



GCSE Examiners' Report

English Language
Level GCSE
Summer 2024

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.edugas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (edugas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner Eduqas

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Executive Summary

Component 1

Successful reading responses were focused and concise where necessary. Candidates selected relevant material from the specified section of text and used it effectively. Where a question asks for 'impressions' of a character, successful candidates moved beyond quotation from the text to explore the significance of the evidence and to suggest what it showed.

There was evidence of some improvement in evaluating a text. However, some candidates still need to establish a coherent line of argument and use the text to support it. Answers which 'agree and disagree' may end up being contradictory which has an impact on the cohesion of the response. Some candidates omitted question 05 on this component (and Q16 and Q22 on Component 2). It is worth reminding candidates not to spend too long on lower tariff questions at the expense of the higher tariff questions.

There were many successful narrative writing responses which were coherent and well-judged in length. Communication and organisation skills improve year on year. Successful writing also displayed technical control, particularly with tenses and sentence construction. Unfortunately, control of spelling, sentences and punctuation is still an issue for some candidates. Time given at the end of the exam for proofreading is time well spent.

Component 2

In the reading section, successful candidates made effective use of the texts to support their responses, while the responses of less successful candidates sometimes lacked coverage of the whole text and were frequently quite brief. Careful tracking of the reading texts, and responses that linked closely to the focus of the question was the basis for gaining good marks. Successful answers balanced detail and coverage, focusing on key words, phrases or details where appropriate but then moved on to other points to achieve good coverage of all parts of the text. Less successful responses only focused on parts of the text, rather than using the whole text, resulting in missed opportunities for reward.

Candidates engaged well with both writing tasks and there were lots of lively and well-structured responses. Successful writing responses had both range and development, kept their intended audience in mind and in both tasks balanced information and personal response/anecdote to good effect. However, too many responses were brief and lacked sufficient detail or development and had too many avoidable technical errors.

Component 3

The majority of centres had applied the criteria accurately and assessed their candidates fairly. Most candidates had been guided by their teachers in choosing a suitable topic which they were genuinely interested in, and which allowed them to hit higher grade criteria.

Some centres still need to give more status to the question-and-answer section. It is important that both candidate and teacher recognise this section as part of the presentation as a whole and not an 'add on'.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Tracking the text/area of text stipulated, to ensure a range of relevant points are made for 10-mark questions	<u>CPD MATERIALS</u>	Previous CPD materials for examples of good responses and strategies for sensible tracking.
Developing a coherent argument in the evaluation questions	<u>KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER</u> <u>POWERPOINT</u>	Evaluation Knowledge Organiser A PPT with strategies to improve coherency in response to evaluation questions.
Improving proofreading skills/technical accuracy	<u>POWERPOINT</u> <u>BLENDED LEARNING RESOURCES</u>	A PPT with strategies to improve technical accuracy. Interactive resource for self-study on improving technical accuracy.
Approaches to managing Component 3	<u>POWERPOINT</u>	A PPT which looks at strategies for managing Component 3 successfully, including how to approach the Q and A section of the presentation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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COMPONENT 1

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 5 assessment objectives (AOs):

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The passage was taken from a short story. The setting was a remote farm in Australia, but the narrative technique was quite straightforward and, although the story was not without subtleties in characterisation and the relationships between the characters, it was accessible across the range of ability.

Section B

This section followed the familiar pattern and there was a choice of four titles which offered opportunities to write imaginatively or from personal experience. All four titles attracted significant numbers of candidates.

There was some evidence of 'prepared' stories being used as batches of candidates produced identical responses. This is not in the spirit of the examination and can be counter-productive in preventing candidates from showing what they can really do.

Handwriting was also an issue and there were more problems than usual with legibility. There are solutions available, and it would be beneficial if they were used where appropriate.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- Q.1** The opening question followed a familiar and predictable pattern, although the focus was on what the reader learned about a place rather than a person. It tested the ability to identify explicit and implicit information and ideas and the relevant points were all to be found in the short opening paragraph of the passage. The instruction to 'List five things' was not always followed as clearly as it might have been, but examiners are not looking to put obstacles in the way of the candidates, and most did produce a list of bullet points about the nature of the farm.

For example, it was clearly remote. It was five miles from the nearest town, Calwarra, and it was situated along a dusty road leading into the scrub. It was marked by a rickety signpost, and it was hot and dry. The farm was infested with ants and the sheep got foot rot. For a few weeks of the year it was busy ('a hive of activity'). The farm grew grain.

As usual, this question was an opportunity to score well with minimum fuss and most candidates took their chance. Less successful answers were imprecise and/or points did not make sense within the context of the question and specified lines.

- Q.2** This question focused on initial impressions of Jack Cogdon and covered a short and straightforward section of the text. There was plenty to say here but the question was only worth five marks and the better answers were concise as well as thorough. As I have mentioned in previous reports, successful answers achieve a pragmatic blend of inference and evidence, but it was not difficult to get the measure of the character. The successful responses used the text effectively.

For example, Jack lived a lonely life on his remote farm, and he coped by retreating into his work on the farm. He was a hard worker, and he was physically strong and determined. He had built a successful farm through his own hard work, and he expected his daughter to work both in the house and on the farm. He struggled to express his emotions, but he was kind in his way, and he loved Alice. The best answers had an assured overview of the character and were organised into a detailed and coherent answer.

These opening two questions gave the candidates every opportunity to achieve marks and make a confident start.

