

GCSE Examiners' Report

English Language
GCSE
November 2025

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2025



Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

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

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For ungraded specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For ungraded specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Unit 1: Non-examination assessment	6
Unit 2: External assessment	11
Unit 3: External assessment	17
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	23

Executive Summary

The November 2025 exam series demonstrated strong engagement across all units, with many candidates performing well and centres delivering the qualification in line with previous guidance.

Unit 1: Non-examination assessment

Oracy

Most centres met the submission deadline, though some required repeated contact for missing samples or declaration sheets. Audio-visual recordings were widely adopted, aiding moderation.

Successful Individual Researched Presentations were persuasive or exploratory, while factual topics limited access to higher bands. Persistent issues include reliance on scripts, electronic notes, and unrealistic Band 4 placement.

Responding and Interacting tasks were generally sustained, though inappropriate group sizes and missing stimulus materials reduced discussion quality. Centres should ensure spontaneous interaction between candidates, assessment in line with WJEC exemplar, and the appropriate set of stimulus materials used according to exam series.

Unit 2: External assessment

Reading and Writing: Description, Narration and Exposition

The exam focused on the theme of 'Cold Weather' and was well-received by candidates, with high completion rates in the Reading section. A choice between description and exposition tasks was offered in the Writing section.

Candidates engaged well with varied texts and question types, achieving strong results in retrieval and word meaning tasks. Higher-tariff questions requiring comparison and interpretation highlighted progress but revealed structural weaknesses.

Writing tasks produced detailed responses, though originality and planning remain key improvement areas. Copying from texts and reliance on pre-prepared content were noted concerns.

Unit 3: External assessment

Reading and Writing: Argumentation, Persuasion and Instructional

The exam focused on the theme of 'Fireworks' and was well-received, with strong engagement and high attempt rates in the Reading section. Persuasion and argumentation extended writing tasks in the form of a letter and of a talk featured in the Writing section. Reading tasks tested sequencing, interpretation, and synthesis skills, with most candidates performing well. Challenges included precision in language analysis and summarising environmental impacts.

Writing tasks produced varied and creative approaches where responses were mostly creative and well-structured. Issues of technical accuracy, planning, and copying persisted.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2025

UNIT 1: NON-EXAMINATION ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessment for November 2025 was to provide an opportunity for every candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language whilst demonstrating verbal reasoning skills. In centres where tasks were appropriately set and candidates were appropriately guided, it was clear that candidates were able to achieve in line with their ability.

The expected deadline was met by most centres; however, a few centres needed to be repeatedly contacted to submit either the full sample or outstanding components of the sample. This was especially problematic due to the tight turnaround for the November series. In some cases, moderators had to contact centres to obtain signed declaration sheets. Centres should note that marks cannot be awarded without a declaration sheet that has been signed by the teacher. Clerical errors occurred in some cases where the marks submitted did not match the marks on the record keeping sheet. In response to the previous Principal Moderator's report, centres were mindful of the fact that where incomplete folders were requested for submission, they needed to be replaced with complete folders of candidates on a similar total mark from the same teaching group.

The record keeping sheets that were most productive in terms of moderation were those that contained purposeful commentaries that were closely tied to both elements of the assessment criteria in the appropriate band. The better commentaries featured exemplification of where the candidates met the criteria and clarified the placement of candidates towards the top or bottom of these bands. Some commentaries did not sufficiently reference both elements of the assessment criteria, and this should be addressed. Some samples were supported by assessment sheets of the centre's own making and highlighted and annotated assessment criteria; these can be useful, but they are not a replacement for appropriate commentary on the official and authenticated WJEC Record Keeping Sheet. Where centres chose to use handwritten commentaries, these were less successful than digitally produced in terms of providing sufficient detail to allow the moderator to understand how marks had been reached.

There was a marked and pleasing increase in the provision of audio-visual recordings for both tasks by many centres. This was very much to candidates' advantage as moderators for these centres were able to ascertain candidates' reliance on notes and see how candidates interacted both with an audience and each other. It is anticipated that this will continue into the next series.

