



GCSE Examiners' Report

English Language
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 unit.

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	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.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	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC 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 WJEC

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Unit 2: External assessment	7
Unit 3: External Assessment	12
Unit 1: Non-examination assessment	18
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	26

Executive Summary

Unit 1: Non-examination assessment Oracy

The purpose, as always, of the Unit 1 assessment for Summer 2024 is to provide opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their ability to express themselves with independence, accuracy and fluency through spoken language. The range of generic topics for the Individual Researched Presentation continued to provide opportunity for candidates to present information in an individual way. The task for Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) was a choice between 'The school prom – an expensive nightmare or the night of your lives?', 'Compulsory school meals – a daily treat or the last thing you want to eat?' and 'Libraries – are they an outdated link to the past or a vital door to the future?' Each of these appeared to engage candidates across the ability and age range. The more successful centres provided adequate teaching, support and encouragement to give candidates a voice across both tasks. Moderators have enjoyed assessing a wide range of interesting and varied topics and viewpoints across both tasks.

Unit 2: External assessment Reading and Writing: Description, Narration and Exposition

This examination provoked evidence of detailed and enthusiastic responses to the reading materials with most candidates managing their time well. Texts and questions appeared to be accessible, to varying degrees, and attempt rates were high across most questions.

The question types and varied levels of difficulty were similar to previous Unit 2 examination papers. This summer, the synthesis question featured on Unit 2. Generally, candidates appear to achieve more highly on the synthesis question than the comparison question (which appeared on Unit 3 this summer) and this may have slightly benefitted performance on this paper. However, this may also have been balanced by the challenge of Question A9 which, although a lower tariff question, offered a rigorous test of candidates' understanding and explanatory skills.

Candidates faced a choice between a narration or an exposition task in the Writing section. Although we have no way of determining which task was more widely chosen, examiners seemed to think there was quite an even balance between the two choices this summer.

Unit 3: External assessment Reading and Writing: Argumentation, Persuasion and Instructional

Most candidates tackled the lower tariff questions with great enthusiasm and attempt rates were pleasingly high. Virtually all candidates completed the first 8 lower tariff questions. Higher tariff questions requiring longer answers tended to pose additional challenges and were tackled with varying degrees of success, clarity and focus depending on a candidate's ability to read effectively for meaning.

Writing tasks appeared to be accessible and candidates across the ability range were able to engage with the tasks and to produce appropriate responses. Some candidates produced rather brief writing which restricted the number of marks that they were able to achieve.

In terms of comparability, the paper appeared to offer the usual level of challenge, and the examining team commented on marking a full range of responses. It was noted that copying resource materials has become a real concern in response to the Writing section. Candidates should be advised to avoid this approach as there is nothing to be gained from unselective copying.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Assessing and internally moderating Unit 1 tasks	Portal by WJEC	CPD standardisation material from Winter 2024
Assessing Unit 2 and Unit 3 learner responses	Portal by WJEC	CPD standardisation material from Autumn 2023
Delivering and developing reading and writing skills	https://d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net/el21-22_4-1	GCSE English GCSE English Literature bridging unit

UNIT 1: NON-EXAMINATION ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

The expected deadline was met by the majority of centres with a few requesting extensions. It was positive to be able to access well-organised folders which included the relevant documentation: signed record sheets; support notes used by candidates during both tasks; and clearly labelled and accessible recordings. Moderators had to, unfortunately, contact centres where all documentation had not been submitted. Some administrative errors that occurred this year included: the omission of candidate and centre numbers on the record sheets; missing marks on the record sheets; a lack of authentication by teachers; and the submission of incorrect marks. In a handful of cases, there was confusion between the original marks and internally moderated marks awarded to candidates. Requests had to be made for the replacement of incomplete folders. Where incomplete folders are requested for submission, centres should replace these with complete folders of candidates on similar total marks from the same teaching group.

Another administration error that occurred was regarding the inputting of teachers' initials when submitting marks. At times, initials seemed to have been mis-typed. Some centres consisted of one large teaching group, showing only one set of initials. Some centres used two sets of initials in some teaching groups. It is important that each teaching group is labelled with the initials of the teacher responsible for the teaching of the candidates within this group.

Record sheets which contained purposeful commentaries showed a clear focus on the specifics of the marking criteria. The better commentaries offered exemplification and made accurate reference to wording in the relevant bands, clarifying the placement of candidates towards the top or bottom of these bands. These enabled moderators to understand the reasoning behind the marks awarded by the centre. Less supportive commentaries made general references to the banding criteria. Some showed discrepancies between the marks awarded and the bands being referred to, presenting a lack of clarity in the assessments.

Tasks

Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

It was pleasing to see most centres following the requirement to submit notes used by candidates when presenting the Individual Researched Presentation; however, it was disappointing that some centres still had to be contacted to submit support material. This creates additional work for moderators and hinders the smooth running of the process. The submission of any notes used by candidates during the Group Discussion is also supportive to moderation.

The issue of overly detailed notes and prompt cards was of real concern and a number of candidates' notes or cards were referred to WJEC for further investigation. It is clearly stated in the guidelines for the Individual Researched Presentation that **'it must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate'**. It is further stated that the role of the teacher is **'to ensure that the candidate does not read his or her presentation'**. Some centres allowed candidates to read from whole scripts, whilst not considering this in the awarding of the marks.

