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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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## **GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2021**

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# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

November 2021

### COMPONENT 1

#### General Comments

##### Section A

The reading material for this paper was taken from a novel by Alexander McCall Smith but the passage was self-contained and the surface of the narrative was accessible. The narrative focused on the efforts of a female private detective in unmasking an impostor but it was handled with McCall Smith's characteristic lightness of touch. The questions followed a predictable pattern and, although there was enough here to challenge the able candidates, there were opportunities for all levels of ability to show what they could do.

##### Section B

As usual, the candidates were presented with four options for their writing and they included opportunities to write imaginatively or from personal experience. Most candidates produced responses which showed some development and coherence, but some were very thin and brief. I have said in previous reports that there is nothing to be gained by writing endlessly and aimlessly but there is a balance to be struck and the writing should have some substance. The suggested length for the writing is 450-600 words and responses which are well short of that target are self-penalising as they lack convincing detail and development. Some responses were very brief indeed.

Predictably, a lack of technical control undermined a lot of responses and too many candidates were much too careless with tenses as well as spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A

**Q.1** The opening question tested the candidates' ability to identify implicit and explicit information and ideas and it was not intended to put barriers in their way. There were some possible inferences but mostly the relevant information was factual, and five marks were available for a clearly presented selection of relevant details about Mma Ramotswe.

For example, the writer made it clear that she had raised money by inheriting and selling her father's cattle. All the animals went to her. She was an only child and she had used the money to set up her detective agency. She loved her father more than any other man and she appreciated what he had done for her. Her agency made a slow start but her services as a detective were, surprisingly, in considerable demand. She usually came up with some information for her clients, suggesting she was good at her job, and she did not charge a fee if she did not succeed, which suggested she was fair and honest in her dealings with clients.

As usual, a concise list of bullet points is sufficient here but it is worth pointing out that bullet points should make sense to the examiner. There is a danger that the candidates take too much for granted and use bullet points which lack internal coherence. Most scored well here but some needed to read the selected area of text more carefully. For example, it was not true that Mma Ramotswe did not charge a fee for her services. That was only the case when she failed to deliver.

- Q.2** This question, which assesses AO2, changed the focus to Mma Ramotswe's client, Happy Bapetsi, and asked for impressions of her character based on reference to the language in the text. In practice, the sensible responses were quite concise, offering some impressions with a well-chosen range of language choice and supporting evidence. No more can reasonably be required in a question worth only five marks and, although there was plenty of material for the candidates to use here, there was not so much that they were potentially overwhelmed by it or tempted into wasting time with answers which were unnecessarily lengthy.

For example, the first impression created in the text was that Happy Bapetsi was anxious or timid as Mma Ramotswe gave her some tea, which she always did if clients were "nervous". However, Happy seemed "intelligent" to Mma Ramotswe and the fact that she was good at arithmetic seemed to confirm this impression. There were few lines on her face, suggesting to Mma Ramotswe that Happy Bapetsi had had few worries in her life. The fact that she did well at school suggested she was hardworking and conscientious and "promotion after promotion" at work reinforced this impression and perhaps suggested that she was successful and capable in her chosen career. However, she was also aware of sexist attitudes at work which limited her progress up the career ladder. Nevertheless, she appreciated that she had a decent job, good pay and a nice house. She seemed to accept her situation. The fact that there was no mention of a husband or partner suggested to some that she was single, a career woman, and that was fair enough. Some candidates suggested that she was an independent woman. Most of the inferences were not too difficult and the opening two questions were a real opportunity to access marks.

- Q.3** This question also assesses AO2 and is worth ten marks. The question focused on a slightly longer section of the text. It was a two-part question and, although its aim was to test analysis of how the writer used language to achieve effects, it allowed some credit to be given for understanding the thoughts and feelings of two of the main characters in the story. In this section the significant part of Happy Bapetsi's story was revealed and it explained why she was looking for help from a private detective.