It was pleasing to see most centres following the requirement to submit notes used by candidates when presenting the Individual Researched Presentation; however, centres are reminded that, even when audio-visual recording is used, notes must be submitted. Most notes were appropriate, being in the form of bullet points on cue cards. However, in some cases, candidates were allowed into task-taking situations with full scripts. There was an emergence of candidates using electronic supporting materials on phones or iPads. This contravenes the specification as notes in this format cannot be retained by the centre for submission as part of the sample. As highlighted in the previous report, some centres submitted candidate notes on electronic Word documents along with audio-only recordings; this is strongly discouraged as it calls the authenticity of the notes used during the task into question. In some cases, it was felt or could be clearly seen that candidates used more notes than were submitted. Every case where notes are not in line with the specification are referred to WJEC for further investigation.

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

Tasks

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

Presentation topics chosen reflected the interests of young people across Wales. The most successful tasks had a persuasive focus or were based on the exploration of a question or viewpoint. Some titles chosen were self-penalising as they lent themselves to conveying information only and did not give candidates the opportunity to access the analysis and evaluation strands of the assessment criteria.

For this series, it was pleasing to see that most candidates adhered to the recommended five to seven minutes for the Individual Researched Presentation. Where candidates fell short of the recommended timing, many teachers posed open questions to allow opportunity for further development of ideas. It should be stated that all candidates should have the opportunity to respond to questions, even when their talk reaches the suggested duration; candidates who were not given this opportunity were disadvantaged, especially where they may have failed to engage in analysis and evaluation in the required depth during their talk, or where they had been reliant on notes to present. It should be noted by centres that candidates who do not respond to questions do not present a full display of verbal reasoning skills, therefore impacting marks in some cases.

The use of overly detailed notes and scripts continues to be of real concern for this task. It is clearly stated in the guidelines for the Individual Researched Presentation: 'it must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate'. It is further stated that the role of the teacher is 'to ensure that the candidate does not read his or her presentation'. Despite this being raised in the previous report, some centres allowed candidates into task-taking situations with inappropriate notes, whilst not considering this in the awarding of the marks. Centres are advised to consider teaching approaches in terms of supporting candidates to write appropriate notes and to check candidates' notes before allowing them to be taken into task-taking situations.

For the Responding and Interacting task, all three topics (climate change, PE in schools and video games) were well-represented. However, in a small number of cases, the wrong stimulus materials for this exam series were used, featuring discussions on dogs and extreme sports, which are the tasks for the upcoming series.

It was pleasing to see a continued response to previous reports in terms of group numbers, as most groups were comprised of three candidates. However, several centres chose to group candidates in fours and even fives, meaning that candidates struggled to find space to present their points. In other cases, candidates were in pairs, meaning that tasks became turn-taking activities, falling flat where a third voice would have provided a range of opinions for discussion. It was pleasing to see that most candidates were able to sustain their discussions to the recommended ten-minute duration.

In some cases, more able candidates self-penalised by presenting extended points as opposed to discussing spontaneously and responding skilfully to what had been said. It was noted in this series that there had been a move towards a 'chatty' style of discussion and that, in some cases, no stimulus material was present from which to springboard ideas. Taking this approach constrains the candidates' abilities to cite relevant evidence and interrogate subject matter perceptively.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

For the Individual Researched Presentation, candidates securely achieving marks in Band 5 presented mature, engaging and highly evaluative explorations of complex and demanding subject matter, demonstrating thoughtful analysis of research and viewpoints. In this band, responses to questions served to further demonstrate verbal reasoning skills, thereby securing the mark. Ambitious vocabulary and the extremely confident presentation of information and analysis through highly effective, complex sentence structures were features of secure achievement in this band. Some over-rewarding occurred where candidates were secure in terms of accuracy, but talk did not feature the wide-ranging and precise vocabulary choices and complexity in sentence structure that we would expect to see in this band. Candidates securely achieving marks in Band 3 effectively delivered structured presentations and went beyond conveying information by clearly signposting some analysis and evaluation. Successful candidates in this band began to take the needs of the audience into consideration by using some rhetorical devices when exploring their subject matter. Candidates at the bottom of Band 3 often relied on conveying information before being encouraged to analyse and evaluate through the use of open questions.

Brevity was an issue that needed to be taken into consideration when awarding marks. Where candidates do not sustain their presentations much beyond the three- or four-minute mark before requiring questions to extend talk, the centre should consider whether ideas have been fully developed and take this into consideration when awarding marks. Marks in Band 4 are generally unrealistic for tasks that have not been appropriately sustained.