The reliance on support material was particularly noticeable in the scripted discussions moderated this year where candidates participated in overly prepared turn-taking, reading from notes. Many candidates seemed to provide mini-speeches, which was particularly evident in more able candidates. At times this was a feature of whole centres, but often was

a practice across some teaching groups. Instructions are clear: **No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.** In a number of cases notes were not sent when it was apparent from the manner of delivery that they had been used. It cannot be emphasised enough that the approach involving reading contravenes the instructions, therefore candidates must be advised that they cannot read their contributions for either task. Moderators are able to ascertain over-rehearsed discussions due to the lack of natural spontaneous responses between candidates.

The provision of audio-visual recordings by many centres was welcomed and appreciated by moderators. An increasing number of centres continue to provide audio-visual recordings for the Group Discussion which supported moderation well; this enables moderators the ability to identify candidates, observe candidates' engagement with each other and evaluate their use of support material during the discussion. Even though many centres provided audio-visual recordings for the presentations, many still submitted recordings in audio-only format. Such recordings can often leave moderators in doubt regarding over-reliance on notes and their engagement with an audience. A move towards using audio-visual recordings for both tasks would advantage both candidates and moderators.

Once again, it was pleasing to get the sense that many centres had responded to previous reports regarding numbers of candidates in the group discussions. There was still, however, the need to remind many centres that the grouping of three candidates is the sensible and recommended approach. There was still a tendency in this series for centres to over-fill groups with four or more candidates, diluting candidates' ability to present their ideas. Many discussions this year were also in pairs, which often narrowed the discussion and limited the opportunity to discuss opinions.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

Most centres continue to encourage independent choice of topics and research with the Individual Researched Presentation. Presentations showcased concerns and interests of young people across Wales: environmental matters, including topical issues such as the plight of Welsh farmers in an ever-changing society, the use of nuclear power and the use of plastic; educational concerns over the relevance of the curriculum in Wales; the importance of living a healthy lifestyle through exercise and diet; and the benefits and drawbacks of technological advancement, such as the sophistication of AI and the fears and concerns surrounding this. Many candidates spoke effectively on more personal topics, presenting their detailed content with conviction. Social media, once more, became an overused topic where whole teaching groups were restricted to present on its negative and positive features. Candidates present more effectively when they are personally engaged with their topic.

At this developed stage of the specification, it is encouraging that most centres adhered to the recommended five to seven minutes for this task; however, some candidates far exceeded this time. Such lengthy presentations often showed a lack of focus on a particular topic. The most successful candidates based their presentation on a question, which helped shape and focus the argument, rather than merely a topical phrase. For example, 'Has the Suffragette movement shaped our society?' provides more focus than a speech entitled 'The Suffragettes'. For candidates who fell short of the recommended time, centres wisely posed questions to allow opportunity for further development of ideas. Candidates who were not provided this opportunity were disadvantaged. Questions should be posed to all candidates. Candidates at the top of Band 5 particularly benefit from responding to questions to showcase their skills and in-depth knowledge of their topic.

As mentioned in last year's report, any reliance on scripted material or over-extensive notes by a candidate in this task should be considered carefully when awarding marks. When interpreting the assessment criteria, consideration needs to be given to the delivery of evaluative detailed information alongside the requirement for 'effective' communication which shows 'an understanding of the needs of the audience' for Band 3; Band 4 requires speaking 'confidently' and 'skilfully' in order to 'meet the needs of the audience'. Even Band 2 requires candidates to 'attempt to structure talk to meet the needs of the audience'. Reading does not suggest that these skills are evident; reading also affects the 'register' used. Allowing the reading of scripted notes disadvantaged many in this series. Candidates must use supportive brief notes. Concerns are always referred to WJEC.

Proms and compulsory school meals were the two most popular topics chosen by centres for the Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) task. The role of libraries was also embraced by many groups and it was interesting to observe how many candidates still grasped their relevance in a modern technical world. The most effective discussions were where candidates were well-informed on the topics, having researched and absorbed the information. These candidates were then able to speak naturally, responding and interacting with others which are the requirements set out in the assessment criteria: Band 2 requires candidates to 'discuss' and 'respond positively'; Band 3 states candidates should 'discuss opinions in some detail' and 'listen attentively' in order to engage and make 'thoughtful responses'; Band 4 requires candidates to be 'confident' in discussing, expanding and 'responding appropriately' (which does not involve reading); and Band 5 candidates should be able to achieve all of these skills with maturity and perception. Many groups this year did not demonstrate these skills as they had been allowed to rely on scripts and over-prepared turn-taking. These candidates were disadvantaged.

The provision of audio-visual recordings and notes purposefully supported the moderation process, whereas the use of audio-only recordings often lacked transparency.

Teacher support was evident this year and it was noticeable that many teachers aptly prompted groups that had run out of ideas, helping them continue the discussion for the recommended ten minutes. This showed good practice as it ensured candidates were given every opportunity to achieve their potential. Teachers also supported less confident candidates at times through one-to-one interaction between the candidate and themselves. Some more able candidates were disadvantaged by this approach due to the power relationship between candidates and teachers which often resulted in question-and-response style discussions, often limiting the candidates' ability to 'move' the discussion forward (Band 3) or 'promote' and 'challenge' (Band 4). The best scenario is that candidates discuss with peers, with the teacher offering necessary support. Centres should consider the words of the specification which states that **'during the group discussion the teacher should give the group an opportunity to discuss fairly independently'** and that, **'if necessary the teacher should: stimulate discussion; encourage a change of direction for the discussion; ask a candidate to provide evidence to corroborate ideas or develop an argument; ensure that all candidates are given an opportunity to respond'**.

Key points to consider ahead of the next Unit 1 submission

Administration

- Centres should check record sheets for correct detail, marks and teachers' signatures.
- Commentaries should provide adequate detail to justify the marks awarded within the bands through exemplification and close reference to the assessment criteria.
- Incomplete folders should be replaced by a complete folder on the next nearest mark from the same teaching group.

