



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
GCSE**

NOVEMBER 2023

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' reports offer valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. They are written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and detail how candidates have performed.

This report offers an overall 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 goes on to look in detail at each question/section of each component, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.ⁱ

The information found in this report can provide invaluable 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 annual 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.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that past papers are published to WJEC and WJEC Eduqas public websites between 1 st and 31 st December, the year after the examination has taken place.	www.wjecservices.co.uk 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 unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the overall 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 (eduqas.co.uk)

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	www.wjecservices.co.uk
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.	www.wjecservices.co.uk or on the Eduqas subject page.
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Subject Officer's Executive Summary

In the autumn series, the majority of candidates entered for the exams are re-sit candidates hoping to improve on their grade from the summer.

Both Component 1 and Component 2 followed a familiar structure. Reading questions across the components assessed candidates' ability to retrieve information, respond to implicit meaning, analyse a writer's use of language, synthesise, compare texts with a specific focus, and evaluate. In the writing section, candidates were given the opportunity to demonstrate skills in creative and transactional writing.

In Component 1, the attempt rate was in the 90th percentile across all questions except for question 05. Approximately 77% of candidates attempted this question, perhaps suggesting issues with time management or difficulty in engaging with the evaluation question.

In Component 2, Q16 and Q22 also had lower attempt rates. In some cases, candidates hadn't attempted either and were unable to access 30 of the 80 marks available.

Technical accuracy continues to be an issue for many candidates.

Centres will find areas that worked well and areas for improvement at the end of each component report.

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 evaluation skills.
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.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2023

COMPONENT 1

Overview of the Component

Section A

The reading material for this paper was a passage taken from 'East of Eden', a novel by John Steinbeck. It had a clear structure and the questions, which followed a familiar pattern, took the candidates through the narrative methodically.

The opening section, which covered the first two paragraphs, set the context and introduced the character Adam Trask. The next section described his arrest, his imprisonment and escape and the final section saw him return to the family farm where he struggled to renew his relationship with his brother, Charles.

Section B

In this section there was a choice of four titles which, as usual, offered opportunities to write imaginatively or from personal experience. The titles are usually open to some interpretation but it is not unreasonable to expect responses to be relevant in content. Sometimes it is not obvious which title is being addressed and this can affect the cohesion of the narrative. That said, most candidates do make a genuine attempt to construct a narrative which has relevance as well as some substance and coherence. Unfortunately, too often they are undermined by technical shortcomings in spelling, grammar and punctuation but the better answers do show a decent level of control and accuracy.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q1 This question tested the ability to identify explicit and implicit information and ideas and the relevant points were all to be found in the opening paragraph of the passage. The instruction to 'List five things' was not always followed as clearly as it might have been. However, examiners are not looking to put obstacles in the way of the candidates and most candidates did produce a list of bullet points. There was plenty of material about Adam in the opening paragraph but not so much that it could tempt the candidates into unnecessarily lengthy answers.

For example, the reader learned that Adam spent five years in the army. Some said he was a soldier, which was an entirely accurate alternative. He spent his time in the army doing routine tasks such as polishing and drilling and the time passed quickly. He rarely communicated with his brother (or he rarely wrote letters home). The reader also learned that he left the army in 1890 in San Francisco and he did write to say that he was coming home. He then 'disappeared' for three years.

This type of question is not intended to be too challenging but it is a test of understanding. Some candidates were careless or imprecise in handling this question (a surprising number got the date he left the army wrong) but it should have offered a straightforward way into the passage, and the character of Adam Trask.

- Q2** Questions 02, 03 and 04 all assess assessment objective 2 (AO2). This five-mark question asked for impressions of Adam Trask and this inevitably involved direct reference to the text but also some inference. The more successful candidates achieved a pragmatic blend of inference and evidence while remaining aware of the pressure of time in a question only worth five marks. In practice, this question was looking for a range of impressions supported by some textual evidence. The answers had to come from the information contained in the second paragraph of the passage.

The fact that Adam spent his first winter out of the army in the warmth of San Francisco perhaps showed his commonsense but also that he was in no rush to go home, or anywhere else for that matter. Some argued, not unreasonably, that he did not like the cold of winter. He ended the winter with no money, but he did not seem to care about money or material possessions and he set out to walk a formidable distance home, enjoying the freedom of the road. He showed resourcefulness in hitching risky rides on freight trains and he learned to beg for food but not money, which perhaps indicated some pride and self-respect. He was a shrewd judge of a house as a source of charity and he also learned how to avoid arrest by travelling alone and making sure he was clean and shaven. He gave the impression of being a loner (though not necessarily lonely) and he became 'expert' at hiding his personality and staying invisible. He did not attract attention to himself. Some candidates noticed that he was afraid of the police and prisoners, but he seemed to enjoy the freedom of his life on the road.

Merely locating details from the text was not really enough on its own but a reasonable selection of impressions and textual references was enough to gain full marks in this question.

