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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
GCSE  
SUMMER 2023**

## Introduction

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

This report offers an overall summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It goes on to look in detail at each question/section of each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.<sup>i</sup>

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

## Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive annual programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	<a href="https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/">https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/</a>
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 6 months after the examination.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a> 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 overall 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: <a href="#">Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)</a>

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a>
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.	<a href="https://resources.wjec.co.uk/">https://resources.wjec.co.uk/</a>
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.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a> 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 invaluable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	<a href="#">Become an Examiner   WJEC</a>

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## Subject Officer's Executive Summary

The Summer 2023 exams series mirrored the Autumn 2022 exam series in terms of subject adaptations no longer applying and Advance Information being provided to teachers and learners.

The total number of candidates aged 16 increased from 30,273 in Summer 2022 to 31,421 in Summer 2023.

For Unit 1, the mean mark increased when compared to both the Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022 exam series.

For Unit 2, the mean mark increased when compared to both the Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022 exam series. The most accessible questions were A1, A2, A5 A8a, A12, A14, A15 and A16. The attempt rate was very high across all questions, whereas the lowest attempt rates were 92.1% on A13 95.5% on B2 being.

For Unit 3, the mean mark increased when compared to both the Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022 exam series. The most accessible questions were A1, A2, A3 A4, A5, A6, and A11. The attempt rate was very high across most Section A questions, whereas the lowest attempt rates were 93.2% on A12 and 84.6% on A13. In Section B, the attempt rates were 93.1% on B1 and 87.4% on B2. The mark distribution shows few candidates are accessing more than 70 marks (max mark 80).

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Unit 1 task setting	<a href="http://www.wjec.co.uk">GCSE English Language (wjec.co.uk)</a> <a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">WJEC (wjecservices.co.uk)</a>	SAMs, Additional SAMs, past stimulus materials, Guidance for Teaching
Units 1, 2 and 3	<a href="https://d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net/el21-22_4-1">HTTPS://D3KP6TPHCRVM0S.CLOUDFRONT.NET/EL21-22_4-1</a>	GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature bridging unit
Units 1, 2 and 3	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">WJEC (wjecservices.co.uk)</a>	CPD standardisation material

## **UNIT 1: ORACY**

### **Overview of the Unit**

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessments for Summer 2023 was to provide an opportunity for every candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language. Each task allowed for the construction of considered ideas, while leaving enough room for flexible thinking and verbal reasoning. Essentially, they gave candidates a voice. In centres where due preparation time was afforded, individuality and independence were given the chance to flourish.

### **Tasks**

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

The Summer 2023 exam series saw the re-introduction of Task 2: Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) to the assessment on a large scale, after the smaller entry in the Autumn 2022 exam series. This clearly meant that centres had to work very hard to capture and submit performances before the 24 March deadline. The vast majority accomplished this, for which moderators were very grateful. As in November, the tenacity shown by centres in this area showed a commitment to giving candidates every opportunity to complete both tasks, rather than merely recording an absence for one of them. Whatever the circumstances, centres who maintained clear lines of communication with WJEC were much appreciated.

It was, again, heartening to get the sense that many centres had used their previous reports as the foundation for assessment. Where concerns had been raised regarding such matters as the use of audio-only recordings and detailed notes, many had sought to address these matters. There was, however, a rather dispiriting drift back towards over-reliance on prepared materials for the presentations, and a tendency to over-fill groups beyond the recommended three candidates for the discussion. This was often not the case across all teaching groups in a centre and it pointed to the need for more robust internal moderation, so that good practice can be seen by all involved within the assessment.

Using candidate numbers instead of candidate names, in the interest of confidentiality, means that the centre reports will continue to require a little decoding in future. Centres should see the investment of extra time needed, in order to cross reference names and numbers, as a key to identifying the approaches adopted by individual teachers within centres. Where adjustments to marks were required, it was often isolated to single teaching groups. Supporting those assessors who have yet to secure the standard for Unit 1: Oracy should be a key development goal in some centres.

### **Task marking**

#### **Comments on approaches to internal marking**

The Individual Researched Presentations saw further progress in the way that centres are encouraging a pinpointing of topics, rather than a broad consideration of a WJEC theme. The presentations provided a snapshot of the concerns and interests of young people in Wales, with such engaging topics as 'sportswashing', gender equality, student debt, and the status of politicians amongst the highlights. Less engaging were instances where whole teaching groups had been invited to consider such matters as social media. This type of approach often led to a duplication of ideas and listener fatigue, whereby questions were often omitted because of over-familiarity had numbed interest.

There was pleasing evidence of the full mark range being used. While some were mindful of the fact, there was still a tendency to over-reward candidates who were too reliant on scripted material, although it was less common to find PowerPoints being read from. Centres are again reminded that, for the presentation to be deemed effective (Band 3) or better, candidates must demonstrate their verbal reasoning skills with a relatively high degree of independence. Notes must be there only to initiate ideas and/ or support them if they stumble. Scripts are not permitted and, if notes are not submitted, they will be requested by the moderator in the first instance. Beyond that, the matter is referred to WJEC for further investigation.