One approach was to tackle each character separately, but it was easier to track the text methodically and engage with the dialogue between the two women. Their interaction was the key to understanding their thoughts and feelings as the narrative progressed. Broadly, the writer showed the reader what the characters were thinking and feeling but he also told the reader what they were thinking and feeling. Language choice was often key.

At first in these lines Mma Ramotswe seemed to feel genuinely pleased that Happy had had a successful and happy life. She smiled and complimented her on 'doing well'. Happy took the compliment and admitted she **was** very happy but her use of the past tense suggested that her feelings had changed and she was not happy at all. She bluntly stated the reason for her change of circumstances as the arrival of her father.

This revelation clearly shocked Mma Ramotswe as she “drew in her breath” and her thought that Happy was having boyfriend trouble was replaced by “a different matter altogether”. Mma Ramotswe seemed to feel apprehensive at this point as the narrative had taken an unexpected turn.

Happy described the arrival of her ‘father’ with no obvious enthusiasm and says she “almost fainted” when he turned up. A potentially joyful reunion had resulted only in misery for Happy. When she paused in her story she was perhaps doing it deliberately for effect, waiting for the full implications to sink in, but also perhaps she was finding it difficult to go on because she was so unhappy. She obviously felt resentment at having to do all the work for her self-invited guest and Mma Ramotswe clearly felt that was a typical situation as she expressed her opinion that “many men are like that.”

Happy claimed that she was “tired” of running after her so-called father and said she suspected that he was not really her father at all. She thought he was an “impostor” who was looking for a retirement home. At this point, Mma Ramotswe stares in disbelief and the writer’s use of the word “astonishment” conveyed the impact on her.

Happy’s questions and her plea for help are said in a tone of “desperation” but Mma Ramotswe felt determined to help this woman as she does not hesitate. Her acceptance of the task was emphatic as she repeated “I’ll find out” in no uncertain terms.

In general, Mma Ramotswe reacts in a series of thoughts and feelings to Happy Bapetsi’s story, ranging from shock to astonishment to determination. Happy herself felt unhappy and exploited and desperate. The overview was not too difficult and the writer used the dialogue and interaction as well as significant language choices.

**Q.4** This question (which again assesses AO2) involved a long section of text and explicitly addressed the issue of how the writer showed Mma Ramotswe to be both clever and effective through plot, language and structure. Given that she succeeded completely in unmasking and removing the impostor from Happy Bapetsi’s home, it would have been difficult to argue against the premise of the question and the sensible responses tracked the details of Mma Ramotswe’s plan as it unfolded, identifying how what she said and did achieved her aims. She formulated a clever plan and she executed it quickly and very effectively.

For example, she borrowed a uniform to give authenticity to her disguise as a nurse and she increased the speed of her van as she approached the house to make it look as if she was in a hurry and was responding to a genuine emergency. She also ran up to the house to reinforce the impression of urgency and create a sense of alarm.

When she reached the house, she pretended to be out of breath and she was convincing as she told the tale of Happy’s life-threatening “accident” and her need for an operation. She was not fooled by his emotional reaction to her news and saw through his outburst of grief and concern, judging it to be “an act”.

The next stage of her plan was to claim that Happy needed **a lot** of blood and, when he suggested paying for it, she cleverly responded by insisting that it could only be supplied by a family member.

There was a battle of wits and he made excuses such as pointing out that he was an old man. However, his reluctance had confirmed Mma Ramotswe’s suspicions and already almost proved that he was a fraud.

She then pushed him into a corner by claiming that the hospital needed so much blood that it would be dangerous for the donor and she said bluntly, “You could die”. The success of her plan was shown clearly as his mouth fell open and she suggested that a real father would make this sacrifice for his daughter.

The collapse of his resistance came quickly at the end as she tugged him towards the van and confronted him with her arms folded in a pose that brooked no argument. She threatened him with the law and she acted and spoke “firmly”, giving him just five minutes to get his things. Her tone was forceful and she spoke with authority throughout the confrontation. Her plan was a complete success.

