



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
GCSE**

NOVEMBER 2020

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Unit	Page
COMPONENT 1	1
COMPONENT 2	7
COMPONENT 3	15

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2020

COMPONENT 1

General Comments

Section A

The reading material for this paper was taken from a short story by Deborah Moggach and it described the disintegration of the relationship between two main characters, a married couple. The narrative focused on the difficulties faced by the female narrator as she tried to adjust being married and to living in the countryside.

Most candidates coped with it well enough, not least perhaps because the characters were well-drawn and interesting. There was enough subtlety in the passage to challenge the better candidates, but some found it difficult to grasp even the surface of the narrative.

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 a response which was relevant to their chosen title, 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. The writing needs some detail and substance.

Predictably, a lack of technical control undermined a lot of responses and too many candidates make avoidable mistakes with tenses as well as spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.01 The first question addressed the requirement to identify explicit ideas and information and five marks were available for a straightforward selection of relevant points. The question asked for a list of what was learned about the main character, who was also the narrator of the story, and there were lots of details available in the opening lines. A neat, concise list of details (facts or inferences) sufficed here.

For example, the first sentence of the passage made it clear that her only companion was a horse which lived in a field at the end of her garden and it was easy enough to infer that she was lonely. The narrator admitted that she was not used to horses and she fed them with chapatis. She was 'born and bred in England' but she was of Asian origin. She was from London but she lived in the country near Swindon. She was married and she was proud of her husband. She had limited contact with her neighbours which she thought was because she had no children rather than because of prejudice. She did not wear a sari. She talked to the horse about EastEnders and what she was cooking, and she confided in the horse that she thought she was going mad. There were other possible answers but there were plenty of details here and most candidates took advantage of this opportunity to score full marks. Most candidates had no difficulty in finding relevant points or sensible inferences.

However, some lacked precision. For example, some claimed that the narrator owned the horse, which was not true. The only other point to make here is that some candidates need to be more careful about their choice of pronouns. Using 'he' or 'they' or 'I' was neither sensible nor helpful.

- Q.02** This question switched the focus to the narrator's husband. Of course, in a question only worth five marks, the sensible responses were quite concise, offering some impressions with a well-chosen range of language choice and supporting evidence. No more was required here.

For example, Ranjit was perhaps rather set in his ways or even intimidating as he 'didn't like disturbance' so the narrator did not confide in him and kept her problems to herself. He also seemed mature and capable of 'deeper thoughts' than his wife as he was older and had grey in his hair. He was considerate and generous in his way and the narrator admitted he was 'kind' and bought her a range of the latest gadgets. His only religion was technology and he 'worshipped' the silicon chip. He regarded the microwave as a modern miracle. He had plenty of qualities as he didn't drink, he kept himself fit and he never lost his temper. He was generous with money and he was hardworking and apparently conscientious as he worked late and had been promoted to a marketing manager.

Some candidates were perceptive enough to pick up the sense of him as not unkind but old-fashioned with a rather traditional view of marriage and the roles of men and women in a relationship. The best answers did not take Ranjit entirely at face value and questioned some of his behaviour such as treating his wife almost as a kitchen maid, despite the stream of 'practical' gifts.

There were a lot of impressions here and most of the inferences were not too difficult. The opening two questions were a real opportunity to score well and a lot of candidates made the most of it.

- Q.03** This question focused on a longer section of the text and most candidates saw that the writer used language and content to build a picture of a sad, lonely woman who was struggling to cope with life.

The section of text began with the minor incident in the shop which left her in tears and feeling foolish. Her emotional fragility and vulnerability were also emphasised when she was affected by the disappearance of the horse and even felt that she had told it too many of her secrets. She clearly felt isolated and lonely as she admitted that she should have got out more. However, the thought of getting on a bus made her heart 'thump', emphasising her anxiety. She had 'panic attacks' when she went to Swindon and in supermarkets she would break into a sweat. Even 'little things' made her 'sad' and her insecurity was demonstrated as she 'fumbled' for her purse and keys and convinced herself that she had forgotten things. The string of questions she asked herself all showed feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. Thinking that she was the centre of everyone's attention showed her paranoia. She worried excessively about catching the bus and, in her confusion and panic, she was flustered and her stomach 'churned'. At the end of the section she revealed that she kept all of her anxieties to herself, feeling that her husband was too busy to be troubled by her problems.

The writer used internal monologue to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the narrator and the language and content indicated her insecurity and isolation. The deliberate accumulation of details created the picture and most candidates made at least some progress by selecting relevant textual details.

