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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2019**

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

November 2019

### UNIT 1 ORACY

#### General Comments

The majority of entries for this series were re-sit candidates where marks were carried forward from June 2019. There was a small number of centres who used this series as a first entry opportunity for its candidates, while some centres entered a small number of candidates to ensure that they had a qualification should they opt out of schooling later in the academic year. While a significant number of candidates were at the lower end of the ability range, there were others at the top of the ability range. Overall, there was a full range of achievement observed during the moderation process.

Unfortunately, a significant number of centres used the tasks for Responding and Interacting from the 2020 series (Vegetarianism – should we all eat green?; Should mobile phones be banned in schools?; What is the future of the Welsh language?) rather than the topics from June 2019: Boxing – a sport for everyone?; Volunteering – a valuable opportunity or a waste of time?; The school curriculum – exam factory or education for life? It had been made very clear, both on the Unit 1 Task 2 cover sheet and in communications from WJEC that the tasks for the November series were the same as those from June 2019. There was also one instances of centres using the materials from the SAMS and their own choice of topic. These centres were referred to the Compliance section of WJEC.

#### Administration

While a good proportion of the recordings and record sheets were sent on time, a significant number were not and there was a large number of cases where record sheets were either not sent or were not signed by the candidates which meant further delays. It was noted that in many cases notes were not sent when it was apparent from either the manner of the recording or the comments in the record sheets that they had been used. A significant number of candidates had notes referred to WJEC as being far too detailed and, in a number of cases, amounting to scripts which were read. Yet again, I must reiterate: for the Individual Researched Presentation 'It is not permissible for the presentation to be scripted. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate'. For Group Discussions, it is also clearly stated that 'No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.'

Incomplete recordings, where a candidate has not undertaken both tasks, should be replaced with complete candidates' work. There were one or two instances of candidates' work being missing which were referred to the Compliance section at WJEC. Centres are reminded that they must ensure there are secure back-up arrangements in place. Occasionally, candidates were substituted by the centre without any contact with WJEC.

Most centres provided recordings on USB devices which were much more straightforward to access. In many cases candidates were very clearly identified at the beginning of the recordings with either the candidate or a teacher giving the date of the recording, the centre number and name, the candidate's full name and examination number and the theme and topic of the presentation and the chosen task for the group discussion. This is a requirement which not all centres are adhering to, particularly regarding the date of the recordings. There was also a significant number of instances where individuals in groups were not identified which made assessment very difficult, especially with audio-only recordings.

There were still some centres where the group discussion used four, five or even six candidates making identification a difficult process, particularly when it was an audio recording. There also appeared to be more centres using a paired situation for candidates, which in most cases was not helpful as there appeared to be little opportunity for real discussion. There were quite a number of cases where a teacher provided the second person in a discussion and also cases where the teacher managed the group very tightly, to the extent that the discussion became a question and answer session rather than any interaction between the candidates or between the candidate and the teacher. This is not ideal and certainly not in the spirit of the task. On the other hand, there were some occasions when teachers intervened to promote more discussion which was clearly helpful to less able or less confident candidates.

Timings for the tasks were generally appropriate, though there were still instances of brevity in both tasks. There were fewer instances of tasks going significantly beyond the time frames required but this was still an issue which in most cases was self-penalising.

In general, the record sheets were detailed and used a combination of criteria related comment and task/candidate specific comment. The best used examples of some of the vocabulary used and, for the group discussions which were audio recordings, often gave the opening words of the candidate or noted whether they spoke first, second etc., which was very helpful.

## **Comments on individual questions/sections**

### **Individual Researched Presentations.**

The full range of topics was used, and it was pleasing to note that many candidates chose topics of real personal interest and spoke with some passion. There was challenge here, with topics such as drug addiction, the plight of the homeless, the impact of social media on self-esteem, environmental issues and provision for MAT students all providing thought provoking work. Many candidates also chose to speak about hobbies and interests, often showing real insight into the demands of sporting and other leisure activities. Those who went beyond straightforward information and tried to evaluate aspects clearly achieved more.

It was pleasing that most candidates appeared to have had a free choice rather than being restricted by a 'one size fits all' choice of topic.