Of the three options provided for the Group Discussion, space tourism and fast fashion again proved to be the most popular. Where rewilding featured, it was usually considered by more able candidates and thoughts were often nuanced enough to recognise the complexities of the topic. Indeed, none of the topics offer simple solutions, and it was both encouraging and realistic to find many groups agreeing to disagree by the end of the discussions. Some, however, seemed to pursue the notion that there must either be common ground or a 'winner' in the discussion. This often led to over-long pieces as candidates sought to find the definitive argument.

The most impressive responses came from candidates who had been given opportunity to prepare for the discussion. By the time it came to the recording, they were ready to share thoughts without having to rely on overly prepared materials. It was always particularly pleasing to hear a range of ideas that were drawn from sources other than the stimulus material provided by WJEC. The latter provides a foundation for candidates, and it should be deemed a weakness if those ideas are merely read aloud or rephrased without any development. Research is a key element of this task and the topics have been chosen with preparation in mind. Even the most minimalist approach to directing candidates to websites and printed resources would reveal a rich seam of fresh ideas with which they can animate discussions.

Key points to consider ahead of the next Unit 1 sample submission.

- These tasks should be subject to preparation and given prior thought, in much the same way as candidates are prepared for external assessment. While the IRPs are usually given due attention, there was a sense that the Group Discussions had rather taken some candidates by surprise. It is known that some centres use past WJEC resources to undertake 'mock' discussions and presentations, often building on oracy work completed as part of Key Stage 3 programmes of study.
- The simple checklist below provides a useful reminder to centres of what is required when uploading samples:
  - audio-visual recordings of each task
  - candidates' notes, as used in each assessment
  - a signed Record Sheet for each candidate, containing tailored comments that give a clear sense of how marks have been awarded.

Those centres that have not adopted this would do well to consider it in all its simplicity. Those that have should recognise the moderators' appreciation, while being careful not to go to the opposite extreme when composing the commentaries.

This should not be an overly complex and time-consuming exercise for departments. A few sentences should suffice, exemplifying instances where elements of the band to be awarded have been revealed in the performances.

- As in all matters of capturing recordings, the audio-visual format removes any doubt about a candidates' performance. With this in mind, many centres continued to move away from audio-only. Sometimes this was only for the discussion, which was a step in the right direction; however, it still led to some presentations that often raised doubt on a candidate's over-reliance on notes. Centres should continue to make progress towards allowing moderators, both internal and external, to share the same experience of the performance as the original assessor.

As ever, if centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these key points, they should contact the Subject Officer prior to the submission of samples. Contact with a moderator, giving some contextual details, can also be made via an attachment uploaded with the sample. This is always very welcome and remains one of the few points of contact for establishing a productive working relationship between centres and moderators.

The moderating team remains very appreciative of the efforts made by all involved in preparing, capturing, delivering, and assessing Unit 1 assessments at their centres.

# GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### UNIT 2: DESCRIPTION, NARRATION AND EXPOSITION

#### Overview of the Unit

This summer's exam was based on the topic of music. The topic was well-received with most candidates appearing to engage with the theme on a personal level. Five texts were presented in the Reading section. A range of text types were on offer, including continuous and non-continuous writing, which allowed for varied levels of challenge and response.

#### Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were required to compare (A9) and evaluate and interpret content (A13) and edit texts (A14-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 page 12 of the specification document which can be found at: [WJEC GCSE English Language Specification](#)

#### Overview of general performance and comparison to previous series

There was evidence of detailed and enthusiastic responses to the reading materials with most candidates working diligently and managing their time well. Texts and questions appeared to be accessible, to varying degrees, and there appeared to be relatively few who did not attempt to engage with the examination as whole.

The examination appeared to offer similar routes to achievement as occurred in previous series. The mix of question types and varied levels of difficulty were similar to previous Unit 2 examination papers. The relatively early appearance of the comparison question (Question A9), which focused on Text B and Text C may have increased the candidates' opportunity to produce more detailed answers to this question. When this question has appeared towards the end of the reading section in previous exam series some candidates have appeared to encounter timing difficulties and not completed as full an answer as they might otherwise have done. Whilst this may have led to the expectation of some candidates having reduced time to complete the final high tariff reading question (A13), this seemed to be less of a problem in terms of timing, perhaps as a result of Text E being relatively condensed.