Notes

- All notes used by candidates should be submitted for moderation.
- Notes for both tasks should be brief and supportive.
- Scripts and detailed notes are not allowed to be used by candidates.

Recordings

- Centres are encouraged to provide audio-visual recordings to aid identification and aid the ease and accuracy of moderation.
- Some recordings were difficult to hear as the recording equipment or microphone was placed at a distance from the candidates. Centres are requested to support moderation by ensuring that recordings are clearly audible.

Individual Researched Presentation

- Use of questions by teachers is important across all abilities. These questions should not be prepared. Questions can encourage further development and also provide opportunity for candidates to showcase their knowledge and demonstrate verbal reasoning skills.
- Teachers should continue to encourage individuals to choose their own topics for discussion.
- Centres should try to encourage candidates to phrase titles to speeches as questions as this may help many candidates follow a clear and focussed line of argument.

Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion)

- These tasks should encourage candidates to research further information than that provided in the stimulus material. Candidates perform well when they become familiar with the ideas and absorb these, using notes as prompts, where needed. Candidates should be discouraged from preparing turn-taking and should prepare for natural discussion.
- Centres should aim to place candidates in appropriate groups of three, where possible.
- Audio-visual recordings aid identification in the Group Discussion task. The naming of candidates at the start of the assessment is also necessary for identification purposes.
- Centres should consider the advice provided in the specification as noted above in order to ascertain the level of teacher involvement necessary in the Group Discussion task. Candidates should be allowed to discuss as much as possible without teacher involvement.

It is hoped that centres will consider and use these points as reminders during next year's assessment process. The fact that many centres have already taken on board such advice is commendable. Such centres also provide clear evidence of the required internal moderation which results in accurate and fair assessment across their sample. This is much appreciated by all moderators, who enjoy assessing the interesting and varied work submitted. It is hoped that more centres will continue to keep these points in mind next year to support the smooth running of the moderation process as we ensure all candidates achieve their full potential.

As mentioned in the previous report, if centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these points, they should contact the Subject Officer prior to the submission of samples. Moderators also appreciate being contacted by the centre when necessary and welcome any information that may support the moderation process.

May I take this opportunity, on behalf of myself and the moderating team, to thank all centres for their diligence in providing well organised and interesting folders so promptly this year.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2024

UNIT 2: External assessment

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Rail Travel'. The topic was well-received with most candidates appearing to engage well with the theme. Some seemed particularly enthusiastic about the chosen topic. Five texts were presented in the Reading section and a range of text types were used. This allowed for varied levels of challenge in the question setting. In the Writing section there was a choice between exposition and narration writing.

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were required to use synthesis skills (Question A10) and evaluate and interpret content (Question A12) and edit texts (Questions A13-A16). Careful evidence selection was required across both higher and lower tariff questions, as was the ability to interpret meaning.

AO3 Writing – all writing skills relating to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested. These are listed on page 13 of the Specification document which can be found at: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/krviytuc/wjec-gcse-english-language-specification-2015-24-10-14-branded.pdf>

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Reading

Text A

This text was taken from a Transport for Wales publication which presented information about upgrades to the Arriva Trains Wales Valley Lines Trains. This was a non-continuous text which provided succinct information and was intended to provide a straightforward introduction to the examination.

Question A1

The opening question was designed to offer a straightforward and accessible introduction to the Reading section. The answer '£500k' or five hundred thousand pounds was easily located in the first part of the text. The majority of candidates were able to locate this and access the mark. Where candidates did not obtain a mark, it was often because they did not copy down the number correctly or did not specify the stated currency. It was necessary to locate sufficient information to adequately answer the question.

Question A2

This question required candidates to choose from five multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the phrase 'modernise and refurbish'. The question proved straightforward, and the vast majority chose the correct answer which was the third choice 'to bring the carriages up to date and revamp them'. Credible distractors were included, and careful reading of the text and an awareness of context was essential. Whilst all distractors were selected by some candidates, the fifth one was the next most popular of the alternatives. A very small minority of candidates elected to select more than one of the boxes. These answers were not eligible for credit.

Question A3

In this question, candidates were required to name **two** 'specific ways in which the Valley Lines Trains have been improved'. The majority were able to do this and were credited with two marks. In order to achieve both marks, candidates needed to demonstrate clear understanding of text and question. A minority of candidates elected to copy down isolated words without demonstrating how this answered the question. These types of answer were ineligible for credit. For example, those who wrote down 'paint' or 'window film' decontextualised their evidence to such an extent that they were unable to demonstrate sufficient engagement with the fact that something had been done to improve the trains.

Text B

This text was adapted from an article written for a national newspaper. The text reported on advancements that would enable railway lines to be powered with solar energy.

Question A4

This question was a low tariff question which required candidates to locate a single piece of information. They were asked to find the name of the 'climate change charity' working on the project described by the text. This proved more challenging than expected and a significant number failed to gain a mark. Careful reading of the text was required to extract this information and those who skim read were likely to struggle. The name of the charity was 'Possible' and this was made a little trickier to extract by the nickname of the project also being included in the same sentence. There was only one correct answer, yet examiners reported seeing many examples of different options – 'Riding Sunbeams', 'Network Rail', 'University of Birmingham' and 'pilot project' were amongst the most common alternative answers to this question. This question proved a true test of reading ability.