- Q.3** This question was more demanding. It was worth ten marks and focused on a longer section of the text. It was a two-part question and, although its main aim was to test analysis of how writers use language to achieve effects, it allowed credit to be given for understanding of the character of Alice's aunt. The issue of 'how' the writer created impressions of the aunt was often a matter of selecting the relevant evidence but the successful answers required some inference and analysis.

The aunt perhaps seemed kind and well-meaning in offering to take Alice and bring her up in the town, but she was also assertive and forceful, turning up at the farm to argue her case. She told her brother in no uncertain terms that he could not bring up a girl properly. She had strong views and was not afraid to express them bluntly, insisting that a girl needs 'other women' in her life. She was combative and when Jack 'fought back' rather aggressively and insisted on his rights as a father, the aunt was not intimidated. She stood up to him and just changed her argument.

She used emotional pressure on her brother, insisting that he would ruin Alice's life by keeping her 'cooped up' on the farm and denying her the opportunity to make friends or learn how to run a home. Her priorities perhaps seemed rather conventional or old-fashioned, but she did seem to be concerned for Alice's well-being.

However, she knew Alice would not choose to leave the farm and, knowing when she was beaten, she gave up arguing and muttered 'dire warnings' about girls who lack a 'proper education'. She was secretly disappointed when Jack managed well and she complimented her brother on his parenting only once, and grudgingly at that. However, she did acknowledge that Alice had turned out rather well and that bringing her up cannot have been easy.

Most candidates saw her as a strong and rather abrasive character, but she was also well-intentioned in her way. It was not too difficult to engage with the character of the aunt and the better answers were methodical and detailed, using the text purposefully to support a good range of impressions. Some candidates noticed the author's use of dialogue and action and the omniscient author employing 'showing' as well as 'telling'. The successful answers showed a good grasp of the character and the text and had some substance as well as insight. Less successful responses tended to be thin and unfocused, offering limited impressions and focusing on the aunt's thoughts, actions and beliefs. Some merely 'told the story'.

Q.4 Like questions 02 and 03, this question assessed AO2 and required the candidates to explore the relationship between Jack and Alice and how the author revealed the nature of their relationship.

For example, Jack was presented in these lines as a caring and conscientious parent who drove his daughter to school every morning and picked her up every afternoon, no matter what was happening on the farm. The sense of his priorities showed how seriously he took his responsibilities as a father. This was reinforced by the fact that he bought her clothes so that she was always well turned out, but he left the choice of clothes up to her. Most candidates argued that this showed he was caring but allowed her some freedom and choice. Jack had expected 'teenage rebellion', but it did not materialise. He had anticipated arguments about staying out late and accepting lifts home from boys who had only just passed their driving tests but none of this happened. The relationship was not tempestuous, and Alice did not seem to push the boundaries. Jack even found her friends 'pleasant and well-mannered', although some candidates picked up the hint in the phrase 'the ones he met' that Alice possibly managed exactly who her father met. That said, there was no suggestion of anything other than a perfectly calm relationship in which Alice was content and able to live her life. She seemed to accept the 'world' she inhabited. She was allowed to go to parties and stay in town with friends, but she was always back on time.

On his side, Jack realised that his daughter had grown imperceptibly into 'a quiet, uncomplaining person' and he was proud of her. When the teacher praised and encouraged her art, Alice was pleased but immediately thought of how they would pay for art school. She seemed to be considerate and unselfish, not just thinking about herself. She was described as 'not used to compliments' and her future had not been discussed. The lack of communication in the relationship was an important point for many candidates, although some perhaps overstated it.

- Q.5** This question invited evaluation of the character of Jack Cogdon across the whole passage. The teacher described him as a lonely and pathetic farmer, depending on his daughter to cook and keep house and the candidates were asked to respond to that view. The key to success was to take a coherent stance and to use the textual detail to develop a persuasive and valid argument. As usual, a methodical approach seemed to work best here.

At the beginning of the story the author made it clear that Jack fought to keep Alice and he did offer to let her choose whether to stay with him on the farm. He expected her to work on the farm and in the house, but the author explicitly stated that he was 'kind in his way' and loved his daughter. Alice was not presented as a domestic servant. Jack managed well as a parent and even his sister had to pay him a grudging compliment. He seemed to be a conscientious father and also quite tolerant. However, the issue of Alice's future was not discussed, and he seemed to assume that nothing would change and that she would stay on the farm. Their life on the farm seemed to have settled into a routine with which they were both content. She did not complain.

Jack was alone, and possibly lonely, and he was 'taken aback' when Alice raised the subject of what she was going to do after school. He smiled but 'weakly'. A day he had dreaded had arrived and he was clearly uncomfortable as Alice pressed on with the conversation. The possibility of 'losing' his daughter to the big city was unsettling for him and he concentrated on eating his food, avoiding her gaze when she mentioned art school and Melbourne. He did say 'why not?' and admitted it was her life but the prospect of losing Alice left him silent and unsettled and anxious, although he tried to act normally.

Alice understood what her father was feeling and what was at stake. If she left the farm Jack could never retire. He would work until he was no longer able to work and then he would have to sell the farm and move into one of 'those houses' filled with retired farmers. Jack desperately wanted a successor to leave the farm to and he hoped that Alice would marry a farmer's son. When he spoke to Mr Paget, both men were laughing and smiling but he seemed attracted to the idea of marrying Alice to his friend's son.