Candidates faced a choice between a description or an exposition task in the Writing section. Although we have no way of determining which task was more widely chosen, examiners seemed to think the description task enjoyed more popularity amongst candidates this series. This differed from our perceptions of the last time the choice was between a description and exposition task (Summer 2022) when it was felt that the majority of candidates favoured the exposition task. This may have been as a result of the relatively open nature of the description task.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Section A Reading

#### Text A

This text was taken from a report which discussed the economic growth of the UK music industry. The text took the form of a factsheet which provided information on areas of growth in the UK music industry. It combined continuous and non-continuous text and was intended to provide a relatively straightforward introduction to the topic.

#### Question A1

The first question of the examination was designed to offer a clear introduction to Text A and the selected theme. This was a straightforward question, and the answer was easily located in two different places. It could be found in the opening sentence of the text or again in the first of the red-bordered text boxes. The majority of candidates did not struggle to locate the correct information and were able to access the marks. Those who did not obtain marks most often did not include sufficient evidence to answer the question. A number of candidates omitted the pounds and/or billion element of the evidence and their answers were therefore incorrect. Less often candidates were incorrect as a result of copying down one of the other figures from the text. Candidates must ensure that they are precise with their number formation – at times it was difficult to be sure what number had been copied down.

#### Question A2

This question required candidates to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the phrase 'all sectors contributed significantly'. The question proved reasonably straightforward, and the vast majority of candidates chose the correct answer (which was the first choice 'all areas played an important part'). Credible distractors were included, so it was essential that candidates read the text and question carefully and made sensible use of the context of the phrase. Whilst, all distractors were selected by a very few candidates, the third one proved the most popular of the alternatives.

#### Question A3

This question was worth two marks. Candidates were required to use evidence from the text to explain one way in which the UK music industry made a greater contribution to the 2019 economy than in 2018. One mark was available for a correct evidence selection and a second mark was available for an explanation which was clearly linked to the chosen evidence. Careful selection and interpretation were required to achieve both marks.

The majority of candidates were able to select at least one piece of relevant evidence and could make some headway with this question. Fewer were able to adequately explain their evidence choice which will have limited the extent of their progress. Some candidates used the words of the text entirely within their answer and whilst this may have enabled them to achieve the 'evidence' mark this did not demonstrate the understanding required to earn the mark for explanation. It was essential that the candidate demonstrate the ability to move beyond the words of the text in order to gain credit for explanation skills.

## **Text B**

This text was adapted from an article written for BBC's *Bring the Noise* about the importance of music. It was clear from the detail of their answers in relation to this text that candidates had engaged with this text with enthusiasm.

### **Question A4**

This question required candidates to provide one way in which music can 'bring people together'. There were four possible responses, and the majority of candidates did not struggle to locate an appropriate answer. The accuracy of their response often hinged upon the specificity of their answer. It was imperative that they found a 'way' in which music brings people together – for example, 'by playing instruments together' or because they have a 'shared interest in a particular style of music'. Candidates who struggled to progress here were often too vague in the response offered and did not sufficiently answer the question. For example, those who wrote only that 'music helps to connect people' did not provide a 'way' in which it does so.

### **Question A5**

This question required candidates to choose from five multiple-choice options and to isolate the incorrect statement. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the third statement, which suggested that 'music can add to people's social isolation', was untrue. The text clearly stated that music 'can relieve loneliness and social isolation'. The task proved straightforward for the vast majority and success rates were high. It was essential that candidates read both question and text carefully in order to be sure of what they were looking for. A small number of candidates made more than one choice in relation to this question, ticking two or more of the boxes. These answers were not eligible for credit.

### **Question A6**

This question required candidates to explain in their own words two ways in which music can 'improve confidence'. As with question A3, this lower tariff question was designed to introduce more difficulty. There were three areas which candidates could potentially have covered to access marks – they could have looked at the gaining of skills and 'resilience'; the improvement and unity that comes through teamwork; or the potential to feel a sense of 'pride' in what can be accomplished. Whilst most candidates were able to make some progress there was a minority who struggled. It was essential that candidates engaged with the section of text which related to the idea in the question – they needed to locate the paragraph with the subheading 'music can improve confidence'. Some candidates did not do this and instead elected to answer the question based on their own knowledge and experiences. Whilst there may have been some accuracy to their suggestions, they were not based on their reading of the text which is what was being tested. Elsewhere candidates may also have struggled if they copied information directly from the text without trying to put it into their own words. No marks were awarded to candidates who copied directly from the text.

## **Text C**

This text was adapted from online guidance provided by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID). It contained information on how loud music can damage hearing and how people can listen to music safely.

### Question A7

This was a location question which was intended to provide a relatively straightforward route into a more challenging text. Candidates were directed to the first paragraph and asked for the name of the term which describes 'ringing or buzzing in your ears'. The answer was 'tinnitus' and this was located in the second line of the paragraph. Many candidates were able to locate this and accurately transfer the information to their examination paper. There was a sizeable minority however who copied down too much information and rendered their answers incorrect. Those who wrote 'permanent hearing loss and tinnitus' had not read the question or text with sufficient care and this answer was not credit-worthy.