Question A5

This question presented candidates with four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was not made by the text. All of the statements were based on information from the text, although the second, which suggested that 'the 'Riding Sunbeams' project has the world's first fully solar-powered trains', was the statement that was untrue. The task proved straightforward with this being the most selected option. It is essential in these question types that candidates read the question and text very carefully in order to be absolutely sure of what they are looking for. There were a considerable number who selected the first and the third boxes and these were incorrect.

Question A6

In this question, candidates were required to list **two** 'reasons why the director of the 'Riding Sunbeams' project thinks moving the railways away from fossil fuels is a good thing'. The majority were able to do this and were credited with two marks. This proved to be the most straightforward question based on this text and success rates were high. In order to achieve both marks, candidates needed to access two out of three possible points all of which were available from the final paragraph of the text.

Text C

This was a colourful and engaging text adapted from a poster published by a national railway company to demonstrate some of the benefits of rail travel.

Question A7

Candidates were required to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the phrase 'make sure your luggage doesn't exceed the allowed dimensions.' As with Question A2, the question proved straightforward and relatively few candidates struggled to answer correctly. Those who read the text carefully as well as employing effective verbal reasoning skills were likely to be successful.

Question A8

This question was worth up to two marks and candidates generally acquitted themselves well. Two negative points made about travelling by train 'whilst on the journey' were required and there were three possible answers. Most were able to engage with the point about a 'narrow' seat or limited 'space to move' which was the first answer on the mark scheme. The other possible answers related to the 'artificial light sources' and/or pressurised air and the fact that all electronic devices are required to be 'shut down' for take-off and landing. Any answers relating to the fact that the journey may take longer were ineligible for credit. The question directed candidates to consider the time spent on the plane journey, so all answers were required to focus specifically on this period of time and the corresponding section of the text.

Text D

Text D was adapted from a blog written about environmentally friendly living. This text set out to discuss the premise that 'cars are greener' than public transport. Whilst it did prove this to be somewhat true, it also built towards the point that there was much more to consider in relation to this topic. This text presented more challenging writing.

Question A9

This was worth three marks and asked candidates to explain why 'public transport is not always the most environmentally friendly way to travel'. The text provided thought provoking content and in order to answer this question effectively candidates needed to interpret the ideas presented. The ability to stand back and reflect on the reading material was helpful. Relatively few candidates will have achieved full marks for this question. Those that did will have been able to explain key evidence in relation to the question. There were many candidates who copied down relevant aspects of the text without attempting to engage with it or explain its significance in relation to the question and they will have struggled to make much headway. The use of decontextualised evidence was often unhelpful and led candidates to interpretations that were sometimes inaccurate. Explanations that demonstrated a clear sense of the meaning of any evidence used based on its context were likely to do well. This question was intended to offer clear challenge and a test of higher order reading skills and a candidate's ability to engage with and interpret meaning.

Question A10

This was the first high tariff reading question on the paper. It tested the ability to synthesise information from Text C and Text D. Candidates were asked to synthesise the information they had read 'to show the potential benefits of rail travel'. As ever, a significant number of candidates understood the expectations of this question type and were able to complete effective responses. Those who struggled did so largely because of limitations in their approach or because they attempted to answer a different question to the one they had been set. Please note the following key points in relation to this question type:

- a bullet point approach is unhelpful to candidates and does not allow them to demonstrate the necessary collation skills
- the use of bullet points often encouraged candidates to copy unselectively from the text (mimicking Text C's use of bullet points) and this may have limited the extent to which they could achieve
- a bullet point approach often leads candidates into being far too concise in the information they present which reduces their ability to demonstrate understanding
- a balance of information from both texts is required to progress through the marking bands

Text E

The final text was adapted from Monisha Rajesh's autobiographical travel writing *Around the World in 80 Trains*. The extract detailed the background to Rajesh's love affair with rail travel as she set out on her next journey.

Question A11

This was a straightforward question and the answer easily accessed at the end of the second paragraph. The majority of candidates were able to locate this and access the mark.

Question A12

This was the second higher tariff reading question on the paper and attempt rates were pleasingly high. Most candidates gave of their best, with some writing in impressive detail. The question required candidates to write about the impressions of rail travel that were created by the writer and a wealth of different evidence and ideas could be accessed from the text. Most candidates were able to present a range of impressions that they attempted to explore in varied levels of detail. The highest achievers were able to present a wide range of perceptive impressions, exploring in detail the writer's use of language. Examiners reported some genuine enjoyment when marking some of the most thorough and convincing work. Whilst this question enabled the highest achievers to really demonstrate their capabilities, it was also clear that most candidates were able to make progress and demonstrate their reading ability through focused discussion paired with appropriate evidence selection.

Clear focus on the question was essential and, as with a similar question type on last summer's Unit 2 examination, this was an area where candidates may have taken a wrong turn. The question clearly directed candidates to explore the impressions created about 'rail travel' but some answers were focused on impressions of the writer and/or London. This was not what was asked for and candidates who did not focus on the set question will have struggled to make much progress.

Questions A13 – A16 (Editing)

All of the question types on this section of the paper had been seen before and with the first three questions there was nothing out of the ordinary to report. Success rates were high on Questions A13, A14 and A15.

In question A16(a) and A16(b) success rates were lower where it was clear that some candidates had found this difficult. As ever with the text-level editing question, candidates were required to read a text presented in five separate sentences. They were then expected to work out in which order the sentences should appear before writing down the sentence numbers for two stipulated sentences. In this case, they were asked to write down the sentences which should come second (A16a) and third (A16b) in the text.