In some ways the narrative supported the teacher's view, and it was possible to argue that there was some truth in her claim that Jack was selfish and controlling. However, those who 'strongly agreed' with the teacher's view had a difficult case to argue and most did so only by ignoring much of the text. It was possible to make the case against Jack, but it was not easy. Those candidates who felt that the teacher's judgement was rather harsh and unfair were usually on safer ground. The most successful answers grasped that the situation was complex, and that Jack was conflicted. He clearly would have preferred it if Alice had married the farmer's son and taken over the farm. It would have been very convenient for him and the farm, but he was not a tyrant and there was no real evidence that he was going to force Alice to sacrifice herself. Those who tried to agree and disagree with the teacher often got into a muddle and failed to establish a clear direction for their answer.

Section B Creative Writing

- (a)** This title allowed a range of narrative perspectives and, although most wrote from the perspective of a pupil, some described events through the eyes of a teacher. Less successful responses sprawled across months or even years, but the better ones captured the feeling of being new and facing a school for the first time. There were a minority of implausible melodramas, but most had a sense of authenticity.

- (b) This was clearly a first-person narrative, but it was quite open and offered a wide range of opportunities. Some candidates struggled to match their stories to the title but most described exploits in sport or in helping others.
- (c) This title invited a focus on a specific incident involving the telling of a lie. The lies were rarely too serious but most candidates who attempted this title did not seem to hesitate when falsehood was required.
- (d) This was an open title which involved the notion of choice but really left the candidates to decide which direction they wished to take it.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- In Q01 the successful responses are clear in presentation and concise and focused in content
- A successful response to a question asking for 'impressions' of a character should move beyond quotation from the text to explore the significance of the evidence and to suggest what it shows.
- Successful writing responses are well-judged in length and are neither too brief nor too long.
- Successful writing displays technical control, particularly with tenses and sentence construction.

Areas for Improvement

- The 'attempt rate' for question 05 is relatively low and time management is an issue. It is sensible to leave enough time for the narrative but not at the expense of 05.
- Reading responses need to be focused and as concise as is reasonable. Candidates need to select relevant material from the specified section of text and use it effectively.
- In Q05 there is a need to establish a coherent line of argument and use the text to support it. Answers which 'agree and disagree' usually drift in to muddle or contradiction. A sensible overview of the text is required here.
- Technical control of spelling, sentences and punctuation is a familiar area of weakness in writing. Basic errors are often numerous, and this aspect of writing has a significant weighting. Candidates should leave themselves enough time to proofread their creative writing.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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COMPONENT 2

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 6 assessment objectives (AOs):

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO3 Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.
 - AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The two reading texts for this examination were accounts of people who had swum the English Channel. One was a newspaper article about Sally Minty-Gravett, who has swum the Channel on multiple occasions over six decades, her most recent success being in 2022, and the other was an account of the very first successful Channel swim, completed in 1875 by Captain Matthew Webb. The account was written by a member of Webb's support team.

The six questions followed a familiar pattern and almost all candidates showed some understanding of the events in the two accounts. Successful candidates made effective use of the texts to support their responses, responding at length to the more demanding questions, while the responses of weaker candidates sometimes lacked coverage of the whole text and were frequently quite brief. In some cases, time-management issues meant candidates struggled to complete the final reading question.

Section B

In this examination the two writing tasks candidates were asked to complete were a talk to their class with the title: 'Toys/Games of my childhood' and to write a lively article for their school or college magazine with the heading: 'The Ultimate Teenagers' Guide to Keeping Fit and Healthy'. The first task gave candidates opportunities to respond from a personal perspective and to offer anecdotes and reflections about their own toys and the games they played as younger children, whilst the second task encouraged candidates to provide advice and information in a way that their readers would find engaging as well as helpful. As usual, there was an expected length of 300-400 words for each task.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- Q1.1** This first question focused on the newspaper article, ‘Jersey woman becomes the first person to swim the English Channel across six decades’, with three one-mark questions that asked candidates to select specific details from across the text. Although they were the familiar ‘search and find’ questions, candidates needed to read the complete article, and this should have also prepared them for the more demanding second question. The first part of the question asked how long Sally Minty-Gravett’s eighth Channel swim took her. The information was contained in the first paragraph – 15 hours and 30 minutes – and almost all candidates were able to select the correct detail. The information for the second part of the question: who told Sally she should attempt a Channel swim, appeared in the fourth paragraph, and again most candidates correctly identified her swimming coach as the correct answer. For the final part of this question, candidates had to read the whole of the article, as the answer only appeared in the penultimate sentence of the final paragraph. They were asked what activity she suggested she might learn to do after retiring from swimming and the correct answer, either sailing or surfing, again caused most candidates few difficulties. For this opening question, where candidates failed to gain reward, it was almost always because they had misread the question, rather than an inability to locate the correct details. Having read the whole article, it should have prepared candidates to tackle the second question with a clear understanding of Sally Minty-Gravett’s involvement with sea and Channel swimming.
- Q1.2** The second question focused firmly on Sally Minty-Gravett and how the writer showed her love for sea and Channel swimming. As has been indicated in previous reports, when dealing with AO2 ‘craft of the writer’ questions, the most successful candidates worked methodically through the text, selecting appropriate textual details and commenting and/or explaining how they illustrated her love for sea and Channel swimming. There was a wealth of detail and information for candidates to probe and explore and the best responses showed good coverage across the whole text, with insightful comments on details or quotations. Weaker responses sometimes only focused on one or two paragraphs of the article, or stabbed at fragments of text without explanation or context; in some cases, these responses were little more than a collection of quotations, with no attempt to explain or contextualise the information.