- Q3** This question was worth 10 marks and covered a significantly longer section of text. The issue of 'how' a writer creates drama and tension involves understanding and referring to the content and the question instructed the candidates to look at what happened in this section of the text as well as language and structure. A focus on what happened and in what order was a perfectly sensible way to approach this question. It is also worth mentioning that it is very difficult to engage with the idea of structure without a methodical approach.

Events took a dramatic turn as this section began with Adam being arrested and sentenced to six months on a road gang for being homeless. Most candidates reacted to the dramatic injustice when Adam was immediately arrested again after his release as the authorities seemed to be playing a version of 'cat and mouse' with him. The writer described the harsh conditions and punishments he endured and his strategy of surviving by making himself invisible and apparently passive. It was not absolutely clear at this stage what Adam was planning but it was not difficult to argue that this part was dramatic as the reader waited to see how things would develop.

Then came the escape which was well-planned and meticulously executed. There was a lot of detail the candidates could use as evidence here as the tension mounted, not least in the dogs searching for him. Adam's cautious tactics added to the tension as he showed 'iron control' in not allowing himself to rush his escape. For example, he stayed hidden on the edge of town until well after midnight and he eventually entered the town 'like a shadow'. He broke into a store and took some clothes. This was a risky but necessary move and he covered his tracks and concealed the robbery as well as he could. He stayed hidden by day and stole food by night, although he took nothing that would be missed. All of this took place against the backdrop of what Adam, and the reader, knew would be a relentless search for him. There was an unspoken but very ominous sense of the consequences of capture and this was emphasised by Adam's extreme caution.

When he reached the station with escape tantalisingly close, he was tense and took a deep breath. The station manager talking to his friend seemed to threaten Adam's plan at the last moment and there was a tense wait of twenty minutes. However, he showed nerves of steel as he took a deep breath to calm himself then walked past the ticket office and sneaked onto a train 'unobserved'.

A lot of the tension and drama here lay in the obvious question of whether he would escape, and how. The chase was inherently dramatic and tense.

The better answers did more than simply 'tell the story' but those candidates who stuck methodically to the sequence of events and at least attempted to address the issues of tension and drama usually coped well enough. Less successful responses lacked substance and detail, and some placed too much emphasis on spotting techniques without developing clear points.

- Q4** There were only two characters in this passage and the relationship between them occupied a significant section of the text. A series of impressions securely rooted in the text did the job in this question and the more successful candidates worked through the passage systematically, linking impressions to textual evidence.

It was important to work methodically and follow the narrative as the relationship between the brothers deteriorated after a promising start into anger and recrimination. At first Charles seemed pleased to see Adam and he made a real effort. He came out of the barn 'quickly' and 'hurried' to shake hands. He had been looking forward to Adam's return for three years and his actions showed he was eager to see him again. However, some candidates did notice that the writer used the dialogue to suggest some awkwardness in the relationship. Their conversation did not develop very far, although at this point it could be argued that this was just a consequence of their long separation or a natural reticence. They were men of few words. Some candidates also argued that the handshake was rather formal.

However, Charles had also gone to some trouble to make Adam feel welcome, and perhaps impress him. He had painted the house and barn and employed a woman to clean the house. He was driven into living in a shed while the house was cleaned but he was so anxious to keep everything clean in the house that he continued to live in the shed until Adam arrived. Some answers perhaps overstated the 'love' between the brothers but there was plenty of evidence to suggest that they were pleased to see each other.

For several months Adam conformed to the routine established by his brother but they began to get on each other's nerves and the writer observed that they saw too much of each other and not enough of anyone else. Living in such close proximity began to increase the pressure on the relationship, particularly as Charles was so inflexible in his ways.

For example, he rose at four thirty every morning and never varied. This provided a flashpoint as Adam found the rigid routine hard to take and the brothers started to quarrel. They clearly had different priorities and they clashed over Charles' work ethic. Adam questioned the need to work so relentlessly just to buy more land and do more work. Charles 'snapped' at him in reply and his temper flared. He argued 'angrily' and when Adam suggested he could leave Charles made no attempt to make him change his mind. Adam knew the quarrel was 'silly' but he could not help himself and provocatively pointed out that the farm belonged to him as much as it did to Charles. The final words on the subject went to Charles as he challenged Adam to do some work.

The brothers then argued about Charles' irritating habit of not wiping his butter knife and it leads to Adam being told to leave. He departed, claiming that he would 'rather live in a pigsty.' The relationship, which had begun so well, ended in bitterness and childish temper. They were just too different to get along. Some candidates understood that Charles was dedicated to the farm but Adam was a free spirit.

The overview of the relationship was quite straightforward but the better responses engaged with the text in detail.

Q5 As usual, the final question in this section required critical evaluation of the text as a whole and specifically a personal response to the presentation of Adam and Charles Trask. Time is often an issue with this question as candidates, quite rightly, are anxious to leave enough time for their writing. However, the main problem for many candidates is establishing a coherent stance from which they can argue a convincing case. The obvious response here, and certainly the most convincing, was to argue that both brothers had their qualities and, as individuals, were presented 'positively' to some extent.