The best answers were thorough and kept a focus on the question. Of course, the responses covered the full range of ability but overall this question was attempted quite well.

- Q.04** It made sense to approach this question methodically and track through the specified section of text. The structure was significant here and it was difficult to see how the narrative developed from 'normality' into rather dramatic events without a step-by-step analysis.

At first the narrator did something 'out of character' and ordered a taxi so that she could take a trip to a famous beauty spot. In a way the writer laid a false trail here and the reader possibly thought that the narrative was moving in a positive direction, showing the narrator trying to cope with her problems.

However, the narrator's familiar anxieties appeared again as she worried about the cost of this long trip by taxi. The taxi driver encouraged her to appreciate the view, but she was feeling sick as she was too far from home and her kitchen. By this point she was experiencing familiar panic 'swelling' inside her. All of this was tense and dramatic enough in its way, but the writer had laid a false trail as the real drama was about to unfold.

The real moment of drama was when she spotted her husband's car in the car park. In a flashback she described the initial moment of recognition (it was a white Ford *like* her husband's car) and her failure to make the precise connection between the car and her husband. When the driver asked her something she did not hear as her attention was focused on the car and presumably her imagination was running wild. When she told herself there was only one head in the car it was fairly clear that she was trying to convince herself that there was an innocent explanation for his presence in this spot. She tried to tell herself that she was 'mistaken' and wanted to go home, presumably to escape from this potentially shattering situation. All of this built drama and tension but eventually she was forced to accept the evidence of her own eyes. She still tried to convince herself that they were 'just looking at the view' and that that was a reasonable explanation for why their heads were so close together. Some candidates noticed that the writer used the first-person narration to capture the sense of seeing but not wanting to believe in this section of the narrative.

When she was close to her husband's car, she saw what they were doing and the details were left to the reader's imagination. However, there was no real doubt about what was happening. The narrator wanted to go home immediately and when she got there she packed two suitcases. The marriage ended decisively and, although she admitted that it hurt, there was no going back. As far as she was concerned, everything was 'clear'. She went back to London and moved in with her sister, sticking to the fiction that it was country life which had driven her to drastic action. There was no confrontation, no attempt to seek an explanation. Her departure from her marriage was as decisive as it was dramatic.

Some candidates saw that the narrator seemed to have recovered her identity and independence. She insisted she was 'not mad at all'. In attempting to deal with her own problems, the narrator discovered her husband's infidelity and the marriage immediately fell apart.

The better answers tracked the development of the narrative in detail and made an attempt at least to analyse what was tense and dramatic about the text.

However, a significant number of candidates found it difficult to line up the answer effectively and resorted to narrative, often failing to separate the dramatic from the mundane. The other problem was that a number of candidates did not understand, or even mention, what happened in the car park. Those answers which got no further than the narrator's arrival at the beauty spot were severely limited in coverage, and quality.

- Q.05** The best approach to this question was for candidates to track their response to the character, working out exactly what they thought about him at various points in the narrative. The writer dropped hints about Ranjit throughout the text, and many of them could be interpreted in different ways, but the key to this question was to establish a coherent stance based on the details in the text.

For example, most saw him as a decent enough character at first and were surprised when it was revealed that he was betraying his long-suffering wife. Others were less forgiving from the beginning.

At first he seemed ambitious and keen to make his way in the world and the narrator admitted that she was 'proud of him then.' The admiration for his diligence was clear but the alert readers picked up the implications of the word 'then' which suggested that things would change. He seemed oblivious, or indifferent, to his wife's problems and absorbed by work, and technology. However, the narrator pointed out his redeeming qualities and she deferred to him, accepting her role as the dutiful housewife.

Although this was open to a rather different interpretation later in the narrative, Ranjit seemed to work 'so hard' in a responsible job. He was often late and his frequent overnight absences initially seemed to be work-related and merely evidence of how conscientious he was. At this point in the narrative, the alert reader could have made some valid criticisms of his behaviour and attitudes, not least his failure to notice his wife's anxieties. However, the fact that she was making excuses for him perhaps encouraged most readers to see him as just a hardworking man who was set in his ways and rather old-fashioned in his ideas about marriage.

When he was discovered in the car park and the truth was revealed, it was difficult to mount any defence of him. He had deceived and betrayed his wife and most readers suggested that his despicable infidelity did change their view of him. The narrator packed her bags without giving him any opportunity to explain or defend himself but there was little sympathy for him. He had perhaps never been the ideal husband but by this point in the narrative he attracted unequivocal condemnation. Some suggested that this had come as a surprise, but others claimed that the ominous signs had been there from the outset. The character certainly provoked a response.