Any reliance on scripted material or over-extensive notes by a candidate should also be taken into consideration when awarding marks. When applying the assessment criteria for content and organisation, consideration should be given to whether candidates are able to deliver 'effectively' and whether the needs of the audience are taken into consideration. When candidates are tied to extensive cue cards (including those not quite in the form of sentences but with very few words omitted) it is unrealistic to consider a 'confident' delivery. These are both Band 3 skills, neither of which occur when the candidate is tied to notes. In terms of accuracy, range of sentence structures and register, reading also affects register as it means candidates do not adopt an appropriate tone, especially where there is a stilted delivery.

For the Responding and Interacting tasks, where candidates were well-informed on their topics, they were able to be rewarded for presenting points coherently and interacting successfully with others. In the higher mark ranges, candidates displayed close listening skills and adapted their responses according to what had been heard, challenging points with some skill where appropriate. The most successful discussions featured perceptive interrogation of the topic, exploring ideas with reference to evidence and real-life contexts.

Across both tasks, centres are encouraged to consider what constitutes a 'secure' command of grammar, as too many candidates are being placed in Band 4 where there are issues with sentence construction, tense and agreement ('there is' not 'there are', for example) and the repeated use of 'like' or 'y'know' as fillers. Ambitious vocabulary should be rewarded, but this is a balancing act where candidates are inaccurate elsewhere.

Key points to consider ahead of the next Unit 1 submission

Administration:

- Centres should check record sheets for correct detail, marks and teachers' signatures.
- Commentaries on the record keeping sheets should provide adequate detail to justify the marks awarded within the bands through close reference to both elements of the assessment criteria with exemplification provided to justify decisions.
- Incomplete folders should be replaced by a complete folder on the next nearest mark from the same teaching group.
- Centres should respond promptly to contact made by the moderator or WJEC to not delay the moderation process.

Notes:

- All notes used by candidates should be submitted for moderation in their entirety.
- Notes for both tasks should be brief and supportive.
- Scripts should not be used by candidates, even when marked accordingly.

Recordings:

- Centres are encouraged to provide audio-visual recordings to aid identification and the ease and accuracy of moderation.

Individual Researched Presentation:

- The use of questions by teachers is important across all abilities. These questions should be open questions and should not be prepared. Questions can encourage further development and provide opportunity for candidates to engage in further analysis and evaluation and demonstrate verbal reasoning skills.
- Teachers should continue to encourage individuals to choose their own topics for discussion and give guidance in terms of refining titles to enable candidates to access all elements of the assessment criteria.

Responding and Interacting task:

- These tasks should encourage candidates to research further information than that provided in the stimulus material. Candidates perform well when they are confident with the subject matter and only refer to notes as prompts, where needed.
- Stimulus materials are helpful to encourage candidates to explore a range of points and refer to evidence.
- Candidates should be discouraged from prepared turn-taking and should prepare for a natural and spontaneous discussion.
- Centres should aim to place candidates in appropriate groups of three, where possible.
- Audio-visual recordings aid identification. The identification of candidates at the start of the assessment is also necessary.

The most successful centres provided clear evidence of internal moderation which resulted in accurate and fair assessment across their sample. It was pleasing to see many centres taking note of moderators' reports and making the required adjustments to their administration and assessment processes. Some centres were raised as concerns where previous advice had not been heeded. It is hoped that centres will continue to keep these points in mind next year to support the smooth running of the moderation process and ensure that all candidates achieve to their full potential.

As always, if centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these points, they should contact the Subject Officer prior to the submission of samples. Moderators also welcome any information that may support the moderation process, and many centres accompanied their sample with a letter to the moderator to outline the assessment and moderation processes and to explain any substitutions.

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

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2025

UNIT 2: EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Cold Weather'. Candidates appeared to engage well with the topic and completion rates were high. Five texts, offering a range of text types, were presented in the Reading section. Questions were set to provide varied levels of challenge across the paper and enable candidates to demonstrate a broad range of skills. In the Writing section, the extended writing question provided a choice of description or exposition writing.

Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were required to use comparison skills (A9) and evaluate and interpret content (A8, A14, A15) and edit texts (A16-A19). Careful evidence selection was required across both higher and lower tariff questions as was the ability to interpret meaning.

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Reading

Text A

Text A was an infographic, originally published as part of a newspaper article, which gave information about historical snowfall in the United Kingdom. It was a non-continuous text containing factual information and was presented in an accessible way.

Questions A1 and A2

Designed to offer a accessible introduction to the examination, the opening two questions both asked candidates to retrieve factual information. This was a straightforward exercise, and the majority of candidates were able to access the available marks.