In the first part of the passage the focus was on Adam, who took three years to get home after he left the army. He became a vagrant, a beggar and a thief but he was also presented as resourceful and shrewd and the writer presented the events from his perspective. He tended to be seen just as a free spirit who attracted sympathy as a victim of brutality and injustice. He did steal but he did not really hurt anyone and the writer showed him only taking what he needed such as clothes and food. He did not beg for money, or steal it, and the character of Adam seemed to engage the readers, at least at first. The readers wanted him to escape and complete his journey home.

Similarly, there was a lot to admire in the initial presentation of the character of Charles. He seemed keen to welcome his brother home and he made an effort to paint and clean the house. He was a dedicated and respected farmer, working hard and running the farm well.

However, both had their flaws and weaknesses and when they were living together on the farm they seemed to bring out the worst in each other. They were different in values and temperament and they saw 'too much of each other and not enough of anyone else.'

For example, Adam did not seem to make much of an effort to adapt to life on the farm and he was argumentative over 'silly' things. He could not resist provoking his brother and eventually he left the farm in a mood of anger, claiming he would rather live in a pigsty.

Charles was not a sociable man and, although he was respected for his work ethic, he avoided the local villagers. He followed rigid and uncompromising routine on the farm and he came across as a dour character who was set in his ways. Both brothers showed they had a temper and were prepared to argue.

The better answers engaged with the detail of the text and pursued a coherent argument. The weaker answers tended to be thin or struggling to respond convincingly to the presentation of the characters.

Section B

Q1.1 (a) The Holiday Job.

It was possible to write imaginatively here but it was more likely that the responses were based on real experience of a holiday job. Many candidates clearly had had actual experience of holiday work in a variety of roles. The more successful responses showed some self-awareness and humour. However, some responses followed rather unconvincing notions of a holiday job.

(b) Write about a time when you took a young relative out for the day.

Although there was plenty of scope here to embellish the truth, most responses seemed to be based on real events and visits to tourist attractions.

(c) The Rivals.

This title was 'open' and invited a narrative which included some sort of competition or rivalry. There was often a clearly personal element in these responses but it was perfectly acceptable to write imaginatively.

(d) Write a story which begins: There are days when things just go right.

The opening of a narrative is often helpful as it provides a way into the writing and a sense of direction. This example clearly offered the opportunity to write about the perfect day but the 'things' that went right were very much open to individual choice. Good things take many forms and it was possible to write about financial gain or sporting achievement or a range of other possibilities. However, a surprising number of responses involved a day when things went wrong.

Characteristics of successful responses

- In the reading section, candidates who tracked through the stated lines were able to accumulate relevant textual details and, in most cases, explore these.
- In the 10-mark questions that assess AO2, answers that selected a range of evidence to comment on and analyse were more successful in gaining marks in the higher bands.
- In question 05, those candidates who immediately established a clear point of view were more successful in maintaining a coherent stance in their response.
- In the writing section, successful responses used characterisation and dialogue to engage the reader and purposefully structure their responses.

Key Areas for Improvement

- In the reading section candidates need to allocate time sensibly and stick to the timing plan. Missing out a question, especially a 10-mark question will inevitably affect the candidate's overall result.
- In question 05 candidates need a coherent argument and they should support their opinions by using the text.
- In narrative writing the responses should have direction and substance. A brief plan can help with this.
- Technical errors and uncertainty with tenses are still too frequent.

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COMPONENT 2

Overview of the Component

Section A

The two reading texts for this examination were about people who had climbed challenging mountains, in one case the remarkable achievement of an 11-year-old schoolboy who climbed the Matterhorn and in the other text, Isabella Bird's account of her successful ascent of what was called the 'American Matterhorn' in 1886.

The questions followed a familiar pattern and most candidates were able to show at the very least, a basic understanding of the two texts. Candidates who had prepared themselves well for the exam were able to make good progress but there were too many candidates who failed to read the questions with sufficient care and then gave incorrect details in response to some of the questions. In other cases, weaker candidates struggled to manage their time effectively, often omitting one or more of the reading questions.

Section B

As usual, candidates were invited to tackle two writing tasks. The first of these was to write an article for a teenage magazine with the title, 'The importance of friends'. The second task asked candidates to respond to part of a letter that had appeared in a newspaper. The view that had been expressed was that supermarket shelves now appeared to be increasingly offering vegetarian and vegan products, the concern being that this would result in everyone being expected to follow a non-meat diet.

Each of these tasks had an expected length of 300-400 words and allowed candidates to reflect on their own experiences and views, offer their own thoughts and suggestions where appropriate and to shape their responses in a way that showed an awareness of their intended audiences.