The article began by telling readers that Sally Minty-Gravett has the sea “in her heart and soul” having swum the Channel on eight occasions, and giving details of her most recent success, which set a new world record for the number of successful crossings. The article continued by giving Minty-Gravett the opportunity to explain in her own words her love of the sea, and how she had come to the point where she attempted her first Channel swim at the age of 18.

Many candidates were able to select quotations from these early paragraphs which made clear her love of the sea. Some explored the impact of the language she used: her “passion” for swimming or discussed how the lack of swimming pools in Jersey had made the sea the only option for learning to swim. Some candidates explained that even swimming in the sea in winter had never been a problem for Minty-Gravett; indeed, she said that for her, being in the water in cold temperatures was “exhilarating” and “invigorating”. Less successful responses tended to simply ‘spot’ words such as these, while successful responses gave a clear exploration and context for Minty-Gravett’s choice of language. Readers were told how the swimmer had learnt to swim in the sea by the age of 4, had become a competitive swimmer by 10, and by 14 was involved in longer swims, including being part of a Channel relay team, before eventually successfully completing a solo Channel swim when she was 18. Some candidates recognised and then explored the way the article had used Minty-Gravett’s own words to emphasise her feelings for her sport: “I absolutely fell in love with being in the sea” or “Being in the water is where I’m happiest”. Some candidates were also able to discuss how the article was structured in such a way that paragraphs frequently concluded with her emphatic comments that made clear her love for sea and Channel swimming, while others explained how the writer had interspersed details about her achievements alongside Minty-Gravett’s own words. As the article drew to an end, with information about her ‘retirement swim’, many candidates noted how the final paragraph emphasised her love and enjoyment of Channel swimming by reporting that she had said if she found she missed doing such swims, she could “always dive right back in” and do another one.

Whilst there was a wealth of detail that candidates could use in their responses, it was the quality of the exploration of quotations or details from across the whole article that marked out the best responses. Many gained good marks for this question with comments that were thoughtful and often insightful. It was certainly possible to gain some marks by the selection of a few relevant quotations but to move into the higher mark bands required good coverage across the whole text, combined with a willingness to explain, explore or contextualise the details or quotations.

- Q1.3** This question asked candidates to read and respond to the second text, the account of Captain Matthew Webb’s successful Channel swim in 1875. As usual, the question was in three parts, intended to ensure candidates had some overview of the text, were able to select some simple details, but also the question should have prepared them for the more demanding question that followed. The first part of the question simply asked what Webb was compared to by the writer as he began his swim. Candidates only needed to read the first paragraph to obtain the answer to this, where readers were told “he very much resembled some large seal or huge fish”. The second part of the question asked how long the swimmer had thought it would take him to complete the swim, the answer, fourteen hours, being indicated in the third paragraph. Finally, candidates were asked what could be heard as Webb came close to completing his swim, this information being contained in the final paragraph. Candidates gained reward for either the cheering from the crowd on the sands, or that some people “struck up ‘Rule Britannia’”. As with question 1.1, candidates who read both the text and the question carefully gained good marks, but it was sometimes the case that an answer had little or no link to the question, an indication of a lack of care in the reading of the question.

- Q1.4** This question asked candidates to consider the account of the 1875 swim in greater detail. They were given a statement: “We are never sure that Captain Webb’s attempt to swim the English Channel will be successful, until the very end of Arthur Payne’s account” and asked to what extent they agreed with it.

Candidates had to consider what readers were told about Webb and how the swim across the Channel developed. As with question 1.2, working methodically through the text, selecting and commenting on appropriate details allowed candidates to accumulate reward. There were relevant details in each of the four paragraphs that candidates could use to shape their responses, beginning with the details readers were told at the start of Webb’s attempt. He set off, his shoulders “shooting through the water” and resembling “some large seal or huge fish”, which suggested he had every chance of success, especially as he was “swimming strongly with a stroke of twenty-two to the minute”. This strong, confident start appeared to continue, as readers were told he was “evidently determined to do or die” until he cried out that he had been stung by a jellyfish. This darkened the mood of those in the support boat and for the first time there was doubt about his ability to complete the swim. However, this was a false alarm and he continued on his way.

In the third paragraph, readers were told Webb was showing “evident symptoms of fatigue” and had become anxious about the prospect of the tide turning, carrying him away from the French coast. Here, good candidates explained the issue well, linking his anxiety to the turning tide, whilst less successful responses merely ‘spotted’ words such as ‘fatigue’ and ‘anxious’ without the context. Some candidates noted that Webb’s swimming rate had slowed, while others commented about the time he had been in the water, at this point already four hours longer than he had expected the whole attempt to have taken. As the tide turned “he began to lose all hope” and those in the support boat felt “that he had no chance”. In the final paragraph, good responses tracked the details of Webb’s final hours in the water with a careful selection of textual detail. Some commented that the account showed he was “fearfully exhausted”, whilst others saw that although this was indeed the case, he “still toiled on bravely”, giving some optimism for a successful attempt. More details followed, and candidates who tracked the account carefully were able to accumulate the details that had left any reader uncertain of the outcome until “Finally, Webb touched ground”. Responses that tracked the uncertainty of the outcome through the four paragraphs were able to gain good marks with a combination of detail and comment, whilst less successful responses tried to make the text fit a fixed viewpoint or selected just a few relevant details.

