepared to reward those who could use the textual detail to support their views. In a similar way to Question 1.2, those candidates who were prepared to work methodically through the text were often the most successful, as they found lots of points they could explore and comment on. It was perfectly possible to take a fixed view, usually that the writer was suggesting the miners would not be found alive, and gain a creditable mark, but those who saw that there were some indications that the miners may have survived probably gave themselves greater opportunities to consider the details and the writer’s choice of words and phrases in arriving at an overview. Brief responses were frequently limited in range and comment but there were many candidates who used the text well and showed good skills of evaluation.

Q 1.5 This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, invited candidates to explain in their own words what happened when news of the mining accidents became known. It was sensible for candidates to be completely text-specific when answering this question and those candidates who began their responses, “Both texts...” usually found themselves in difficulties as they tried to make the details in the individual texts fit a ‘both texts’ formula. For example, candidates who responded by saying that in both texts miners’ families rushed to the scene of the accidents to set up camps were clearly incorrect.

Careful readers were able to find a range of relevant details from each of the texts and many candidates gained full marks, but as with other questions it was important to be clear about exactly what details the question was focused on. In looking at the ‘Extraordinary Rescue’ text, candidates who read the text and the question carefully noted that when news of the accident became known, an alarm was given and the news of the accident spread rapidly through the neighbouring villages. As a result, readers were told that “thousands were seen rushing to the spot”, especially distraught relatives of the trapped miners who thought the accident meant the death of their loved ones.

Other candidates focused on the way work was immediately brought to a halt and fellow workers gathered to help in the rescue attempt. As a result, it was decided that a new hole would be dug to try to get to the men.

In the Chilean mine collapse, it was the mining company that took the first decisive steps, sending their own emergency squad into the mine. When their attempt to reach the men failed, the Chilean government stepped in with their own rescue team. As this was happening the relatives of the trapped miners went to the mine, setting up a tent city there and calling it 'Camp Hope', while they waited to see the outcome of the rescue attempt.

To gain good marks in this question it was not necessary to produce a long response or explain the impact of particular details or comment on the writers' choice of language. Some candidates gained full marks with just a few sentences that captured the appropriate details from each text, while others wrote much longer responses that included details irrelevant to the question. Unfortunately, there were candidates who failed to read the question carefully and launched into accounts of what the men had to eat in the Chilean mine account or how the rescue attempt in 'Extraordinary Rescue' succeeded. Other responses limited themselves to just a broad, general overview of circumstances or wrote about only one of the texts. These gained only limited reward as did most of the responses that tried to exclusively adopt the 'both texts' formula.

Q 1.6 This question, asking candidates to compare across the two texts, is often viewed as presenting the greatest challenge in the reading section, although the two bullet points give a clear indication of what is required. As has been the case in previous examinations, good candidates were able to gain high marks with a clear focus on the bullet points. That said, it is worth repeating the point made in previous reports that it is essential for candidates to read the question carefully and be clear what the bullet points are asking them to focus on. This question focused on **the day** the miners were rescued, the first bullet point asking candidates to compare details of what happened on the day and the second bullet point asking them to explain how the writers showed the drama of that day. In the examination the word 'day' was emboldened to ensure candidates focused on the correct areas of text.

In addressing the first bullet point, good candidates tracked the details given of the day of the rescues, for example in 'Extraordinary Rescue' they focused on the final two paragraphs where the rescuers increased their efforts to reach the men and began to hear sounds of tapping and then the voices of the trapped miners. They finally broke through to where the miners were trapped and when this news was given to those waiting on the surface, there was much relief. All of the trapped miners were alive, each of them then brought to the surface in the arms of a rescuer and then taken to their homes. In the case of the Chilean rescue, candidates were able to track the events which began when the miners were brought to the surface in the rescue capsule, 'Fenix 2'. There were "scenes of jubilation" where they met with their families, crying, hugging and praying and in the nearby town of Copiapo a delighted crowd of 3000 cheered and chanted their country's name with pride at news of the rescue. At the mine, the Chilean president greeted the rescued men before the men were sent to hospital to recover.