It is worth stressing that it is vital to establish a coherent line of argument and support it with textual evidence. Some had coherence but little reference to the text while others had the detail but limited coherence. Those who managed both did well.

Section B

Q1.1 As usual, the extended writing offered a choice of four titles and an opportunity to write imaginatively or from personal experience.

The better responses maintained a coherent perspective, using either first or third person, and the content was relevant, though not necessarily predictable, showing a sense of direction and structure. They used detail, dialogue and characterisation appropriately to keep the reader engaged and interested.

Less successful narratives were often implausible or lacking substance.

(a) Write about a time when you were pushed to the limit.

This title was popular and offered plenty of scope for physical or emotional challenges. It was a first-person narrative and the better responses had a ring of authenticity as the candidates drew on personal experience.

(b) The day that changed everything.

This title often prompted writing from personal experience ranging from examination results to the loss of a relative or friend. Some of the narratives were a little awkward in structure but most focused on a significant day either for the writer or the wider world.

(c) Write a story that begins: I had volunteered to help with the primary school trip.

Although the responses to this title were mostly imaginative in the sense that the writer had never actually volunteered to help with a primary school trip, the candidates who chose it were writing about an event most of them had experienced as children and therefore they had plenty of material to work with.

The less successful responses tended to be either rather uneventful, focusing mostly on what was for lunch, or rather implausible. The better answers maintained a coherent perspective and contained convincing detail and characters.

(d) Write a story that ends: ... and the teacher never found out.

Writing towards a given ending can be difficult but this title worked well enough and there were few responses that lacked a clear structure. Predictably, the responses to this option focused on pranks, or sometimes more serious or illegal behaviour. The better answers were engaging and sometimes alarmingly authentic.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates should take care with their approach to lists in Question 01, using bullet points and the appropriate pronouns.
- Candidates should 'line up' the question and the answer to ensure that they are using the text to answer the question (using the words of the question is often helpful).
- All questions require candidates to 'use' the text but never simply to tell the story.
- In evaluation questions, a well-argued and well-supported personal response is the key.

In the writing section:

- Candidates should aim to write a brief plan before starting their narrative
- Candidates should develop their ideas so that their writing has some substance and detail. (There is no need for excessive length but a narrative needs development).
- Most candidates need to be consistent with tenses and take more care with technical accuracy.
- Narrative writing needs shape and direction and candidates should think about the structure of their work before they start writing.

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COMPONENT 2

General Comments

Section A

The two reading texts for this examination gave accounts of encounters with gorillas in the wild. One was a newspaper article about a safari in Rwanda's National Park, written by one of the tourists who took part in a small group trek to visit a gorilla family in their natural habitat. The second text was taken from Mary Kingsley's book, 'Travels in West Africa', published in 1897 and described one particular incident when Kingsley and her guide unexpectedly came upon a family of gorillas as they were feeding.

The questions followed a familiar pattern and most candidates showed, at least at a basic level, their understanding of the two texts. Those that read the texts and the questions carefully were able to make good progress, even in some of the more demanding questions, but examiners also saw too many responses that showed a lack of care in the reading of the text and/or questions, resulting in answers that sometimes lacked the correct focus or which failed to support assertions with appropriate textual evidence.

Section B

As usual candidates were invited to tackle two writing tasks. The first was a 'guide to surviving the teenage years' written for a school or college magazine, and the second was to write what might be said in a talk to the class about a hobby or special interest, with a view to encouraging others to become involved.

Both tasks made it clear that the pieces were for very specific audiences. The most effective responses showed good understanding of the purpose of each task and with a clear awareness of their intended audiences. They were sufficiently detailed, often with engaging personal anecdotes and clear opinions. Weaker responses were often quite brief and lacking in detail. As with Component 1, there were often weaknesses in technical control and basic errors impacted negatively on overall marks.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q1.1 This first question followed the pattern of three one-mark questions that asked candidates to identify particular details from one of the texts, in this case the newspaper article, 'Trekking with the Gorillas of Rwanda'. It gave the opportunity to gain an initial familiarity with the text but although these were straightforward 'search and find' questions, it was important to read both the text and the question carefully.