- Q1.5** As usual, this four-mark question asked candidates to select relevant material from across the two texts with a brief explanation of the weather conditions faced by Webb and Minty-Gravett on their Channel swims. Dealing with each text separately was the obvious and sensible approach and those who looked at the weather conditions that Minty-Gravett faced saw that her first crossing was made “in thick fog” that meant she only realised that she had made the crossing when she was just three-feet from the sand. She had also faced inclement conditions in 2013 when she completed her swim “in a storm”, but for her ‘retirement swim’ she said that she started out when there was “just a light breeze”. In the account of Webb’s attempt to swim the Channel in 1875, readers are told that when he set out his shoulders were “gleaming in the sunshine”.

He swam through the night and there was “early morning mist” as he approached the French coast and some hours later, in the final stages of the swim readers are told that “rain clouds had begun to form”.

Most candidates were at least able to select a detail from each of the texts and many gained full marks. In some cases, responses drifted from the focus of the question but as in previous examinations, candidates could gain full marks with just a sentence or two on each text if they were able to capture succinctly the precise details

- Q1.6** The final question asked candidates to consider what made Minty-Gravett and Webb successful Channel swimmers, and how the writers showed what made them successful. The article about Sally Minty-Gravett made it clear that she had been a sea swimmer from a very young age and took part in swimming competitions and longer swims before attempting to swim across the Channel at just 18. Her swimming career as “one of Jersey’s best known swimming coaches” and record of completing a swim in every decade had given her years of experience as a sea and Channel swimmer. Candidates who saw that coupled with her experience, she was also a very determined swimmer; some noted that even as a youngster she was “fiercely determined” as a competitor and “determined to be a winner”, exactly the qualities needed to be a successful swimmer in the sea for a very long time; many noted that even on her first Channel swim, she had to have that determination needed to swim “in completely thick fog”. Other candidates noted that “she always had the self-belief” that she could complete such an arduous swim, using support from the article, where she explained that she didn’t find it difficult to summon up the physical and mental strength required for each of her Channel swims. Many candidates also went on to say that the over-riding reason Minty-Gravett was such a successful Channel swimmer was simply her enormous love of the sea and the fact that through the years she had continued to “swim all the time” and sea swimming “has always been a huge part of her life”. Throughout the article, her love of the sea was clear: she said, “I live for it” in the early paragraphs, and went on to tell readers that it was her “natural place to be” and “Being in the water is where I’m happiest”.

In Arthur Payne’s account, he wrote about the bravery of Webb and of him being “committed to being the first person to swim the English Channel”. This was supported by some of the details that indicated his single-minded determination: six hours into the swim Payne noted that Webb was swimming “with the same steady stroke”, and that he “rarely spoke, evidently determined to do or die”. In the early part of the account, it was made clear that Webb was a strong swimmer, even to the point that he was compared to a “large seal or huge fish”. The quality that most candidates were able to identify that made him successful was his resilience or endurance, his refusal to give up, even when exhausted or when circumstances seemed to make success appear less likely. Lots of candidates noted that he battled through what initially appeared to be a jellyfish sting, or struggled as the tide turned, making his progress more difficult. Many were able to document the details of his increasing fatigue and exhaustion as he neared the shore, using relevant details from the text to support this, up to and including the point where success was assured, and recognising the attempt to be “a triumph of his endurance”.

As in previous examinations, there were too many candidates whose time-management was such that they had allowed themselves too little time to tackle the question in sufficient detail.

Some candidates had interpreted the first bullet point as “How do we know they are successful Channel swimmers?” and struggled to make good progress, but for those who read both question and texts carefully, there were good, detailed responses where the qualities of each swimmer was supported by a range of relevant detail.

Section B

Q2.1 The first of the two writing tasks for candidates was to write what they would say in a talk to their class with the title: ‘Toys/games of my childhood’.

It was an opportunity for candidates to explore what was important to them when they played as young children and most candidates approached the task with engaging anecdotes of games played in primary school or at home, reminiscences of toys loved from a very young age and so on, whilst some wanted to discuss the importance of toys/games in shaping and developing their imaginative play and creativity. There were confident responses about the part Barbie had played in some candidates’ young lives, or the creative power of Lego, whilst others focused on playground games: ‘Bulldog’ and its many variants featured in lots of responses – many candidates keen to explain why and how it had frequently been banned from their primary playgrounds, but the simple games of childhood ‘Hide and Seek’ and ‘tag’ also featured widely. Others wrote fondly of their time with Wii or their pleasure when they had been engaged in computer/online games such as Minecraft, Roblox and Fortnite. Board games also featured in responses, with accounts of marathon Monopoly games, Snakes and Ladders and Frustration clearly having a special place in some candidates’ lives. Many responses were lively, assured and sustained, mixing information about the toys or games with personal anecdotes. Successful responses often contained detailed and personal accounts of two or three particular favourites, sometimes with information about how games were played but always with an awareness of their intended audience. For many, the task seemed to awake feelings of nostalgia for their childhood games, and some wrote about how they felt fortunate to have lived at a time when they could enjoy games and toys without the intrusion of social media. That said, there were responses that were sometimes quite brief and struggling to move very far beyond a simple list of games and toys played with. These responses lacked detail and development and often lacked sense of their intended audience.