Effective responses showed good understanding of the purpose of each task. In the first task, many candidates gave anecdotes about their own friendships and how they had benefited from the support and advice from friends. In the second task, more assured candidates showed the ability to sustain a viewpoint, often with examples or other supporting information. Although there were good responses to both writing tasks, it was disappointing to see very brief responses, where it was clear candidates had given themselves too little time to shape and develop their responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q1.1 The first question focused on the newspaper article, 'The schoolboy who conquered the Matterhorn.' As usual, there were three one-mark questions requiring candidates to select details from across the text. Although these were straightforward 'search and find' questions it was important that candidates read these carefully, as well as the text. The first part of the question illustrated the importance of this, as it became clear to examiners that too many candidates rushed to offer an answer, rather than checking exactly what was being asked for. The question asked which mountain range the Matterhorn is in, but answers sometimes simply gave the height of the mountain and even more frequently, where the mountain is situated. The final sentence in the opening paragraph gave the information: "It is in part of the Alps, a mountain range straddling the border between Switzerland and Italy."

The second part of the question asked candidates why climbers would set off early in the morning to tackle the mountain, and whilst most candidates were able to find this information without difficulty, there were responses that showed a lack of care in the reading of the question. The article had explained the reason for an early start was to reach the summit before the sun melted the snow on the top section, as this made it prone to avalanches, and many candidates gained reward for this part of the question. Those who failed to gain reward often showed they had not read the question carefully, some giving the time climbers set off and others showing they had not read the text carefully enough, with responses that were not based on the passage.

The third part of the question asked what was the most dangerous part of the climb, according to the 11-year-old climber, James Molyneaux. In his account, he had explained that the descent was the most dangerous because of the level of concentration needed and how "the legs start to feel like jelly." Most candidates were able to select the right detail, although again, some seemed to ignore the text and offer their own thoughts. The three parts of this opening question were no more demanding than those seen in other examination papers of recent years, yet disappointingly there seemed more candidates failing to gain full marks; in many cases, it appeared that not reading the question carefully enough was the reason.

Q1.2 To have answered all parts of the opening question meant candidates should have had some understanding of how and why climbing the Matterhorn at the age of 11 was a significant achievement, preparing them for the 10-mark question that followed: 'How does the writer try to show that it was a remarkable achievement for Jules Molyneaux to climb the Matterhorn?'

As in previous examination series, the most effective way for candidates to tackle this type of 'craft of the writer' question was to select appropriate details from the text, commenting on how or why these illustrated the idea that the successful ascent was a 'remarkable achievement'. From the very opening of the article, the writer had made it clear to readers that Jules Molyneaux was unlike most 11-year-old boys, comparing the way most youngsters would spend their time playing football or visiting the local park with Molyneaux's dream of conquering one of the world's most challenging mountains.

Readers were given a little detail of the way the 11-year-old dreamed of climbing the mountain after a school project and how he felt 'magnetised to it' by the shape of it. Readers were then told about how the dream gradually unfolded into the plans made by his father, Chris, to increase the youngster's endurance and technical skills, so that as he became fitter, the dream began to be a possibility. Good candidates used the details in the opening paragraphs to build the picture of Jules gradually moving towards the realisation of his dream, at the same time noting that the writer had frequently used adjectives such as 'toughest', 'dangerous' and 'challenging' along with phrases such as 'potentially deadly' to ensure readers understood the scale and level difficulty that faced any climber, never mind an 11-year-old boy.

The article then gave details about Jules Molyneaux having to prove his capability to tackle the mountain, suggesting that "normally you have to be 16" to even apply for permission to attempt the climb. Having successfully proved himself, Jules joined his father and Swiss guides for the climb, the writer giving details of the event, along with the words of Jules and his father to show the level of challenge and their feelings at various points during the climb. Again, good candidates selected those details and/or words of the youngster to capture both the sense of it being a momentous occasion in the young boy's life but also how he coped with the potential perils of the climb itself. Many included the way in which the youngster distracted himself from the pain of the climb by singing to himself, or noted the way Molyneaux himself talked about the level of concentration needed "every second" for the descent where some of the "ledges that are only a foot wide" in the knowledge that "if you lose concentration...you slip and fall."

The final paragraph of the article dealt with the arrival back at the Matterhorn Museum, where the youngster was "congratulated as the youngest person to climb the mountain" and one mountaineer describing it as "an amazing achievement." The article concluded with Jules himself reflecting on his success, and here he was shown to simply have been glad to have had the opportunity of tackling the mountain with his father, and "having as much fun as possible".

Throughout the article, the writer made clear that what Jules achieved was 'remarkable', although some readers tended to focus on just one or two sections of the text, rather than the whole text, and offered only brief and limited responses. Some struggled to make effective selections, sometimes using just a fragment of a sentence and failing to contextualise it clearly. In some cases, candidates had adopted an approach that appeared to be based on simply writing down as many quotations as possible in the hope that this would provide a formula for a good mark. It frequently went along the lines of: "*The writer says [insert irrelevant quotation] and this shows it was remarkable.*" With little or no comment, contextualisation or explanation, this approach gained them few marks. In contrast, those who tracked the text methodically, made appropriate selections of detail and were prepared to explain clearly why or how those particular details showed Molyneaux's achievement was remarkable, and were able to range across the whole text were able to gain good marks.