There were, again, examples of presentations which clearly evoked strong interest from the candidate but which were difficult to place in a category. These included a talk on the serial killer Ted Bundy.

Despite messages to the contrary and exemplar materials available on the WJEC website, there are still far too many candidates who are being allowed to use very detailed prompts or scripts which are clearly being read. Should this occur, candidates should be given guidance on how to use brief prompts. Also, there is a tendency to think that many statistics are needed to support their opinions and often these add little to the overall piece. An honest and enthusiastic presentation on a topic of personal interest is the best option rather than a topic which requires much research and is really of little concern to the candidate.

## Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion)

It was pleasing to note that many more of the group discussions limited the group sizes to three candidates (although, disappointingly, there were still examples of groups of five or six) and also mixed the groups rather than having single sex groups. There were some centres which provided audio-visual recordings for this task which made identification of the participants very straightforward. However, there were still far too many examples of discussions which had clearly been rehearsed and sometimes read as polite exchanges with very detailed scripts being used. This is an area which has been highlighted many times and the Instructions for Teachers is absolutely clear: **‘No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task’**. Where groups were able to interact more freely, genuine exchanges of views were apparent.

All three topics were used with perhaps more candidates looking at ‘Boxing – a sport for everyone?’ ‘The school curriculum – exam factory or education for life?’ provoked some interesting views. ‘Volunteering – a valuable opportunity or a waste of time?’ was probably the least popular and sometimes veered towards aspects of work experience rather than volunteering.

This area is still one where candidates need practice in interacting with each other and learning how to sustain an argument. The over-reliance on detailed notes and the increased use of actual scripts is a worrying development in an area which is a real life-skill for candidates and furnishes them with the ability to make and sustain an argument. This is a transferable skill for the written papers and certainly an area which would benefit from more practice and less detailed preparation.

## Assessment

Overall the assessments were generally sound and there was clearly some attempt to moderate the recordings before marks were submitted in some cases. Where there were discrepancies, these arose because marks did not always reflect brevity of performances, limitations of content or reading of scripts. Audio-visual recordings were transparent and generally much more accurately assessed. Audio recordings frequently did not recognise the reading of material in the marks awarded.

Candidates who gave an Individual Researched Presentation lasting under two minutes and then answered one or two straightforward questions were unlikely to achieve marks above the lower end of Band 3 at best. Similarly, a member of a Group Discussion who only made two or three brief contributions – often as a result of there being too many people in the group or because it was a brief discussion – will struggle to move beyond Band 2 marks. In these instances, marks were often very generously awarded. Candidates who did little more than provide information on a topic were also often generously rewarded when there was little or no evidence of evaluation or analysis – skills required for Band 3 and above.

Allowing candidates to select topics of personal interest and encouraging good practice in terms of use of brief notes for the Individual Researched Presentation are still areas for improvement. For the Group Discussion, candidates need to practise the art of arguing and discussing with each other in order to develop this essential life skill.

## **Summary of key points**

A significant number of centres used the tasks for Responding and Interacting from the 2020 series instead of the 2019 series.

It was noted that in many cases notes were not sent when it was apparent from either the manner of the recording or the comments in the record sheets that they had been used. A significant number of candidates had notes referred to WJEC as being far too detailed and, in a number of cases, amounting to scripts which were read.

An honest and enthusiastic presentation on a topic of personal interest is the best option rather than a topic which requires much research and is really of little concern to the candidate.

There were still far too many examples of discussions which had clearly been rehearsed and sometimes read as polite exchanges with very detailed scripts being used.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**  
**GCSE (NEW)**  
**November 2019**  
**UNIT 2 WRITTEN PAPER**

**General Comments**

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. Five reading texts of different types were set for this examination. All were based on the theme of Foodbanks which was chosen deliberately for the November series given the seasonal implications of Text C.

As with previous examinations for this specification, there was a range of question types and the texts provided a balance of continuous and non-continuous writing. All texts were selected in response to the chosen theme. There were no unexpected question types that had not been seen in previous examinations or the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs). Overall, the question paper was well received with the theme appearing to be of interest to the majority of candidates. There was clear evidence of engagement with the questions and reading material and no shortage of empathetic response. Clearly the topic of Foodbanks was a sobering one, but many candidates demonstrated real social awareness through their responses.