### Question A8

This question was split into two separate parts. Candidates were asked to write down one tip given in Text C to show how to 'protect your ears' when 'listening to music through headphones' (A8a) and one tip for when 'out at gigs, clubs and festivals' (A8b). Both parts of this question were straightforward and there were few barriers to success.

Occasionally, candidates wrote their answers in the wrong answer space but there were few who did not recognise this and offered amendments through the form of arrows or clear textual support to suggest that they were aware of what they had done. Where candidates correctly demonstrated that they knew where the answer should have been written they were awarded the mark(s).

### Question A9

This question asked candidates to compare what Text B and Text C say about the 'impact music can have on a person'. A clear focus was set which enabled many candidates to engage with both texts in a specific way. Text B provided a wealth of details which the majority of candidates were able to access whilst Text C may have required a little more unpicking in relation to the range of points which could be made. The most successful candidates were able to discuss a range of relevant details in relation to both texts whilst making direct comparisons and contrasts. Examiners reported seeing some excellent answers to this question. Candidates who looked at the texts separately, without making any attempt to offer a comparative point, will have struggled to demonstrate the skills required for achievement in the higher marking bands.

Last summer, the comparison question featured on Unit 3 and the Principal Examiner Report sought to discourage certain approaches. It is worth reiterating some of the styles of answer to avoid again here:

- bullet points are unhelpful in structuring an answer to this question – they rarely enable a candidate to demonstrate skills of comparison
- grid/table approaches are unhelpful – lining up points side by side does not offer a comparison and restricts the candidate's ability to engage with the question
- unselective copying is unhelpful – a candidate's knowledge and understanding can only be demonstrated by the way in which they engage with the evidence.

The appearance of the comparison question towards the middle of the paper did provoke a couple of further observations. Many candidates seemed to write considerably more in response to this question than we have seen in papers where the comparison question is set at the end of the Reading section.

This was interesting, especially given that both Text B and Text C were reasonably lengthy texts which will have required careful reading. It seems clear that allowing sufficient time to answer the comparison question, no matter where it appears on the paper, is a desirable examination skill. The other observation in relation to the positioning of this question is that there appeared to be more candidates who tried to answer using a wrong text and/or who mislabelled the text they were referring to. For example, there was a small but noticeable minority of candidates who attempted to answer this question using Text C and Text D. Whilst they may have been able to make some progress with their work on Text C, the extent of their possible attainment will have been restricted.

### **Text D**

This text was adapted from an infographic that showed why music can be beneficial for the brain.

### **Question A10**

This was a straightforward location question that required two pieces of information. Candidates were asked to write down ‘two ways’ in which music with a ‘strong beat’ can ‘stimulate brainwaves’. There were few barriers to success and candidates generally achieved well. It was necessary to have sufficient information to answer the question, those who did not make their answer specific to either ‘slow beats’ and/or ‘fast beats’ will not have made progress. To be awarded both available marks candidates were required to make a point about both ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ beats.

### **Question A11**

This question presented candidates with four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was correct. Credible distractors were included, so it was essential that candidates read all elements of the text and question carefully and made sensible use of the context of the phrase. The vast majority of candidates correctly identified the fourth answer ‘something that diverts someone’s attention’. All distractors were selected by the candidates, although the third one (‘something that is positive’) proved the most popular of the alternatives.

### **Text E**

This text was adapted from Robbie Robertson’s autobiography *Testimony* which detailed some of his experiences in the music industry. The extract used contained more challenging writing although it was of moderate length.

### **Question A12**

This was a straightforward location question, designed to ease candidates into a text that was rich in content. Candidates needed to identify the age of the narrator when he first saw *Ronnie and the Hawks* perform. The correct answer, that he was aged fifteen (15) was located at the beginning of the second sentence and there were very few candidates who did not attempt this question or obtain a mark.

### **Question A13**

This was the second (and final) higher tariff reading question on the examination paper. Most candidates gave of their best in response to this question and it was clear that many had timed the exam successfully up to this point.

This question was designed to encourage candidates to engage with and explore the rich language of the text. For the most part, candidates were focused and willing to explore evidence in detail. The highest achievers had plenty of opportunities to demonstrate the rigorous and perceptive analysis of language which this question seeks to illicit, and examiners were delighted to witness some of the thorough, focused and detailed answers which were submitted. Most candidates were able to make some headway through appropriate evidence selection and the demonstration of understanding.

Focus on the question was clearly essential and this may have been one of the few areas where candidates went awry. The question clearly asked for candidates to focus on 'when *Ronnie and the Hawks* appear on stage' and some candidates spent considerable time focusing on the part of the text which described the time before they took to the stage. Most recovered from this though and continued to make relevant points and some progress.