The first part of the question simply asked candidates to note the numbers of gorillas said to be in the Rwanda National Park. Most candidates found no difficulty in locating the number, 480, from the fourth paragraph but some failed to read the question with sufficient care and wrote down '900', which was the number remaining

across the world, rather than those in the national park. In some ways, this was a simple error but illustrated very well the importance of careful reading, not just of the text but of the question too. The second part of the question asked candidates how much time visitors were allowed to spend with the gorillas and there were very few who failed to get the correct answer of one hour. In order to find the correct answer to the final part of the question, to name another animal found in the national park, candidates had to read the entire text, as it was only in the penultimate paragraph that antelope and buffalo were mentioned as being snared in traps in the park. Although many were able to select the correct detail, others struggled to find the relevant detail and responses included 'bamboo' or the gorilla named in the article, while others failed to offer an answer.

- Q1.2** Having had some opportunity to read the article in the search and find answers to question 1.1, candidates were asked how the writer had tried to make the trip to see the gorillas sound like a very tiring but memorable experience. As with previous questions of this type, the best way for candidates to tackle this type of question was 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. It was sensible to take the two key words in the question, 'tiring' and 'memorable' as separate areas to explore, although working methodically through the text meant that evidence of the arduous nature of the trek to get to see the gorillas was sometimes juxtaposed with a detail that suggested being close to the animals provided a wonderfully memorable experience for the tourists.

The writer begins by suggesting to readers that there would be few occasions where it is possible to be so close "to wild beasts capable of mauling you", thus setting the scene for a rare and unforgettable experience. However, the writer makes it clear in the second sentence of the article that the trek to get to the gorillas is physically difficult and involves navigating tough terrain: "One second you are exhausted, struggling through thickets of bamboo....pulling yourself up a steep slope, step by painful step." Many candidates found this a useful sentence to begin their exploration as it provided proof of the difficulties the trekkers faced. Some went further, selecting and commenting on individual words such as 'exhausted', 'struggling' and 'painful' to emphasise the tough conditions. Some candidates chose to organise their answer by first exploring all the details of the tiring nature of the visit before they turned their attention to considering what the writer found memorable. Whilst this might have appeared as a sensible way of organising a response, it meant the text had to be 'combed' separately for each aspect of the visit and this sometimes resulted in responses that said little about how memorable the visit had been, as candidates realised the need to manage their time and move on to the subsequent questions.

Those who chose to follow the more methodical tracking of the text found that having explored the second sentence of the text, they could immediately consider how the difficulties of the journey were rewarded by the way in which they suddenly happened upon the gorillas: "The next (second), you turned a corner and gasp" to see just 30 feet away a female gorilla "lovingly cradling" her infant. Many commented on the way this would have had a lasting impression on the tourists, with some noting how this sight mirrored that of human behaviour. The writer went on to say how the tourists instantly reached for their cameras to record what some candidates said would be 'once in a lifetime experience'. Some felt the most important thing was to show they had identified a simile and went no further but those who kept the question in mind and commented on how memorable a sight this would have been made better progress. The writer went on to give a flavour of the gentle behaviour of the young gorillas and the mother's response and some candidates found this more useful evidence that contributed to the trekkers' memorable experience.

The writer offered some details about the efforts to protect and increase the gorilla population in the national park and how this is done alongside managing visits to see them. Although simply selecting some of these details on their own brought little reward, more assured readers saw that the relative exclusivity of the visits would be another way they would be seen as particularly memorable.

Those candidates who chose to write all about how tiring the trip was before considering how memorable it might have been, had to read to the sixth paragraph before discovering further evidence of the tough journey. An “early 6am start” and “three hours of intense hiking” made it clear that the tourists would work hard for their reward of the sight of gorillas in the wild. The information about the make-up of the group of which the writer was part engaged some candidates but more careful readers made more progress with their focus and subsequent comment on the evidence that “even the fittest of us were huffing and puffing twenty minutes in” or that “everyone stumbled down a hill on their backside at some point.”

When the writer provided a number of specific details of the gorillas’ antics, good candidates were able to select and comment on those they felt would live in the tourists’ minds for a long time. Candidates who were able to explore both aspects of the question almost invariably gained higher marks than those who focused exclusively on just ‘tiring’ or ‘memorable’ and those who approached the question from the perspective of building a response around ‘feature spotting’ struggled to make a great deal of focus. The best responses kept a clear focus on the question, tackled the text methodically, selecting and commenting where appropriate on a good range of evidence; these responses often also had good coverage of the whole text.