In dealing with the second bullet point in the question, candidates looked to the way the writers captured the drama of the rescues. In 'Extraordinary Rescue' the rumour of sounds heard by the rescuers had led to greater urgency, as expressed in the sentence, "All now was increased activity."

Many candidates also commented on the way the drama and relief was captured in phrases such as the “joyous burst of feeling” that arose when the relatives heard the men were alive or how close to tragedy the situation had been when it is revealed that the miners were “in the very last stages of exhaustion.” Others also pointed to the way the writer had described the situation as an “extraordinary rescue” to show how dramatic and remarkable the events had been.

In the article by Jeffrey Brown, candidates often focused on the description of the emotional reunion of miners and their families, exploring the dramatic impact of details such as “onlookers sobbed, others hugged each other...”, the way in which the Chilean president greeted the rescued men with, “Welcome to life” or the emotional words of the last man to be rescued, Luis Urzuza. Some also commented on the emotional impact of the second photograph.

Unfortunately, and as in past examinations, there were candidates who ignored the bullet points and struggled to gain many marks and whilst candidates who read the question had no shortage of material from which to select and comment, there were too many who simply wrote about the articles in more general terms. Some ignored the instruction to focus on the day of the rescue and instead wrote about how the Chilean miners spent their time underground, or how the Victorian miners had become trapped in the mine. This emphasised the importance of reading the question carefully before launching into an answer.

Those who did follow the instructions occasionally focused too heavily on the first bullet point and failed to consider the second bullet point, limiting their opportunity to move into the higher mark bands. Most candidates chose to deal with each bullet point separately, although some linked their comments about the drama of the day, quoting and commenting on relevant words or phrases as they tracked through the details of ‘what happened’. Either approach was perfectly acceptable. Most candidates are now aware of the need to ensure they state which text they are referring to but just occasionally some only dealt with one of the texts, which limited their marks to Band 1. Some weaker responses were quite brief and where time-management had been a problem, some candidates seemed to have decided to move on to the writing tasks rather than spend time building a more detailed response to this question. That said, there were many candidates who gained good marks in this question, showing good skills of selection and understanding about how the drama of the days had been captured by the writers.

Section B

Q 2.1 Candidates were asked to write a review for a teenage magazine of a book, film or TV programme they had enjoyed and explain why it might appeal to others of their age. This was a task where candidates could write from personal experience of what they had seen or read and examiners were treated to a wide range of recommendations that had been enjoyed. However, to produce an effective review required some planning about the level of plot detail to be included, the characters involved and in the case of a film or TV programme, decisions about the selection of such aspects as the actors involved, background details, special effects and so on. It was a task with which candidates seemed to genuinely engage and most responses showed an awareness of their intended reader, even to the point where some key details were withheld in case they gave away how the book or film ended.

Films and TV programmes were the most popular choices and many went beyond a single programme or film and reviewed a whole series of programmes or films they had enjoyed.

Netflix seemed to have supplied endless enjoyment to many, some of whom confessed to 'binge-watching' a particular series and the films produced by Marvel Studios were also especially popular, with 'Avengers: Endgame' given many five-star ratings. Among TV programmes, Love Island had its aficionados and old favourites such as 'Friends' were clearly still popular with many teenagers. Fewer candidates chose to recommend books, but J.K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' novels were popular and some chose to write about novels that were, or had been, set examination texts.

Weaker responses sometimes gave too few details about plot or characters for their readers to get a real sense of the action or in some cases candidates had tried to give so much detail that examiners had to grapple with large numbers of characters who seemed to be engaged in a series of incidents that were not always explained with clarity. Brief responses often struggled to explain the content of their chosen book, film or TV programme, although even these were able to explain why they had enjoyed it and also why it would appeal to other teenagers.

More assured writers often began with a general overview that briefly covered the scope of the book, film or TV programme and then offered some details about a particular episode or about the central characters. In some cases, useful background information was included and where the reviewer felt there was a weakness, this was also explained. The best of these were written with assurance and with a pleasing mixture of detail and comment and many examiners will have added to their planned summer viewing or reading as a result.