This was perhaps a more challenging task than some questions of this type because of the sentence numbers that were required. Neither option was obvious or straightforward and both required careful reading and some potentially time-consuming consideration of the context provided by the other sentences. Whilst this may have placed a higher level of difficulty on this question, it was certainly balanced in the editing section as a whole by the very straightforward nature of the first three questions.

Success rates were somewhat lower in response to A16a and A16b than in some of the previous versions of this question type. Despite this, there were a considerable number of candidates who were correct in response to both, or alternatively one of the questions. Where candidates answered incorrectly there was no clear pattern with the choices that they made. All other possible sentence numbers were given in answer to both Questions A16a and A16b.

Section B Writing

Question B1 (proof-reading)

The text in this proof-reading question was presented as a complaint about train service. As ever, there were five clear and obvious errors within the text. Most candidates made some progress with this question but whilst many correctly identified all of the errors, relatively few were able to fully correct all of them. The errors most commonly identified but inaccurately corrected were 'trollie' (trolley) and 'completly' (completely). Some candidates also tried to identify 'received' as an error, which was not the case; nor was the insertion of additional commas or the replacement of the second full stop with a comma.

Question B2

Two questions were offered for candidates to choose from, and both proved accessible with much enthusiastic and detailed writing on offer. As ever, we have no way of measuring which of the two question types was most often chosen by students, but anecdotally examiners felt that both tasks were similarly popular this summer.

Task A was a narration writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their experiences to write about a journey they had taken. As in previous years, examiners were instructed not to be too 'narrow' in their expectations of what constituted a journey and our expectations of seeing metaphorical as well as literal 'journeys' were definitely met. A great many candidates wrote about physical journeys – they were often holiday-bound, but there were also many varieties of train, coach, plane and car journeys. These were to cities, theme parks, school, football matches, and a great many other locations and occasions. All were valid and all offered the potential to develop pleasing detail in relation to what was experienced. The content of these accounts often combined descriptive detail with entertaining family or friend-based narratives. Those who wrote more metaphorical journeys often wrote from the heart about overcoming personal challenges and/or triumph in the face of adversity. These were often thoughtfully introspective and moving in nature.

There were quite a number of responses to Task A that bore little resemblance to the task set. Some candidates wrote about a journey to a holiday destination, which then, perhaps understandably sidestepped into a holiday narrative, but others paid little attention to the journey element at all. There was a reasonable number of answers which wrote the story of their holiday, a trip to a theme park or attendance at an event with absolutely no mention of a journey. These could not be considered to be addressing the set task. Similarly, there were a few who elected to write a fictional narrative about completely unrelated concepts such as a deserted house, science-fiction escapade, wartime events or playing in a rugby match. An examiner should be able to see how an answer responds to the task that has been set – if that is not the case then this is likely to be reflected in the marks given.

A small minority of candidates elected to copy out Text E in response to the narration question, sometimes in its entirety, sometimes by changing the odd word (such as the location). They will not have benefitted from this approach.

Task B was an exposition writing task which produced some very detailed responses. Candidates were clearly able to draw upon their own environmental and scientific knowledge as well as utilise the content of the reading section with skill. There were passionate defences of the car and its necessity to human life from some quarters, with equally fervent challenges to humankind's current dependence on cars. A great many were able to argue convincingly in favour of improvements to public transport as well as the health benefits associated with increased cycling and walking.

As expected, the reading materials from Section A were used to inform Task B pieces and specific information was often used sensibly to support points made. Unfortunately, there was still a tendency for some candidates to copy extensively from the reading materials. This was likely to yield little, if any, reward. A few copied wholly from Text D – a writing style that was very easy to spot – whereas some copied selectively from each of the texts with little intervention of their own. Again, these were easy to spot for examiners who had been fully immersed in all aspects of this paper. Some candidates do not seem aware of how to effectively use the reading resources to aid with their writing and this may be something that would benefit from being further exemplified in the classroom. In expository writing, for example, it is anticipated that candidates will present reasons or explanations based on ideas they have gleaned from what they have read and from their own experiences.

As with last summer, timing did not appear problematic for the majority of candidates with many candidates writing extensively in Section B. Indeed, in some cases candidates reached what appeared to be a natural end to their piece but continued on for another page or two. Sadly, in some cases, this may have reduced the coherence and effectiveness of a piece of writing. Time spent planning a piece of writing is rarely time wasted and could often prevent mistakes such as these. In some cases, a little extra time at the end of an exam would be far better spent checking what has been written.

Finally, whilst there was clear and extensive evidence of writing that was secure in accuracy and coherence, there can be no doubt that written accuracy remains a significant area of concern. Struggles with tense and agreement as well as punctuation issues such as comma splicing can be tremendously detrimental to the coherence of a piece of writing. The examining team would suggest that this is the single most likely reason for writing achievement generally being some way behind achievements in reading.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2024

UNIT 3: EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

This Unit 3 examination was based on the topic of 'Snowdonia', a topic which was enthusiastically received. Candidates across the cohort responded positively to the resources and tasks and there was a great warmth and national pride in evidence. Five texts were presented for exploration and the range of text types and question types allowed for different levels of challenge and engagement.

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested mostly across a range of lower tariff questions (A1, A2, A3, A5, A7, A8 and A10). Candidates were required to use summary (A13) and comparison (A14) skills during the examination alongside interpreting meaning (A11) and analysis (A9). Careful selection of and reference to evidence was required across a range of higher tariff questions (A9, A11, A14) alongside the ability to interpret texts and use verbal reasoning skills (A4, A6 A12). Sequencing skills were also tested (A5).