### **Editing Section - Questions A14-A17**

This section did not present anything unexpected. All of the question types had been seen across past examination series and there was nothing out of the ordinary to report. Question A14 asked candidates to provide the past tense of 'buy' and as expected, examiners reported the most common alternatives to the correct answer ('bought') were 'brought' and 'bayed'. There were also some attempts that may have been misspellings of 'bought' that could not be credited – such as 'bute', 'bout', 'but'.

### **Section B Writing**

#### **Question B1**

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this proofreading question. The text was presented as a paragraph written about the rental of musical instruments. There was little to separate which errors were identified and corrected most frequently, although 'competitive' was probably the error most often identified but not accurately corrected. Two other words that seemed to be most regularly identified as errors (incorrectly) were 'hire' and 'monthly'.

As ever, credit can only be given to corrections which do not make further errors. These corrections must appear exactly as they would appear in the text being corrected. For example, no additional capital letters or punctuation should be introduced. A minority of candidates put clearly marked full stops after every answer which will unfortunately have rendered each of those answers incorrect.

#### **Question B2**

Both writing questions proved to be accessible to candidates, many of whom wrote with enthusiasm and engagement. Although we have no way of measuring this, anecdotally examiners felt that Task A was the more popular choice this summer.

Task A was a description writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their own experiences of attending an outdoor event. Examiners were instructed not to be too 'narrow' in their expectations of what constituted an 'outdoor event'. Many candidates wrote about outdoor music concerts or festivals and the theme of the examination may have encouraged this. However, descriptions of other outdoor events such as sporting tournaments, family occasions and whole town celebrations (amongst many other things) were equally valid. The content of these accounts was varied and there were many instances of detailed and engaging accounts.

Examiners reported being entertained by embarrassing scenes at family weddings and impressed by the creation of atmosphere at significant sporting events. Equally as pleasing were those who spent their time creating a carefully constructed scene at a local festival or demonstrating their absolute devotion to recreating their experience of a favourite band.

Task B was an exposition task which produced some very detailed responses. There were many passionate supporters of musical education who wrote convincingly about varied reasons for music education being available to all children. There were some equally convincing and committed responses which expounded on reasons why it was unnecessary and unrealistic to prioritise musical education in the current curriculum. Whichever direction they took, it was clear that many candidates were able to write in detail and with conviction. Occasionally, candidates drifted from the focus of this task – writing more generically about the benefits of music itself. Most were able to reign themselves in from going too far off task and appeared to remember to relate their ideas to music education in the later stages of their writing, but a few may have struggled a little with the positioning of their ideas.

The reading materials from Section A were often used effectively as part of a discussion about the benefits of music and its importance as part of a child's education. Specific information taken from the texts was often used to exemplify points made by candidates. This was sensible and enabled candidates to write in convincing detail. Unfortunately, and as has been reported in previous Principal Examiner reports, there were also candidates who copied significant chunks directly from the reading resources. This is unacceptable and will not have aided the candidates who took this approach.

Timing did not appear to be an issue for the vast majority with many candidates again writing extensively in Section B as well as in the reading section.

There were a number of areas of concern in the Writing section, some of which are similar to those which have been raised in the past:

- There was an increasing number of writing answers which were referred to the senior examining team as a result of handwriting that was very difficult to read. Despite the various tools at our disposal some work was almost illegible. If the majority of words in a piece of writing are unreadable this has a serious and damaging effect on the coherence of a piece of writing and thus the marks which it is possible to award.
- Some candidates wrote with little sense of either of the set tasks, perhaps writing in response to a question they had previously practised. This work struggled to demonstrate the necessary focus on the set question. Whilst these candidates may demonstrate some writing ability examiners have no way of knowing how much of this work has been learned in advance or indeed whether it was originally of their own creation.
- Written accuracy is still an area of weakness for many candidates and affects the quality and coherence of their writing as a whole. Struggles with tense and agreement as well as the omission of basic punctuation are the areas of most particular concern.

# GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### UNIT 3: ARGUMENTATION, PERSUASION AND INSTRUCTIONAL

#### Overview of the Unit

This summer's Unit 3 examination was based on the topic of social media. Although prior knowledge was not assessed, candidates were extremely knowledgeable about the topic and there was a genuine willingness to engage with the materials presented. Five texts were presented for exploration and a range of text types allowed for different levels of challenge and engagement.

#### Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested mostly across a range of lower tariff questions (A1, A2, A6, A11). Candidates were required to use both synthesis (A13) and summary (A9) skills during the course of the paper. Careful selection of and reference to evidence was required across a range of higher tariff questions (A7, A12, A13) alongside the ability to interpret texts. 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 page 12 of the specification document which can be found at: [WJEC GCSE English Language Specification](#)

#### Overview of general performance and comparison to previous series

The paper appeared to have been well received and examiners noted a general enthusiasm about the topic and tasks.