- Q1.3** This third question now turned candidates’ attention to the second text, the extract from ‘Travels in West Africa’ by Mary Kingsley. 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. However, as with question 1.1, candidates had to read the question and the text with sufficient care to locate the correct information. The first question asked candidates to note how far away Mary Kingsley was from the gorillas. Kingsley tells her readers she got to where the gorillas were, “some thirty yards off” and most candidates correctly had this as their answer but others gave fifty yards, this being the distance Kingsley and her guide had crawled forward to arrive thirty yards from them. It was an example of a straightforward question that simply needed a little careful reading to gain a mark, so it was disappointing that examiners saw too many incorrect answers. The second part of the question, asking for the name of another animal Kingsley had come across in Africa seemed to pose no great difficulties and almost all candidates correctly identified elephant, leopard or python, this information being found in the third paragraph of the extract. The third part of the question asked candidates to identify what had disturbed the gorillas as Kingsley and her guide, Joseph, watched them, and again most were able to note that Joseph had given ‘an explosive sneeze’ that had startled the gorillas, sending most scuttling back into the forest. Although this was an opportunity to gain three marks relatively easily, the lack of careful reading meant too many failed to do this, and examiners also noted that a small number had answered on the wrong text.

Q1.4 This next question asked candidates to consider Kingsley's text in greater detail and to consider how far they agreed with the statement: "Mary Kingsley's account captures her mixed feelings about the gorillas she sees on this trip." Opinion was free and whether candidates agreed or disagreed with the statement, what counted here was the exploration of her account and the way in which the candidate viewed her experiences. As with the second question, the most profitable approach was to track methodically through the text, selecting relevant detail and commenting upon it. The best responses were often those that showed good coverage of the whole extract, using details from each of the four paragraphs.

Kingsley begins her account by saying that as they tried to get as close to the gorillas as they dared, they approached "with great caution" which to some candidates suggested that she felt anxious and wary of them. This feeling of anxiety may have increased when she saw the savagery with which they were attacking the pineapple and bananas, candidates often selected details such as "tearing to pieces" the fruit, "noisily attacking" and "destroying more than they ate" and felt it showed her negative attitude towards them, seeing them as violent and aggressive creatures.

This view of the gorillas seems to be confirmed in the second paragraph, where she writes about the "shrill, whinnying, chattering noise" made by the animals and the way they "moved awkwardly...in a most inelegant style." By tracking the text in a methodical way, good candidates were able to use details like these to support a view about the feelings and attitudes Kingsley had about the animals she viewed. In the same paragraph, Kingsley tells the readers that she was "fearful of an attack" indicating her view of the gorillas as potentially dangerous but interestingly, prevents her guide from taking action to defend her, lowering his gun "to prevent him from firing." Those who had used some of the previous textual evidence to decide she held entirely negative views of the gorillas now saw there was perhaps a case to modify their evaluation of her, at least in part. Many candidates gave these opening paragraphs only limited scrutiny, perhaps because it appeared from the third paragraph that she only saw the gorilla as "the most horrible wild animal", and in this paragraph she certainly expanded this view, even to the point that they were compared unfavourably with leopards, pythons and elephants. Many were able to select and comment on her condemnation of the gorilla with phrases such as "horrible disgust" and the gorillas' "hideousness of appearance."

Unfortunately, a significant number failed to then explore the final paragraph where it is clear she sees an entirely different aspect of the gorillas' behaviour. She tells her readers that she watched the animals "with great interest" and when the huge male gorilla was frightened by Joseph's "high-pitched screeches" and made off into the forest, she confesses to being captivated and entranced by the speed and graceful nature of his departure, calling it a "superbly perfect hand-trapeze performance."

Where candidates tracked the text carefully, it was possible to make some comment on her 'mixed feelings' in each paragraph of the extract. That some chose only to focus on part of it limited their opportunity to explore the range of feelings and attitudes she appeared to have about the gorillas. However, some more careful readers were able to gain good marks with thoughtful evaluation supported by textual evidence.