Q 2.2 This second task was to respond to a decision taken by the school's headteacher to cancel the end of year celebration, prom or party because he/she believed it was just an excuse for some students to "show off in an expensive way." Although the recipient of the letter was known, it nevertheless required a formal response and an aspect such as tone was just as important as the substance of the letter. Most candidates were able to show some awareness of the layout of a formal letter and the vast majority of candidates were able to sustain a viewpoint, almost universally arguing that the removal of a prom or party should be reconsidered. Like 2.1, this seemed to be accessible as a task and gave candidates the opportunity to shape and develop a number of points in pursuit of their opinion. It was a task that many warmed to, arguing with some passion that the school prom was a final opportunity to meet up with school friends who would, upon leaving school, rarely meet again. Others felt that a prom was a fitting reward for all the stress of the GCSE examinations and the hard work that students had put in over the previous years in school. Most candidates dealt with the suggestion that such an event was merely an excuse to show off their wealth either by defending what they saw as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dress to impress or they argued that whilst some of their peers might "show off their wealth", for the majority of students, it was simply an opportunity to enjoy the experience of coming together with friends and teachers for a final time. Some made the point that having planned for such an occasion for some time, dresses had already been bought, bookings made for hair appointments or car hire and it would be unreasonable at this stage to abandon all that had been planned. Others argued that such events were seen as a tradition in the school and therefore cancelling such an event should not be considered.

Whilst some weaker responses tended to drift towards something approaching a rant, most were quite measured in the way arguments were put forward. Indeed, many made a point of saying how caring and effective the headteacher had been and how disappointed the teachers themselves would feel at not having one final opportunity to say goodbye to those they had helped to become young adults, able to move confidently into life beyond school.

As this was the final task in the exam, some responses showed the effect of poor time-management with some incomplete pieces, and weaker responses tended to struggle to effectively develop the arguments they put forward; in some cases they tended to repeat the same point rather than develop other arguments and some resorted to strategies such as including information about a survey they had conducted that showed the percentage of students who gave overwhelming support for the prom. However, the best responses argued their case carefully and convincingly with appropriate detail and appealing to their headteacher's belief in them as mature students able to enjoy a last opportunity as a year group, rather than simply as an occasion for "showing off". Examiners saw many excellent responses that showed sustained, cogent and sometimes passionate arguments and, overall, the mean marks for both writing pieces had improved compared to previous examination series.

As also highlighted in the Component 1 examiner report, technical accuracy remains an issue for too many candidates and as in previous examinations, many gained marks in a higher band for their communication and organisation than the band they were placed in for vocabulary, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates should read the text related to questions 1.1 and 1.2 closely and carefully. They should then check exactly the focus of each question before they begin their response. They should then repeat this process for the second text and questions 1.3 and 1.4.
- Questions focused on a specific text (1.2 and 1.4) are best tackled by tracking through methodically, selecting appropriate textual detail and commenting where appropriate. The best responses always include a good range of detail from across the text or parts of the text specified. "Feature spotting" as a method of tackling these questions rarely results in good marks.
- The question asking for details drawn from both texts (1.5) is always best tackled by dealing with the details from each specific text before considering any details that appear in both texts.
- In the final question (1.6) it is imperative that candidates deal with what is specifically asked for in the bullet points, rather than other, general points of comparison.

In the writing section:

- Candidates should take the opportunity to plan their responses before they begin writing.
- They should consider content and their intended audience and write at sufficient length to develop ideas, opinions or information effectively.
- Candidates should adopt an appropriate tone based on the intended audience and formality of the task.
- Many candidates need to pay more attention to technical accuracy, especially basic spellings, sentence construction and punctuation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3

General Comments

In the third year of this specification, monitors reported fewer problems in dealing with centres' Spoken Language samples. There was still a small number of centres whose work was difficult to locate and watch which made the monitoring process more time-consuming than necessary. In the majority of cases, however, it was clear that some care had been involved in making the process as easy as possible for the monitors who greatly appreciated that professional courtesy.

More importantly, monitors were very pleased to see a general improvement in the quality of work sampled and in the accuracy of assessment. Most centres had given some consideration to task setting, obviously set upon making the most of this component for their candidates and had taken seriously the accurate assessment of their work. Some centres contacted last year in connection with insecure assessment deserve credit for their professionalism in addressing issues raised and following advice. Some centres had amended their task setting by adapting some of the tasks outlined in the Eduqas guidance, and it was a pleasure to watch their focused, challenging and accurately assessed presentations.