Although most candidates worked hard to complete the examination, a minority struggled to produce extended responses. During the assessment of whole scripts (return to boards) it was possible to note that some omitted several of the longer (and higher tariff) tasks across both reading and writing. Examiners reported a significant number of blank responses this year, particularly in relation to B2 writing. Last summer's paper was adapted and required candidates to complete only one of the two writing tasks and perhaps some thought that this was still the case. The lack of completion could also be a combination of a lack of stamina, ability or perhaps indicative of the candidature (similar to Summer 2017 when over 10% of candidates did not attempt B2).

Candidates responded well to the reading materials. Virtually all candidates completed the first 6 tasks which were lower tariff questions. The ability to track the text and respond coherently to the questions set was instrumental when tackling the more challenging reading questions and the quality of responses, as per previous series, varied in terms of quality.

When comparing this summer's examination to previous exam series, the writing tasks, as stipulated by the specification, required candidates to produce one piece of argumentation writing and one piece of persuasive writing. Tasks were accessible and candidates across the ability spectrum were able to engage with the questions and to produce appropriate writing.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Section A Reading

#### Text A

This text was a non-continuous poster which gave information about a person's digital footprint. The text was intended as a straightforward introduction to the topic in which key information/terms could be explored.

#### Questions A1 and A2

The first two questions on the examination required candidates to use close reading skills to locate key details from the text and to then deduce and retrieve information. Question 1 required candidates to find a definition of the phrase 'digital footprint' and the information could be found immediately following the text title ('A digital footprint: what is it?'). Most candidates did not struggle to locate the correct information and to write this down verbatim. It was rare to find an incorrect answer and those who were unsuccessful usually made up their own definition. It was quite concerning to note how many candidates were unable to copy the correct spelling for the word "trail" and although not penalised for this, candidates ought to be more careful.

Question 2 asked candidates, '...how many people use social media...'. Only two numbers were used in the text, one which referred to the number of people using the internet (4.8 billion) and the other, the correct answer, which referred to the number of people using social media (3.8 billion). Careful reading of the second bullet point in the text should have guaranteed success. While some candidates wrote down the incorrect number, others incorrectly stated that the number was a million rather than a billion. Again, very few candidates did not achieve the mark for this question. Last year's report commented on the legibility of numbers as number formation was an issue for many. This year, this aspect was much improved with a greater level of clarity and accuracy.

Precision when transferring information is crucial for answering these questions successfully.

#### Question A3

This was the first of three multiple choice questions on Unit 3. Candidates were asked to determine the meaning of the phrase "paper trail" and were given four options from which to select the correct definition. To ensure that the question was sufficiently challenging, each possible answer began with a similar phrase. The correct answer was the first one and the statistics highlight that success rates were high.

It is worth reminding candidates of the need to present their answer neatly and to only select one possible answer unless instructed to do otherwise.

#### Text B

Text B was an advert giving social media users some helpful instructions on how to sign up safely for a social media account. During paper production it is always pleasing if a text can have use beyond an exam series and given the number of references to Text B during the writing tasks, the information certainly had an impact.

#### **Question A4**

The second multiple choice question on the paper tested a candidate's ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills as candidates were required to find a definition of the word 'activate'. The second answer 'to start something up so that it is working' was the correct answer and candidates were largely successful in their selection of this option. Yet again, a number of candidates ticked multiple boxes and sometimes inadvertently rendered a correct answer incorrect by doing so.

#### **Question A5**

Text B usually tests sequencing skills on Unit 3 and this series was no exception. This year's task was no different in terms of demand and content to any other series but perhaps the very familiar topic (social media) meant that candidates were also able to use their prior knowledge to reach a correct answer. Attempt rates were high for this question and candidates appeared to score well. It was pleasing to note that most candidates were able to present their answers clearly and very few used the same number more than once.

There are some barriers to success:

- candidates who try to change the answer that they have been given do not gain full marks
- candidates should never repeat the same number more than once
- candidates should ensure that they only use the numbers 1,2,3,4 (and not 5,6,7 etc).

#### **Text C**

This text was perhaps the most useful for candidates in terms of wider education. It gave information about how to protect your digital footprint and was heavily referred to by some candidates during their writing tasks. With a range of facts about the dangers of not protecting your digital footprint and a wealth of tips regarding the protection of social media accounts, this text was the best choice in terms of testing the skills required for a 'how' question.

#### **Question A6**

This question eased candidates gently into the text and, as the correct answer to the question was found towards the bottom of the page (in the penultimate paragraph), it was hoped that candidates could get a real sense of the text before moving onto the more challenging A7. A range of possible answers could be found although most candidates opted for the second or third bullet point from the mark scheme. Success rates were extremely positive for this one-mark question and those who answered unsuccessfully often had not read the question carefully enough.

#### **Question A7**

This question asked candidates to consider how the article persuades 'you to look after your digital footprint' and required candidates to demonstrate close reading and analytical skills. Tracking of the text was key to success.