The better answers tracked the development of the narrative in detail and made an attempt at least to identify what was clever and effective in Mma Ramotswe’s plan. However, some candidates found it difficult to line up the answer effectively and resorted to simple narrative. Some candidates made a decent selection of relevant material but really struggled to explain why any of it was either clever or effective. There were also examples of candidates answering a different question as they discussed how the text was tense and dramatic.

- Q.5** This question was evaluative, inviting a critical response to the text as a whole, and the specific focus of the question was the way men were presented in the passage. The wording of the question suggested that men were not presented in a good light in this story and generally it was difficult to argue with that proposition as most of the men were not attractive characters with the notable exception of Mma Ramotswe’s father who made only a brief appearance at the beginning of the story. However, as always, the key to this question was to establish a coherent stance based on the details in the text.

Those who worked on the text methodically began with Mma Ramotswe’s father. He passed an inheritance to her and wanted her to have her own business. He obviously cared for his only daughter and she appreciated that he had worked and saved to give her a good life. The fact that Mma Ramotswe loved him beyond all other men confirmed the unequivocally positive presentation of her father as a caring, responsible and generous man.

Some candidates paused to consider and include the behaviour of Happy Bapetsi’s colleagues at the bank. The presentation of these men was much less positive and they were criticised as envious of a woman’s ability, causing Happy’s career to stall as she reached a ceiling because of this envy. It was also suggested that the men were worried because Happy would make them look stupid.

Mma Ramotswe also expressed some unflattering opinions about men in general, assuming that it had to be a man’s “bad behaviour” that ruined Happy’s happiness. When Happy described her fake daddy as lazy and selfish, Mma Ramotse suggested that “many men are like that”.

However, the male character who attracted the most attention was Happy’s father. Her ‘real’ father had gone away to work, according to her mother. It was possible to argue that this was well-intentioned. However, the apparent lack of communication and the fact that Happy’s mother did not mind his absence because she never really liked him anyway implied that this was not a positive move and it seemed to most that he had simply abandoned his family and responsibilities.

The best answers had coherence and good coverage, but a number of candidates answered a different question and got distracted by the issue of whether the presentation of men was fair or accurate. It is important to read the question carefully.

## Section B

**Q.1.1** The choice of four titles offered an opportunity to write imaginatively or from personal experience.

As always, the better responses maintained a coherent perspective, using either first or third person, and the content showed a sense of direction and structure. They used detail, dialogue and characterisation appropriately to keep the reader engaged and interested. Responses do not have to be predictable, but they should be relevant and engage the reader's interest. Less successful narratives are often implausible or lacking substance.

- (a) The fresh start almost always involved moving to a new school or college. Some of the responses were unconvincing but most were coherent enough, often contrasting the restrictions of school with the freedom of college.
- (b) This was a popular choice and offered a good opportunity to write from personal experience. Some were unconvincingly melodramatic, but most described the trials and tribulations of looking after small children without becoming implausible. Life as a babysitter rarely goes smoothly it would seem.
- (c) There were some rather awkward transitions from this opening, but it was another popular choice. Cheating in examinations or relationships were the obvious paths to take and there were some good responses to this option. It helps the candidates when the title offers a clear structure and direction, as it did here.
- (d) Constructing a narrative to fit a given conclusion can be difficult. However, this title offered a clear 'target' for the writing and most managed to put together a story which involved selfishness of one sort or another. Some responses misfired but most were relevant and reached the conclusion appropriately.

## Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates need to work methodically through the text, particularly in questions worth ten marks.
- Candidates need to provide some substance and detail in questions worth ten marks. Some answers are too brief and offer very limited coverage of the text.
- Candidates need to line up the question (for example in Q.03) and answer the question that is actually there (for example in Q.05).