Q1.3 This third question asked candidates to look at the second text, an account of Isabella Bird's attempt to climb Long's Peak, the 'American Matterhorn'.

Like question 1.1, these three one-mark questions asked for specific details and provided careful readers with an opportunity to gain marks as they gained familiarity with the text, in readiness for the more demanding question that followed.

The first part of the question asked how readers knew that 'Long's Peak is higher than the mountains around it?' In the opening sentence, readers are told that the mountain "dwarfs all the surrounding mountains" and this was all that was required to gain the mark. Most candidates used this opportunity to gain a mark but there were candidates who chose to simply give the height of the mountain or some other detail that earned no reward. The second part of the question seemed to prove more straightforward: "where did the real business of the climb begin?" Most candidates sensibly located 'the real business' in the text and were able to note the outcrop of rock called the Notch. The final part of the question asked how long it had taken the climbers "to reach the top of the gorge?" Some candidates went to the final paragraph, mistakenly giving the time for the final part of the whole climb, rather than the time to get to the top of the gorge, which Bird reported as taking two hours. Whilst most candidates gained reward for the correct answer, this again showed too many candidates not taking enough care over the reading of the question.

Q1.4 This next question asked candidates to respond to the statement: 'Isabella Bird's account convincingly shows the difficulties Long's Peak presents to climbers,' and explaining to what extent they agreed with that view. Whilst it was apparent that Isabella Bird found the mountain presented both a physical and emotional struggle for her, the question invited candidates to consider the challenges the mountain presented to any climber, so those who confined their responses solely to Bird's struggles could make only rather limited progress. Whilst there was some reward for candidates exploring her physical struggle, the fears she had as she climbed and the length of time it took her to make the ascent, there was much more to include. Bird's account made it clear that for any climber, the mountain offered a serious challenge and good candidates noted how she called a successful ascent "a real mountaineering feat" and that it "dwarfs other mountains." There were a number of references to the challenge the mountain presented and words such as "towered" suggested how intimidating the view would be of the climb facing those attempting to reach the top. There were details of the loose rocks that "tumbled down when touched", the "deep gorge with inaccessible sides", the "smooth ice appearing where it was least expected" and so on. Good candidates were able to select and comment on such details and accumulate reward as they worked through the text, using some of these specific details to explain how they would challenge even the most able of climbers. Bird wrote about the peak looking "nearly vertical for 400 feet" and about the "terrifying cliff" from where a climber could fall 3000 feet to certain death, and as she neared the final part of the climb she wrote about facing boulders "of enormous size" or dealing with steep climbs that were "fearful." It was also clear that the higher climbers went, the thinner the air became, but for those climbers able to reach the top, their efforts would have been thoroughly worthwhile, with the experience described by Bird as "wonderful". There were lots of textual details for candidates to select and comment on but too many confined their response solely to Bird's personal struggles, and with only limited references to the details included in the account that clearly illustrated the challenges of the mountain itself.

Q1.5 This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, asked candidates to explain briefly what readers learn about Jules Molyneux and Bird's guide, Jim Nugent. As ever, selecting specific details with precision and clarity meant candidates could gain good marks without writing at great length. Too many candidates tried to write about what was learned about 'both' men, rather than dealing with them individually and this almost inevitably meant some loss of precision or only being able to offer a rather limited or generalised overview. Previous reports have suggested that it is always more sensible to deal with each text separately and this was especially the case with this question.

In the newspaper article, readers learned that Molyneaux's father initially thought Jules "was joking" when he asked about climbing the Matterhorn. When he realised he was serious he planned "a rigorous schedule" to improve his climbing skills and his endurance. We also learn that in climbing alongside his son, he had a "total focus" on the task of getting to the top of the mountain and was relieved to get to the top safely. In Isabella Bird's account, she painted a picture of Jim Nugent, who was a local guide, as a physically strong climber, able to drag her up parts of the climb. However, more than this, he helped Bird "with patience and skill" so that she was able to continue, and we are also told that he "was gentle and considerate" with her.

As in previous examinations, it was possible to gain full marks by selecting two details from each text or by focusing rather more on one text, providing at least one detail was selected from the second text. Some candidates misread the question and wrote about Jules and about Isabella and those who shaped their answers around both struggled to find points of similarity, although those who offered that "both were supportive" did gain marks. Those who explored each text separately usually gained better marks, with many able to gain full marks.

- Q1.6** Although this final reading question focused on a comparison of the two texts, as ever, candidates were asked to do this by specifically focusing on the two bullet points as the basis for the comparison. Candidates who chose to ignore the bullet points rarely gained good marks.

In the first bullet point, candidates were invited to compare the thoughts and feelings of Jules Molyneaux and Isabella Bird **while they were climbing the mountains**. Importantly, and to signal clearly the focus of the question, the final detail in the bullet point was emboldened in the question paper. The second bullet point then asked candidates to explore how they got their thoughts and feelings across to their readers. Where candidates kept their focus on exactly what each of the climbers thought and felt as they climbed were able to accumulate creditable marks from the first bullet point, particularly if they shaped their responses around the words 'felt' and 'thought'. As with 1.5 it was usually better for candidates to deal with each text separately, although both climbers felt tired and in pain during parts of their climb and both thought about the dangers of slipping and falling.