Close task focus is essential when attempting a 'how does the' question, so candidates are able to see exactly what is required in an answer. Being able to access the full range of marks hinges on close reading/text tracking.

Those who were less successful often answered a generic ‘how does the’ question without the specific focus required or went off at a tangent, focusing more on the writer’s methods than the text’s key messages. A minority sought to answer a question about ‘reading on’ and this approach must be avoided. Although these may seem like subtle lapses in focus, they can cause a candidate to be classified as ‘struggling to engage’ as they become side-tracked. Brief answers were not uncommon. Appropriate comments and a range of supporting details were essential to those who wished to accumulate marks.

The key messages regarding a ‘how does the’ question remain the same across all exam series. This task does not intend to encourage the showcasing of every technical device (or for candidates to be guided by their knowledge of 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. Those who perform well concentrate on the content of the passage and work chronologically. Top Band answers are selective in their choice of material and include concise explanations and comments about effect/techniques. The best answers respond to language and consider the ways in which the writer’s argument develops.

It is worth reminding candidates to constantly refer back to the question and to include the keywords from the question when writing their own answer.

#### **Text D**

This article explained how social media can affect a person when applying for a job. The text began with a bold, controversial statement ‘Employers are stalkers’ and this set the tone for the rest of the article in which the writer laid bare some of the truths behind how we can be perceived online by others and the long-term effects this can have.

#### **Question A8**

Candidates were asked to explain ‘in their own words’ the meaning of the phrase ‘Employers are stalkers.’ As with all word meaning questions, context was paramount to success. Those who chose to focus solely on the word ‘stalker’ often found themselves being distracted by their own prior knowledge rather than trying to demonstrate their reading and understanding skills. Only a small number of candidates took the route of describing physical stalkers and most focused on the fact that employers have the ability to examine a potential employee’s profile to get a deeper understanding of that individual. Synonyms such as ‘look...research...check...’ were commonly used and credited.

#### **Question A9**

This summer’s summary question worked well, and many candidates found themselves being rewarded for sensible, succinct, and focused work. In previous series, candidates have sometimes taken the incorrect route of explaining, expanding and analysing the information required for an answer but such approaches are thankfully becoming far less frequent. Many candidates chose to present their answers in a bullet point format which is perfectly acceptable for this question type. Please note that this is the only extended reading question where bullet points are encouraged and rewarded.

A good summary is:

- brief and succinct

- confined to the lines given in the booklet
- able to separate points clearly
- written in bullet points or concise sentences
- not copied from the text.

If candidates produce brief and focused summaries, they can use the time saved here to include more detail in other responses. Candidates should never use extra paper for this question as they will not be summarising.

### **Question A10**

The final multiple-choice question on the paper asked candidates to consider five statements and to work out which of the five were true. With four credible distractors, the correct answer, 'Employers may avoid employing people with controversial opinions.' was the most popular option but many candidates selected other options. When candidates are asked to consider whether information is true or false, close reading of the question is vital. Many candidates misread the question and then struggle to select the correct answer when faced with this question type.

### **Text E**

The final text in the examination was taken from a newspaper article and offered an insight into the life of a man named 'Felix' who has chosen to limit his online presence. We were unsure how candidates would feel about Felix and his somewhat 'atypical' behaviour, but he was surprisingly well-received, and many candidates admired his stance. Many candidates explored the character of Felix during Section B.

### **Question A11**

This one-mark question proved to be a straightforward introduction to Text E. Candidates were asked to write down what Felix searches for when he uses the internet at the library. There were several possible answers, but telephone numbers and addresses were by far the most popular. Those who were unsuccessful often wrote down 'admin tasks'. Close reading of the text would confirm that although Felix completes admin tasks at the library, this is not something that he searches for.

### **Question A12**

Candidates are familiar with an impressions question on Unit 2 and Text E gave such an insight into Felix's character that an impressions question seemed like a natural choice. Across the cohort, candidates were able to identify character traits and behaviours, and many were able to comment on the impressions created by the writer of Felix.

The best approach when completing this type of question is for candidates to work chronologically through the passage noting specific details and characteristics or actions that might suggest something about the individual in question. Many candidates, for example, chose the phrase 'swimming against the tide' as their first quotation to analyse. Once details have been selected, it is helpful for the candidate to suggest what the quotation might imply about the character. In this instance, many candidates could see that the impression created by the writer is that Felix has deliberately chosen to shun technology. Reading in context is vital as those who took words and phrases out of context often find that they misread information. Some candidates took this phrase to imply that he is a strong outdoor swimmer.

Range (both quotations and ideas) and coverage is important for those who wish to achieve top Band marks. Candidates who are struggling can begin by simply writing, 'The writer creates the impression that Felix is.... because it says....' and can then develop their skills and variety once they have a basic answer structure.