In the writing section:

- Candidates need to think about using relevant detail to give their work substance and authenticity.
- Candidates need to take care with tenses. This has been mentioned in previous reports but the failure to control tenses is a widespread problem and it seriously undermines a lot of writing.
- Candidates need to take care to communicate clearly and accurately.



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE

November 2021

### COMPONENT 2

#### General Comments

##### Section A

The two reading texts for this examination focused on achievements in the history of flight, from an early attempt in a `flying machine` to the first spacewalk by a British astronaut. The article that Robert Wood wrote in 1896 after watching and photographing the flight of Otto Lilienthal's `flying machine` captured his sense of awe at "witnessing the very start of the flying age, and the second text, taken from Tim Peake's `Ask an Astronaut` book, similarly records Peake's feelings when he describes stepping "into the vacuum of space" to repair a faulty solar panel 250 miles above the Earth.

The questions followed a familiar pattern and most candidates were able to show at the very least, a basic understanding of the two texts. As ever, candidates who were well prepared for the exam were able to make good progress, showing their ability to select appropriate detail and analyse the texts. However, there were also many candidates who struggled to use their time effectively, resulting in incomplete scripts or responses that were brief or lacked careful reading.

##### Section B

As usual candidates were invited to tackle two writing tasks. The first of these was to produce a lively article for a school/college magazine, entitled: `Things I can't live without`, and the second task was to write what might be said in a talk to the class about how people in their everyday lives can help protect the environment and save the planet. Both tasks made it clear that the pieces were for very specific audiences, each with an expected length of 300-400 words. The most effective responses showed good understanding of the purpose of each task and with a clear awareness of their intended audiences. In each of the tasks successful responses discussed a range of topics linked to the title, developing their views, arguments or advice as appropriate. Disappointingly, a significant number of candidates struggled to manage their time effectively and examiners often saw brief and limited responses, along with candidates who failed to tackle one or both of the writing tasks. As in Component 1, candidates' work often displayed weaknesses in technical control, with some very basic errors impacting negatively on overall marks.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A

**Q.1.1** This first question focused on the Tim Peake passage, with three one-mark questions that required candidates to select details from across the text. As in previous examinations, these questions were straightforward location of explicit information questions but candidates needed to read both the text and the questions carefully. The first part of the question asked candidates to note the job that Peake had to do during his spacewalk.

Most candidates were able to correctly identify that he had to repair a faulty solar panel, thus ensuring that the space station was restored to full power. Some candidates failed to read the question carefully enough, responding to the question with answers such as `astronaut` or `to fly into space`. These incorrect responses serve to illustrate the importance of reading the question just as carefully as the texts. The second part of the text asked candidates why Mission Control ended the spacewalk and to locate this information it was necessary to read the seventh paragraph in the text, where Peake explained that his partner, Len Kopra, had a faulty spacesuit, resulting in water entering his space helmet. Mission Control told both astronauts to return to the space station. Again, most candidates gained reward for this question, but there were still candidates who failed to identify the correct detail, losing the opportunity for what should have been straightforward reward. This was also true for the final part of the question, where candidates were asked who Tim Peake received a message of support from. The penultimate paragraph made it clear that among many messages that had flooded in, Sir Paul McCartney had sent a special message to Peake, and whilst most found this an easy detail to locate, there were candidates who failed to gain a mark.

**Q.1.2** Tackling the first question meant reading the whole text and this should have prepared candidates for the 10-mark question: How does Tim Peake try to make his account of the spacewalk vivid and interesting for his readers? As I have reported in previous exam series, the most effective way for candidates to tackle this type of question is to work methodically through the text, selecting appropriate evidence and detail and, where appropriate, commenting and considering the way in which the evidence or detail has been presented by the writer. Peake's account could be considered `vivid and interesting` in a number of ways, and whilst moving through the text methodically, perceptive readers were able to see, for example, that one of the ways the text made an impression on its readers was the way he wrote about it being a unique experience, one that he called "unreal". He gave examples of the incredible speed at which they orbited the Earth while outside the space station and the rapid change of night into day. He wrote about his spacewalk being his "most vivid memory" and reflected that few in history had been given the privilege of seeing "the widescreen beauty of Earth" that he had been given. His account could be regarded as vivid, even dramatic, as from the very beginning of the passage, Peake made it clear that everything during a spacewalk was completed in "perilous conditions". He went on to give examples of the dangers faced, from being hit "by a hurtling micro-meteorite" to losing his grip and finding himself "floating away into space" or miscalculating his time outside the space station and being exposed to temperatures that would suddenly fluctuate from 200 degrees Celsius to minus 200 degrees. Many candidates saw the dangers that he faced and were able to write about how they added to the impact of the passage, with good readers commenting purposefully on them.