The Question Paper Evaluation Committee had considered the requirements of the full range of abilities represented across the untiered candidature. Overall, the texts proved accessible to most candidates and there was no shortage of effort made to engage with the content. There was perhaps a small minority who were unable, or unwilling, to engage with all of the materials on offer, but these candidates were seen infrequently by examiners and the general impression was that most of the candidates were keen to apply themselves to the question paper.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Reading**

**A1. How many three-day emergency food supplies were given by the Trussell Trust foodbanks in 2017-18?**

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

As ever, the first question of the paper is partly designed to provide a straightforward introduction to the first text and also the theme of the examination. The expectation is that the majority of candidates will prove successful in their response to this question. This was a straightforward location question and most candidates were able to engage with the information presented in the non-continuous writing of Text A. The text type, presented as an infographic which was taken from an annual report, provided a series of facts about Trussell Trust foodbanks and proved a useful and thought-provoking introduction to the theme of this paper. The answer to this question was '1,332,952' and this was easily located within the first section of the text. Most candidates selected the correct number although where errors occurred it was often as a result of choosing a number which represented other dates on the chart. Occasionally, examiners reported seeing candidates who had copied down the number incorrectly – either missing a digit out or changing the order of the digits within the number. Clearly these answers were not worthy of credit and care must be taken when copying down information. Overall, this question allowed the majority of candidates to engage with the text, isolate the pertinent information and answer the question.

**A2. Which one of the following statements is NOT true?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question presented candidates with a choice of five multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was incorrect. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the untrue (and therefore correct) statement contained an incorrect number for the number of food supplies provided to people in Wales. 119,946 was actually the number of food supplies provided to people in the West Midlands. It was essential that candidates read the question carefully and were sure of what information they were being asked for, in addition to carefully reading the whole of the text. This was a straightforward task and overall success rates were high.

**A3. Explain in your own words what is meant by a ‘three-day emergency food supply’.**

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

Successful answers to this question needed to engage with the full extent of the phrase whilst being mindful that their ‘own words’ were needed to form at least part of the explanation. Answers that engaged with the idea that this is a food package to support someone in need or who is desperate and that it is intended to help them through a short period of time will have been marked as correct. There were many ways of expressing these ideas and examiners were prepared to see and credit different explanation styles.

No marks were given to candidates who copied unselectively from the text or who relied too heavily on the words in the question with no attempt to explain or use their own words.

**A4. What does the graph show about the number of emergency food supplies provided by Trussell Trust foodbanks?**

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

This question required candidates to engage with the information presented in the graph and engage with the idea that the number of food supplies increased each year or over the years in question. Engagement with the question and what was being asked was key to answering correctly. Examiners were prepared for the fact that some candidates may use the words of the question within their answer or to frame their answer. Clarity was necessary and many candidates proved able to demonstrate the understanding required.

For those candidates who failed to score here, in the majority of cases, it was because of a lack of information or vagueness in their answer – just stating that the food supplies had increased/were increasing was insufficient and there needed to be some engagement with the fact that this had happened over the years or during the time period in question. Occasionally, limited expression muddled the clarity of the answers and in some cases may have resulted in a mark not being given.

**A5. The article refers to some patients as ‘very deprived’. What does the word ‘deprived’ mean?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This was presented as a multiple-choice question and the first question asked in relation to Text B, which was a continuous piece of writing. The question proved reasonably straightforward although there were credible distractors included within the possible answer selections, so it was essential that candidates read the text and question carefully. The fourth answer, ‘people who are suffering from a severe lack of basic necessities in life’, was the correct answer, and this could be inferred from a careful reading of Text B. An awareness of the fact that this term offers an overview will also have helped. The vast majority of candidates answered this question correctly. All of the distractors received some interest from candidates but, as would be expected, the first and second answers were the next most popular choices.