Q2.2 In the second writing task candidates were asked to write a lively article for their school/college magazine with the heading: ‘The Ultimate Teenagers’ Guide to Keeping Fit and Healthy’. Most candidates seemed to approach the task with enthusiasm, with many keen to show their knowledge of healthy eating and the opportunity to offer advice to a generation of young people who, in the opinion of those writing, clearly needed some prodding into fitness. Readers of the articles were frequently reminded how unfit their generation was, with some shocking statistics being used to hammer home the message that becoming fit and making time for regular exercise was both necessary and fun. Most responses tried to deal with the task by exploring fitness, healthy eating and mental wellbeing and this frequently helped in the shaping of the article. Keeping fit was given the key focus in many responses, with advice that ranged from the benefits of a daily gentle ten-minute walk to those who felt fitness could only be achieved by visiting the local gym three or four times a week for a punishing regime that would then guarantee complete fitness for life.

Some candidates showed good knowledge of the fitness routines they espoused, explaining in considerable detail how particular exercises or gym equipment would enhance abs, quads, heart health or energy levels for anyone, beginner or potential Olympic participant. Other candidates explained that fitness was simply a matter of `moving more`, whether that be a regular walk round the park or substituting the bus for a walk to school, cycle rides with friends or a regular trip to the local swimming pool.

When it came to eating healthily, there was again no shortage of advice on offer, with many suggestions about how to achieve a balanced diet, the benefits of “eating your greens”, the menace of ultra-processed foods and how it was essential to swap sugary drinks for frequent glasses of water.

Almost all agreed that allowing oneself to consume a little chocolate or a few sweets could be allowed as long as it was seen as just an occasional treat.

Some candidates went into considerable detail to explain the importance of knowing about daily calorie intake or the health-giving properties of particular foods, whilst others offered suggestions such as how to cook healthy meals every day of the week. Linking fitness and health to mental wellbeing was a focus for many, with advice about how to achieve good sleeping patterns, reduce stress and how to reduce a reliance on social media.

Good responses adopted a reassuring `you-can-do-it` tone and examiners reported many engaging and informative responses. As ever, those who organised their work well, developed the points they felt were important and ranged over the topic well, were highly rewarded; less successful responses often managed to keep their intended audience in mind, but content was more limited and brief. As in previous examinations, and in too many cases this year, this task also fell victim to poor time management, resulting in incomplete responses.

Too many candidates gained marks in a higher band for content than for VSSPS, with simple spelling and punctuation errors again costing candidates valuable marks.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- Careful tracking of the reading texts, and responses that linked closely to the focus of the question was the basis for gaining good marks, especially on 10-mark questions.
- Good responses balanced detail and coverage, focusing on key words, phrases or details where appropriate but then moved on to other points, so that the response achieved good coverage of all parts of the text.
- Responses to the 10-mark questions were sustained and thorough, and clearly explained and contextualised quotations and relevant textual details.
- Writing responses had both range and development, kept their intended audience in mind and in both tasks balanced information and personal response/anecdote to good effect.

Areas for improvement

- In some cases, the reading of the question was insufficiently careful, leading to time being spent on answers that were not the focus of the question, and gaining little reward.
- Where textual details and/or quotations were used to illustrate a point, the lack of explanation or context, where appropriate, was limiting and often failed to gain reward.
- Responses that only focused on parts of the text, rather than using the whole text, resulted in missed opportunities for reward. This was particularly an issue for some candidates in questions 1.2 and 1.4.
- In writing, too many responses were brief and lacked sufficient detail or development; many of these responses were well below the 300-400 words indicated in the exam paper.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3

Overview of the Component

As in previous years, all centres were required to send a recorded sample of their candidates' work for monitoring to ensure that the Pass, Merit and Distinction grades they awarded were in line with agreed standards. Monitors viewed a sub-sample in each grade to check that the assessment criteria had been applied correctly and consistently. It was also a key part of the monitors' role to confirm that candidates had a clear grasp of what constitutes a presentation affording them the opportunity to meet the Spoken Language assessment objectives.

This year centres were given the option of uploading their candidates' presentations directly to Portal, rather than posting USBs to their designated monitors as in past series. It seems centres found the new process helpful as the vast majority chose this way of submitting their samples, although a small number still opted to send the work on electronic devices. Monitors reported that the uploading system worked efficiently on the whole and led to fewer problems identifying candidates, although some of the files were very large and took quite a long time to download.

The majority of centres had applied the criteria accurately and had assessed their candidates fairly. It was very encouraging that monitors' feedback indicated the standard of the presentations was stronger than in 2023. Perhaps this was because centres were getting back in their stride and feeling more confident than in the first year after the enforced hiatus following the covid pandemic.

In the most successful centres, it was clear that teachers had acted on advice relating to task setting, developing presentation skills and accurate assessment, all areas where there was evidence of very good practice. Monitors were impressed by the commitment and hard work candidates demonstrated and the wide range of stimulating and testing topics they had selected for their presentation

Key features of a successful presentation

- Candidates had been guided by teachers in choosing a suitably challenging topic which genuinely interested and engaged them and allowed them to meet higher grade criteria.
- A clearly defined purpose for each talk, such as persuading the listeners to agree with a particular idea or stance, making it easier for candidates to organise their material effectively and avoid a purely descriptive approach.
- Teacher advice to candidates on how to *deliver* their ideas effectively as a *spoken presentation*, showing the audience awareness needed to meet Merit and Distinction criteria.