Peake writes powerfully about the emotional impact of being in space and good readers were able to comment on his tone of "awe and reverence" as he surveyed Earth from afar. Many candidates saw that when he wrote that seeing day change into night was "like having a front-row seat in nature's own widescreen cinema" it had a huge effect on him. While some were only able to note that it was an example of a simile, others went further to explore the image and comment on Peake's awe and wonder at what he saw unfolding.

There were many points through the passage where Peake writes about the feelings he experienced during his spacewalk and good candidates selected and explored both individual words he chose, such as “marvelling” at the view of Earth or the specific details he writes about such as seeing Earth slip “gracefully into shadow” and feeling “completely detached – utterly removed from Earth” or the image of him “being a tiny spectator in an immeasurably vast universe”. Some candidates were able to successfully explore the way he wrote about feeling “awe and reverence” and the “humbling” impact it had on him.

Although the emotional impact of his experience is a powerful element in the passage, his account of the repair work undertaken during his spacewalk, and the emergency that arose during it, also provided candidates with opportunities to consider aspects that were `vivid and interesting`. Some candidates wrote about how his initial anxieties were replaced by his determination to complete the task he was assigned, while others considered how Peake used the comparison of what would have been a simple repair task on Earth to it having a potentially fatal outcome whilst in the “vacuum of space”. The fact that in completing the repair “timing was critical” encouraged some candidates to comment on the ever-present danger Peake faced, while others gave details of the faulty spacesuit and how this emerging danger curtailed the spacewalk. Finally, for candidates looking to consider an overview of how Peake had made his whole experience both vivid and interesting, the final paragraph gave them the opportunity to comment on Peake’s reflections and his sense of achievement in being the first Briton to walk in space.

The best responses to the question showed the ability to select and comment on appropriate textual details and showed good coverage of the whole text. They were able to explore Peake’s text from different standpoints, whilst less effective responses focused on just the danger of the mission, for example. Some candidates tried to tackle the question as a `feature-spotting` exercise but quickly found themselves resorting to unhelpful searches for similes or short sentences or asserting that it was an interesting account because of the alliteration in `Ask an Astronaut`.

**Q.1.3** This third question now turned candidates’ attention to the second text, an article written by an American, Robert Wood, in response to being invited to watch and photograph Otto Lilienthal’s attempt to make a flight in his `flying machine`. Like question 1.1, these three one-mark questions asked for specific details and provided careful readers with an opportunity to gain three marks as they gained familiarity with the text, in readiness for the more demanding question that followed. The first part of the question asked candidates how long Lilienthal had been experimenting with flying machines. The answer could be found in the first paragraph and unsurprisingly most candidates had no difficulty locating the information that Lilienthal had spent eight years experimenting and working on designs for a machine that would take to the air. However, there were candidates who simply mis-read the question and examiners saw responses that gave information about the cloth that covered the wings of the flying machine, the fact that there was not a single loose cord on the machine, or that Robert Wood was witnessing the start of the flying age. The second question also just required a little careful reading of the question. This asked how high Lilienthal went in his flying machine; those who read the third paragraph carefully had no difficulty in obtaining the answer: about fifty feet. The final part of the question asked candidates for the evidence that Lilienthal was pleased with his flight. The answer lay in the fourth paragraph where Wood describes the way Lilienthal cleverly brings his `flying machine` back to the ground, describing him as being “quite breathless from excitement”.