In the newspaper article, Molyneaux began discussing how he felt at the beginning of the climb, explaining that he felt exhausted and then in pain. However, he felt better when he could distract himself from the tiredness by singing 'Lose Yourself' as he climbed. When he did get to the top of the mountain, he clearly felt it was a wonderful experience when he says, "it really does feel like being on top of the world." For the descent, he recalls that he had to "concentrate every second" and think about "where you are putting each foot and hand." He admitted he felt "nervous at times" but knew he just had to keep focusing. In Isabella Bird's account, she made her feelings and thoughts about the climb very clear. At times she felt it was "impossible to continue" and felt scared when she encountered loose rocks that "tumbled down when touched", describing her feelings as those of "extreme terror." She wrote about her feelings of "fatigue and pain" and that she certainly would have given up the climb, were it not for Jim Nugent's constant support and determination for her to succeed.

She wrote about the “terrifying cliff” that she came upon and her thought that one slip would lead to certain death. She also wrote about how she felt “tortured with thirst” before getting to the top of the mountain where her pain and fatigue were overtaken by the feeling that it was “wonderful” to see spread before her the views of the mountains around her. Some candidates found it difficult to confine their focus to the thoughts and feelings of the climbers as they climbed and gave details about Jules’ preparation or why he wanted to climb the Matterhorn in the first place. Similarly, some wrote about Bird’s decision to climb Long’s Peak or that she had “no head for heights”, but exploring these details brought no reward. However, those who kept the focus on the thoughts and feelings of Jules and Isabella while they were climbing were able to gain good reward, even before the exploration of the second bullet point.

The writers got their thoughts and feelings across to readers in rather different ways. For example, Molyneaux made clear how he feels by using similes on occasions. He wrote about the narrowness of the ledges as he made his descent as feeling like he was “standing on a knife edge” or that his legs started “to feel like jelly” to capture his feelings of anxiety. He also used precise details about the focus and concentration needed during the descent, having to “concentrate every second” and check “one step after the other.” In Bird’s account she was self-deprecating, comparing herself to “a bale of goods” being hauled up by Nugent. She used exaggeration to emphasise her fear during the climb, saying her “feet were paralysed”, and adjectives like ‘towered’, ‘gigantic’ and ‘enormous’ to emphasise the size and scale of the mountain.

Where candidates were clear about responding to the bullet points to build and shape their responses, they could select from a range of textual details, and the best candidates were also able to comment on how the writers made their views clear. However, too many drifted from the focus of the bullet points and included details that brought limited reward. Some weaker responses lacked clarity about which text was being referred to and some responses were very brief. It also became clear that a significant minority of candidates struggled to manage their time and as a result, failed to tackle this final reading question altogether.

Section B

Q2.1 In the first of the two writing tasks candidates were asked to write an article for a teenage magazine with the title: ‘The importance of friends’. Most candidates tried to explore the topic from both a general and a personal perspective, and the most successful were able to blend the two elements neatly into their responses. Many began by discussing the role a friend might play in an individual’s life: the support and help given in times of difficulty; the joint activities to be enjoyed with friends; the positive influence of a friend and so on. Responses often also included discussions about those ‘friends’ who proved to be unreliable and frequently candidates also offered suggestions about how to deal with such situations.

Less successful responses to this task were often brief and frequently lacked structure, with few links between one point of view and another and sometimes ending rather abruptly. More successful responses tended to range more widely, with particular opinions given some development. As indicated above, the best responses often fused general opinions or points about the nature of friendship with personal reflections on the candidate’s own situation or anecdotes that illustrated the point of view raised about either a ‘true friend’ or in some instances a group of friends that had proved to be supportive and helpful.

It is worth the reminder about the expectation that responses should be 300-400 words; where responses were much briefer than this, it almost certainly impacted negatively on the range and development of the content and made it difficult to achieve marks in the upper bands for communication and organisation.

- Q2.2** This second task was to write a letter to a newspaper in response to a comment that had appeared in a letter in a previous edition. This offered the view, “My local supermarket shelves seem to be increasingly filled with vegetarian and vegan products. Will we all be expected to stop eating meat in the near future? What about personal choice?” The task offered the opportunity to express a viewpoint in a formal register and develop that viewpoint with a series of reasons, explained and supported by convincing information, personal anecdotes, ‘expert’ evidence and so on.

There were 12 marks available for communication and organisation, so it was disappointing that some candidates took little or no opportunity to organise their work as a letter. Showing an understanding about how a formal letter should be presented involved some illustration of address layout (my address/their address/suitable salutation and sign off is acceptable) so it was unfortunate that some candidates ignored this entirely. It was perhaps no surprise that those candidates who took care over the layout of the letter were often those who were able to adopt an appropriate register most successfully and whose work also had the most convincing content.