Question A3

This was the first multiple-choice question on this exam paper. Candidates were required to choose from four options to isolate the statement that was not made by the text about snowfall in the United Kingdom. All of the statements were based on information from the text, although the third statement 'Cornwall experiences an average of 17.4 days of snow a year' was untrue. Careful reading of the text showed that Cornwall actually experiences an average of 'only 7.4 days of snow or sleet' per year. The question proved straightforward and success rates were high with well over 90 percent of candidates selecting the correct answer. With this type of question, it is essential that candidates read the text and question carefully to make sure of what they are looking for when assessing the multiple-choice options. A very small number of candidates made more than once choice in relation to this question, ticking one or more of the boxes. These answers were not eligible for credit.

Text B

This text was adapted from advice given by the Met Office on the impact of cold weather.

Question A4

This question required candidates to retrieve factual information from a specific area of the text. Candidates were asked to identify one risk that winter weather might bring based on their reading of the first paragraph of this text. There were multiple answers available, and most candidates were able to earn credit. A small number selected answers taken from later on in the text and these were ineligible for credit.

Question A5

This question required candidates to list two details from the text, focusing specifically on ways people can keep warm in the winter. To earn two marks, it was necessary to identify two clear and distinct points. Most candidates scored highly here. However, a small number of candidates were too vague in their answers which will have brought them little reward.

Question A6

This was the second multiple-choice question on the exam paper. The question required candidates to choose from four options to explain the meaning of the word 'insulating' in the context it was used in the text. The question proved straightforward and a significant majority chose the correct answer which was the fourth choice 'a material that prevents the loss of heat'. The first answer, 'a substance that offers ventilation' was the next most popular choice but there were very few candidates who did not choose correctly.

Text C

This text was adapted from an article about health which appeared on the BBC website. It reported on what happens to the human body when experiencing cold conditions.

Question A7

This was the final multiple-choice question on this exam paper. Candidates were required to choose from four options to explain the meaning of the word 'sceptical' in the context it was used in the text. The question proved straightforward and around 90 percent of candidates chose the correct answer which was the second choice 'having doubts'. Credible distractors were included therefore candidates needed to read the text carefully and, as ever with this question type, look at the phrase in the context in which it was written. The fourth answer, 'affected by the cold' was the next most popular choice and this was closely followed by the first answer 'easily pleased'.

Question A8

Candidates were asked to explain why it might be difficult for a child to study in cold temperatures. This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and information. Candidates needed to apply what they had read to the question and explain the information contained in the text. There were two marks available for this question and the majority of candidates were able to access at least one of them. The most commonly explained idea was that cold weather affects a person's thinking processes and concentration, due to a fall in blood flow to the brain. Candidates who explored this and/or the example provided in the text that puzzle solving proved more difficult or time-consuming due to diminished focus, were eligible for one mark. The second area for discussion (and credit) was that cold temperatures brought about physical discomfort or difficulty. There were relatively few candidates who attempted to provide more than one explanation. Overall though, the majority of candidates worked hard to try to provide an explanation and there appeared to be fewer candidates who attempted to answer this question solely by evidence spotting.

Question A9

This was the first high tariff reading question on the paper. It tested the ability to compare information from Text B and Text C. The question provided a specific focus for comparison – candidates were asked to compare what was said in the texts about how cold temperatures can affect people's health and bodies. The majority of those who succeeded in response to this question proved able to find clear similarities and differences between the content of the two texts. There was plenty of evidence of the general and more commonplace health risks introduced by a cold environment in both texts and this was probably the most commonly made comparative point. Progress was also made by comparing what the texts said about the way in which the body has to work in cold temperatures; the serious dangers to the body created by cold temperatures; and by focusing specifically on how the extremities are affected by cold temperatures.

Whilst examiners reported some pleasing progress regarding the way this question was approached, this was not the case across the entire entry for this exam. There was a number of candidates who persisted in adopting the self-limiting structures which previous reports of this nature have already highlighted. For example, those who use bullet point frameworks or divide their answers into clearly labelled sections of 'Text B' and 'Text C' are unlikely to move far through the marking bands. These answers do not fulfil the comparative requirement of the question. In a few cases, it is clear that candidates are well aware of the requirement to compare but struggle with the nature of this question and are unable to position their ideas in a sensible way. It is not sufficient to place two completely unconnected points side by side in a comparison question – a sensible point in relation to how they are similar or different needs to be made in order to make clear progress.