Sadly, however, there is still a minority of centres where Spoken Language is perhaps viewed as an obstacle to overcome, rather than an opportunity to extend the candidates' language skills and complement their reading and writing. While the unweighted status of Spoken Language and the pressure on English departments to meet increasingly demanding targets for GCSE are fully acknowledged, it is nevertheless disappointing to see work from centres where candidates are not given the opportunity to succeed in this component. Once again, some centres had not assessed their own candidates' work accurately and will be given further guidance on how to bring their assessment in line with agreed standards.

As in previous years, the purpose of this report is to share examples of good practice (and practice to perhaps avoid) to support all centres in reviewing and making improvements to their own approaches to Spoken Language. Hopefully, all English teachers committed to maximising their candidates' chances to develop confidence in using language will find something in the advice offered here which will be of help in preparing next year's cohort.

Monitors identified the following issues as those most affecting candidates' chances of success:

- Lack of advance planning and poor task setting
- Topics chosen without sufficient challenge to meet Merit and Distinction grades
- Ill-advised literature-based tasks which limit candidates
- Poorly planned paired and group work confining candidates to Pass grades
- Insufficient emphasis on selection and organisation of material to meet audience needs
- Lack of focus on basic presentation skills, especially over-reliance on reading from scripts and PowerPoint slides
- Overly brief or lengthy presentations
- Unhelpful audience make-up
- Poor quality questions in the mandatory feedback or Q and A section

Advance preparation and task setting: level of challenge and effective organisation

In the most successful centres, candidates had clearly been well-prepared for the component and encouraged to view it as a valuable life-skill worth developing. While a lot of candidates were clearly nervous or experiencing natural teenage reticence in giving an individual presentation to an audience, there were examples of genuine enthusiasm and even enjoyment of the experience in some candidates which was a delight to see.

Even those who had to settle their nerves, had clearly gained something worthwhile in getting through it and it was positively uplifting to see how passionate even very shy candidates can be when given a chance to present their views on an issue close to their hearts. Growing up in what can euphemistically be called 'interesting times', many of these young people seemed to welcome an audience, even a sole teacher at lunchtime, for their concerns, and some clearly found the process cathartic.

Once again, those aiming at higher grades tackled a range of challenging topics: *climate change and the threat to the environment; issues related to social media, such as cyber bullying, teenage anxiety and body dysmorphia; the North/South divide; gun control, knife crime and stop-and-search policies; the gender pay gap and social issues such as neglect of the elderly and homelessness*. Many of these young speakers across the country proved to be well-informed, eloquent and committed.

As required in the specification guidelines, the candidates in successful centres had clearly been advised by their teachers on appropriate topics and how to organise their material into an effective presentation. For Merit and Distinction grades, candidates must '*achieve the purpose of the presentation*' so the most effective presentations **had** a clear purpose, often involving persuading a specific, defined audience to agree with a viewpoint. For instance, a 'talk' on 'climate change' or 'knife crime' could become mainly descriptive, and even straightforward, leading to a Pass grade. Yet in centres where advice on task setting had been absorbed, monitors saw more evidence of teachers helping candidates to 'tweak' or shape tasks to incorporate a specific audience and a persuasive element, allowing them to demonstrate a more sophisticated vocabulary and effective strategies to engage the audience. The following tasks are examples of successful task setting:

- *Persuade Donald Trump why climate change is the most pressing issue of our times and what the US should be doing to combat it*
- *Persuade the editor of a fashion magazine that airbrushing of photographs in his or her publication must be discontinued*
- *Persuade the Prime Minister why government funds should immediately be diverted to combating knife crime and how these resources should be deployed*

In less successful centres, it was clear that candidates had not benefitted from this teacher guidance in choosing their topics or structuring their ideas. Some candidates introduced their topics with brief, even one-word titles, outlining broad topics such as 'football', 'video games' or 'horoscopes', with little scope to demonstrate the challenge needed to move beyond Pass criteria.