AO3 Writing – all writing skills appertaining to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested. These are listed on p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/krviytuc/wjec-gcse-english-language-specification-2015-24-10-14-branded.pdf>

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Reading

Text A

This text was a non-continuous, colourful poster which gave information about Mount Snowdon. The text was intended as a straightforward introduction to the topic in which key information and facts could be shared.

Questions A1 - A2

The first two questions were straightforward retrieval tasks. These required candidates to find a specific piece of information from Text A and to present this in their answer booklets. Question A1 required candidates to copy down how many metres Mount Snowdon is above sea-level. The question was very specific in its request for metres, and most were able to present the correct number (1085) in various ways. Please note that numbers or words could be used to answer this question (e.g. one thousand and eighty-five). The measurement of metres was implied in the question, so the correct number alone was sufficient to receive credit. Several candidates chose to write down their answer in feet (3560) and were ineligible for credit. Candidates must also ensure that numbers are clearly formed to ensure work is corrected assessed.

Question 2 asked candidates to give the name of the first person to climb Snowdon (Thomas Johnson) and most answered this correctly. Indeed, it was difficult to find candidates who did not successfully complete this task. Please note that spelling is not assessed during the reading section of the examination, but candidates should be encouraged to copy down the correct spelling to ensure clarity.

Question A3

The final question based on Text A was the first multiple-choice question of the paper. Candidates coped extremely well with this question with well over 32,000 candidates securing a mark. A small minority ticked multiple boxes and were not credited for this approach. It is worth reinforcing the need for candidates to present their final answer clearly when completing this type of question.

Text B

Text B, an information text, gave a range of details for those preparing to climb a mountain but also allowed candidates to complete a sequencing task. The information was organised randomly around a picture and presented as a series of instructions.

Question A4

Word meaning questions are a common feature of this paper and an excellent way to test reading and understanding in context. Candidates were asked to engage with the meaning of the phrase “comfortably ascend”. This phrase could be found in the “Prepare” section of the text. When completing this question type, candidates are advised to locate the phrase and then to read the phrase in context. The words “ascend” and “descend” were used in the sentence and most were able to deduce that they meant “up” and “down” with most reasoning that you would go “up” first sequentially. Some pleasing deduction skills were used (or prior understanding) as an impressive 30,500 candidates managed to select the correct option.

Question A5

This question required candidates to sequentially order the information given in Text B. Success rates were pleasing but some candidates lost marks due to them not following the instructions. It is essential that candidates pay attention to the number that is given to them (in this paper it was 2) and account for this in their answers. This prevents duplication of numbers. Some candidates tried to tick some of the boxes rather than writing in a number, and this approach was unhelpful. Those completing the paper using a word processor often saved themselves time by writing down their answer for this question in the answer booklet (rather than typing up the information in order to sequence it).

Question A6

The final question based on Text B was, like A4, a word meaning question. This time, however, candidates were asked to explain the meaning of “obstacles” using their own words. A wide range of different interpretations were offered but candidates must be reminded that they are answering about meaning based on the context provided by the text. Those commenting on races at school or obstacles on the road, for example, struggled to receive credit. Understanding of the word obstacle could be explored in either a physical or mental way as long as the candidate focused on the meaning rather than specific things that may be deemed to be obstacles (for example, a fallen tree). On a straightforward level, many candidates made progress with simple phrases like “something that is in the way” while others adopted a more complex approach and focused on “obstructions” or “challenges” that need to be overcome. Overall, success rates appeared to be promising and examiners reported that many candidates were secure in their understanding of the word.

Question Text C

This text was a delightfully informative and persuasive text which was taken from a brochure advertising Snowdonia. The text was rich in language, detail and persuasive techniques and gave candidates every opportunity to excel at analysing the writer’s craft.

Questions A7 - A8

These two questions gave candidates the opportunity to skim through Text C before moving onto the more challenging Question A9. Both questions required candidates to locate and copy down a specific name. These questions are a good reminder that answers should be selective and specific. Candidates were asked to “write down the name of a Welsh castle” (Question A7) and while most simply copied down the correct name “Castell y Bere”, a number simply copied unselectively from the text and therefore did not give the name of the castle. The same approach was unhelpful for Question A8 where some candidates incorrectly copied down “nine-mile Mawddach Trail” rather than the correct name for the trail “Mawddach” or “Mawddach Trail”. The capitalisation should have helped those who were uncertain.

Question A9

This was the first extended reading question of the paper. The question asked candidates to consider, “How does the writer of Text C persuade us to visit Snowdonia National Park.” With a wealth of positive and persuasive language, specific details, factual information, persuasive techniques and a stunning picture, the text was full of persuasive content. Those who were able to step back from the resource and simply ask themselves, why would I want to visit this place, would have put themselves into a good position.

The best approach to adopt when answering this question type is to be led by content. Those who find a persuasive area of the text, for example, “Mighty, mist shrouded Snowdon” and then consider how it might be persuasive, for example, “the language creates an air of mystery and encourages those with a natural sense of curiosity to visit” perform well. Similarly, those who are able to use a relevant technique, for example, “the writer uses statistical information, “823 square miles of sky-scraping peaks” to persuade visitors due to the sheer scale of the park and its impressive appearance...” demonstrate secure understanding of how to answer this type of question.

A significant number of candidates still approach the text by feature spotting and then try to shoehorn these techniques into an answer. All too often these answers end up missing the point of the question and lack focus. For example, “the alliteration in “Mighty mist shrouded Snowdon” makes us interested in the location because it is a smooth soft sound.” The other approach to avoid is the “this makes us want to read on....” approach whereby candidates consider why they are reading the text rather than (in this case) why they are being persuaded to visit.