Q1.5 This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, invited candidates to briefly explain how the guides helped to keep the writers safe when they came across the gorillas. In previous reports I have suggested that the most useful way of approaching this question has been to deal with each text separately, rather than try to insist that both texts had similarly appropriate details, especially when this was not the case. However, in these two texts there were points of similarity and whilst it was perfectly sensible to tackle each text separately, many gained good marks by indicating those similar details. In both texts it was stated that the guides carried guns for protection. Some candidates went on to give additional detail such as in the text 'Trekking with the Gorillas in Rwanda' where the writer explained that no guides had ever had to use a gun to protect a tourist. In the Kingsley passage, it was made clear that the guide was prevented from using the gun he carried. It was not necessary to give any additional detail and many candidates gained reward for simply recording that both guides carried guns. In the 'Trekking' text, candidates were able to identify other measures that the guides used to ensure safety: the tourists were told that as a basic rule they must stay at least 22 feet away from the gorillas. They were also told they must stay calm if a gorilla were to move towards them and if necessary "just move calmly out of the way. In the 'Travels in West Africa' extract, Mary Kingsley's guide ensured they kept out of sight as they 'wormed their way forward 'towards the gorillas, her guide then keeping her at a distance of 30 yards from the gorillas. When there appeared to be a threat to the writer, her guide warded off the attentions of the old male gorilla by making lots of noise, clapping his hands and making "a set of high-pitched screeches" that sent the gorilla swiftly back into the forest.

As in previous examinations it was possible for candidates to gain full marks on this question with a careful concentration on two or three relevant details from each text. Many were able to gain good marks, although some responses lacked the necessary precision, sometimes muddling up the details between the texts or only including one detail from a text. Where candidates failed to gain good marks some candidates only wrote about one of the texts or their responses lacked the specific details needed to gain reward. Good responses were clear and succinct, pointing out where guides took the same steps to keep safe those in their care and then selecting other appropriate details from each text without adding unnecessary detail. The very best were able to shape their responses into just a few sentences and gain full marks.

Q1.6 For candidates to achieve good marks on this question, which asked candidates to compare across the two texts, it was essential that they read the whole question carefully and shaped their responses so that they focused on the two bullet points. It was a point made in previous examiner reports but once again examiners saw responses that made general points of comparison but failed to focus on what was asked for in the bullet points.

This question focused first on the impressions the writers give of the gorillas they see and then invited candidates to explore how those impressions had been created. In the 'Trekking with the Gorillas of Rwanda', the writer offers an impression of the gorillas as unthreatening, even friendly animals, who almost seem to put on a show to entrance the tourists. Readers are given the impression that the female gorilla has all the attributes of a loving human mother, while the young ones are playful with each other and the mother. The tourists are also given the impression that the gorillas sometimes like to give a display, showing off by beating their chest, but also when the guides use oral prompts, they are animals that can be communicated with through language. The writer tells readers that the impression they have of the dominant male is like a king "surveying his domain" yet at the same time grooming one of his youngsters in the manner of a doting father. Good candidates were able to

focus on the descriptions used to create these positive and sympathetic impressions of the animals, the little cameos of their behaviour being explored and commented on to good effect. They were also able to consider the language used to describe their behaviour and antics, often considering words and phrases such as 'tumble' and 'scampered' with their associations of childish behaviour.

These impressions contrasted significantly with those created in Kingsley's text, where the gorillas were viewed as wild and dangerous animals that could only be approached with extreme caution. The impression Kingsley gives of the gorillas is one of unpleasantly noisy creatures that aggressively 'attack' 'tearing' their food to pieces. These animals walk awkwardly and 'inelegantly' and her impression is often negative. She calls the gorillas 'horrible', suggesting they are more repugnant than other dangerous animals. For all that, she watches them "with great interest" and even prevents her guide from shooting one when she was "fearful of an attack." There were points in the extract where candidates felt her impressions were not entirely negative and in the final paragraph, her impression of these 'awkward' and 'inelegant' animals is replaced by something close to being in awe and wonder as she creates the impression of swift, graceful creatures disappearing into the forest in a display she describes as a "superbly perfect hand-trapeze performance." These impressions are largely created by the descriptions she gives of the gorillas' behaviour and good candidates used the text well, selecting and commenting on specific adverbs, adjectives and verbs to illustrate how her impressions changed depending on what the gorillas were doing.

For candidates who kept their focus on the impressions given of the gorillas, there was plenty of material to select and comment on, and careful readers who organised their responses well gained high marks. However, examiners also saw responses where the focus became the impressions of the writers' experiences or their attitudes towards the gorillas. Sometimes these were quite detailed responses but because they failed to focus on the question, there was little to reward. In some cases, examiners saw only very brief or limited responses and it was clear too, that issues of poor time management meant some candidates failed to attempt the question.