Text D

This non-continuous text was adapted from an infographic from a water company which provided advice to customers on how to protect their homes in winter conditions.

Questions A10-A12

These questions were designed to test a candidate's ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information. Candidates were asked to retrieve factual information which was a straightforward exercise and most candidates were able to access the available marks.

Text E

The final reading text on this paper was adapted from the novel *Winter Ghosts*. In this extract, the narrator is driving in treacherous conditions during a winter storm.

Question A13

This was designed to be a straightforward introduction to a more challenging text. The question required candidates to locate the relevant section of the text and interpret what happens when the narrator turns on her windscreen wiper. There were very few who were unable to make progress with this question.

Question A14

Question A14 required candidates to engage with meaning and introduced a greater level of challenge. Candidates were asked what was meant by the snow being described as 'deadening all sound'. There was an expectation that candidates would locate the quotation within the text and make a judgement about the meaning aided by their contextual awareness. In this case, an explanation which explored the idea that the snow was insulating the car or that it muffled or blocked out any noise was anticipated. Examiners were instructed that answers may be expressed in different ways and to be mindful of the use of synonyms and alternative vocabulary which demonstrated clear understanding of meaning. Many candidates achieved well in their responses and worked hard to articulate meaning. Those who struggled often lacked clarity and/or precision or had not quite understood the meaning of the phrase. For example, there was a number who incorrectly tried to explain that the snow was noisy.

Question A15

This was the second higher tariff reading question on the examination paper. Attempt rates were high, and it was pleasing that candidates appeared to have managed their timing well up to this point. The question was designed to encourage candidates to engage with the language of the text to explore the impressions created by the writer. Most candidates were able to show some understanding and provide quite general impressions that the conditions were wintry and became dangerous. The highest achievers were able to carefully examine the text, usually through tracking chronologically, and demonstrate a wide range of specific impressions about what the narrator experienced. There was much evidence to explore in this extract, and many were able to discuss the worsening nature of the conditions and the physical assault of the weather whilst exploring how the language of the text was used to create these impressions.

Candidates who struggled in response to this question often wrote too briefly or were unable to explore the content provided, making only vague and generalised comments on what they had read.

Editing Section - Questions A16-A19

As with the summer examination, 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. Attempt rates were high and most were able to achieve at least some marks in this section. The word and sentence level questions had particularly high success rates.

Proofreading section - Question B1

This section presented a short paragraph of text headed 'Cold weather advise'. Most candidates were able to make some progress and once again there was little to separate which errors were identified and corrected most frequently. Many candidates picked up that 'forcast' was an error but there was a significant number who were unable to offer an accurate correction. Examiners were instructed to accept 'forecast' or 'forecasted' as viable corrections.

Question B2

Candidates faced a choice between a description and an exposition task in the Writing section. Although we have no way of determining which task was more widely chosen, examiners seemed to think there was a relatively even balance between the task choices. Timing did not appear to be problematic with the majority of those who were willing seeming to be able to write in detail in Section B.

Task A was a description task which asked candidates to describe a time when they had experienced difficult weather conditions. A wide range of experiences were offered by candidates and there was no shortage of effort or detail. Indeed, there was much for examiners to enjoy with plenty of humorous descriptions of being caught short by challenging weather of varying types. Common areas of description were subjects such as the unpleasantness of a sports match in poor weather, school snow days and hostile road trips. There were numerous examples of candidates focusing on their journey to school and the effects of a change in weather conditions. This was pleasing and mostly produced convincing writing, which showed a sensible focus on the familiar.

As ever, there were a couple of factors that gave cause for concern, and these were not dissimilar to those reported on in the Unit 2 Examiners' Report from last summer's exam series. Firstly, a number of candidates took the content of Text E and either copied it entirely or copied sections of it, weaving key vocabulary and sentence structures into their own writing. This does not demonstrate the ability to write an original piece of writing and answers such as these will have struggled to make much progress. Unfortunately, there were also still one or two candidates who neglected to consider the direction provided by the task. As mentioned in the summer report, those who write pre-prepared content rather than demonstrating a genuine attempt to answer the question will struggle to make the progress that they might have done with a more appropriate approach. It does seem that there are those who trust revision tips and short-cuts provided on social media rather than the good advice of the professionals around them. There is no substitute for careful preparation in advance of the exams and thoughtful planning and original development of ideas whilst answering this question.