More candidates struggled with this part of the question than the first two parts, with some simply saying he was pleased or incorrectly focusing on Wood's reaction to the flight, rather than Lilienthal's. Although most candidates found this an opportunity to gain all three marks, once again, the lack of careful reading, either of the questions or the text, meant that some gained only limited reward.

**Q.1.4** This next question asked candidates to consider Wood's text in greater detail and to consider how far they agreed with the statement: "Robert Wood admires Otto Lilienthal's skill in building and flying his 'flying machine'". It would be difficult to suggest Wood was not impressed by Lilienthal and this was an opportunity for perceptive, careful readers to track through the text, selecting relevant detail and commenting upon it, whether it be about Wood's admiration for Lilienthal's skills as designer, builder and engineer of the 'flying machine' or his admiration of the skills and daring Lilienthal shows as a pilot of a machine that Wood described as being "at the very start of the flying age".

Wood begins his account by telling readers about the flying machine and even in this opening paragraph, he makes it clear that the machine is an impressive sight. He writes that it had been constructed "so perfectly" that no fault could be found in the supporting cords for the wings or in the tautness of the cloth for the wings. As early as the second sentence he writes that he "felt privileged" to be witnessing what he saw as "the very start of the flying age" and went on to describe Lilienthal as "an engineer of great ability". Good candidates gave themselves an effective start to their response if they probed this opening paragraph to suggest that Wood's view of Lilienthal's skill as a builder of the flying machine is already clear, even before he sees him flying it.

Each of the five paragraphs contains material that candidates could select and comment on and good candidates worked methodically through the text. In the second paragraph, Wood comments on the way Lilienthal worked hard to get the machine in a position for take-off, noting the protections he had taken from the cold or in the case of an emergency landing. The following two paragraphs detail the actual flight and here some candidates commented on the way Wood describes him standing "like an athlete" in preparation for the starting pistol, some suggesting that the simile captured Wood's view of Lilienthal as being perfectly prepared for this historic flight. He goes on to explain that the take off was timed to perfection and Lilienthal flew the machine "at a terrific pace, at a height of about fifty feet". He continues that the machine flew so fast he struggled to photograph the event.

For candidates keen to comment on Lilienthal's skill in flying the machine, the penultimate paragraph offered details to select and Wood's account makes clear how the machine was "expertly brought...under his control" after a gust of wind threatened disaster, and then as the flight neared its conclusion, how Lilienthal "cleverly allowed the wind to strike under the wings" so that it could drop lightly to the ground. Candidates were rewarded where they were prepared to probe Wood's use of adverbs or the specific details to illustrate Wood's admiration of the skills Lilienthal exhibited towards the end of the flight.

The final paragraph also offered more evidence of Wood's admiration of Lilienthal, writing about his skills as both designer and pilot of his flying machine. Some weaker readers struggled to make an effective selection of text, offering just a few words that lacked sufficient context to make a point clearly, but others selected more skilfully, combining comment with a telling phrase, perhaps focusing on "how perfectly

designed his invention was” or the flight “produced an impression that can never be forgotten” to convey his admiration.

Weaker responses were often brief and frequently only focused on a limited section of the text, but as indicated above, the best answers used the text extensively, had coverage of all five paragraphs and explored Wood’s response to Lilienthal as both builder and pilot.

**Q.1.5** This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, invited candidates to identify what Tim Peake and Otto Lilienthal wore for the spacewalk and the flight in the flying machine. This simply required candidates to select the appropriate details for each of the men and although most who attempted the question were able to gain a creditable mark, at this point in the examination almost 10% of the candidates failed to tackle the question.