Overall, the key messages regarding this type of question remain the same. This task does not intend to encourage the spotting of every technical device. Instead, the question aims to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer’s arguments/ideas and how these are conveyed to the reader. Those who perform well concentrate on the content of the passage and work chronologically. Top Band answers are selective in their choice of a range of materials and include concise explanations and comments about effect/techniques. The best answers respond to language and consider the ways in which the writer’s argument develops.

It is worth reminding candidates to constantly refer back to the question and to include key words from the question when writing their own answer. It is imperative that candidates do **NOT** answer this question using bullet points as this approach is likely to dilute the quality and focus of their answer.

Text D

A factual text taken from the Mountaineering Council website; Text D explored the reasons why people need to be prepared when climbing Mount Snowdon. The text gave plenty of advice as to how a hiker or climber can prepare but it also gave a range of dangers and consequences faced by those who climb Snowdon unprepared.

Question A10

This location question had the added challenge of requiring two pieces of information in order to secure one mark. Candidates should be familiar with this question type as it has appeared on previous Unit 2 and Unit 3 examinations. The second paragraph contained the sentence, “A lot of people think Snowdon is an easy mountain to climb...” and those who were able to locate this sentence would find that the answer was contained within the sentence. Many performed well in relation to this question and often those who were unsuccessful did not follow the emboldened instruction to give “**two**” reasons.

Question A11

This question began with the instruction “explain” and most recognised that this question required more than simply the location of information. Candidates were asked to explain “what is needed to climb Mount Snowdon in the winter months” and five marks were available for this question. The main concerns raised by the marking team were the following:

- bullet point responses were scant and did not answer the question
- some answers simply located details with no explanation
- unselective copying of the text failed to make progress.

When candidates are asked to explain, there should be an immediate recognition that some form of reasoning should be offered. Many performed well by simply locating a key detail from the text and then writing “so they can....” or “because it will...”. Those who gave five details and five reasons to explain their selected detail would have scored highly. Those who simply selected some key equipment or requirements struggled to move beyond 1 mark.

Text E

The final text on the paper was taken from a newspaper article written in 2020 about the problems faced by Snowdon due to increasing tourism during the pandemic. The text explored some of the problems faced but also stated some of the actions being taken to resolve these issues.

Question A12

The final multiple-choice question on the paper asked candidates to determine the meaning of “clogged” which appeared in the second paragraph in reference to roads being “clogged with illegally parked vehicles”. There were five options to choose from which added a layer of complexity alongside a less familiar word “clogged”. This certainly added to the challenge of the question. Over 21,000 candidates were able to select the correct definition “congested” for this question which suggested some careful deduction skills were in use.

Question A13

This year’s summary question was worth five marks and was the penultimate question on the paper. The summary question is the only instance in either Unit 3 or Unit 2 examinations where bullet points are an acceptable format for an answer (unless otherwise specified). Candidates were asked to summarise (in their own words) the reasons why the council has hired security guards. Seven broad areas (see mark scheme) were suggested as summative points and candidates could gain credit for including any of these once (to a maximum of five marks). While candidates are asked to use their own words, we do understand that this is

not always possible and bear this in mind when judging the quality of a response. However, candidates should make every effort to read the text and to condense the information into salient details.

All candidates should be encouraged to use as little of the answer space as possible. Those who use extra paper are unlikely to be writing in a summative way.

To reiterate previous advice. A good summary:

- is brief and succinct
- is confined to the lines given in the booklet
- separates points clearly
- is written in bullet points or concise sentences
- is not copied from the text.

Question A14

The final question on the paper was a comparison task (worth 8 marks). Candidates were asked to “Compare what the writers say about the people who visit Snowdonia.”

The first key to success when comparing two texts is to look closely at the specific focus of the question. In this instance, candidates were asked to compare the “people who visit” and those who embarked on a general comparison of the two texts (looking at features, layout, details) did not perform well.

The layout of a comparison answer is critical to success. An increasing number of candidates have adopted an unhelpful bullet point approach to these questions in which they present a series of unrelated details about the two texts. This is an unhelpful approach (most contain no suggestion that they are comparing information at all). Those with no sense of comparison struggle to make progress so isolating information into essentially two separate lists, is unlikely to score highly. Some candidates choose to separate their answer into two sections with headings (again, not an ideal approach). This approach is only successful if the candidate makes a clear attempt to compare the two texts (usually in the second part of their answer) and those who do not compare will not score highly.

The best approach for those wishing to access the higher Bands, is an integrated comparison. This type of answer allows a candidate to find clear details from each text and to then line these ideas up and compare them. Comparative language is also helpful and candidates who are armed with appropriate vocabulary (unlike...in comparison, however, although, but etc.) often make good progress.

Section B – Writing

Successful completion of Section B depends on the following:

- careful timing to ensure enough time is allocated for the completion of both tasks
- efficient planning to allow work to be successfully sequenced
- conscious writing with a clear sense of the audience and purpose of the task
- conscious use of punctuation, structure, technical accuracy, techniques.

Failure to complete a writing task means that a candidate has prevented themselves from accessing 25% of the possible marks.

Thoughtful content is vital and careful planning usually helps candidates to generate some ideas which can then be developed into coherent writing. Although many candidates produced plans, a significant number did not and the effect on their writing was evident.

Copying of source materials from the Reading section is an increasing concern. Work that is copied wholesale is **ineligible for credit**. Many candidates copied whole chunks or paragraphs of text in the writing section (across both tasks) and must realise that examiners are very familiar with the materials and recognise copying. Candidates may use *some* of the ideas from the reading materials but must avoid excessive use of these. Some candidates borrow the odd word or phrase from the reading materials while others quote key details in their own work. Both are acceptable, as is using the reading materials as a springboard to generate ideas or introduce new points. Those who copy swathes of text struggle to move beyond Band 1. Work that is copied in its entirety is ineligible for credit.