Task B was an exposition writing task which asked candidates to write an essay explaining their views on the weather. They were provided with the stimulus of a quote from a famous writer who once said, 'There is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather. Sunshine is uplifting, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up and snow is exhilarating.' There were some interesting and detailed responses to this question. Some relied heavily on the quotation to structure their essay and spent time discussing all aspects, whereas others used it as a springboard to a particular area of this topic which they wanted to discuss. Both approaches were valid and this meant that examiners saw some quite varied and interesting approaches to this task. It was interesting to see candidates agree with the quotation and embrace a very positive mindset towards the weather whilst others firmly disagreed and were able to write from the perspective of enthusiastic difference. Some of the most detailed and thoughtful writing though, came from those who could both agree and disagree and wrote passionately about the circumstances of the weather being the thing under consideration. One particularly notable answer, wrote a detailed answer considering the effects of weather as a natural force, its emotional power, how it is of societal importance and its pedagogical purpose. What was a relatively straightforward stimulus provoked some varied and far-reaching discussion.

As with the summer exam series, written accuracy was an area of significant weakness for many candidates and, for the majority of those who were resitting this qualification, is likely to be the single biggest factor necessitating the resit. This list of concerns from the Summer 2025 Examiners' Report is worth repeating, the following issues are all likely to detrimentally affect the quality and coherence of writing and will restrict a candidate's progress:

- limited control of tense and agreement
- verbless sentences
- the omission of basic punctuation like full stops and capital letters
- the prevalence of comma splicing
- basic spelling mistakes – particularly regular homophone errors and errors with key words that can be found in the texts and questions
- the omission of paragraphs
- inaccessible handwriting – if writing is illegible, it cannot be marked as accurate.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2025

UNIT 3: EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Fireworks', a topical theme for the timing of the exam and one which candidates seemed to genuinely enjoy. Examiners anecdotally reported a good deal of effort and commitment with good attempt rates across the paper. A combination of continuous and non-continuous texts could be found in the Reading Section and the range of question types ensured varied levels of challenge were posed. Writing tasks saw candidates complete a letter and a talk to comply with the requirement to produce argumentation and persuasion writing.

Which AOs were assessed?

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

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Reading

Text A

Text A was an infographic, originally published as a poster to inform people about the laws and rules that should be followed regarding Fireworks. This non-continuous text provided factual information and was presented in an accessible way encouraging all candidates to engage with the theme immediately.

Questions A1 and A2

These questions tested the ability to retrieve and deduce information from the text. They served as an introduction to the topic and allowed all candidates to engage. Success rates were high and candidates were pleasingly accurate in their presentation of the correct answers. Question A2 asked candidates to find how much the 'on-the-spot fine' is if caught with fireworks in a public place and most candidates helpfully remembered to include the pound sign.

Question A3

This was the first multiple-choice on the paper and required candidates to determine which of the options was 'not true'. Overall, candidates did not struggle to disregard incorrect options and to elicit the correct option (option 3). A number chose option 4, perhaps not reading the times offered in this option carefully enough. It is worth reiterating that any candidate who chooses more than one option in this question type cannot be credited, even if one of the options selected is the correct one. Sadly, there are still candidates who tick multiple boxes or do not follow the instructions on how to present their answer.

Text B

This text was taken from a guide to hosting a fireworks party, but the information contained within the text was not presented sequentially.

Question A4

This question asked candidates to consider what they should check on the morning of a fireworks display. Two possible options could be written in response to the question (weather or wind conditions), and many were credited for the correct answer. A number of candidates included both options, which was perfectly acceptable. It is prudent to remind candidates to not, in any circumstances, include information or ideas from their own experiences.

Question A5

Candidates should be very familiar with the sequence question on Unit 3. The format is consistent where it is only the theme and content that differs from series to series. The question requires candidates to sequentially order the information given in Text B. Success rates were especially pleasing for this series with candidates thinking logically about the process and using some of the language markers to aid their choices. Sadly, some lost marks due to not following the instructions. Candidates must pay attention to the number that is given to them (2) and then allocate the remaining numbers (1,3,4). Some candidates ignored the numbering instruction and tried to tick boxes and others wrote incorrect numbers such as 3,4,5). Those completing the paper using a word processor often saved themselves time by writing down their answer for this question in the answer booklet (rather than typing up the information). Success rates were pleasing and many candidates did well to deduce the correct order for the process.