Section B

Q2.1 In the first of the two writing tasks candidates were asked to write a lively guide to surviving the teenage years for a school or college magazine. It gave candidates the scope to range as widely as they wanted around the topic and the invitation to be 'lively' offered the opportunity to be informal, humorous or even a little controversial in approach. The nature of the task invited a mixture of advice and information, and to be successful required an awareness of the intended audience, most of whom would know only too well the trials and tribulations of being a teenager. The best responses managed to do this without 'talking down' to their readers and were often written in an easy, engaging style that suggested they themselves had managed to navigate their way through these difficult years and were happy to share their experiences as well as their advice. On occasions, little personal anecdotes gave the guidance they offered greater weight, particularly where the writer showed they had benefited as a result of what happened to them or what they had done.

It is perhaps true to say that the majority of the responses were earnest rather than lively, with quite a number taking a narrow, but nonetheless entirely acceptable approach to give advice exclusively about the preparation for school or college examinations. Others focused on managing school life more generally, with advice about how to manage all the distractions of the opposite sex, awkward teachers and homework regimes. Those who chose to offer guidance on an altogether wider perspective sometimes touched on topics such as the importance of friendships, keeping healthy, having good family relationships and maintaining mental wellbeing. The best of these displayed a wisdom far beyond the candidates' years, with advice that would gladden the ears and hearts of their teachers and their parents.

Whilst not necessarily being the only way to organise material in the guide, some candidates used sub-headings to make clear what they regarded as the key elements in successfully surviving the teenage years. This did have the advantage of helping writers to expand and develop each of their suggestions, whereas weaker responses sometimes failed to develop some perfectly sensible ideas and advice, leaving their work brief and lacking in detail. As in previous examinations, there was an expectation that responses would be a minimum of 300 words in length and those that were significantly briefer usually struggled to gain good marks because the overall content was limited and lacked detail.

Q2.2 This second task was for candidates to write what they would say when giving a talk to their class about a hobby or special interest they had to try to get others in the class involved in. Most candidates had little difficulty in writing about some interest they had, and although sports such as football, rugby and swimming were frequent and popular choices, examiners were usually treated to a wide range of topics that included voluntary work, gaming, interests in music, computing, films, drama groups, cookery, reading and cadet groups.

Good responses were sufficiently detailed to give information about the hobby or interest but also how the writer had become interested in it. In some cases, anecdotes gave engaging insights into the benefits the writers had gained from their involvement and there was useful and practical advice offered about how members of the class might find out more or where to begin their own involvement. The best pieces showed good awareness of the intended audience, offered a range of interesting information and advice and the material was balanced, well organised and structured. Rather less successful responses sometimes struggled to balance the information about the hobby/special interest with guidance or encouragement to also become involved; on occasions the second aspect of the talk seemed to be little more than a concluding comment along the lines of, "I hope you are now interested

too.” In addition to lacking this balance in structuring of the piece, weaker responses were often rather brief, lacked very much sense of the intended audience or offered only very generalised information about their topic.

As the final task in the examination, some candidates struggled to complete their work, and sadly, some mis-managed their time so badly that they never gave themselves time to attempt it.

In terms of the communication and organisation of the writing responses, examiners found much to enjoy and engage them but there remains a concern about basic technical accuracy. Examiners reported that many of the writing pieces were awarded marks for communication and organisation that were sometimes one or even two bands above the band for vocabulary, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. These concerns have been a feature of previous reports but continue to weaken the overall impact of candidates’ written work.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates need to read each question carefully. There were too many instances where questions were mis-read and as a consequence, candidates gained few marks. This was particularly the case in question 1.6.
- In questions worth 10 marks, coverage of the whole text is important as this gives candidates a range of relevant details they can use to support comments and evaluation.
- Methodical tracking of the texts is the most effective way of selecting the details to use in an answer. Where candidates focus their responses mainly on ‘feature spotting’ it rarely allows them to gain very good marks.

In the writing section:

- Responses need organisation and structure to be effective; the use of paragraphs (or sub-headings where appropriate) help the organisation of material; similarly, the use of an opening topic sentence in each paragraph can usefully lead into greater exploration and detail of that particular topic.
- Candidates should write responses of sufficient length, allowing them to explore and develop the subject matter in sufficient detail. Brief responses invariably lack depth and development.
- Many candidates need to pay more attention to technical accuracy, especially basic spellings, sentence construction and punctuation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2020

COMPONENT 3

General Comments

As in previous November series, the vast majority of resit candidates' Spoken Language grades were carried forward from the summer. This year the Coronavirus pandemic meant that candidates' GCSE English grades were based on Centre Assessed Grades. It was therefore expected that there would be even fewer candidates resubmitting new Spoken Language work than in previous years.