As in other examination series, the most successful pattern for the letter was to offer a brief introduction establishing why the letter was written and giving the writer’s opinion on the subject, followed by three to five paragraphs each dealing with a specific reason for the overall viewpoint, and ending with a brief concluding paragraph and sign off.

There were plenty of reasons advanced by candidates, either in opposition to increasing vegan and vegetarian products at the expense of the range of meat available, or supporting the move to increase non-meat options on environmental, ethical or religious grounds. It was the quality of the arguments that earned reward and whilst some tried to adopt a more neutral stance, those who were able to advance a clear viewpoint, developing each of their arguments in detail, perhaps by good explanation or by using specific supporting examples or anecdotes, tended to write the more convincing letters. It was important, too, that candidates read the task carefully; the letter to be written was intended for readers of the newspaper and as a response to the original letter indicated in the task details. Although most candidates understood who was to be the recipient of the letter, some candidates believed it was the newspaper editor who had decreed that supermarkets should stock fewer meat products, whilst others wrote their letters to the manager of their local supermarket, sometimes losing the thread of their argument and drifting into overlong suggestions about the design of the supermarket and where products should be placed in the store.

This final task on the examination paper suffered if candidates had not managed their time effectively and examiners saw too many brief responses, where the content lacked range and development of the argument, and unfortunately there were also too many candidates who failed to tackle the task at all. As has been reported in previous examination series, there are still too many candidates whose basic accuracy with spelling, punctuation and sentence construction and control remains an issue and this frequently resulted in their work gaining marks in a lower band for VSSPS than for their communication and organisation.

Characteristics of successful responses

- In the reading section, successful responses showed methodical tracking through the texts, with candidates selecting appropriate textual details as they worked through each paragraph, explaining the significance of the detail or quotation.
- In the most successful responses, there was always a clear focus on the question. For example, in question 1.6 successful answers used the words ‘thought/thinks’ and ‘felt/feeling’ a number of times in the response, which limited any ‘drift’ from the question.
- Reading questions worth 10 marks were answered with a wide range of textual details that showed good coverage of the whole text, and with comments and explanations on them that showed insight and perception.
- In the writing section, successful responses were always well-sustained, showed a clear understanding of the intended audience and had shape and structure, often with paragraphs that began with a clear topic sentence, four or five sentences that explored the focus or topic of that paragraph, with the best showing the ability to neatly link one paragraph to the next.
- Successful letters (the 2.2 task) showed understanding of an appropriate register and organisation of a formal letter and were able to construct convincingly developed arguments in a variety of ways.

Areas for Improvement

- In the reading section, although candidates will be anxious to ‘put pen to paper’, of even greater importance is knowing exactly what the question is asking of them. For example, in question 1.5 some candidates gave details about Jules and Isabella, rather than Molyneaux’s father and Jim Nugent; as a result, and however much they wrote, they gained no marks.
- Where candidates select and use textual details/quotations in questions 1.2, 1.4 and 1.6 they should comment, contextualise or explain why or how they reflect the focus of the question.
- Reading questions worth 10 marks were sometimes responded to very briefly, with few details from the text, or details that showed only a limited section of the whole text had been used in the answer.
- In the writing section, it was clear some candidates had failed to manage their time and gave themselves too much to tackle in too little time in Section B, so these written responses were often brief, limited in range or development and lacked structure.
- Basic technical errors, especially simple spellings (including those used in the exam paper, such as ‘friend’ and ‘vegetarian’ were often written incorrectly), punctuation and poor sentence construction and control were frequent issues in weaker responses.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2023

COMPONENT 3

Overview of the Component

As in previous years, the majority of candidates in this Autumn series were resitting their GCSE English Language, and most opted to carry forward their Spoken Language grades from the summer.

A small number of centres did enter new work, however, and were required to submit a recorded sample of the candidates' presentations for monitoring by the official deadline of November 5th.

The purpose of the monitoring process is to ensure that candidates' work is assessed by their teachers in line with the established standards using the competency assessment model. Rather than a best-fit approach, this model requires that a candidate must meet **all** the criteria for a particular grade before that grade can be awarded.

Monitors also check that centres ensure their candidates have a clear understanding of what is meant by a 'presentation' in this component. Most candidates opt to give an individual presentation in front of an audience, which can be made up of fellow students or the teacher(s) assessing their work. Candidates are allowed to work in pairs or small groups, although this sort of task has to be carefully planned to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all participants to meet the criteria in an extended presentation of their views or ideas. As previous Principal Moderator's reports have emphasised, the teacher's guidance is crucial if such tasks are to be successful for all candidates involved.

Some centres are still a little unsure of what is meant by a 'formal presentation' in this component and the evidence they need to submit for monitoring. In one centre, for example, the single candidate was recorded giving a conventional individual presentation but this was accompanied by a second file showing the candidate's contribution to a group discussion. It was not fully clear which activity had been assessed and should be monitored, although the individual presentation fortunately allowed the candidate to meet all the criteria for the grade awarded by the centre. To clarify, centres need to assess and submit as evidence only one presentation per candidate, whether as an individual speaker or as part of a paired or group activity.