Even when the topic had more potential complexity, such as 'social media', 'mental health' or 'racial hatred', candidates given limited guidance often adopted a descriptive or straightforward approach, limiting their performance to a Pass. For instance, one centre had invited their candidates to 'talk about a role model' which had potential, but most candidates were confined to Passes or Merits at best, as they gave descriptive, factual accounts.

These often began with a chronological biography of their chosen role models, starting with basic details about the date and place of birth, then moving on to family and schooling, potentially losing the audience's interest before any important or compelling points were covered.

Some simple amendments would have helped the candidates use their research more effectively to '*meet the audience's needs*' for a Merit or to '*engage the audience*' for a Distinction. As suggested in Eduqas advice, simply injecting an element of competition, such as turning the task into a 'Balloon Debate' or a contest to decide whose was truly a 'Great Life', would have helped give the speakers more chance to meet Merit or Distinction criteria. They would hopefully have recognised the need to edit their material and the value of some rhetorical devices and emotive language in order to 'win' for their hero.

Monitors viewed quite a few samples where candidates had all been given the same task, especially those related to one of their set English Literature texts. As emphasised in previous reports, the teachers' motives in trying to make the most of limited time, by effectively killing two birds with one stone, are understandable. However, most monitors saw examples of approaches which were likely to kill the candidates' enthusiasm for both Spoken Language and English Literature. The tasks were often very unimaginative, requiring candidates to give descriptive, straightforward accounts of a character, theme or poem, often relying on material downloaded from study sites and merely read aloud.

If centres want to give candidates the option to use their English Literature studies as their topic, there are suggestions on the Eduqas website on ways to adapt tasks to avoid simply straightforward, descriptive recounts as well as ideas for effective paired activities.

Paired and group work tasks also raised some concerns again this year. It is understandable that due to time constraints and the logistics of the Spoken Language presentation, some centres opt for paired/group work. However, in order to give every candidate equal opportunity to present more than straightforward ideas and to respond to feedback in detail, tasks have to be very well organised and monitors unfortunately saw little evidence of this. Once relieved of the sole responsibility for the talk, candidates naturally tended to relax and invest less time and effort rather than more.

As emphasised in previous feedback, centres using paired or group work tasks, or other approaches which were popular and relevant to the legacy specification's Speaking and Listening, should review their appropriateness for Spoken Language where the emphasis is firmly on 'presentation' rather than discussion or teamwork. For instance, **Room 101** is still used by quite a lot of centres but, unless it is done well, candidates struggle to meet even Merit criteria, let alone Distinction.

Presentation skills: using notes and the potential perils of PowerPoint

In successful centres, candidates had been made aware of some **basic tips** to raise their game, such as making eye contact and using appropriate intonation to emphasise key points. Candidates are not expected to give polished orations, even for Distinction grades, but simply standing up to present their ideas and giving some thought to how to introduce the topic and close the talk helped to lift their performance.

The best Distinction candidates often had notes, as most adults would in a similar situation, but tended **not** to read slavishly from a pre-prepared script as they had been made aware of the key difference between writing and spoken language skills. They did **not** rely too heavily on PowerPoint slides and most simply did not use them at all, recognising that they can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a help.

However, in many centres reading from scripts was still very common, and often meant that candidates buried their heads in their chests and read too quickly, affecting basic audibility at times and making audience engagement more difficult. Some candidates awarded Distinctions had not met the clear requirement to engage their audience because they were reading very haltingly and stumbling over unfamiliar words, sometimes suggesting this was the first time they had read their material. Even allowing for some understandable nerves, it was hard to understand how centres could award Distinctions for very hurried and badly prepared presentations. Notes are allowed and both CHARLOTTE and LAURA in the standardising examples make use of them, but both have clearly practised delivery and given thought to how to keep their audience's attention.

Some candidates using PowerPoint were at a disadvantage. Well-motivated candidates had often spent planning time perfecting their slides rather than practising their delivery and turned away from the audience to read from the screen, rather than engaging with their audience. Many had transcribed their whole presentation onto the slides, often in very small font, and a small number of candidates played quite lengthy musical excerpts or video clips which did little to demonstrate confident spoken language skills. At times, there were technical difficulties with forwarding the slides which did not help the candidate's confidence levels.