Technical accuracy remains an issue for many. Writing without paragraphs, inaccurate capital letters, missing full stops, basic spelling errors and slang terms should be avoided at all costs. When assessing writing, examiners try to reward positively but must account for all errors in a piece of writing. Errors affect the mark awarded for writing accurately and cause lapses in cohesion. Any additional attention that can be given to this area would hugely benefit candidates.

Handwriting is another barrier to success. Many candidates appear to struggle to write clearly, and intervention would be advised in this instance. It is impossible to award a fair mark to something that cannot be read. Please consider the use of a scribe or word processor if a candidate's writing is very difficult to decipher.

Question B1

B1 asked candidates to produce a talk to persuade classmates on “the importance of National Parks and outdoor spaces and why we need to look after them.”

The task deliberately included the reference to “outdoor spaces” to allow candidates to write about more familiar outdoor spaces and a small minority took the opportunity to discuss their local parks or other local outdoor spaces. The vast majority, however, wrote about Snowdonia National Park. It was pleasing to note the patriotism and pride that candidates share for this “national treasure” and there were no reports of candidates being critical of the park and the environment.

Many candidates focused on the joy/health benefits that these areas can bring and then focused on what is being done to spoil them (linking their ideas to some of those presented in Text D). Litter was identified as an overwhelming problem as was the need for National Parks to ensure animals are protected and do not become extinct. Candidates are extremely well versed in environmental issues and many candidates explored the need for trees and outdoor spaces to preserve the environmental balance in our world. It is both humbling and engaging to read earnest and thoughtful writing in which candidates of all abilities care for the world we live in.

Those who were less successful often tried to use the resource material and force some of the information into their own writing. For example, the opening paragraph of Text C was referred to by many candidates but often not linked to the overall message of their own writing. A significant number started with a link to the task but then drifted into persuasive writing about mountain climbing.

Only a handful of candidates wrote a script for the talk this year and this was a significant improvement from previous series. A scripted approach often becomes more about interaction than content and is to be avoided.

Brief writing was an issue for some who simply did not develop ideas or observations. Some simply rewrote the quotation and expressed a minimal view about it. Others produced several statements or views that lacked any real development. Work could be done on how to develop ideas and expand views. Some candidates produced quite chaotic writing in which they contradicted some of their own views. Again, careful planning would help to avoid this.

Question B2

A significant number of examiners commented on their delight at seeing a review on the paper at the examiner conference and we were not disappointed in the results of this question throughout the process. Some fabulous reviews were on offer across the cohort based on all three suggested areas. Transactional writing is often fact based with little room for candidates to share some facets of their personality. However, review writing allows candidates to share some of their personal views (both likes and dislikes) and it was a treat for examiners to get such an insight.

Teachers will be delighted to hear that book reviews were not uncommon and that candidates were genuine in their passion for the written word. From childhood favourites such as 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid' to school reading books like 'Of Mice and Men' and then everything from Matt Haig to Colleen Hoover and Dan Brown to Mark Billingham – the list was endless. TV and film reviews were also popular with Harry Potter, Baby Reindeer, Sex Education, Young Sheldon, Barbie and Marvel Avengers (to name but a few) making many appearances. There were some heartfelt accounts of childhood movies and a good number of candidates related sharing these "old favourites" with younger family members. A small minority chose to review the resource materials and this was largely unsuccessful as candidates were often ambivalent in their comments.

Successful reviews can be either positive or negative – there is no preferred approach, but strength of opinion is often most engaging. The most successful reviews always make it clear what is being reviewed (a small number chose to write reviews without specifying a topic/title) and these were usually vague and undeveloped. Comments like "this is a good programme and the actors are interesting...the places are nice...it is set in a house..." were less convincing. The best reviews are specific and give as much detail as they possibly can – place names, characters, directors, all contribute to a more rigorous reviewing style. Candidates should give some key details and highlights when reviewing and many endeared themselves to examiners with comments like "spoiler alert" and "that should give you a flavour..."

It is impossible to share the joy that has been gained from reading some of these reviews. Tears have been shed over some of the heartfelt pieces and candidates have made us laugh too. It was a real treat to gain a snapshot into our candidate's viewing and reading preferences. Please do ensure that candidates are aware that there is no preference between books and TV programmes – all reviews are assessed equally. Although it is a shame when candidates write about the books they have studied for English Literature and try to analyse the content rather than weigh up what they have read. Some reviews of 'Of Mice and Men' saw candidates wrestling with their own feelings towards the characters and the way that we are manipulated into siding with Lennie despite his character flaws - really reviewing how the novel makes us feel and its successes, which was great practice. Others, sadly, only wanted to write about the themes studied for their literature examination and key quotes.

Brief work and incomplete exam papers are a concern as candidates immediately deprive themselves of marks when this happens. It is also a shame that candidates waste precious time counting words, drawing pictures and writing letters to examiners when that time could be spent extending work or proof-reading and gaining more marks.

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 4289

Email: gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [GCSE English Language \(wjec.co.uk\)](https://www.wjec.co.uk)

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

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.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

WJEC Qualifications

As Wales' largest awarding body, WJEC supports its education community by providing trusted bilingual qualifications, specialist support, and reliable assessment to schools and colleges across the country. This allows our learners to reach their full potential.

With more than 70 years' experience, we are also amongst the leading providers in both England and Northern Ireland.



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