For the first time centres were offered the opportunity to upload their recordings to the Eduqas site via the secure website rather than having to post memory sticks or similar devices to their designated monitors. Most centres in this Autumn series chose this method to submit their work, suggesting that they found it convenient. Monitors were pleased to report that in most cases the system made it very straightforward to access the candidates' presentations. This facility will be available in the summer series as an option for teachers in charge of compiling and submitting the Component 3 sample.

Some centres still chose to post USB devices and, as in the past, monitors were very grateful to teachers who had taken the time to label the work clearly with the relevant candidate information. Many centres ensure each presentation begins with the candidate confirming his or her name and number and this has proven to be a useful safeguard.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Accuracy of assessment

In line with Eduqas guidance, all teachers involved in assessing their candidates' work were advised to revisit the Inter-board Standardising Exemplar presentations to inform their own marking and reinforce accurate application of the assessment criteria. The standardising presentations have become very familiar to teachers and it can perhaps be easy to think that there is no need to watch 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. The commentaries which accompany each of the twelve presentations are an invaluable guide for centres in how to apply the assessment criteria.

In most cases the Spoken Language grades awarded by centres were fair and in line with agreed standards. Most of the candidates had been awarded Pass grades and in the majority of cases monitors judged this to be an accurate assessment of the candidate's achievement.

There were relatively few examples of centres where assessment was inaccurate but when this did occur the centre's sample was referred to a second monitor for confirmation. The centres involved will be contacted by letter to explain why the assessment was not fully secure. This communication is intended to support centres by raising awareness of any inconsistency in applying the criteria so that this can be adjusted before the summer series entry.

Main Issues

Careful **task setting** continues to be a crucial factor in candidates' achievement.

- As in the Summer series, many candidates' choice of broad, open-ended topics without a clearly defined audience or purpose made it more difficult for them to meet Merit or Distinction criteria, making a Pass grade appropriate.
- Candidates 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 and deliver their material in advance of the actual presentation.
- Eduqas 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. In some instances, monitors felt that candidates had been disadvantaged by tasks which encouraged a descriptive and relatively straightforward, informative approach to their topic. This made it more difficult to demonstrate a sophisticated range of strategies to engage their audience. For example, one candidate spoke very knowledgeably and confidently about tank weaponry, using an impressive range of vocabulary but presenting the audience with a bewildering amount of technical information. Rather than an open-ended 'talk', such a fluent speaker might have benefited from a defined purpose, perhaps tackling some of the moral issues relating to such armaments.

- More careful selection of detail and organising of ideas would allow the speaker to meet the Distinction criterion relating to structure of material. This element of persuasion or promoting an issue or belief can also help the teacher in the feedback section to pose more challenging questions to elicit the perceptive response needed for Distinction grade.

When it came to criteria relating to **presentational skills** and delivering material to meet audience needs, candidates with a clearer sense of the requirements of a spoken language presentation fared better.

- As emphasised in previous advice to centres, candidates who read with lowered heads from prepared scripts were disadvantaged. It is important that candidates are made aware of the differences between writing an effective speech and presenting their ideas as a Spoken Language task.
- Of course, candidates are allowed to make use of notes which can be a very useful aide memoire, as well as visual aids such as PowerPoint slides. However, reading without appropriate intonation or eye contact meant that they struggled to engage their audience or simply meet their needs.

The mandatory **Question and Answer section** of the presentation does still pose problems for some candidates. Monitors once again reported that it was a shame to see some candidates falling at the last hurdle by failing to meet the criteria relating to the response to feedback or questions on their presentations.

- Some candidates did not seem aware of the importance of this part of the presentation and gave very brief or straightforward responses without the detail or formality required for the higher grades. It is important that centres stress to their candidates that this aspect of their presentation is assessed.
- At times, candidates were to some extent let down by very functional, closed questions which did not make it easy for them to give more developed or perceptive answers. As emphasised in previous reports, it often falls to the teacher to ensure that suitably challenging questions are posed so that candidates can meet higher grade criteria.

Summary of key points

- Candidates must meet **all** the criteria for a grade.
- Teachers involved in assessing candidates' work should revisit some of the Inter-board Standardising Exemplars before awarding grades.
- Task setting plays a crucial part in candidates' success. All need guidance on selecting an appropriate topic and presenting material effectively as spoken language.
- 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.
- All candidates must respond to feedback on their material and this criterion is given equal weight with those relating to the presentation per se.
- Teachers are advised to consult the advice on task setting and presentation skills available on the Eduqas website.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team are on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 02920 404288

Email: gcseenglish@eduqas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/english-language-gcse/#tab_keydocuments

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | Eduqas](#)

CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

Regional Rep Team

Our regional team covers all areas of England and can provide face-to-face and online advice at a time which is convenient to you.

Get in contact today and discover how our team can support you and your students. [Regional Support Team | Eduqas](#)

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ⁱ 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.