While it is understandable that very nervous candidates might feel much more confident given the support of technology, PowerPoint should be approached with caution. Monitors frequently saw candidates come to life at the end of their PowerPoint slides, finally able to interact with their audience in the question and answer section. Sadly, it was often too late for them to meet all the criteria for the grade they were clearly capable of achieving.

There is some practical guidance on the use of PowerPoint in Eduqas online support and monitors would strongly recommend that candidates are advised how to use PowerPoint sensibly. It is perhaps noticeable that only one of the candidates in the standardising materials uses PowerPoint and, even then, only to show visual images.

How long should the presentation be?

Some presentations were simply too short to allow candidates to demonstrate even challenging ideas let alone sophisticated ones. It would take a lot of skill to impart sophisticated information, using a sophisticated repertoire of vocabulary and an effective range of strategies to engage the audience in less than two minutes. However, quite often candidates were awarded Distinctions for very brief presentations. Occasionally candidates are also highly rewarded for very lengthy talks, of up to twenty minutes sometimes, which is also unnecessary and again does not suggest careful, effective organisation to engage the audience.

As suggested in the initial advice to centres, presentations should ideally be less than ten minutes in total, and about six or seven minutes for the higher grades might be a useful rule of thumb. This includes time for the Q and A requirement. None of the standardising presentations are longer than ten minutes but even those of the least confident candidates, HOLLY, MOFAIZA and JAMIE, are more substantial than two minutes.

Appropriate audiences

From the outset it has been emphasised the **audience make-up can be flexible** and is the centre's decision. In one efficient example, the centre had adapted the audience to fit the candidate, even within the same teaching groups. Monitors saw lots of other good practice as outlined below:

- Some less confident candidates, working at Pass and Merit grade, presented their ideas to a single teacher without peers and were asked at the start whether or not they preferred to sit or stand
- More confident candidates had a small audience of selected classmates who were attentive and supportive, asking thoughtful questions which made clear they had been listening closely
- The most confident candidates aiming at Distinctions had a slightly larger audience, sometimes a whole class or, in a few cases, several teachers who were able to make the feedback really challenging in order to highlight the candidates' skill.

There was less flexibility in some centres where all the presentations were delivered to a single teacher, often at lunch times or after school. There might have been very good reasons for this arrangement and it sometimes worked well, especially for more nervous candidates. At times, however, it was too informal and became more like a chat, with the teacher sometimes speaking more than the candidate. As the standardising commentaries make clear, in relation to candidates like HOLLY and JOSH, this level of teacher input does limit the candidate to a Pass grade and it was perhaps more difficult for candidates aiming at Distinctions to showcase presentation skills in this informal set-up. Those aiming at Distinctions should be advised to consider standing up in order to give the sense of occasion and formality needed. It was also clear that an audience, even a small one, can also lift good candidates' performances.

Monitors had to sympathise with some candidates giving their presentations to classmates who were not even pretending to listen but working individually on other tasks, sometimes with their backs to the speaker or even wearing headphones. All the monitors are teachers with realistic expectations and practical experience of the trials of the classroom, but it was difficult to view some samples where candidates weren't being given the attention they deserved.

Question and Answer: not falling at the last hurdle

Monitors identified this crucial aspect of the presentation as the area most in need of attention. A lot of centres had acted on advice to improve task setting and candidates' delivery, but the feedback session was still rather overlooked and neglected in a lot of cases, meaning that candidates often fell at the last hurdle. It is important to remember:

- **All candidates must respond to some feedback or questions on their presentations.** If candidates do not fulfil this criterion, they cannot be awarded any grade and should be recorded as Not Classified. There were still centres where some, or even all, the candidates failed to meet this basic requirement and whose grades were therefore not accurate. Teachers must ensure that candidates are given the opportunity to answer questions and that evidence of this is included in the recording sent as the centre's sample
- In order to gain a **Merit grade**, candidates must respond '*formally and in some detail*' whereas for a **Distinction grade**, '*perceptive*' responses are needed and '*if appropriate, elaboration and further ideas and information*'.