**A6. How many patients from Langworthy Medical Practice are currently using Salford foodbank?**

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

This was a straightforward location question and most candidates were able to engage with the information presented. The answer to this question was (‘around’) 45 patients. Careful and discriminative reading of the text and question was required to ensure that candidates were able to access the correct information. Where candidates did answer incorrectly it was generally as a result of confusing the information given about Height Medical Practice with the information about Langworthy Medical Practice.

**A7. How does this article make it clear that the use of a foodbank is helpful for patients at the Height Medical Practice?**

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

This more demanding question was worth up to five marks and most candidates were generally able to make some headway in their answers. Better answers were able to combine accurate comments about a range of ways in which the foodbank proved helpful to patients with well-selected textual support and a clear ability to use inference and/or analytical skill to demonstrate secure understanding. Those candidates who did not demonstrate a range of ideas and only focused on one or two ideas, perhaps restricting themselves to quite generic commentary on the patients being ‘very deprived’ or experiencing a ‘life and death situation’ were limited in how far they could progress. As ever, those who were prepared to look at a range of evidence and who maintained a clear focus on the question, were able to make real progress.

Reading the text and question carefully is an important skill and some candidates were impeded by using details that related to Langworthy Medical Practice rather than Height Medical Practice. Whilst this did not detract from or diminish any relevant work within an answer, such content was unworthy of credit and will have cost candidates time and perhaps the possibility of looking for relevant evidence.

**A8. According to the poster, why might people find themselves in ‘food crisis’ at Christmas?**

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

This low tariff question provided an introduction to Text C, which was an advertisement for a Reverse Advent Calendar scheme for Cardiff foodbank. The necessary information could be immediately located in the opening paragraph of the text and most candidates were well equipped to find at least one of the three possible reasons given. Candidates who did not score here were generally a little too brief or vague with the information given. For example, the question directed them to the idea of ‘food crisis’ at Christmas so those who responded only that people were on a ‘tight budget’ did not fully engage with the question. Some indication that Christmas can make living on a ‘tight budget’ especially difficult was necessary.

**A9. How does the Reverse Advent Calendar make it seem easy to help others at Christmas?**

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

Successful answers to this question demonstrated a clear focus on what they were being asked. The question was framed around the idea that the calendar makes it seem ‘easy’ to help others and a clear focus on this was essential. Those candidates who did well will have accumulated marks through making a range of different points in response to the question. For example, among the points that could be accessed were the facts that the text asks for a ‘daily donation’ over 2 days which makes the process seem very simple and straightforward, or that the Foodbank will do most of the work and ‘make up the parcels’ so making it easy for the people donating.

As ever, candidates who were able to demonstrate clear understanding of what they had read, combined with an overall focus on the question, will have done well. For those who were not as successful as they might have been, it was generally because they lost sight of the focus of the task or because they did not deliver a range of points. Some candidates also became preoccupied with persuasive ‘technique’ to the detriment of their answer. This kind of analysis is helpful when it aids a candidate in the explanation of a relevant point – for example, some were able to make real headway with an examination of the imperatives ‘pop’ and ‘drop’ to demonstrate the quickness and ease of the actions required of someone donating. However, those who were preoccupied with the fact that there was a rhetorical question in the middle of the text or that the article was presented in ‘Christmas colours’ seemed to lose sight of the focus of the question.

**A10. Explain why Edwina Currie thinks there has been an increase in ‘people using food banks in the last 12 months’.**

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

This was the first question set on Text D which was intended to provide more challenging reading material. As such, the question was intended to be reasonably straightforward in a bid to aid the candidates in understanding the writer’s position. Examiners were instructed to credit students where they demonstrated understanding of the central premise that Currie felt there was an increase in ‘people using food banks’ because there were more foodbanks available or because the number of food banks had increased. Many were able to make some headway here and were able to gain the mark available. Some candidates were also able to demonstrate greater understanding of the text which will no doubt have aided them in their answers to A14.