However, a small number of centres did enter new candidate work rather than carrying their grades forward and were required to submit a recording of the candidates' presentations for monitoring by the official deadline of November 5th.

Monitors were very grateful to those centres where teachers had prepared the sample efficiently, making sure that the work could be easily accessed and had been clearly labelled with the numbers of the centre and candidate. Some centres had opted to encrypt their candidates' presentations meaning that a password was required. It is important that centres remember to email encryption@wjec.co.uk with passwords so that these can be forwarded to the Spoken Language Monitor.

Comments on individual questions/sections

In most cases the Spoken Language grades awarded by centres were fair, consistent and in line with agreed standards. There was evidence of careful assessment in ensuring that all the criteria for a particular grade had been met before that grade was awarded. For instance, in the case of one candidate, the centre had correctly judged that he had met most Merit criteria; he dealt with some challenging ideas and information, using a range of vocabulary, and responded to questions with appropriate detail and formality. However, the candidate had not organised his material appropriately so as to meet the needs of the audience or achieved a clearly defined purpose. This was properly reflected in the centre's assessment of the presentation as a Pass grade.

In the few cases where the monitor judged the centre's grading to be insecure, the problem most often lay in the topic chosen by the candidate and, still more specifically, the wording of the task which restricted the candidate to a Pass grade. Those candidates who opted for broad, open-ended subjects, without a clearly defined objective, tended to find it more difficult to achieve the purpose of the talk or to organise their material clearly to meet audience needs.

For instance, one candidate opted to speak about 'General Franco' and adopted a descriptive approach covering some biographical details and facts and details about the Spanish Civil War. There was potential for challenging material, but the talk wasn't always structured effectively making it less accessible and easy to follow as a listener.

Another candidate experienced similar problems in trying to deal with the wide-ranging topic of 'Domestic Violence' and also struggled to achieve the purpose or meet audience needs by organising ideas and information clearly. In both cases the candidates were awarded Merits but had not met all the criteria. Unfortunately, the nature of their tasks hindered them to some extent and they should have been awarded Pass grades.

There is a useful example of a similar situation in the Inter-board Standardising Exemplar Presentations which have been available to help guide centres in assessing their own candidates' work since the introduction of the current specification. In one of the twelve sample presentations, Connor meets some Merit criteria but, as outlined in the accompanying commentary, the straightforward, chronological structure of his talk on 'Dr Crippen' restricts him to a Pass grade.

The standardising presentations have become very familiar to teachers and it can perhaps be easy to think that there is no need to revisit them before awarding candidates' grades. However, they were originally chosen because they exemplify so clearly the standards for each grade and teachers are strongly advised to consult them before assessing candidates' work.

Since the introduction of the current specification, experience has shown that candidates definitely benefit from their teachers' advice when deciding on their tasks to ensure that they can move beyond Pass grades. The original guidance for centres made clear that teachers are expected to discuss with candidates the topics chosen and how to prepare their material in advance of the actual presentation. Our advice to centres has consistently recommended that introducing an element of persuasion or establishing a clearly defined purpose for the talk can help candidates move beyond Pass grade, especially in relation to the criterion governing clear organisation. For example, the first candidate mentioned above could have set out to persuade the audience why General Franco should be regarded as infamous as Mussolini or even Hitler, which would have helped shape the material more effectively and avoid a straightforward, descriptive approach. The second candidate might have worded the task as an attempt to persuade a specific audience, such as the school's senior leadership team or some local councillors, to include the topic of Domestic Violence in the curriculum or to make it a greater priority for funding in the area.

There is guidance for centres relating to effective task setting available on the Eduqas website, with useful examples of ways to help candidates shape their material to meet the higher-grade criteria.

Summary of key points

- Candidates must meet **all** the criteria for a grade. To be awarded a Merit grade the candidate must 'achieve the purpose of his or her presentation' and 'organise and structure his or her presentation clearly and appropriately to meet the needs of the audience'.
- Candidates stand a better chance of moving beyond Pass grade if they have a clearly defined purpose for their talk rather than an open-ended topic which can lead to a straightforward, descriptive approach.
- Teachers involved in assessing candidates' work should revisit some of the Inter-board Standardising Exemplars before awarding grades.
- It may be worthwhile consulting guidance for teachers relating to task setting on the Eduqas website.
- Presentations submitted for monitoring should be stored in separate files clearly labelled with the centre number and the candidate number
- If samples are encrypted it is important that any password is made available to the monitor.



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