Those who struggled to answer this question often adopted the following approaches:

- unselective copying
- bullet point answers with limited detail/evidence/focus
- unsupported assertions.

Please note that bullet points should not be used when completing this task.

### Question A13

The final question in Section A tested the ability to synthesise information from Text D and Text E. Candidates were asked to 'synthesise the information that can be found online about a person' and a wide range of possible answers could be used. Those who understood the requirements and expectations of a synthesis task did not struggle and many completed efficient and detailed responses. Those who scored less well either attempted to compare the information or simply did not read the question carefully. Brevity was also an issue for some.

Please note the following key details about synthesis questions:

- bullet points do not allow candidates to demonstrate their ability to collate information and those who adopt this approach will struggle to access the top Bands
- for a synthesis response to move beyond Band 1 (1-2 marks) candidates must refer to both texts
- quotations or paraphrasing are acceptable when synthesising information
- candidates are not required to name which source the information has been taken from, but most find this extremely useful in terms of organising their ideas and tracking which texts they have used.

### Section B Writing

Candidates were required to produce two written responses in Section B of the examination. As mentioned earlier in the report, candidates should have been well aware of the need to complete **both** pieces of writing. However, during the assessment of both tasks, but especially B2, a substantial number of brief responses or blank pages were seen. Timing is essential when completing this examination to ensure that all aspects are given sufficient attention. Failure to complete either of the writing tasks means that the candidate has prevented themselves from accessing 25% of the possible marks.

The content of written work is important and careful planning usually helps candidates to generate some ideas and then to develop these in a coherent manner. Planning has improved significantly throughout this specification and those who follow their plan often reap the rewards. Unfortunately, those who do not plan often find themselves struggling to create a coherent piece of logically sequenced writing. Equally, those who plan excessively usually find that they run out of time to complete the writing.

While it is perfectly acceptable to use some of the ideas from the reading materials, the way in which these are incorporated into a candidate's writing is important.

Some candidates borrow the odd word or phrase from the reading materials while others quote key details in their own work. Both of these approaches are acceptable as is using the reading materials as a springboard to generate ideas or introduce new points. An increasing number of candidates choose to copy significant chunks of the reading materials when completing examination tasks. This approach is not restricted to the writing section (candidates choose to answer extended reading responses in this way too) but it is a costly decision to make. Those who copy, struggle to move beyond Band 1 and this approach must be avoided.

Technical accuracy remains an issue for many candidates. Basic skills like paragraphing writing, using capital letters and full stops alongside the correct use of basic homophones should be a priority for many candidates. When assessing writing, examiners try to reward positively but must account for all of the errors evident in a piece of writing. Errors can impact not only the mark awarded for writing accurately but can also cause lapses in cohesion when assessing a candidate's ability to communicate.

Handwriting is also an increasing barrier to success. Many candidates appear to struggle to write clearly, and intervention would be advised in this instance. It is impossible to award a fair mark to something that is impossible to read.

### **Question B1**

This year's B1 task appeared to be accessible and was based on a topic that is at the forefront of many young people's priorities (social media). Candidates had every opportunity to showcase not only their writing skills but to also demonstrate their appreciation of social media and its impact. Many candidates produced entertaining and engaging writing and were rewarded for their efforts. Brief writing was an issue for some who simply did not develop ideas or observations. The risks of social media were described by many candidates, often using anecdotes about shared/personal experiences. Cyber bullying was reported as another key concern with many young people discussing their experiences of critical online activity. Some candidates produced incredibly well-considered, lively, witty and illuminating pieces detailing their reflections about social media, these were a joy to mark. Those referring to specific examples or perhaps drawing on their social and political knowledge also stood out and impressed. A small minority chose to ignore the task that was set and produced pre-prepared writing about a sport, hobby or the environment, for example, and these were difficult to credit.

### **Question B2**

B2 was the last task on the paper. To complete this writing candidates were asked to produce a talk for their classmates. The talk was to inform classmates that laptops would be acquired for each student but to encourage students to support the initiative. Examiners were instructed to reward each piece of writing based on its merits. Some candidates focused mostly on the issue of the laptops and the necessity to purchase them while others launched into event planning and fund raising. There was no preferred approach and the range on offer was pleasing. Again, a small minority chose to ignore the intended audience for example writing in role as a teacher. Once again, careful reading of the task can help to avoid any misconceptions.

Overall, many examiners enthusiastically reported creative, interesting and thoughtful writing. Band 4 and 5 responses were not uncommon, but many candidates appeared to be operating in the Band 2 to 3 area. Planning and practise are key to success when writing and candidates ought to be reminded of the need to take the examination seriously (quite a number chose to inappropriately draw pictures, doodle and write messages to the examiner).

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### Useful contacts and links

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

Tel: 029 2240 4289

Email: [gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk](mailto:gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk)

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

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<sup>i</sup> *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.*