

GCSE Examiners' Report

English Language

GCSE

November 2024

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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

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Executive Summary

A total of 2,890 candidates cashed in this series which is an increase of 343 candidates compared to November 2023. 56.2% of candidates were aged 16 (a drop of 12.4% compared to the previous November series) and 33.5% of candidates were aged 17 (an increase of 10.3%).

The overall candidate profile remains stable. Most candidates were male (54.7%) and the vast majority were entered from secondary schools (83.6%).

Centres are reminded to use the correct set of stimulus materials for the group discussion task which for this series was the one labelled for assessment in Summer 2024 and Autumn 2024.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Assessing and internally moderating Unit 1 tasks	Portal by WJEC	CPD standardisation material from Autumn 2024
Assessing Unit 2 and Unit 3 learner responses	Portal by WJEC	CPD standardisation material from Autumn 2024
Delivering and developing reading and writing skills	HTTPS://D3KP6TPHCRVM0S.CLOUDFRONT.NET/EL21-22_4-1	GCSE English GCSE English Literature bridging unit

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UNIT 1: ORACY

Overview of the Unit

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessments for November 2024 was to provide an opportunity for every candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language whilst demonstrating verbal reasoning skills. In centres where tasks were appropriately set and the correct amount of preparation was afforded, individuality and independence were able to flourish.

The expected deadline was met by most centres with just two requesting extensions. It was positive to be able to access well-organised folders which included the relevant documentation (signed record sheets and the notes used by candidates for both tasks) alongside clearly labelled and accessible recordings. However, in some cases, moderators had to contact centres to obtain documentation that not been submitted. Where there were administrative issues, these included the omission of the final mark total and the omission of the dates of task-taking. Clerical errors occurred in a handful of cases where the marks submitted did not match the marks on the record keeping sheet. Requests had to be made for the replacement of incomplete folders. Centres are reminded that, 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.

The record keeping sheets which were most productive in terms of moderation were those which contained purposeful commentaries that were closely tied to the assessment criteria in the appropriate band. The better commentaries featured exemplification of where the candidate met the criteria and clarified 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. In some cases, commentaries did not sufficiently reference both elements of the assessment criteria. In a handful of cases, assessment sheets of the centre's own making featuring highlighted and annotated assessment criteria were included; however, these are not a replacement for an appropriate and effective commentary on the signed WJEC record keeping sheet.

The provision of audio-visual recordings for both tasks by many centres was very much appreciated by moderators. For the Individual Researched Presentation, audio-visual recording allowed the moderator to be assured of the level of reliance on notes as well as be able to appreciate a candidate's engagement with their audience. Where audio-visual recording was used for the Interacting and Responding task, this enabled moderators to identify candidates, observe candidates' engagement with each other and evaluate their use of support material during the discussion. A move towards using audio-visual recordings for both tasks would advantage both candidates and moderators.

It was pleasing to see most centres following the requirement to submit notes used by candidates when presenting the Individual Researched Presentation; however, as stated in the previous report, some centres still had to be contacted to submit notes. Non-submission of notes creates an extra administrative burden to both centres and moderators, and it can also disadvantage candidates where a moderator feels there is an over-reliance on notes during task-taking. Most notes submitted were appropriate, being in the form of bullet points on cue cards. However, in some cases, candidates were allowed into task-taking situations with an inappropriate amount of notes, often in the form of full sentences.

In a few cases, candidate notes were submitted on Word documents; this is not helpful as it calls into question the authenticity of the notes used during the task. In some cases, it was felt that candidates used more notes than were submitted. These cases were also referred to WJEC.

Many centres helpfully submitted the notes used during the Interacting and Responding task. Though the specification does not state that notes used need to be maintained and submitted for this task, it is good practice to do so to aid moderation.

Tasks

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

Most centres continue to encourage independent choice of topics for the Individual Researched Presentation. However, in a minority of centres, all candidates presented on the same topic. This is to be discouraged as candidates should be able to present on topics of their own choosing with some task-setting guidance from the teacher. Presentation topics chosen reflected the interests of young people across Wales, though some titles chosen lent themselves to conveying information only and did not afford candidates the opportunity to access the analysis and evaluation strands of the assessment criteria. The most successful tasks had a persuasive focus or were based on the exploration of a question or viewpoint.

For this series, it was pleasing to see that most candidates adhered to the recommended five to seven minutes for the Individual Researched Presentation. For most candidates who fell short of the recommended time, centres wisely posed open questions to allow opportunity for further development of ideas. It is expected that all candidates should have the opportunity to respond to questions; candidates who were not given this opportunity were disadvantaged, especially where they may have failed to engage in analysis and evaluation in the required depth during their talk, or where they had been reliant on notes to present.

The issue of overly detailed notes and prompt cards was of real concern for this task, and a number of candidates' notes or cards (and, in some case, whole centres) 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'**. Despite this being raised in the previous report, some centres allowed candidates to read from whole scripts, whilst not considering this in the awarding of the marks. Centres are advised to consider teaching approaches in terms of supporting candidates to write appropriate notes and to check candidates' notes before allowing them to be taken into task-taking situations.

Compulsory school meals and prom were the dominating topics for the Responding and Interacting task. The role of libraries was also fairly well-represented, though this tended to occur in isolated cases within centres, clearly showing that candidates in that centre were given autonomy in their choice of topic. However, in an unprecedented number of cases, the wrong stimulus materials for this award were used, featuring discussions on PE in schools and video games.

It was pleasing to see a response to previous reports in terms of group numbers, as most groups were comprised of three candidates. However, in some cases, discussions were in pairs, which can limit opportunities for exploration of a variety of viewpoints and can create a disadvantage if candidates are not well-matched in terms of ability.

It was pleasing to see that most candidates were able to sustain their talks to the recommended ten-minute duration, either independently or with the use of teacher intervention where candidates struggled to find new points to discuss.

Where circumstances meant that teachers had to take the role of a second or third voice in discussions from the outset, this tended to create a dynamic where candidates responded to teacher questions only, as opposed to being able to pose questions and challenge and develop on others' points. In the more successful of these cases, the teacher took a more natural role in the discussion, allowing candidates to play an equal part in developing the discussion.

The over-reliance on supporting material was increasingly noticeable in the Interacting and Responding task where candidates took a turn-taking approach, reading from detailed notes and not responding to what had been said before. In some cases, entire discussions were scripted, and in the most extreme cases teachers took part in reading from the script, which suggests a misunderstanding of the requirements of the task. As mentioned in the previous report, 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, and candidates are expected to respond to and interact with each other in a spontaneous manner.** Even when audio-only recording is used, moderators are clearly able to ascertain where delivery is heavily reliant on notes or scripts.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

For the Individual Researched Presentations, candidates achieving marks in Band 4 presented skilfully organised talks, featuring the use of rhetoric to engage and affect the listener. These talks were analytical in their nature and made good use of independent research (which was analysed and evaluated) to support points. Candidates in this band left the listener in no doubt of their views, presenting effective arguments. Further knowledge of their topics were then shown in confident responses to questions, thereby securing the mark. Candidates awarded marks in this band used vocabulary precisely and their spoken language featured variation in sentence structure for effect, secure in terms of tense and agreement and featured the absence of fillers (for example, the repeated use of 'like'). Candidates achieving marks in Band 5 went beyond this with highly engaging and effective presentations, exploring the subtleties of the issues surrounding some quite complex and demanding topics. Arguments were built through effective construction, and the listener was engaged through the conscious use of rhetoric. Ambitious vocabulary and the extremely confident presentation of information and analysis through highly effective, complex sentence structures was a feature here. In a few cases, candidates were pushed into Band 5 for deliveries that were lacking in the highly engaging, deliberate construction that we would expect to see in this mark range.

Any reliance on scripted material or over-extensive notes by a candidate should be taken into consideration when awarding marks. When applying the assessment criteria for content and organisation, consideration should be given to whether candidates are able to deliver 'effectively' and whether the needs of the audience are taken into consideration, both Band 3 skills and neither of which occur when the candidate reads from a script. In terms of accuracy, range of sentence structures and register, reading also affects register as it means candidates do not adopt the appropriate tone, especially where there is a 'stilted' delivery. Brevity was also an issue when awarding marks as there were cases where candidates only sustained their talks to around the three- or four-minute mark. Where ideas are not sufficiently developed and questioning is required to bring the talk to the suggested duration, it is difficult to consider a mark beyond Band 3.

For the Interacting and Responding tasks, where candidates were well-informed on the topics, having researched and absorbed the information, they were able to be rewarded for presenting points coherently and interacting with others, which are the requirements set out in the assessment criteria. In the higher mark ranges, candidates discussed spontaneously, displaying close listening skills and adapting their responses according to what had been heard. There was a clear sense that ideas were being explored in depth as a group and that group members' thoughts and relevant evidence were considered when doing so.

In some cases, a reliance on pre-prepared, extended points and scripted materials needed to be considered when awarding marks. A mark in Band 2 requires candidates to 'discuss' and 'respond positively to what they hear', whilst Band 3 requires candidates to 'discuss opinions in some detail' and 'listen attentively' in order to engage and make 'thoughtful responses'. Again, these cannot be achieved through reading.

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 on the record keeping sheets should provide adequate detail to justify the marks awarded within the bands through exemplification and close reference to both elements of the assessment criteria.
- Incomplete folders should be replaced by a complete folder on the next nearest mark from the same teaching group.
- Centres should respond promptly to contact made by the Moderator or the WJEC so as not to delay the moderation process. This includes taking prompt action in terms of submitting requested items, for which new key codes will be required in many cases.

Notes:

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

Recordings:

- Centres are encouraged to provide audio-visual recordings to aid identification and the ease and accuracy of moderation.
- Centres are requested to support moderation by ensuring that recordings are clearly audible.

Individual Researched Presentation task:

- The use of questions by teachers is important across all abilities. These questions should be open questions and should not be prepared. Questions can encourage further development and provide opportunity for candidates to engage in further analysis and evaluation and demonstrate verbal reasoning skills.
- Teachers should continue to encourage individuals to choose their own topics for discussion and give guidance in terms of refining titles to enable candidates to access all elements of the assessment criteria.
- It is good practice to link the title of the presentation to one of the five WJEC themes in the 'Description of activity' box on the record keeping sheet.

Responding and Interacting task:

- 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 and spontaneous discussion.
- Centres should aim to place candidates in appropriate groups of three, where possible.
- Audio-visual recordings aid identification. The identification of candidates at the start of the assessment is also necessary.
- Centres should consider the advice provided in the specification to ascertain the level of teacher involvement necessary. Candidates should be allowed to discuss as much as possible without teacher involvement.
- Centres must ensure the correct stimulus materials for the November entry are used.

It was pleasing to see many centres taking note of moderators' reports and making the required adjustments to their administration and assessment processes. The most successful centres also provided clear evidence of the required internal moderation which resulted in accurate and fair assessment across their sample. 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 and ensure that all candidates achieve their full potential.

As always, if centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these points, they should contact the Subject Officer prior to the submission of samples. Moderators also welcome any information that may support the moderation process.

The moderating team would like to take this opportunity to thank all centres for the hard work that has gone into preparing the candidates for their assessments. As always, the moderating team has very much enjoyed listening to such an interesting range of materials from a huge range of candidates within a variety of settings.

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UNIT 2: DESCRIPTION, NARRATION AND EXPOSITION

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Film and Cinema'. Most candidates appeared to engage well with the theme and attempt rates were high across the paper. Five texts were presented in the Reading section and a range of text types were included. This allowed for varied levels of challenge in the question setting. In the Writing section there was a choice between exposition and narration writing.

Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were required to use synthesis skills (A12) and evaluate and interpret content (A11 and A14) and edit texts (A15-A17). 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 p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at:

[Specification](#)

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Reading

Text A

Text A was adapted from *Wittertainment's* light-hearted code of content for cinemagoers. This was a non-continuous text which provided humorous instructions on appropriate behaviour in a cinema. Details were presented in an accessible way and this provided a straightforward introduction to the examination.

Question A1

The opening question was designed to offer a straightforward introduction to the examination. It asked candidates to identify the food described as causing 'special offence' in this text. The answer was 'nachos' and this was easily located in the very first section of text. Candidates were further aided by the 'No Eating' subheading which made location a very straightforward exercise. The majority of candidates were able to access the available mark.

Question A2

This question required candidates to write down **two** things that people 'should avoid doing' when attending the cinema. Two marks were available and there was a range of options to choose from. There were few barriers to success and most candidates were able to make progress here. Some candidates elected to base their answer on two examples from the same area. For example, they accessed the 'no hobbies' area of the text and gave two examples of different hobbies that were suggested in the text. These were only eligible for one mark if no further suggestion was offered.

The only other barrier to success arose when candidates were too brief in their answers. For example, simply stating 'food wrappers' did not provide sufficient detail for the mark to be given.

Question A3

This question required candidates to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the word 'foraging'. The correct answer which was the third choice 'searching for something' and this was the most selected answer. Credible distractors were included though and the second choice 'behaving noisily with food wrappers' also proved popular. Careful reading of the text and the ability to read the options in context was helpful. There is an expectation that candidates try to understand the word (or words) in this question type and not just find other aspects of the text that are closely linked with it. A very small minority of candidates selected more than one of the boxes. These answers were not eligible for credit.

Text B

This continuous text was adapted from an article focusing on the benefits of cinemas.

Question A4

A4 was a low tariff question which required candidates to locate information. They were asked how long Text B suggests that stories have 'been with us'. This was a straightforward question and success rates were high. The information was located in the opening paragraph of the text and could easily be found next to the words which were quoted in the question. The text was clear that 'stories have been with us for thousands of years'. A few candidates incorrectly stated 'thousand' or 'thousand of years' and, due to a lack of precision, this was ineligible for credit.

Question A5

This question provided some challenge. Candidates were asked to explain two ways in which films help us in 'difficult times'. There were four possible areas that they could cover in their explanations and any two correct explanations would guarantee them two marks. Many candidates struggled here. There was a significant number who elected to copy evidence from the text without attempting to explain those selections in their own words. This approach was self-penalising. Explanations that demonstrated a clear sense of understanding and the ability to interpret meaning were justly rewarded.

Question A6

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 in some way on information from the text, although the fourth, which suggested that 'cinemas can't compete with streaming services', was the statement that was untrue. The text actually suggested what cinemas will have to do in order to compete with streaming services. The task proved straightforward with this being the most selected option by a significant margin. It is essential in these question types that candidates read both question and text very carefully in order to be absolutely sure of what they are looking for.

Text C

This was an infographic which provided statistical and background information about the film and TV industry in Wales.

Question A7

This was a location question which asked candidates to identify how many people are employed in the Welsh film and TV industry. This information was immediately accessible as it featured in the opening paragraph of the text.

The correct answer was 'more than 8,000 people' and many candidates accurately copied down this number. Careful reading and selection skills were necessary and a number of candidates incorrectly answered '8,000' or '8,000 people'. These answers were ineligible for credit.

Question A8

Candidates were required to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the phrase 'globally respected'. This question proved to be very straightforward and the vast majority of candidates answered correctly. Those who read the text carefully as well as employing effective verbal reasoning skills were likely to be successful. A few candidates tried to select multiple answers which was an ineffective strategy.

Question A9

As with A7, A9 was a straightforward location question which required candidates to use deduction skills to retrieve relevant information. There were four possible types of micro-business to choose from and there were very few candidates who did not make an accurate selection. Incorrect answers tended to be selected from words that appeared close to 'micro-businesses' in the text. Unfortunately, there was little understanding of question or text in these answers.

Text D

Text D was adapted from an article about the use of Wales as a filming location for the television series *Willow*. This text presented more detailed and challenging writing than previous texts on this paper.

Question A10

This was a location question which was designed to ease candidates into a more challenging text. The answer 'nearly 35 years' could be found at the beginning of the second paragraph. The inclusion of the date of the original film's release meant that some candidates will have worked out that this article was produced a while ago. For this reason, those who omitted the nearly and wrote '35 years' were also credited for this question. There were very few who did not make progress here.

Question A11

This was a more challenging question which asked candidates 'How does the writer show Wales to have many 'beautiful dramatic settings' in this text?' This question sought to encourage candidates to analyse information. Four marks were available for this question. It is relatively unusual for this kind of question to have a lower mark tariff but this was done deliberately, in combination with the other question types, to ensure levels of unpredictability in relation to the paper. It was clear that many candidates had struggled to demonstrate the necessary engagement with language to make significant progress with this question. This is perhaps a reflection of the 'resit' nature of this paper and that there were some candidates who struggled with the more challenging and complex nature of a question that required analysis. There was no shortage of effort though, and many candidates were able to select appropriate evidence and comment on it in a more straightforward way.

Question A12

This was the first of two higher tariff reading questions on the paper. It tested the ability to synthesise information from Text C and Text D. Candidates were asked to synthesise what they had learned about the ways in which Wales and the film and TV industry benefitted each other. Many candidates seemed to understand the expectations of this question type and were able to offer relevant points from both texts.

As with previous synthesis questions, there were some who struggled because they did not demonstrate the necessary focus on the question or because their answers failed to demonstrate a balance in relation to information from both texts. As mentioned in the Principal Examiner report after the summer series, a bullet point approach is unhelpful to candidates and does not allow them to demonstrate the necessary collation skills. Unfortunately, there was still a number of candidates who elected to take this approach and very few who did so will have reached their potential on this question.

Text E

The final text was adapted from the diaries of the actress Carrie Fisher. This particular extract was written when she was a young woman and about to become Princess Leia in the *Star Wars* films.

Question A13

This was a relatively straightforward question and most candidates were able to deduce that two people interviewed Carrie at her audition. It was necessary to state the number of people present and most candidates were able to do that. Many also named the directors in order to be sure of the marks, although it was not necessary to do so.

Question A14

This was the second of two higher tariff reading questions on the paper and attempt rates were pleasingly high. The question required candidates to write about how Carrie Fisher shows her thoughts and feelings when auditioning for the part of Princess Leia. There was no shortage of possible details to cover in answer to this question and many candidates were able to present some of Fisher's thoughts and feelings. For the highest marks, accurate and perceptive comments were required along with a real awareness of inference and the writer's use of language. There is no doubt that there were proportionately fewer candidates than in the summer series who proved able to access the highest marks, however there was certainly no shortage of effort or engagement. Most candidates were able to make some progress and demonstrate an awareness of some thoughts and feelings, supported by appropriate evidence. It was often the case that candidates focused on Fisher's general feelings of nervousness or insecurity and supported this in numerous ways rather than exploring the evidence in a more specific or analytical way.

Editing Section – Questions A15 – A17

All of the question types on this section of the paper had been seen before and the first two questions presented few difficulties with success rates proving high.

In question A17(a) and A17(b) success rates were lower and, as with the summer series, it was clear that some candidates had found this difficult. With this question, candidates were required to read a text presented in five separate sentences. They were then expected to work out the order in which the sentences should appear before writing down the numbers for two stipulated sentences. In this case, they were asked to state the sentences which should come second (A17a) and third (A17b) in the text.

Success rates were somewhat lower in response to A17a and A17b than in some of the previous versions of this question type although they seemed largely comparable to the summer series. Where candidates answered incorrectly there was no clear pattern with the choices that they made which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about particular difficulties or trends. All other possible sentence numbers and combinations were given without any particular wrong answers dominating.

Section B: Writing

Question B1

The text in this proof-reading question was presented as a job advertisement. As ever, there were five clear and obvious errors within the text. Most candidates made some progress with this question although relatively few were able to fully correct all errors and score a maximum of five marks. All errors were regularly identified and corrections attempted and there did not seem to be any particular error types that were more often right or wrong.

Question B2

Two questions are offered for candidates to choose from and both proved accessible with much enthusiastic and detailed writing on offer. Unfortunately, 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 proved similarly popular.

Task A was a narration writing task which asked candidates to write about a time when they had felt annoyed. This elicited a significant number of enthusiastic and animated responses and there was certainly no shortage of ways in which the candidates had been annoyed. Parents, teachers and especially siblings had all proved provocative and infuriating in a multitude of different ways! Some of these accounts were detailed, lively and entertaining to read – thus demonstrating audience awareness. There were, as ever, a good many students who wrote about exams and/or results days, although in many of these cases annoyance seemed to be secondary to quite a varied range of other emotions and it did often feel that these answers had been squeezed to fit the task rather than directly responding to it. One or two did stand out though, and whilst being deliberately insulting of the subject you are attempting to score highly in is not really to be advised, the candidate who described English language as the 'lesser of two evils' when compared to English literature did provide some amusement for examiners. Elsewhere, there were some lovely responses which dealt with annoyances encountered using public transport, in waiting rooms or in dealings with bureaucracy of some sort. As ever, there were plenty of tales of sporting woe which included some detailed recounts of the effects of injury and some inspiring displays of determination to get back on the pitch after the annoyance of injury-induced absence.

As with the summer series, there were a few responses to Task A that showed no awareness of the task set. Indeed, a few candidates wrote responses that would have been perfectly acceptable to questions set in a previous series but definitely did not address the task set for this exam. These candidates did not benefit from this approach and will have struggled to progress through the marking bands.

Task B was an exposition task which produced some very detailed responses. Candidates were clearly able to draw upon their own experiences of cinema-going and provided very varied exemplification of films that have been both educational and culturally enlightening. Some candidates had also benefitted from building upon the content of the reading section and adapting this to purpose. As with the summer, there was still a tendency for some candidates to copy extensively from the reading materials which significantly reduced their opportunities to gain marks. A few copied from Text A, and really struggled to make this fit the requirements of the task, but most who resorted to copying used Text B. As ever, those who took this approach were very easy to spot for examiners who had been fully immersed in all aspects of this paper. In the summer report, we advised that candidates may benefit from further exemplification of how to use the reading resources as a springboard into their own writing and this remains true of a number who returned this November. In expository writing, 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.

Finally, there can be no doubt that written accuracy remains a significant area of concern and is likely to be the reason that many of these candidates were revisiting this qualification. Inaccurate usage of tense and limited grammatical agreement was of concern, as well as punctuation issues such as comma splicing and missing full stops. These types of error were detrimental to coherence in quite a widespread number of cases.

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UNIT 3: ARGUMENTATION, PERSUASION AND INSTRUCTIONAL

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Chocolate'. Candidates appeared to be enthusiastic about the topic and there was a good deal of effort and commitment with good attempt rates across the paper. A combination of continuous and non-continuous texts were presented in the Reading Section and the range of question types ensured varied levels of challenge were posed. Writing tasks saw candidates complete a letter and a talk to comply with the requirement to produce argumentation and persuasion writing tasks.

Which AOs were assessed?

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Reading

Text A

Text A was a non-continuous factsheet that provided information about the nutritional value of chocolate. Some baking tips, facts about portion sizes and a comparison between dark and milk chocolate provided key details. Information was presented in a straightforward way and most candidates responded positively to the infographic.

Question A1

With a high success rate, A1 proved to be a clear and straightforward introductory question to the topic. The question asked candidates to locate information to enable them to focus on 'Which type of chocolate contains a higher amount of sugar?' In almost all cases, incorrect answers were not based on the text and, instead, presented information from a candidate's own knowledge. Overall, success rates were high, and many candidates presented the correct answer in a clear and economical way.

Question A2

Like question A1, this question tested the ability to locate information in Text A. Candidates were asked to locate the 'recommended portion size' for 'dark chocolate' and the information required to answer this question could be found in the bottom right-hand corner of the text.

Candidates were required to provide both the number (25) and the correct weight (gram or g) to receive credit. Those who were unsuccessful usually gave an incorrect weight with most candidates writing '25kg' rather than '25g'. Please note that candidates did not need to present their answer in a full sentence, the correct answer was sufficient.

Question A3

This was the first multiple choice question on the paper. With a success rate in excess of 90% it was evident that candidates were able to read the question/text carefully and select the correct answer. The question asked, 'Which of the following statements about carob is NOT true?' and the correct response was the third option 'carob contains caffeine'. There was little to separate options 1, 2 and 4 in terms of the next most selected answer. Very few candidates chose to provide multiple options and the majority were able to present their answer clearly. Please note that any candidate who selects multiple options (even if they have also ticked the correct one) is ineligible for credit.

Text B

This text was presented in the form of a poster and provided information about the processes involved in the production of chocolate. The information on the text was not ordered chronologically to allow candidates the opportunity to sequence the information.

Question A4

The second multiple choice question of the paper required candidates to locate the section about 'tempering'. Close reading of the section of text enabled candidates to deduce that option 2 was the correct choice. Although there were five options to choose from, candidates were largely successful in working their way through the information and answering the question. Success rates were excellent with over 90% of candidates choosing option 2. Option 4 was the most credible distractor.

Question A5

This question required candidates to sequentially order the information given in Text B. Success rates were pleasing but some lost marks due to not following the instructions. It is essential that candidates pay attention to the number that is given to them (in this paper it was 1) and then allocate the remaining numbers. Some candidates tried to tick 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). Success rates were pleasing and with no adverbial clauses to aid their sequencing (although the pictures did aid understanding), candidates did well to deduce the correct order for the process.

Text C

This article was selected deliberately due to its wide range of persuasive features. The article explored why we love chocolate so much and it was clear in their answers to A7 that candidates were largely in agreement with the writer's views.

Question A6

The final multiple choice on the paper was A6. Candidates were asked to select the correct meaning for the word 'infinite'. This was a challenging multiple-choice question and required candidates to read the sentence in context. While over 50% of candidates were successful and chose 'limitless, impossible to measure', approximately 25% of candidates chose 'a pleasant range' showing a lack of understanding both of the 'infinite' and the following word 'variety'. Candidates should be encouraged to read the sentence in which the word is contained in addition to any surrounding clues to give themselves the best possible chance of success.

Question A7

The first extended reading question of the paper was A7. The question asked candidates to consider, “How does the writer of Text C try to persuade us that ‘chocolate is fantastic?’ The text was overwhelmingly in favour of chocolate and gave a wealth of positive and persuasive examples of language, specific details, factual information and persuasive techniques. At all levels, candidates were able to engage with the text on some level, and most could recognise the writer’s hugely positive opinions about chocolate. When teaching candidates to complete a ‘how’ question, it is good practice to encourage them to step back from the resource and simply ask themselves, what does this writer say to make this product/place/concept seem fantastic? Understanding the writer’s perspective is the first step to success.

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, ‘Our parents gave chocolate a special and unique place’ and then consider how it might be persuasive, for example, ‘the adjectives ‘special’ and ‘unique’ create the sense that chocolate is an exceptional and treasured item, something that is precious, giving it the sense of it being fantastic.’ This sentence links to the task, includes supporting evidence and references a technique – a winning combination.

Some candidates adopted a technique spotting approach, which was unhelpful and often limited the number of marks that could be awarded. Others wrote an entire answer with no sense of chocolate being ‘fantastic’ which did not lend itself to success.

Overall, 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. 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

This blog gave candidates an interesting view on chocolate. After a discussion with their doctor, the writer produced this blog about the dangers associated with eating too much chocolate and sugar. The article was factual and informative, and candidates really appeared to engage with the dangers presented.

Question A8

To gain credit for this task, candidates were required to find one side effect of giving up chocolate. There were two possible answers ‘cravings’ and ‘headaches’ and both appeared frequently. On the whole, success rates were pleasing and those who did not receive credit for this task either included their own opinion or were careless when writing down information.

Question A9

This question required verbal reasoning skills as candidates were required to demonstrate understanding of the phrase, ‘parents can only control what a child eats within their four walls’. When completing this type of task, it is imperative that candidates engage with the phrase as a whole. Some candidates cherry pick a word or phrase without considering the context of the passage and the whole phrase. Selective approaches are usually unsuccessful. Many candidates who were successful quickly unpicked the idea of ‘four walls’ being the family home and could then wrestle with the idea of ‘control’. Some completed the task using synonym substitution and this approach was usually successful.

The best approach was by those who tried to perhaps think of the phrase as an overall concept or message. Answers such as 'parents can only manage what a child eats when they are at home/ with them' were focused and effective.

Question A10

A further location question was included as A10 demonstrating the unpredictability of the paper in the sense that difficulty levels vary according to task and text rather than tasks becoming increasingly difficult. The answer to this question could be found at the start of paragraph 3 and those who had been trained to skim read via topic sentences would have located the correct details efficiently. Success rates were pleasing as were attempt rates for this question.

Question A11

This question was one of the most challenging on the paper and although only worth 3 marks, some candidates struggled to amass sufficient details or information to complete it. The question asked candidates to, 'Explain why the writer thinks that sugar is bad for us.' Those familiar with the command word 'explain' worked hard to give reasons and to answer the question. A considerable number of candidates simply copied words and phrases from the text in an evidential style rather than considering the 'why' element of the task. Those who were able to select key details and explain them were credited. The information appertaining to sugar could be found in the final paragraph although a number ignored the focus on sugar and instead wrote about chocolate.

Text E

The final text in the examination gave an unexpected view about chocolate. Written by a self-confessed chocolate-loving doctor, candidates appeared to engage well with its contents.

Question A12

As mentioned in the summer report, great progress has been made in relation to the summary question. In the infancy of the Specification, candidates were cautious in their approach to summary, often writing more than was necessary. Strange approaches were adopted such as using an 'evidence/explain' style of response, which was unhelpful. In recent years an increasing number of candidates have produced some succinct and well-focused responses. This series was no exception with many candidates using bullet points to structure their summary and restricting the number of words used (which is excellent practice).

Unfortunately, a small number of candidates produced responses which were overly long and struggled to make a summative point. Candidates should consider the amount of space allowed for the completion of this question and respond accordingly. Candidates should not write on extra paper as this would suggest a lack of understanding of the expectations of a summary.

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 A13

This question asked candidates to consider the reliability of the source by considering ‘why Text E can be considered a reliable source?’ Answers were often pleasing with many candidates recognising the fact that the information had been written by an actual doctor. Comments relating to a ‘professional tone’, the sources of the material on a ‘healthcare website’ and the ‘medical knowledge’ of the ‘doctor’ were all considered valid responses to the task. Vague comments about font, size and details were usually less focused and harder to credit.

Question A14

The final reading task on the paper was an extended comparison response (worth 10 marks). Candidates were asked to ‘Compare and contrast what the writers of Text D and Text E think about the dangers of chocolate.’ Candidates appeared to find Text D easier to access than Text E and often focused on the medical dangers that can be caused by excessive sugar or chocolate. Text E was more subtle in terms of the dangers suggested however both texts focused on the addictive nature of chocolate and the fact that over consumption can cause weight gain or obesity.

When comparing texts, candidates, must look closely at the specific focus of the question. In this instance, candidates were asked to compare the ‘dangers of chocolate’ and those who embarked on a general comparison of the two texts (looking at features, layout, details etc.) did not perform well. Organisation is also important in a comparison answer. The best approach for those wishing to access the higher Bands, is an integrated comparison. This allows a candidate to find clear details from each text and to then compare them. Comparative language is also helpful and those who are armed with appropriate vocabulary (unlike, in comparison, however, although, but etc.) often make good progress.

Some candidates adopt an unhelpful bullet point approach to comparison questions in which they present a series of unrelated details about the two texts. This is unhelpful and those with no sense of comparison struggle to make progress. 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 do not score highly.

Section B: Writing

Successful completion of Section B depends on the following:

- careful timing to ensure completion of both tasks
- efficient planning to allow successful sequence
- conscious writing with a clear sense of audience and purpose
- conscious use of punctuation, structure, technical accuracy, techniques.

Candidates, overall, were committed to producing some thoughtful and considered writing. However, a small number chose to rely heavily on the resource materials, and this had an effect on the quality of their contents. Candidates who use details or ideas from the resource materials can enhance the quality of their writing, but copying is self-penalising.

Brevity was an issue for approximately 10% of all candidates. Candidates must try to pace themselves in the examination to ensure they are able to complete all sections. Those who produce a few lines or half a side of writing for a Section B task limit the number of marks available to them.

Technical accuracy remains an issue for many. Writing without paragraphs, inaccurate capital letters, missing full stops and basic spelling errors and should be avoided where possible. When assessing writing, examiners try to reward positively but must account for all errors. 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.

Question B1

B1 asked candidates to produce a letter to the Headteacher at their school giving their views about a proposed chocolate ban. Responses were mixed and candidates often expressed strong views either to support consuming chocolate in school or banning it. Many focused on the idea of chocolate being a 'deserved treat' in their writing and some honest reflections about the 'need' for chocolate and sweets were used. Some candidates were wholly opposed to chocolate, stressing their support for the ban (usually those who are serious about sport or fitness). It was amusing to read accounts from the very few 'non-chocoholics' who were quite happy to deprive their classmates of their daily treat. A number also explored the notion that the teachers were likely to revolt if chocolate products were banned and some humorous ideas were included. One candidate even suggested a monthly chocolate payment for teachers to reduce stress levels.

The structure of writing remains important. It was disappointing to note how few candidates understood the basic layout of an address (many were unable to sequence an address correctly). Many omitted paragraphs or did not give any consideration to how the letter would begin and end (often causing duplication). Those who planned their writing more carefully often demonstrated the ability to structure their work, remain focused and write in detail. Some produced quite chaotic writing in which they contradicted some of their own views. Again, careful planning would help to avoid this. Preparatory work could also focus on the development and expansion of ideas.

Question B2

Candidates are familiar with speech writing and this task asked them to produce a talk about pursuing hobbies to reduce stress. The topic appeared to appeal to candidates who spoke about a wide range of hobbies with great enthusiasm. Many candidates discussed the topics given to them in the task (especially, baking, exercising and listening to music) and there was a genuine attempt to explore these topics using personal anecdotes and examples. Across the cohort, candidates took the link to 'stress' and wider mental health issues extremely seriously and worked diligently to sensitively navigate this aspect of the task.

Timing can often have an effect on the final writing task on the examination. Candidates must leave sufficient time to be able to write in detail and to give of their best. A number of candidates adopted the right approach to this task and started well but their responses were lacking in detail and development. It is important that candidates are balanced in their timings across the paper to avoid issues appertaining to completion. For example, some candidates wrote excessively on another extended task to the detriment of B2.

Overall, however, it was felt that candidates enjoyed completing the task and their heartfelt, engaging and thoughtful responses were enjoyable to read.

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

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Email: gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

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