- The question and answer/feedback section was accorded suitable status as a crucial part of the whole presentation, so that candidates could give thoughtful and informed responses to suitably challenging questions.
- Candidates were able to present their ideas to an attentive audience in a calm, quiet location, conducive to effective communication.
- Teachers assessing the presentations had applied the competency model correctly, ensuring that the candidate had met ALL the criteria for the grade.

Unfortunately, however, there was again a number of centres where the assessment on one or more grades was not accurate or consistent, meaning that candidates had been generously assessed when their work did not meet the required standards.

Monitors also expressed concern that in quite a high proportion of these centres, certain factors meant that candidates had not always been given the opportunity to meet higher grade criteria and had under-achieved as a result.

Problems in centres where the assessment was inaccurate tended to centre on certain key weaknesses, most of which were highlighted in last year's report:

- neglecting the question and answer section
- candidates' unwise choice of topic
- weak presentation skills
- unhelpful audience and/or conditions
- lack of internal monitoring of standards

Neglecting the question and answer section

This has been an issue from the outset but has been given greater prominence this year as so many monitors expressed concern about this aspect of assessment. Far too often we have seen candidates who have worked hard on their initial presentations fall at this last hurdle as the feedback section was not given enough status.

It is perhaps worth quoting the comments of a senior monitor on this issue:

'A lot of work had clearly been put into the majority of presentations, so it was concerning when students were unable to access a grade because they were not given a question which allowed them to offer a perceptive answer. In many centres, the questioning lasted less than thirty seconds and comprised only one question asked by another student.'

'It was sad to see a candidate who had been asked one closed question repeatedly ask, 'Are there any other questions?' before reluctantly sitting down. Teachers need to know that if nothing is forthcoming from the class, they, as part of the audience, need to become involved in the question and answer section.'

It is essential that both candidate and teacher assessing recognise the feedback section as part of the presentation as a whole, rather than something to be quickly bolted on at the end. There is a separate criterion relating solely to the response to feedback, which means that it has equal importance with content, vocabulary, presentation skills and audience awareness. Even when a candidate has given a highly effective, engaging talk, he or she cannot be awarded a particular grade unless the final criterion is met.

It was disappointing to note that in many centres the teachers had not correctly applied the competency assessment model, even though this has been in place since 2017. Some teachers had awarded a Merit or Distinction grade when candidates had clearly not satisfied all the criteria, almost as if the feedback section was an afterthought.

It was still alarming to note that in quite a few centres, some candidates were awarded high grades when there was no evidence of their having responded to *any* questions, meaning that they had not even met the basic requirements of a Pass grade and should have been entered as Not Classified. In only a very small number of cases was this failure to respond to feedback the result of the candidate's lack of co-operation.

The time allowed for the feedback was often very brief, making it very difficult for even accomplished speakers to demonstrate suitably formal and detailed responses, let alone the 'perceptive elaboration' required for a Distinction grade. In more than one centre, the teacher actually commented that there was just time for a 'quick question'. Unsurprisingly, this approach elicited only a brief, straightforward response which should have limited the candidate to a Pass grade, irrespective of how engaging or sophisticated the actual presentation had been.

In some centres there was enough time allowed but it was given over to a lot of questions, when none were sufficiently probing or incisive to allow the candidate to move beyond straightforward responses. It should be the quality of response which counts, not the number of questions fielded.

Another factor in disappointing feedback sections was the poor quality of the questions themselves which did not allow the candidate to respond in a thoughtful or detailed way. As mentioned in previous reports, the teacher has a key role to play as part of the audience in helping the candidates reach their full potential as relying on uninspiring questions from fellow teenagers is often not sufficient.

The standardising examples of Charlotte, Jibreel and Laura demonstrate how crucial the teacher's input can be in helping Distinction candidates meet the criteria, even by asking one challenging question. One monitor gave a useful example of how a teacher's probing question had helped lift a candidate into Merit grade; after an enjoyable and well organised, but slightly lightweight talk on dogs as pets, a question about the dangerous dogs legislation allowed the candidate to demonstrate more challenging ideas and a wider range of vocabulary in her formal and detailed response.

Rehearsed questions and answers are not prohibited but rarely worked to the speaker's advantage, lacking the spontaneity of genuine 'feedback' on the presentation the audience has just heard. The classmate reading a prepared question and the speaker's hurried, awkward response tended to lack any genuine engagement or evidence of 'perceptive elaboration'.

In many centres, it was disappointing to see candidates who had clearly devoted a lot of time and thought to the content and delivery of their talks falling at this final hurdle, unsure how to deal with more demanding questions or left to answer prompts in brief, often monosyllable responses.

Unwise choice of topic

The original specification required that teachers give all candidates some guidance on their chosen topic, but this was clearly not the case in all centres. Some subjects simply lacked the required challenge or sophistication for the higher grades. A good example would be a centre where all the candidates gave an account of their work experience placement, adopting a chronological, day-by-day approach which limited them to a straightforward structure at Pass level, despite their attempts to employ more varied vocabulary and engaging delivery. The flat nature of the content also caused problems in posing helpful questions for the single teacher as audience, especially after listening to so many talks on the same subject. As suggested in the Eduqas task setting advice, a task like this could be improved by identifying a clear purpose, such as persuading the audience of the merits or demerits of the work experience scheme. If the purpose of a talk is purely to describe or give an account of an experience or treasured possession, it can be more difficult to avoid the straightforward approach which limits the candidate to a Pass grade.