Text C

Candidates seemed to engage well with this resource, a short text taken from BBC's Science Focus Magazine about the damaging effects of fireworks. Many candidates also referred to some of the information when completing B1.

Question A6

Candidates were asked to explain the meaning of the phrase 'cocktail of chemicals'. It was anticipated that this would be one of the more challenging questions of the paper and success rates reflected this. All previous reports and training sessions have emphasised the need to explore the meaning of an entire phrase, and this series was no exception. Some candidates were able to explain the meaning of 'cocktail' (a mix, blend, combination) but then simply added the word 'chemical' rather than attempting to explain its meaning. To receive credit for this question, candidates needed to explore both 'cocktail' and 'chemicals', the latter of which could be done via a range of synonyms such as 'substances, compounds, elements, materials, ingredients' and so on.

Question A7

A range of approaches was adopted in response to this task although the most efficient and economical was, by far, the use of bullet points. Candidates were asked to focus on ‘the ways in which fireworks are bad for our planet’ and most managed to include information about fireworks being bad for the ‘air’ and ‘animals’. Those who sought to find points that were clearly different usually found themselves being credited for a range of details while those who repeated similar points were less successful. Candidates were asked to summarise ‘bad’ ways and those who failed to focus on this specific angle were also less successful.

To reiterate previous advice. An effective summary:

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

Question A8

The second multiple-choice question of the paper was particularly positive with excellent success rates. Well in excess of 90% of all candidates were correct in their selection of the third point ‘to pollute the rivers’.

Question A9

This task questioned a candidate’s understanding of text reliability. This question has featured on several previous papers, and most were adept at making a clear statement about the BBC and their ‘trustworthy nature’. Some quite astute individuals who were clearly more aware of recent comments about the BBC in the media and were less inclined to attribute the BBC to being reliable. The context of the answer was key in terms of what could be credited. Candidates could be credited for stating that the information could be trusted/not trusted as long as a valid reason was given. Two correct comments were required for full marks and some struggled to move beyond one reason.

Text D

This text was taken from an advert produced with the intention of persuading people to buy low noise fireworks.

Question A10

Two pieces of information were required in response to this question. Success rates were high for this location question although a number of candidates missed the emboldened instruction to include **two** pieces of information. It is also worth reminding candidates of the need to be precise when answering this question type. A number shortened ‘Catherine wheel’ to ‘Catherine’ or ‘wheel’ and such imprecision is not advised.

Question A11

This was the first extended reading question of the paper. Candidates were asked to consider ‘How does Text D try to persuade the reader to buy low noise fireworks?’ A wealth of positive and persuasive examples of language, specific details, factual information and techniques could be found in the text, and many candidates were able to spot the deliberate comparison between low noise and regular fireworks as a persuasive technique. Many candidates spotted that ‘low noise’ fireworks are more affordable and that they still offer the same aesthetic appeal. Comments on technical aspects of the language were less common, and some candidates would benefit from spotting key words and phrases rather than copying out entire phrases or significant chunks of text without considering their effect. Indeed, copying is a worry for an increasing number of candidates, some of whom are badly advised by social media and internet chats, rather than listening to the advice of their English teachers.

At all levels, candidates were able to engage with some of the text, and most could recognise the writer’s hugely positive views. When teaching candidates to complete a ‘how does the text or writer persuade’ question, it is good practice to encourage them to step back from the resource and simply ask themselves, what does this writer say to make this product/place/concept seem appealing? Understanding the writer’s perspective is the first step to success.

The best approach to adopt when answering this question type is to be led by content. Those who find a persuasive area of the text, and then consider how it might be persuasive, perform best. Supporting evidence, a link to the question and reference to a relevant technique is a winning combination.

Text E

The final text of the examination was taken from an article written by an individual who appreciates fireworks and the ‘joy’ they can bring. The writer shared a range of benefits and constantly focused on why people ‘love’ fireworks.

Question A12

This question was intended as an introduction to the text and tested text deduction skills. Success rates were very positive, and most candidates were eligible for credit. Usually those who struggled to achieve did so due to them either using their own knowledge or not reading the question carefully.

Question A13

The final multiple-choice question on the paper asked candidates to deduce the meaning of the word ‘mesmerising’. This was a more challenging multiple-choice task, and the distractors required close reading to disentangle the difference between meaning and effect. A significant number of candidates were accurate in their selection of the fourth bullet. The second most popular choice was ‘to remember happy times’.