In centres where the importance of the Q and A section had clearly been taken on board, the quality of the questioning was markedly superior. In some centres, candidates had clearly been made aware of the difference between challenging, open questions which allow elaboration, and closed, basic enquiries which limit the speaker's response. It was also very encouraging to see some teachers persevering with good candidates, asking supplementary questions when initial responses were a little weak, giving the candidate every chance to show their ability.

In other centres, this section was often disappointing, with interesting and confident talks followed by lacklustre questions put by inexperienced peers. This gave the speaker little chance to meet Distinction criteria and often led to more informal, colloquial responses, matching the register of the question. In cases like this, the teacher could have stepped in to ask more challenging questions. Questions which were too personal or informal, often led the candidate to give brief, undeveloped responses or even chatty, anecdotal ones e.g. *Why did you choose this topic? Who is your favourite team?*

There is advice on the Q and A section on the Eduqas open website and examples of more challenging questions. As made clear from the outset, however, it might be unreasonable to expect 16-year-olds or even younger students to pose challenging questions. In many cases it has to be the teacher who steps in and makes sure that good candidates are given the opportunity to shine in this crucial area if they are to achieve Distinction grades.

Accurate Assessment

There were still a relatively significant number of centres whose assessment of the candidates was inaccurate and simply too generous. The competency model had not been correctly applied as the candidates had not met all the criteria for the grade awarded, often limited by their task or the brief, perfunctory Q and A section.

In some centres, the standards for Merit and Distinction grades did not match those exemplified in the twelve standardising presentations which must be used as the benchmarks for all centres' assessment. Please remember the following:

- **All teachers** involved in assessment must first revisit at least some of the official standardising presentations before marking their own candidates' work
- The head of department, or colleague in charge of Spoken Language, must ensure that all teachers assessing work are familiar with the criteria and **grades within the centre are standardised**
- **All criteria** for a grade must be met before the candidate can be awarded that grade. A best-fit approach is not applicable in assessing Spoken Language.

The standardising materials are very familiar after three years, but they are nevertheless good, clear examples of the standards and how the criteria are accurately applied. **These are the standards which must be applied to all candidates' work.**

Preparing the monitoring sample

There is a checklist easily downloadable from the Eduqas open website which gives centres clear guidelines on how to prepare the sample. Each year, however, there are some issues.

Please ensure the following basic requirements are noted:

- Centres check that all the presentations are **clearly audible**. At times, the candidate can barely be heard even when the volume is turned up to maximum to allow the monitor to hear what is being said. The recording device should be placed as near as possible to the speaker who should ideally be filmed face on, rather than from the side or behind.
- All presentations should be a **separate file, clearly labelled** with the candidate's name and number. All candidates should also announce their names at the start of their presentations.
- Candidates' individual files should be grouped according to grade with **separate folders for Pass, Merit and Distinction**
- The presentations included on the device should **match the names** in the centre's chosen sample.

- **All grades should be fully exemplified.** For example, if a centre awards twenty Distinction grades, ten must be included in the sample. Eduqas has always advised centres to record more than the minimum of ten examples in each grade
- When centres wish to use encryption, it would be helpful if passwords were checked for accuracy.
- USBs are generally quicker, more reliable and more accessible than DVDs.
- There is no need to include any paperwork, such as candidate records, with the sample and the Head of Centre's Declaration should be emailed directly to WJEC EDUQAS rather than the monitor. It is helpful to have a compliment slip, however, or some indication of the centre name and number affixed to the device.

Summary of key points

- Teachers should guide candidates in choosing their topics and organising their material into an effective presentation
- Approaches to task setting should be regularly reviewed in light of Eduqas guidance
- Candidates aiming at higher grades should be advised against over reliance on reading prepared scripts or on PowerPoint slides
- The question and answer section must be recognised as an integral part of the presentation, a key criterion which candidates must meet to achieve the appropriate grade
- Centres should review assessment and internal standardisation procedures, before assessing their candidates' presentations.

Finally, all monitors would like to extend their gratitude to those centres where an efficient, professional approach to the preparation of the sample was taken. Moreover, all would wish to congratulate those hard-pressed, dedicated English departments who worked tirelessly to prepare their candidates for this component. It was a genuine pleasure to see work from centres where the candidates had obviously been encouraged to fulfil their potential.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk