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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2021**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?l=en>

### **Online Results Analysis**

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### **Annual Statistical Report**

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Page</b>
Unit 1: Oracy	1
Unit 2: Description, Narration and Exposition	4
Unit 3: Argumentation, Persuasion and Instructional	15

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

### **GCSE (NEW)**

**November 2021**

### **UNIT 1 ORACY**

#### **General Comments**

The sample of candidates for the November 2021 series illustrated that evidence had been captured in difficult circumstances for many centres. There were many examples of presentations being recorded at a distance from the candidates, with some having to remotely deliver their ideas while at home. The efforts made to pull together recordings, record sheets and cue cards/notes were greatly appreciated by moderators. Most centres managed to do this but there were significant cases in which notes did not appear. When used by candidates, these remain a key piece of evidence when assessing the degree to which presentations had been prepared for. Without them, due credit could not be given to those who had endeavoured to rehearse and remember their ideas. If they had not been used, it would have been very helpful to find that noted on the record sheets provided by WJEC.

Indeed, the best examples of record keeping managed to capture the individuality of each performance, alongside due reference to the band descriptors. Moderators genuinely appreciated the effort taken by the teachers who paid particular attention to the highlights in a presentation, often quoting key phrases and noting development in the content's structure. Less useful were the comments that referred to non-verbal gestures such as eye contact and body language. These are not features of the assessment criteria. Attention should have been given to other ways in which a candidate can show confidence, such as directly engaging the audience through their rhetorical style and having the inclination to pursue an idea beyond an initial statement.

Without doubt the best way to showcase a cohort's presentation skills was to record them via audio-visual equipment. Given that most candidates and their teachers had such devices at their fingertips, it was particularly surprising when a sample was composed of audio-only recordings. It was an opportunity lost to reveal the full extent of a candidate's skills as a presenter of ideas. The audio-only option was only two-dimensional in its usefulness, making it difficult to fully gauge the degree to which an audience had been engaged and affected. Many centres had moved towards embracing audio-visual recordings and seemed proud to show their candidates. It certainly made for more a more interesting moderation process but, most importantly, it allowed for more accurate assessment. Where circumstances demanded that audio-only was the only option for particular individuals, some centres usefully noted the reasons for such pragmatic moves. Communication of this kind, via either covering notes to moderators or communication with the Subject Officer, was always very useful when getting a sense of the context for a sample.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

This series required evidence of the assessment of Task 1: Individual Researched Presentation only. Task 2: Responding and Interacting (group discussion) was not a feature of the assessment. This opportunity to hone focus on one task resulted in presentations that, in the vast majority, could be clearly linked to the themes offered by WJEC. Greater effort had been made to ensure that candidates did not just take a theme, such as Citizenship, and attempt to present obtuse ideas that reached for substance.

More work seemed to have been done to guide students to consider topics within the theme, so that each presentation had a particular subject matter. Indeed, the topics provided an interesting overview of what life was like for young people in Wales in 2021. Covid-19 and its impact, mental health and social media all appeared at regular intervals. Quirky and characterful work was also inspired by those who chose to share their interest in such matters as cats, body piercings and musical melody.

Less success was found in the blanket coverage of the same topic at centres, sometimes within classes, which led to content that was presented with little enthusiasm as candidates were compelled to consider a topic that had been chosen for them. There was also limited value in many of the presentations linked to football. VAR and footballers' pay did not spark sustained and convincing work from most of the candidates who considered these topics. It was common to find that these pieces were amongst those that seemed to inspire little research, instead only providing a platform for loose opinions that could not be sustained for the recommended duration of 5-7 minutes. Such presentations usually called for the support of questions, which can reboot focus and further encourage the development of ideas. It should be noted, however, that questions should not be reserved for only such occasions. Questions should also be offered to the most adept speakers, enabling them to display verbal reasoning skills that are more spontaneous than those that may have been crafted for the body of their presentations.

On this matter, centres who spent time aiding their candidates in the best ways to structure and sustain content often saw the most satisfying results. Such presentations were fuelled by purposeful research in the best classrooms. It was clear to glean those classes who had been taught to navigate the perils and potential of the internet, honing their focus on a select range of sources. This can involve limited, but direct, supervision of candidates and can be as simple as a few minutes to verify the topic and help to filter the research materials. Teacher advice and guidance was as crucial for this aspect of the qualification as any other in November 2021. Indeed, the skills developed in composing the presentation can have dividends when carefully considered writing is assessed in Units 2 and 3. Despite this, some candidates were still left to prepare in relative isolation, with the resulting presentations lacking substance and yielding low marks. The best presentations were usually characterised by interesting facts, colourful cases studies and personal reflection. Teachers will have had a hand in guiding the candidate to the point where they could then independently share their ideas.

It was still a matter of concern when some candidates were allowed to read from densely written notes, composed in full prose. This approach is not compliant with the requirements of the specification, and often adjustments to marks had to be made by moderators. Rewarding attainment beyond Band 3 was not possible for presentations that were read aloud.

Thankfully, there were fewer cases of this infringement and, when it did occur, centres were usually mindful of the limitations such an approach imposed on candidates. Such matters would be much easier to spot if internal moderation became a feature in more centres. Marks were more accurately awarded by those centres who sampled work across groups or who marked in pairs. Some centres were also fortunate enough to work with enlightened senior colleagues who permitted the timetabling of dedicated days for Unit 1 assessment. It was no coincidence that this led to marking that left little to dispute and much to admire.

Centres are thanked for their efforts to compose the sample of work for the November series. Reports to each centre contained tailored recommendations to share across departments. They often contained comments that reflected the dedication of English departments and their students across Wales. These were worth sharing with management teams in centres.

### **Summary of key points**

- As with any other centre-based assessment, internal standardisation must take place to ensure consistency across all teaching groups. This process would also reveal the difficulties and doubts encountered when moderators were presented with audio-only recordings. It would have required a conscious choice to disable cameras. Should this choice be made in the future, centres should offer a rationale for this decision.
- The five-to-seven-minute duration of the presentation is the only time in this assessment when candidates should participate completely individually. To get them to this state of confident independence, teachers should guide and generally advise, just as they would for any other task. A significant number of candidates seemed to have been left to prepare in isolation.
- The most characterful and confident work came from candidates who were rewarded by the interest of their audience. Questions should not be seen as an optional extra in future submissions. They are a spur to thinking and give access to the full mark range.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

November 2021

## UNIT 2: DESCRIPTION, NARRATION AND EXPOSITION

### General Comments

A question-by-question breakdown of the Unit 2 examination is provided below.

For this examination, candidates were provided with five different reading texts. All were based on the theme of school uniform.

As with previous examinations for this specification, there was a range of reading question types and the texts set provided a balance of continuous and non-continuous writing. All texts were selected in response to the chosen theme of school uniform. Question types were varied across the paper to assess the range of skills expected for this specification. These were followed by a proofreading task, and a choice of two extended writing tasks in Section B.

Overall, the question paper was well received with the theme appearing to engage the vast majority of candidates. The texts provided candidates with a wealth of information and opinions in relation to the topic of school uniform and there was clear evidence of engagement with the texts and the questions set. Candidates seemed to enjoy the topic and many were able to use the reading texts and/or their own experiences as a starting point for both discussion and the explanation of ideas and opinions in the writing section.

The majority of candidates worked diligently to engage with this Unit 2 examination. There was plenty of evidence of detailed and enthusiastic responses and the reading texts seemed accessible to most candidates. On the whole, time management did not appear to be problematic and there were many thoughtful and engaging responses, particularly in Section B. A very small minority were unable to engage with all of the materials on offer, but generally examiners reported that candidates were keen to give of their best.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

#### Reading

#### A1. What percentage of teachers believe that wearing a school uniform helps students to 'fit in'?

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Award **one mark** for the correct answer:

The first question of the examination is designed to offer a straightforward introduction to the first text and the selected theme. The expectation is that most candidates will prove successful in their response to this question. Question A1 was a straightforward location question based on Text A, a non-continuous text which was taken from a report into attitudes towards school uniform in the UK.

Most candidates were able to engage with the statistical information presented at the beginning of this text. The answer to the question was '95%' and this was easily located in the opening section of the text.

Most candidates selected the correct percentage and rates of success on this question were high. Where errors occurred, it was often as a result of choosing a different percentage from elsewhere in the text, perhaps disregarding the 'fit in' part of the question.

Overall, this question allowed the vast majority of candidates to engage with the text and locate and retrieve the necessary information.

**A2. Text A refers to 'standardised outfits'. What is meant by the word 'standardised' in this text?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning.*

This word meaning question provided some early challenge to candidates. They were required to interpret the use of the word 'standardised' within the context of the text. Successful answers were able to demonstrate clear understanding that this word meant that outfits would be of the same type or that they were made to look the same. There were many approaches taken when responding to this question, but the best answers were clear and tried to explain by using context and the candidate's own words.

It was clear that some struggled to get to grips with the actual meaning of the word 'standardised'. A number commented on other aspects such as why standardised outfits were introduced, for example, to stop people being judged on their clothing choices; or gave an explanation that did not quite address the meaning, such as suggesting that 'standardised' meant 'basic clothing'. Some candidates also failed to offer sufficient explanation by repeating the root word 'standard' or even 'standardised' from the question as their explanation.

**A3. Which of the following statements is NOT suggested by the text? Tick (✓) that box.**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This question presented candidates with a choice of four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was incorrect. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the untrue (and therefore correct) third statement in the question suggested that wearing a school uniform 'can cause students to be bullied by other students'. Text A actually made the point that 'helping to prevent bullying' was a 'positive effect of a school uniform' and careful reading of this section made it clear that the third statement was incorrect.

It was essential that candidates read both the question and the text carefully and were sure of the information they were asked to focus upon. Overall, this was a straightforward task and success rates were high.

- A4. Text B refers to ‘statutory guidance’. Which of the following definitions best describes the term ‘statutory guidance’? Tick (✓) that box.**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This question presented candidates with a choice of four multiple-choice options and required them to select the definition that best fit the term ‘statutory guidance’ as it appeared in the context of Text B. The correct answer was the fourth statement, ‘Instructions that must be followed in order to comply with the law’. Candidates who read the text carefully were successful in their response to this question. The second paragraph gave a clear steer towards the meaning of ‘statutory guidance’ by stating the meaning of what the term ‘non-statutory’ guidance meant.

Overall, it seems that some candidates found this multiple-choice question reasonably challenging and, although the majority opted for the correct answer, there was still quite a significant number who selected the second distractor, ‘Assistance in finding ways of keeping costs down’.

- A5. Write down three changes that schools in Wales will be expected to make regarding school uniforms.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This was a straightforward question and required candidates to write down three changes that schools in Wales will be expected to make to school uniforms. Examiners were instructed to award a mark for each relevant point up to a total of three and many candidates were able to accumulate maximum marks. Answers that contained sufficient detail to engage with the question were rewarded. Some answers were extremely brief – perhaps quoting just one word and these found it harder to achieve full marks. Where isolated words such as ‘gender-neutral’ or ‘school logos’ were written down candidates will have struggled to achieve – this approach did not enable candidates to show that they had adequately interpreted the meaning or selected their evidence with the intention of making a clear point.

- A6. In the second paragraph, the writer refers to ‘joining the sea of similarly-clad girls’. Explain what she means.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This type of word meaning question can pose a challenge, especially when candidates are asked to interpret a phrase rather than a single word. Question A6 provided a clear test of the ability to understand language and meaning and some candidates may have struggled with the demanding nature of the metaphor. Successful answers were able to engage either specifically or holistically with the meaning of the phrase. To succeed, candidates needed to juggle at least two aspects of the phrase – either focusing on the ‘sea’ metaphor or the sense of ‘joining’, alongside the meaning of ‘similarly clad’.



Those who examined the use of the 'sea' metaphor to explore the fact that a significant number of girls were dressed the same way were rewarded, as were those who focused on the 'joining' aspect of the quote to demonstrate that she was dressed to fit in.

Overall, candidates were benefitted by clarity of thought and a willingness to engage with the writer's language. Those who were vague or tried to repeat the quotation without engaging with it struggled.

**A7. Explain why the writer paid attention to uniform when looking at schools for her own children.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Successful answers to this question were able to demonstrate the ability to focus on the writer's reasons for paying attention to school uniform in later life. It was important that they isolated the information towards the end of the passage which showed what her most recent reasons for paying attention to school uniform were when looking at schools for her own children. Some clarity of thought was needed and careful reading of the text to isolate two clear reasons. Many candidates were able to access the point that the enforcement of uniform rules gives an idea of 'how a school is run'. Other points related to her interest in how rules were implemented, or put into place, and the way that school uniform gives an impression of the school. Separating these details into clear points was perhaps part of the challenge and those who lacked selection or explanatory skills may have found it more difficult to achieve both of the marks that were available for this question.

**A8. How does the writer make Mrs Jones seem like a memorable teacher?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This was the first of the higher tariff questions on the Unit 2 paper and worth up to five marks. Most candidates were able to make some headway in their answers and there was clear engagement with the fact that the writer has lasting memories of Mrs Jones. Better answers were able to examine specific details and discuss how the writer made Mrs Jones seem memorable through these. The very best answers focused in detail on specifics and presented their thoughts with real clarity and commitment in addition to supporting evidence from the text. There were some excellent comments on 'Mrs Jones' eagle eye' and how this heightened the sense of her constant (and memorable) vigilance with regard to uniform. However, some candidates also became a little distracted by this image and struggled to make much progress as they presented some very literal explanations of how Mrs Jones may have looked like an eagle. Some maturity and skill when focusing on language and making inferences was essential for those answers pushing into the top band of marks.

As ever though, those candidates who were prepared to look at a range of specific evidence and offer an answer that was clearly focused on the question were able to make decent progress.

**A9. According to Text D, why were more than 200 Bradford secondary school pupils sent home from school?**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This question was set to provide candidates with a straightforward introduction to a more complicated text. The answer, 'uniform infringements' was contained in the first paragraph and was easy to locate. Success rates were high and many candidates were able to cite 'uniform infringements' as the reason for students being sent home. An example of 'uniform infringements' that was given in the text of students 'wearing trainers or the wrong cut of trousers' was also offered by many candidates in answer to this question. As the nature of this question was designed to be straightforward, and the text did not make it overtly clear that this was an example, candidates who quoted the entire example were also credited.

There were some candidates who chose to focus on 'burning bras' or 'tying ties around their heads'. This was clearly incorrect as an answer to the question and no credit was given in these cases.

Overall, this question allowed the majority of candidates to engage with the text, isolate the pertinent information and answer the question.

**A10. In the paragraph beginning 'And uniform...', the writer describes uniform as a 'distraction'. Explain what she means.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Most candidates were able to make some headway with this question and it was clear that there was some understanding of the relevant details. Explanations that explored the idea that teachers waste time on enforcing uniform regulations, time that would be better spent teaching, were guaranteed one mark. Better answers came from those who were able to interpret the evidence in their explanation, and these answers were able to access both available marks. For example, explanations which went on to consider how the uniform checks were made to seem silly or petty (and this was often done through focusing on the idea of 'quibble' or that 'far too long' is spent) were more likely to achieve both available marks.

There were some incorrect answers and those candidates who chose to focus on how uniform is 'distracting' in an exam were ineligible for credit. The question clearly directed candidates to study the penultimate paragraph and this is where their focus was required. Other incorrect answers came from a small number of candidates who elected to make their answer personal to their own experience and clearly these did not demonstrate the necessary reading skills.

**A11. Compare and contrast what the writers of Text C and Text D say about how school uniform affects school life.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and compare and evaluate the usefulness, relevance and presentation of content.*

This was the question with the highest mark tariff on the reading element of the Unit 2 exam paper. As ever, the comparative element of this question provided robust challenge. Candidates were required to compare Text C and Text D on the paper in relation to the specific focus point of 'how school uniform affects school life'. The attempt rate for this question was very positive and there were very few candidates who did not attempt this question. Those candidates who elected to answer using a table format or bullet points are likely to have been self-limiting. Sometimes this approach is understandably taken if candidates are running out of time, but it is to be discouraged if other alternatives are available. Such approaches tend to mean candidates use brief snippets of information or evidence and fail to make points with the detail or understanding required for marks in the higher Bands.

Candidates who paid close attention to the focus of the question and carefully tracked through both texts for relevant content were able to accumulate marks and make decent progress on this question. Examiners reported fewer examples of answers which try to make very general comparisons of the content and style of the texts being examined, rather than focusing specifically on the focus of the question. This was pleasing to hear and suggests that some of the hard work that is being done in centres in relation to this question type is beginning to take effect. There will always be candidates who do not read the question carefully enough or who misread the question, but happily there seemed to be fewer of them in this series.

Examiners were advised not to be prescriptive in terms of the structure of answers and judge each answer on its own merits. It is worth mentioning though, that whether electing to offer a fully integrated response or deal with the text separately before making comparative points, there was a pleasing number of answers which demonstrated real comparative skill. It was encouraging to see links being made and points of difference established as integral elements of focused and convincing answers to the question.

**A12. In this text the writer describes rebellion against uniform as a 'rite of passage'. Which one of the following statements best describes the term 'rite of passage'? Tick (✓) that box.**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This was the third multiple-choice question on this paper and it presented candidates with a choice of four options. Candidates were required to select the statement which best fit the term 'rite of passage' as it appeared in the context of Text E. The correct answer was the first statement, 'The actions of one person as they move from one stage of life to another'.

Overall, students found this multiple-choice question challenging and the third statement 'The act of protesting against authority' was selected by more students than the correct answer. This question was designed to provide challenge and this certainly proved the case with the third statement distractor perhaps drawing out

those who read the phrase in context and, perhaps due to insufficient understanding or a more literal reading of the text, chose the option which best described the overall content of the paragraph in question.

**A13. What impressions does the writer give of the Headmaster in this extract?**

*This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within texts and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.*

As with the other higher tariff questions on this exam paper, this question was designed to be challenging and as a result it provoked some excellent responses from the highest achievers. However, this question did also allow for the vast majority to make some progress by providing overall and more general impressions of the Headmaster. Many candidates were able to engage with the fact that the Headmaster was strict or obsessive about uniform.

More successful answers were produced by candidates who were really prepared to engage with the text and deliver a range of clear (and perhaps more subtle) impressions about the Headmaster. The best answers were able to support their ideas with a consideration of relevant and focused evidence selection.

Those candidates who struggled to engage with the question, or who confused the characters involved and their respective roles, will have struggled to make much progress. Examiners reported some confusion with regard to who Mr Straitley was and his position relative to that of the Headmaster. There were also a few cases of candidates who misunderstood why the Headmaster does not like to be called 'Headmaster' and any explanations that this made him more likeable and relatable to his students were sadly unhelpful.

**A14. Complete the sentence below by using the past tense of the verb given at the end:**

Holly..... her uniform incorrectly and was given a detention.  
(Use the past tense of **wear**.)

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.*

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out the appropriate word choice. The success rates suggested that the majority of candidates were able to complete this with few problems. Barriers to success came where candidates did not read the instructions properly and completed the sentence with a word of their own choosing, or where candidates were unsure as to the correct use of the past tense of 'wear'. Errors such as 'word' or 'weared' were amongst the most common but, generally speaking, these were rare.

- A15. Which one of the following sentences is grammatically correct? Tick (✓) the box of the correct sentence.**

The way you dress reflects their personality.

The way we dress reflects your personality.

The way you dress reflects our personality.

The way we dress reflects our personality.


*This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.*

This question was presented as multiple-choice with the fourth answer being correct. Success rates were high and pleasingly few candidates were unable to answer this question correctly.

As ever with this type of question, a few candidates elected to ignore the instructions given and this will not have helped them. The question made it clear that only one sentence was required for a correct answer.

- A16. Which one of the following words best fits the meaning of the sentence below? Tick (✓) the box of the correct word.**

\_\_\_\_\_ the boots were too big, Joel was grateful for them as he walked through slush and snow to get to school.

However

Although

Because

Firstly


*This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.*

Again, this question was presented as multiple-choice with the second answer being the correct choice. Most candidates were successful on this question. In some cases, it was clear to see the thought processes that had been taking place, as some candidates had written in (and crossed out, at times) the various options before settling upon the one which they felt fit the sentence best. In most cases, this proved helpful to them and resulted in the correct answer being selected.

- A17. Read the text below which consists of sentences in the wrong order. Show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:**

- 1) "Charlie Ash!" boomed the head teacher. "Are those trainers you're wearing?"
- 2) He was just in the nick of time.
- 3) Charlie quickly tucked in his shirt and moved towards the door sure that he'd got everything right.
- 4) Charlie checked his watch as he arrived at the school gates.
- 5) Then he noticed the head teacher standing just inside the doorway doing the daily uniform check.

- (a) Which sentence should come **second** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.
- (b) Which sentence should come **fifth** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at text level.*

As with the previous questions of this type, to answer successfully candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences to see which sentence fit best into the required location. Again, there was some challenge but the majority of candidates proved able to determine at least one these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. Charlie checked his watch as he arrived at the school gates.
2. He was just in the nick of time.
3. Then he noticed the head teacher standing just inside the doorway doing the daily uniform check.
4. Charlie quickly tucked in his shirt and moved towards the door sure that he'd got everything right.
5. "Charlie Ash!" boomed the head teacher. "Are those trainers you're wearing?"

## **B1. Proofreading**

**In this task, as with previous proofreading tasks, candidates were asked to read a text, circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.**

*This task tested the ability to write accurately.*

For this question, the text was presented as the opening paragraph of a school's uniform policy. Most candidates were able to make some progress with this question and success rates were reasonably high. As ever, there was a mix of error types with errors in spelling, punctuation and grammatical accuracy all available for selection. Although the spelling errors perhaps proved the easiest to locate and correct for most candidates, the misidentification of words that did not contain spelling errors was also the most common way in which candidates failed to gain marks. The words 'professional' and 'environment' were regularly selected and changed despite being accurately written.

It is also important that candidates are reminded that corrections must appear exactly as they would appear in the text – if they introduce further errors (such as capital letters or additional punctuation) those answers are not eligible for credit. Some candidates work extremely hard to copy down the exact section of text and correct the error within a whole phrase or sentence and this can offer clear proof of understanding and accuracy. However, if by doing this they introduce additional errors in the words that are not being corrected they may prevent themselves from being awarded the mark. Please encourage all candidates to double check their answers are exactly as they intend them to appear before moving on to the next question.

## B2. Writing

**For this task, the specification states that ‘one writing task’ is to be chosen from a choice of two that could be either description, narration or exposition’. On this occasion, candidates were asked to choose between:**

- (a) “School uniform is vitally important in all schools.”  
Write an essay explaining your views on this, giving clear reasons and examples.

**Or**

- (b) Describe a time when you had to create a good impression.

*This task assessed the quality of a candidate’s writing skills.*

As with all writing tasks, candidates were free to choose according to their own preferences and strengths and each piece was marked according to the quality of the writing produced.

Task A was an exposition task and, perhaps unusually, this appeared to be the most popular choice of task by quite some margin. Answers to this task were often detailed and effective. Candidates were certainly engaged by the topic and many wrote convincingly, drawing on both their own experiences of the subject and what they had read in the reading section. It was interesting to see that candidates were quite evenly split between being ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ uniform, and many were able to see that the issue was not as clear cut as the view given seemed to suggest.

Whilst many candidates used what they had read in Section A carefully, and as the suggested ‘springboard’ to further discussion, there were perhaps more candidates than anticipated who resorted to copying unselective chunks, or even large sections, from these texts. Clearly, much care needs to be taken when guiding students to what is acceptable. The fact that Text D was written from the perspective of a young person perhaps encouraged more ‘borrowing’ than we might normally experience.

Task B was a description writing task which produced some really enjoyable writing. Examiners reported reading some very entertaining accounts of disastrous job interviews and meeting the parents of girl/boyfriends for the first time. This was certainly a task that could, produce detailed and engaging writing. Happily, and perhaps as a result of so many candidates opting for the exposition option, there were fewer instances of ‘pre-prepared’ pieces that we have had cause to report on in previous Unit 2 examinations.

Overall, with both tasks, there was certainly no shortage of effort in much of the work on display. Examiners were pleased that, in most cases, poor timing did not appear to be a barrier to achievement in B2. There was also plenty of evidence of careful planning and focus on the task set.

The most significant areas for concern in Section B are very similar to those reported on in the past.

Brief or incomplete work tends to be self-penalising and we certainly saw a number of candidates who had barely written half a side of their answer booklet. If examiners are not given sufficient writing to form a judgement, then there is little they can credit, even with the most accurate examples of brief work.

As ever, accuracy will have impeded the progress of many candidates. Written work which is characterised by a high volume of errors, whether in spelling, punctuation or grammar, or as we often see through a combination of all of these, will struggle to progress through the Writing accurately bands of achievement. If these errors affect the clarity or coherence of a piece of writing, or where they are combined with limited organisation skill, the ability to progress through the Communicating and organising bands of achievement will be similarly impaired.

### **Summary of key points**

- For the higher tariff reading questions, those candidates who are willing to engage with a range of specific details in order to answer the question generally achieve well.
- Bullet point or tabled responses should be avoided for all higher tariff reading questions on Unit 2. These types of answers often encourage brevity and candidates generally fail to engage adequately with the evidence or make clear and sustained points.
- In B2, limited accuracy and/or very brief writing continue to be the biggest barriers to success.
- In B2, candidates who copy extensively from the reading resources will struggle to make much progress. The reading texts can successfully provide ideas and a 'springboard' to success, but this will not be achieved through copying.



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

November 2021

## UNIT 3 EXAMINATION

### General Comments

A question-by-question breakdown of the Unit 3 examination is provided below. The theme for this November's GCSE Unit 3 examination was hedgehogs.

For this examination, candidates were provided with five different texts based on the theme of the paper. A range of questions (differing in challenge and mark tariffs) featured across the texts, and this was followed by two Writing tasks. As this was an adapted series, candidates were given the choice of completing one of the two writing tasks. This meant that the total mark for the paper was reduced to 60, rather than 80.

With a range of text and task types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical GCSE English language examination. Prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being tested or the positive achievement of outcomes. The texts provided readers with a wealth of details about hedgehogs and candidates appeared to be genuinely engaged by the topic. Many of the examiners commented on the upbeat and positive contributions made during the Writing section, often a good indicator as to how candidates feel about a paper.

Although the entry numbers were relatively low, we were fortunate enough to assess the full range of abilities with many candidates scoring well on the higher tariff questions where they worked with diligence and commitment. Most carefully considered the most effective use of their time and produced some thoughtful and engaging responses.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

This section will focus on candidate performance across each individual question.

#### Section A

##### A1. What is the name for a baby hedgehog?

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Text A, a poster, was a brief, continuous text which served as a general introduction to the topic. The text included an image and a series of facts presented as bullet point about hedgehogs. This accessible text was deliberately included to allow all candidates to immediately engage with the theme.

The question required candidates to read the first bullet point and to copy down the correct answer 'hoglet'. Candidates did not struggle to locate this detail and success rates were high. Most took the time to carefully copy down the correct spelling and there were few errors.

**A2. On average, how many spines does each hedgehog have?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Like question 1, this was a relatively straightforward question although some care was needed when copying down the correct number. In previous exam series, a number of candidates have added extra numbers when working with figures, in this series, such errors were rare. The correct answer was 5,000 but this could be written using either numbers or words. Candidates did not need to add any qualifying details, but a number wrote 'spines' or 'on average' to accompany their answer.

Please encourage candidates to take care when writing numbers as some were virtually illegible – such responses are difficult to credit.

**A3. European hedgehogs 'hibernate throughout winter.' What is the meaning of the word 'hibernate'?**

*This question tests the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This was the first of the multiple-choice questions. Four possible answers were provided for candidates to select from. As with all multiple-choice questions, credible distractors were included to increase the demand and challenge of the task. There was, however, only one correct answer which a significant majority selected (above 85% of all candidates). As with previous exam series, every care should be taken to present a clearly demarcated final answer. Any corrections should be both clear and legible. No credit was given to candidates who ticked multiple boxes.

The correct answer was the second option 'to remain inactive during the winter', which was the closest definition of the term 'hibernate'.

**A4. Text B shows how to rescue a troubled hedgehog. Put these stages into the order which best shows the steps to take when rescuing a troubled hedgehog. Number the steps below.**

*This question tests the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in sequencing information.*

Text B was taken from a blog and gave advice to readers on how to rescue a hedgehog. Four steps were given in the text, but these were not presented in chronological order. Candidates utilised a range of approaches when tackling sequencing questions. Some try to complete the question at speed by scanning the first word of each sentence and looking for literal clues in the words being used. This approach, in isolation, is unhelpful as some of the context is lost when reading words without considering their wider implications or meaning. Candidates who read the whole text and sequenced the information based on its general meaning undoubtedly helped themselves when completing this question

Candidates were given the first answer in the sequence to help them complete the stages and were then required to sequence the other three stages. A significant number of candidates was able to see that the final option 'get advice' would come after any attempts to secure the hedgehog's safety. 'House' and 'Heat' then required some reasoning skills in order to determine the correct sequence. When reading the description for each of these steps, it is clear that 'Heat' is the most natural step to follow 'Grab' as it mentions the hedgehog being 'cold to the touch'.

Having deduced this logical step, it then makes sense to 'House' (this could not be completed prior to the other two steps as they require the initial handling of the hedgehog).

A range of combinations were offered, but many candidates managed to secure all three marks. As always with sequencing questions, a minority struggled to make their answers clear (either by inputting the same number twice, through untidy number formation or through excessive scribbling out).

**A5. Who will provide emergency treatment for an injured hedgehog?**

*This question tests the ability to use inference and deduction skills.*

One-mark questions can be challenging and often some disentangling of information is required. This question required close reading in order to secure a mark. The correct and only answer to this question was 'a local vet'. However, the 'Get advice' section began with an instruction 'Contact your local RSPCA', those who did not read the rest of the section and simply wrote 'the RSPCA' were marked as incorrect. When reading the rest of this section it is made clear that 'injured hedgehogs' should be taken to a local vet. While most incorrect answers mentioned the RSPCA, a few others gave their own answers (not based on the resource materials). It is imperative that all answers are rooted in the text to ensure marks can be awarded.

**A6. What equipment did the writer attach to the hedgehogs to monitor their movements?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Question 6 was the first question on Text C, a continuous text exploring one man's experiences with hedgehogs. The question carried a one-mark tariff, but close reading was required to arrive at the correct answer. The process of attaching equipment to a hedgehog's spines is called 'radio tagging' (as the text explains, this is the process that monitors a hedgehog's movements). The equipment that is attached to the hedgehog's spines is a 'miniature transmitter'. To successfully answer this question, candidates were required to explore the first paragraph of the text and to determine the correct answer. While some candidates used the 'radio transmitters' to explain the process of attaching the 'miniature transmitters' to a hedgehog, it was a requirement that any correct answer contained the answer 'miniature transmitters.' Like question 5, close reading and deduction skills were essential for success.

**A7. Explain why hedgehogs are a 'gardener's best friend'.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Candidates are familiar with word meaning questions and most recognise that it is sensible to stand back from the text and/or phrases and to consider the holistic meaning of the information. To answer this question, candidates had to understand the meaning of the phrase, 'gardener's best friend' but they also had to apply the context of the passage and explore the reasons why a hedgehog might be given this title.

Some text use to explain that hedgehogs eat pests was permitted. However, to successfully answer the question, candidates were required to show clarity of thought and to engage with the fact that gardeners like hedgehogs due to the fact that hedgehogs consume the garden pests/unwanted invertebrates and that this is greatly appreciated by a gardener whose crops will not be eaten by the aforementioned pests.

While many candidates were able to present an answer that demonstrated understanding of the concept, a minority relied too heavily on copying sentences/phrases from the text without showcasing their comprehension skills.

- A8. In the third paragraph, the writer tells us that the hedgehogs' natural habitat has been 'obliterated'. Select the definition from the list below that best describes the meaning of 'obliterated'.**

This question, also based on Text C, was the second multiple choice question of the paper. Like question 3, the question gave the candidates only one word to explore, 'obliterated' and candidates were required to select the most suitable explanation of this word. Five possible explanations were offered, and candidates were credited for correctly selecting the third option, 'Their numbers are being wiped out'. Success rates were just over 85% for this question so most were able to successfully eliminate the credible distractors. Very few candidates chose to tick multiple boxes for this question, which was reassuring to see.

- A9. How does the writer try to persuade us that hedgehogs should be protected?**

*This question tests the ability to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.*

These questions are one of the more challenging reading questions and require candidates to demonstrate close reading and analytical skills. With a wealth of personal insights and facts, Text C was the natural choice for this type of question, giving candidates the opportunity to select a range of details and to consider the impact of the text and the writer's methods.

Analysing this type of question itself requires a considered focus so that candidates are able to see exactly what is required in an answer. It was clear from some of the exam papers that a number of candidates annotated the task, which demonstrated how they were actively exploring what was required. Spending a few moments to consider the task is also essential so its focus can be scrutinised, and candidates can then present an answer which is both relevant and on task. Being able to access the full range of marks hinges on this close reading. While many lose focus when tackling this type of question, it was reassuring to note that a significant number worked hard to remain on task. Those who were less successful often answered a generic 'how does the writer try to persuade' question without the specific focus required and others went off on a tangent, focusing more on the writer's methods than what was said. A small minority sought to answer a question about why they may choose to 'read on' (a common misreading) while others focused on the fact that hedgehogs are 'loved'. Although these may seem like subtle lapses in focus, they can cause a candidate to be classified as 'struggling to engage' as they often fail to answer the question when becoming side-tracked by their own agenda or misreadings. Brief answers were not uncommon. Appropriate details and range are essential to those who wish to accumulate marks for this type of question.

The key messages regarding this question remain the same across all exam series. 'How' can be answered in different ways but focus on the question is essential. This task does not intend to encourage a showcasing of every technical device (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question). Instead, the question aims to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer's arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader (any relevant techniques used can be mentioned and explored but should not be commented on at the expense of focusing on the question). Many who perform well mainly concentrate on the content of the passage. Those who work chronologically often produce more coherent and methodical responses.

Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material, but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information. The very best respond to language and consider the ways in which the writer's argument develops.

This question required candidates to consider how the writer 'tries to persuade us that hedgehogs should be protected.' The mark scheme for the question was full of positive language and reasons as to why hedgehogs deserve our help, both because they are valuable animals in terms of how they support our eco-system and also because they offer other positives such as mental health benefits. A number of candidates picked up on the undertones of doom with the negative language such as 'obliterated' and the shocking statistical evidence supporting the fact that these animals face a bleak future. Many worked through the passage chronologically picking out a range of supporting words and phrases and were credited for doing so. Some chose to paraphrase the text rather than quote information and were often less successful as they strayed into narration rather than analysis).

**A10. Summarise what you can do to limit the chances of harming a hedgehog on Bonfire Night.**

*This question tests the ability to summarise information.*

Text D was taken from a newspaper article and gave information about how to protect hedgehogs on Bonfire Night. The article outlined the dangers caused by bonfire night but also alerted the reader to a number of steps that can be taken to minimise the risk to hedgehogs.

It is obvious that a significant amount of work has been done in school to develop summary skills since the beginning of this specification. During this series, we saw many candidates working through Text D and presenting salient points or a summarised overview. Far fewer candidates tried to quote the information and although there was still an issue with copying, this was less common than in the previous series. Please note that there is no preferred approach for candidates when completing this task (they can write their answer in bullet points or a paragraph) but the examining team broadly felt that those who adopted the bullet point approach performed best and were actually able to produce the most focused answers.

Seven possible areas were included in the mark scheme for candidates to comment on. The eagle-eyed teachers out there will note that we did not include the usual instruction 'In your own words' for this summary task and this was due to the fact that so much of the language (hedgehogs, spade, fork, bonfire, cow, milk etc.) would be difficult to express using alternative language. Success was accounted for using a best fit judgement as to how much information was actually summarised.

Many candidates commented on the first bullet point and were able to see that the bonfire had to be built 'on the day' that it would be lit. To successfully achieve the second bullet, there had to be a recognition that this step had to be completed only when building a bonfire in advance. Bullet three referred to 'checking' and this could be done from a number of angles, it was probably the second most commonly awarded point. The final four bullets appeared in many answers (especially those who scored 4-5 marks and ranged across the whole text). A number did not move beyond the first couple of bullets largely because they either over-wrote about these or they did not read the whole text.

**A11. Write down one reason why you might need to call The British Hedgehog Preservation Society.**

*This question tests the ability to use inference and deduction skills.*

This one-mark question required one clear reason in order to receive credit. As can be seen from the mark scheme, a range of answers could be accepted in response to this question. While some chose to include two or three reasons, others chose to reduce the information they included to the point where it rendered their answer meaningless. Please encourage students to read answers to ensure they make sense. Thankfully, such instances were relatively infrequent, and the majority chose sensible, valid reasons to answer the question. One mark was awarded for any one of the potential six correct answers.

**A12. Peter Smith is a 'natural history crusader'. Which of the following definitions best explains the meaning of the word 'crusader'?**

*This question tests the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

Text E, was taken from an article explaining why hedgehogs are struggling to survive. The text painted a stark picture of the future for hedgehogs and cited a number of reasons for the decline in hedgehog numbers.

This, the last of the multiple-choice questions, was a challenging one. Candidates were given the phrase, 'natural history crusader' and were asked to match the word crusader to its closest definition. Four possible options were given with the most credible distractor being 'someone who is interested in history and the natural world'. The word 'history' clearly distracted those who may have struggled to read in context or to process the meaning as this was the second most common answer. It is worth reminding candidates of the importance of reading each question in its entirety at least twice before answering. The correct answer 'someone with strong beliefs who is determined to change something' was the most popular answer (and the closest definition of the word 'crusader') with a success rate of over 55%.

**A13. Where do hedgehogs build their nests?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

The answer to this question was 'hedges' and although the question may appear to be straightforward, a number of candidates were side-tracked by the wealth of information contained within the text and therefore mentioned a number of non-specific places. Some candidates clearly based their answers to this question on their own prior knowledge, rather than reading the text and were not rewarded for doing so. The third paragraph contained the correct answer, but close reading was required especially given the fact that the 'nesting' element from the question came after the answer, 'hedges'.

**A14. Give two reasons why it can be difficult for hedgehogs to get food.**

*This question tests the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This question type has featured in various different guises across Unit 2 and Unit 3 since the beginning of the specification (Unit 2 June 2017, Unit 3 November 2019 and November 2020, for example) where two details are requested. Sometimes, as per the examples cited previously, only one mark is awarded for two correct answers. In this paper, however, two correct answers were rewarded with two marks. The changeability of this question type is to ensure that papers are not predictable. There were three possible correct answers for candidates to choose from. While most managed to score one mark, care and precision were needed to achieve the full two marks. For example, some spent the whole answer focusing on the same idea (rather than giving two reasons) while others did not include sufficient information to convincingly answer the question (producing vague or brief answers without a clear reason). Some candidates simply wrote 'badgers' in reference to the fact that it is difficult for hedgehogs to get food because they are 'competing with badgers who have the same diet', and this was not enough.

**A15. Synthesise the information in Text D and Text E to show the dangers faced by hedgehogs.**

*This question tests the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text, interpret themes, meaning and ideas in a text.*

*This question tested the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text.*

As per last year's Report, synthesis was, on the whole, completed competently with both focus and precision. The synthesis task often concerns teachers in terms of the 'right' approach for their candidates to take in responding to it, however, the examining team expressed no concerns about this question, or the approaches taken. Candidates, on the whole, understood what to do and produced clear responses with a range of appropriate details.

In this task, there were plenty of appropriate details to select from and most candidates did not struggle to include some range of details. Some tried to conflate one or two points but were less successful if they omitted key details. As with all other questions, unselective copying is not acceptable, and this approach is reflected in the marks awarded. The main concern for examiners regarding synthesis was an over-reliance on copying.

A small minority chose to copy down several paragraphs from each text, an approach which is not acceptable. Bullet point responses should also be avoided in a synthesis response as this approach does not demonstrate the ability to collate effectively as required for top Band marks. The nature of synthesis is to draw from different sources to make a new text. Those who only take information from one source will find that they are only able to access the criteria for the lower Bands.

Synthesis requires candidates to draw on a range of details gleaned from the texts indicated and to produce a new document. The ability to produce a coherent response, to disentangle information and to remain on task is essential. There are two main approaches that candidates tend to adopt when approaching a synthesis – some like to deal with each text separately and others tend to integrate details from both sources. There is no preferred style, and both are assessed equally as long as candidates do not stray into comparing the information. During this series, the preferred approach was to specify from which text the information was taken. This is not a requirement but it would appear that many prefer the approach - perhaps it affords clarity of thought as it allows them to organise or compartmentalise their ideas.

As with all examination questions, access to the OER materials will provide clear exemplars for each task. These aim to aid teachers in their understanding of what constitutes a specific mark in each Band.

## Section B

November 2021 was an adapted series. Rather than completing both B1 and B2, candidates were given the choice of completing only **one** of the two writing tasks. Candidates are used to choosing writing (this is something that they are familiar with on Unit 2), and I am not aware of any candidates who completed both tasks or struggled to make a selection. The two tasks were both transactional in nature with B1 being more argumentation in scope and B2 requiring a persuasion element. As with all writing tasks, there was no preference between the two tasks and each individual candidate was marked according to the quality of their work.

When approaching the writing task, it is essential that candidates establish the audience and the content of their writing. For many, the planning stage is vital, allowing them to pause and reflect on the topic and then to amass some ideas. A minority did not plan, and, in most cases, this was evident in their work (which lacked direction, cohesion and development). Some candidates would benefit from noting down a few ideas before writing and to give some consideration to the sequence of these. The type of plan is important too, all too often the examining team see plans which list a range of techniques and devices but have no sense of content. Arguably, the latter of these is more important as without content and sequence, writing can often lose impetus and focus.

Some candidates made excellent use of the Resource Materials. Quotes were included in some answers and were used skilfully to support an argument or to substantiate a point, which was a sensible approach. However, resources should be used sparingly as examiners are best able to make performance judgements based on the candidate's own work.



Technical accuracy remains the major concern when it comes to writing. Comma splicing was rife in many essays and a significant number produced entire paragraphs with only one full stop at the end. A number of candidates did not use paragraphs to organise their writing and this often caused lapses in fluency. Spelling, as ever, remains a concern. It is understandable that candidates make errors in their work, but when these are copied errors using vocabulary from the exam, it does not impress. For example, a number of candidates were unable to correctly spell 'hedgehogs' despite being given it in the exam. Please encourage candidates to use exam texts to eradicate some of these errors.

The following section will outline some of the observations about each task.

**B1. 'We have enough problems in the world without worrying about animals.' Write an article for the school or college magazine based on the statement above. Write an article giving your views.**

B1 required candidates to produce an argumentation article based on a controversial quotation, 'We have enough problems in the world without worrying about animals.' Of the two tasks, this one was slightly more popular with many candidates loosely focusing on hedgehogs to support their opinions.

While more candidates sought to disagree with the statement and worked to extol the virtues of animals, a significant number of candidates chose to agree with the statement often arguing that we have enough problems in the world (covid, pollution, global warming etc). It is always pleasing to see candidates thinking independently and illustrating the depth of their concerns in a piece of writing. Some excellent work was seen in this area with marks across all Band areas being produced. Less pleasing were the candidates who chose to copy unselectively from the texts.

A significant number choose to do this during every exam series and their marks are limited because of this. While it is acceptable to include one or two details or a handful of quotations from the source materials, wholesale copying is to be avoided at all costs. Some candidates actually introduced new errors into the copied work, which was unhelpful. Please remind candidates that examiners are very familiar with the source materials and do recognise them when they are copied.

**B2. You would like to raise some money for an animal charity. Write a talk for your classmates persuading them to donate to your chosen charity.**

Although this task was slightly less popular than the other, we were fortunate to see some exemplary writing in response to the task. For this task, candidates were asked to write a talk for their classmates. There was a general confidence about the topic and audience and many candidates wrote in detail on this task. Only a few missed the instruction to write about an animal charity.

Those who chose this title often seemed to be genuinely passionate about animals and their welfare. Of course, a number chose to write about hedgehogs, but a significant number of other animals were mentioned. Orangutans, whales, dogs and cats were mentioned alongside a number of other animals with some convincing underpinning knowledge. Those who could share some facts and details often produced more convincing writing. At the lower end of the ability spectrum, a number included anecdotes about their own pets, and these were enjoyable to read. Some of the more able candidates explored animal rights and made firm cases about raising money due to mistreatment and global survival.

As with the previous task, copying was an issue for some who decided to write down large sections from the text – an approach to be avoided. A couple of candidates produced a script with stage directions in response to the task and this approach is not recommended. Finally, please remind students to check the format of the task. A few candidates produced letters and articles in response to this task and ultimately were less effective in their tone and appeal.

Overall, we saw some engaging writing, and across the ability range, examiners commented that these were enjoyable and interesting to mark.

### **Summary of key points**

Some thoughtful responses were produced in response to A9. However, too many candidates lost marks because they struggled to focus on the question and produced generic responses.

It was pleasing to note an increased number of candidates using bullet points for the summary question. Although this is not a requirement, many candidates find themselves producing more pertinent and brief summaries (when using bullet points) compared to those who produce detailed paragraphs in full sentences.

Bullet points should only be used for a synthesis response if a candidate is running out of time. Bullet point responses for this question type often curtail the level of detail included and candidates adopting this approach often struggle to produce well-collated responses using bullet points.

It was pleasing to note that the majority produced clear, unambiguous responses when completing multiple choice questions.

Many candidates would benefit from being taught how to incorporate textual details into their writing responses. Far too many copied entire sentences and paragraphs, thus weakening the quality of their writing



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