In the ‘Ask an Astronaut’ text, Tim Peake made reference to his preparation for the spacewalk, telling his readers in the second paragraph that he remembered “pulling on my pressurised space gloves” in readiness for stepping out of the space station. A little later in the text he recalls that as he and Len Kopra waited by the solar panel he was told by Mission Control to “raise the visors on our space helmets” as they moved into darkness. Finally, he goes on to explain the problem that Len Kopra had with his faulty spacesuit, when water began to enter his helmet and the pair were ordered back to the space station.

In Robert Wood’s article, he gives information about how Lilienthal was dressed for his flight, explaining that he was dressed “in a thick flannel shirt for protection against the cold” and he also wore “baggy trousers” with thickly padded knees, that Wood explains would provide some protection in the case of an emergency landing.

There was no requirement to explain the details of their clothing, although some candidates did so in considerable detail. As has been the case in previous examinations, it was possible to gain full marks by selecting two details from each text or by focusing rather more on one text; providing at least one detail was selected from the Robert Wood text, details from the Tim Peake text could gain a further three marks. Although most candidates who tackled the question gained good or full marks, some candidates contented themselves with a single detail from each of the texts and there were others who either mis-read the question, gave only details from one of the texts or failed to give adequate details – for example, examiners saw a number of examples where Lilienthal was “dressed in a flannel”.

**Q.1.6** Although this final reading question was focused, as ever, on comparison of the two texts, it was essential that they read the whole question carefully and in particular responded specifically to the focus of the two bullet points. There were still candidates who chose to ignore the bullet points and instead shape their answer to a more general comparison of the texts and these rarely gained reward. It has been a point made in almost every post-exam report that reading the question and following the instructions is the only way to achieve success in this question.

The question invited candidates to compare the difficulties and dangers faced by Tim Peake and Otto Lilienthal and then to consider how the writers showed these difficulties and dangers in their respective texts.

In the Tim Peake text, there were a number of dangers that he faced, most of which would have resulted in his demise. In the opening paragraph he writes about the possibility of being “hit by a hurtling micro-meteorite” when outside the space station and then if something were to go wrong during the spacewalk “you could find yourself floating away into space”. He also wrote at length about the way temperatures outside the space station fluctuated from one extreme to another in a matter of minutes and made it clear that any fault with the spacesuit worn for work outside the space station, as happened to his companion, could quickly become life-threatening. Peake uses adjectives such as “perilous” and “critical” when describing the work he had to undertake as a means of emphasising to readers the potential dangers of his spacewalk.

He also uses comparison to emphasise how a perfectly simple job on Earth carried a much greater risk in space and gave specific details of the rapid and extreme temperature change as the space station moved from night into day.

In Robert Wood’s text, although the dangers and difficulties may have seemed less immediately life-threatening than the situation Tim Peake described, they were no less real. One of the obvious difficulties Wood wrote about was the awkwardness Lilienthal had of controlling the machine as he waited for the perfect time to catch the wind and take off. He wrote about how the weight of the machine and the huge wings made it difficult to hold, especially when there was any gust of wind. He explained why Lilienthal wore a thick flannel shirt and the importance of having thickly-padded knees on his baggy trousers, protection in the event of an emergency landing. The flight itself carried significant dangers for the pilot, as Wood described the machine flying “at a terrific pace, at a height of about fifty feet”. When it was caught by a sudden and dangerous gust of wind, he described how it was only brought under control because of Lilienthal’s expertise as a pilot. Wood makes clear the difficulties that Lilienthal faced as he watches “anxiously” before Lilienthal is airborne and goes on to describe the machine rocking and tipping “with every puff of air” or how it “swerved dangerously” in mid-air. To convey the speed and inherent danger of the flight, he describes the machine as flying “at race horse speed”.

Where candidates focused on the bullet points it was possible to accumulate appropriate textual details fairly easily across the two texts and there were some good responses. Unfortunately, too many candidates failed to attempt this final reading question or wrote only brief or generalised comparisons.