Question A14

The final question on the paper tested the ability to synthesise information from Text D and Text E. Candidates were asked to 'synthesise what the writers say about why we enjoy fireworks.' A wide range of possible answers could be used and those who included a decent range of relevant detail were usually rewarded. 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 or lack of detail was 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 move beyond the lower Bands
- answers should be written in full; a table or grid style approach does not demonstrate the ability to collate effectively
- 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

Question B1 and Question B2

A wide range of engaging pieces of writing were produced in response to both question B1 and question B2. The examining team saw the full range of abilities on offer during this series. At the very upper end, candidates were awarded full marks for some exceptionally astute and carefully crafted responses, which were both engaging and insightful. Across the cohort, it was pleasing to note the commitment shown by candidates, many of whom were clearly keen to improve upon their result from the summer series.

Question B1 asked candidates to produce a formal letter to their local newspaper giving their views about a statement, 'Fireworks are dangerous, expensive, disruptive and cause damage to the environment.'

Question B2 asked candidates produce a talk for their classmates suggesting how they could raise money for the local community.

Most candidates appeared to understand the tasks and produced some thoughtful and engaging writing. For many candidates, there were areas across both tasks that could be slightly changed, improved or adapted to improve their written outcome.

Structure and format

Question B1 required candidates to produce a formal letter. This is a style of writing that most will be required to produce when applying for a job and it was a little worrying to note the number that omitted addresses (or were unable to write them sequentially), used inappropriate salutations and failed to paragraph their writing. While none of these factors are marked individually, they do add to the holistic mark awarded for Communicating and Organising and could help to improve the cohesion of a piece.

While most candidates paragraphed their writing, the absence of a plan was sometimes notable when the response lacked direction or clarity. Those who attempted to organise their writing, sometimes using a sequential plan, often found it easier to produce a clear piece of writing that was easier to follow.

Technical accuracy

These reports always focus on technical accuracy and it is clear that some candidates heed the lessons in class and, even in the lower Bands, try to demarcate sentences using simple full stops and capital letters. This approach undoubtedly helps to present a clear overall message to the reader. Apostrophes for contraction were an issue in some of the talks where candidates could be advised not to abbreviate rather than make repeated errors. Tenses were a concern across several papers where candidates drifted between past and present tense making their ideas a little trickier to follow. Finally, while a range of punctuation is desirable and a necessity for the higher Bands, adding a range of punctuation types incorrectly can often hinder the clarity of a piece of writing.

Use of materials

While it is acceptable for candidates to use the source materials when writing, the use of these must be given careful consideration. Text C, for example, provided some facts and information that many candidates use to support their own ideas or to springboard into further discussion (a very welcome approach). Sadly, this was not always the case and a number simply copied from the texts. Some randomly plucked sentences from across all 5 source materials and erratically linked them. Some copied the texts wholesale or changed the odd word, and this was also an unacceptable approach. Sadly, there have now been numerous reports of so-called experts giving advice on social media and the internet, purporting the 'benefits' of copying source materials. These are not isolated cases, and, if followed by candidates, can be hugely detrimental to their success. All learners would be well advised to follow the advice of their teachers in terms of how to incorporate textual information into their own writing or to perhaps ignore the sources altogether rather than risk damaging their final mark.

Development of detail

One of the main barriers that can prevent a candidate moving to the next Band is the level of detail included in their work. A number of the candidates achieving marks in Band 2 often presented an idea within a sentence and then moved to the next idea in a subsequent sentence. Linking ideas can aid the cohesion of a piece of writing but also giving a reason to explore the idea presented or even alternative suggestions or ideas can elevate a piece of writing. For example, in question B2, several candidates suggested an area of their community that would benefit from support but failed to give a single reason why.

Task focus

When writing strays from the task it is easy for the candidate to become totally distracted and lose track of the task. A number of candidates started question B1 with a strong aversion to fireworks but then, without any real justification or explanation, started to explore the benefits. Others became sidetracked by the topic and lost sight of the intended reader and purpose. Those who stuck closely to the task, perhaps by referring to it frequently or following their plan, often performed more successfully.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

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

Tel: 029 2240 4289

Email: gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

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

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

CPD Training / Professional Learning

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

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

WJEC Qualifications

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

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



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