Even when candidates had selected a more demanding and potentially sophisticated topic, they still needed advice on how to organise their material in an engaging way. This was especially noticeable when the topic was an open-ended one, such as climate change, or the life of a famous person, when a lot of scientific facts or biological dates and details would have been better omitted to meet the audience needs.

It is a demanding task to select, organise and present sophisticated ideas in an engaging spoken presentation, which is why Distinctions should have been reserved only for those candidates who had met all the criteria for the highest grade. Monitors commented that too many centres still approached assessment as a best-fit exercise rather than applying the competency model, dividing candidates into good-better-best categories and awarding Pass, Merit and Distinction grades accordingly, irrespective of whether or not they had satisfied all the criteria.

Poor presentation skills

The number of candidates who read from written speeches was even higher than in previous years and often led to overly generous assessment. Candidates are allowed to use any kind of aide-memoire they find helpful, from a few notes to a transcript of the whole talk, but this approach has potential pitfalls which candidates and teachers assessing their work must bear in mind.

Candidates who read with heads lowered in a monotone or frequently stumbled, as they were reading too quickly or hadn't practised, were unlikely to demonstrate the 'strategies to engage' needed for a Distinction grade. As repeatedly stressed in guidance for centres, there must be some clear awareness of the audience and how to engage their interest to meet this criterion, such as effective eye contact, varied intonation and carefully judged pacing. Many candidates awarded Distinction grades had *written* impressive speeches but seemed unsure of the difference between this and the skills required for an effective *spoken language presentation*. Too often, they seemed to have been assessed on the quality of their writing alone.

Many candidates who read their speeches from pieces of paper or similar were hampered to a certain extent. Some candidates were encumbered by unco-operative PowerPoint slides or who hid their faces behind their scripts or showed only the top of their heads when reading from an exercise book placed on a low table in front of them. All of these problems obviously affected their chances of engaging their audience, limiting many to Pass grades. One centre alleviated this problem to some extent by using simple music stands and encouraging their candidates to look up from their scripts at key points.

By far the most engaging presentations were nearly always those where the candidates spoke without reading the whole speech, showing that they had practised and had the confidence to make eye contact and vary their inflection. It is perhaps not surprising that candidates are nervous and feel more comfortable reading, but they do need some guidance on how to read in an engaging way and it was clear that some centres had taken this into account when advising their candidates.

While candidates are not expected to be accomplished orators, there is advice on basic presentation skills on the Eduqas portal/website which could be beneficial for all.

Unhelpful conditions

Some candidates battled against loud background noise or a very tough 'audience' of classmates with heads on desks, watching a film or even chatting. Quite a lot of candidates seemed to be giving their talks in a corner of the classroom during a lesson which made it difficult to demonstrate skill in engaging an audience. This was also true to some extent of those delivering their ideas to a single teacher in an empty classroom, although this was usually a more encouraging and conducive set-up.

Monitors are realistic, recognising time is limited and that Spoken Language's status as only an 'endorsement' to the candidates' GCSE grades means other components are obviously going to be given higher priority. Many centres seemed to have opted to use the summer term of Year 10 for the presentations which made sense, but it was disappointing when Spoken Language was given very little status or importance. In some centres, however, there was a clear sense that it was worthwhile doing this as well as possible and bringing the best out in candidates rather than just getting it done.

Lack of Internal moderation

In many centres there was limited evidence of a cohesive approach to Spoken Language and monitors often saw excellent practice from one teaching group which others in the same centre might have benefited from adopting. As with all non-examination assessment, it is expected that steps have been taken to ensure that the sample used for monitoring reflects the whole centre's approach to assessment.

It is the Head of Department's responsibility to ensure that all teachers involved in assessing their students' work are fully familiar with the standardising exemplar materials and the requirements of the competency model.

Recording issues

While most centres took a highly professional approach to filming the candidates' presentations, there was still a significant number where the poor quality of the recordings hindered effective assessment and monitoring. It was sadly not uncommon to see candidates filmed from the side or, even more frustratingly, from below, so that their notes obscured their faces and made it difficult to judge their interpersonal skills.

At times, it was not easy to hear what the candidates were actually saying or the questions from the audience, as the recording device had been placed closer to the teacher, whose voice was extremely loud. As being audible and clearly intelligible are fundamental criteria for any grade, this should be a basic requirement for all presentations. Sharing good practice and expertise among colleagues within the centre might be a useful starting point.

It is the nature of a report like this to look at areas for improvement, but that does not mean candidates' achievements should not be celebrated. All monitors commented on how enjoyable and uplifting an experience it was to see the work of so many conscientious, well-motivated and lively candidates who are to be commended, along with their dedicated teachers. It was again heartening to realise that many English departments still recognise the value of spoken language skills for their students across the ability range and do their best to develop them in all their charges.

Main areas for development:

- All candidates should have an opportunity to discuss their topics and how to plan their presentations with a teacher
- Candidates should be made aware of some basic presentation skills and advised against simply reading prepared speeches in a monotone.
- The question and answer section should be recognised as an integral part of the presentation as a whole and accorded appropriate importance
- All teachers marking their students' work should be fully aware of how to apply the competency model and judge their candidates' work correctly by applying the assessment criteria in full.
- There should be clear evidence of internal moderation before the sample is uploaded to ensure the standards of the centre as a whole are accurately reflected.
- Care should be taken with the recording of all candidates' work so that the presentations and questions posed are clearly audible.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4288

Email: gcseenglish@eduqas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [GCSE English Language | Eduqas](#)

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