## **Section B**

**Q.2.1** In the first of the two writing tasks candidates were asked to write a lively article for a school or college magazine with the title: Things I can’t live without. Candidates were free to range widely over a number of topics or could focus their attention on just one or two indispensable necessities. In some cases, candidates wrote their responses as more of a talk than an article and examiners occasionally saw a response that drifted from the focus of the task, but for those who attempted the work, most were able to explain why they simply could not function without a mobile phone, for example. More assured candidates were able to explain the reasons why this was an essential item and how it kept them in touch with life as we know it. Some candidates approached the task earnestly, writing about family life, friends or the importance of education and schools. Others waxed lyrical about their beloved X-box or online games, and hobbies and sports were also considered indispensable. Perhaps predictably, many also said it was impossible to live in the modern world without Netflix.

Examiners saw some lively and engaging pieces, although there were many less successful responses where candidates struggled to manage their time successfully and wrote only brief and limited responses. Where candidates wrote significantly briefer responses than the indicated 300-400 words, the work almost inevitably lacked range and development, and although most pieces captured a sense of writing for a specific intended audience, the limitations of the content were obvious.

**Q.2.2** This second task was for candidates to write what they would say when giving a talk to their class about how people in their everyday lives can help protect the environment and save the planet.

Like the first writing task, there was a significant percentage of the entry that failed to tackle the task, and for many who did, it became a struggle to complete the work. Examiners saw brief and limited responses, with too many unfinished pieces. The task itself was particularly topical, because of the COP26 conference which was taking place at the time of the examination and enjoying much national press coverage. Candidates wrote about a variety of topics related to the question, ranging from information and advice about recycling and dealing with litter to reducing meat intake, changing to electric vehicles, taking more care of the oceans and reducing waste. Whilst some candidates focused their attention on what many described as simple changes everyone could make, others widened their focus to encompass the dangers posed by the melting polar ice caps or the Amazon de-forestation. Many presented facts and opinions with a compelling urgency and there was no shortage of passion as the talks implored or demanded those in the class should take action.

Where the writing tasks were complete, examiners saw engaging and often thought-provoking responses but there were many who failed to complete all of the reading and writing tasks, and some who seemed simply ill-prepared for the demands of a two-hour paper, either in terms of their time management or in the quality of their responses. Technical accuracy in writing has long been flagged up in reports as an ongoing concern but in this examination paper, there was little excuse for so many candidates to incorrectly spell words such as `environment` or `planet` which appeared in the writing task details. Although a message in the previous examiner's report, issues of incorrect or missing punctuation, basic spelling errors and poor sentence control continue to weaken the impact of candidates' written work.

## Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates need to read each question carefully to ensure their answers have the appropriate focus. In question 1.6, responses must focus specifically on the two bullet points and not be seen as a question inviting a more general comparison of the two texts.
- Candidates should track the texts methodically to select appropriate details, commenting where appropriate. In questions that ask candidates to consider the craft of the writer, 'feature spotting' is an ineffective approach.
- Questions 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5 are essentially those requiring specific details from the texts. Where candidates fail to gain full marks it is often because they have mis-read the question or supplied insufficient detail or information.

In the writing section:

- Candidates must manage their time in the examination to leave sufficient time to tackle both writing tasks. In this examination, markers reported that many responses were incomplete or so brief that there was little to reward. Responses that are significantly below the 300-400 words indicated in the exam paper are likely to struggle to have the range and development of content that mark out more successful responses.
- Lack of technical accuracy remains a significant issue and many writing responses were rewarded marks for VSSSP in a lower band than was gained for the communication and organisation of the work.



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE

November 2021

### COMPONENT 3

#### **General Comments**

Centres were not required to send recorded samples of the Spoken Language presentations to WJEC Eduqas in this November series. Therefore, as no Spoken Language presentations were seen, there is no Principal Moderator report for November 2021.

For ongoing Component 3 guidance and support please visit our [English language homepage](#).

#### **Comments on individual questions/sections**

N/A

#### **Summary of key points**

N/A



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