**A11. Edwina Currie uses the phrase ‘a stick to beat the government’. Explain what she means.**

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

This was a demanding question which provided challenge to candidates and there was a real range of both correct and incorrect answers. Successful answers were able to demonstrate an understanding that Currie thinks that figures about the use of foodbanks are being used to criticise or cause difficulty for the government. Candidates needed to be able to interpret the phrase and demonstrate their understanding through brief explanation. There were many approaches taken to this question, but the best answers were clear and tried to engage with the phrase and its context. Some candidates were able to point out that Currie was using a metaphor, and this may have aided their explanation but it was not necessary that candidates did this in order to receive the mark. It was clear that some candidates struggled to interpret the text in relation to this question and were therefore unable to offer a valid explanation. Indeed, there were multiple candidates who offered the opposing view that the figures were being used to lend support to the government.

**A.12 This blog refers to ‘long-term issues’. What does this mean?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This was presented as a multiple-choice question and a substantial majority of candidates answered correctly. The correct answer was the first option ‘problems that occur over an extended period of time’. The next most popular answer was the third answer ‘problems such as addiction and alcoholism’ which is identified by the text as one of the examples of a long-term problem. This option was deliberately included within the range of answers in order to provide a credible distractor. Successful candidates were able to discriminate between an example of a ‘long-term’ issue and the actual meaning of the term (which provides something of an overview).

**A.13 Look at the first paragraph of this text. What impressions does the writer give of what it is like to get into debt?**

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

This question was designed to be a challenging question on the paper, but it did allow candidates an opportunity to respond more generally and make some initial headway by giving more of an ‘overall’ impression. The more successful answers were produced by candidates who were prepared to really engage with the text and deliver a range of clear impressions that were supported by relevant and focused evidence. In most cases, these responses came from candidates who were able to offer clarity in their ideas and the way they engaged with the text. Candidates who were unable to sustain a focus on the question, perhaps missing the directive to focus on the ‘first paragraph of the text’, may have struggled to accumulate marks. This was also true of those candidates who struggled to demonstrate clear selection skills, perhaps copying down overly large ‘chunks’ of evidence with little attempt to identify what aspect of this evidence was the point of focus or failing to suggest a relative impression.

**A.14 Look at Text D and Text E. Compare and contrast what is said about people who use foodbanks.**

*This question tested the ability to analyse and respond to texts and their subtexts, using inference and deduction and linking ideas within or across texts.*

This was the highest tariff question on the reading element of the paper and, as always, the comparative element provided robust challenge. Candidates were required to compare the two final texts on the paper in relation to a particular point of focus. The attempt rates for this question were, on the whole, very positive and it was pleasing to see so many candidates had timed the paper to allow for dedicating a reasonable proportion of time to this question.

Although Text E was not written directly in response to Text D, the author of E does make reference to Edwina Currie and her beliefs on foodbank users. As such, these articles provided clear and appropriate stimulus for a comparison question. The question directed candidates to compare and contrast what is said about the people who use foodbanks. Further emphasis was added to the focal point by the word 'people' being emboldened on the question paper. Candidates who paid close attention to this and were clearly focused on the task, were often able to present a decent range of points and many will have accumulated marks. There were still many candidates though who did not read the question carefully and offered a more general comparison of both articles or the theme of foodbanks. These candidates will have found it difficult to accumulate marks. In the summer series the comparison question was on the Unit 3 examination, but a similar situation occurred. Candidates who do not respond to the focus of the question cannot be considered 'on task' and this will be reflected in the marks that are awarded.

Examiners were advised not to be prescriptive in terms of the structure of answers and there were different and equally worthy ways to set out an answer to this question. As with the last time the comparison question appeared on Unit 2, it was interesting to see that a number of candidates did offer fully integrated answers and again this may have been as a result of the way these texts were positioned in relation to one another.

**A15. Circle the word below that best fits the gap in the sentence:**

**That evening, my family and I were intending to go to a new restaurant for ..... dinner.**

- A) me            B) are            C) our            D) that

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

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out the appropriate word choice in the context of the sentence presented. Four possible answers were provided, and candidates were required to choose one. The success rates suggested that the majority were able to complete this with few problems. The next most popular choice appeared to be 'are' which is probably as a result of the similar sounds of both words when spoken and will be of little surprise to anyone who has taught or marked English writing.

**A16. Tick (✓) the box of the sentence which is grammatically correct.**

- |                                      |                          |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| He did not want no more ice cream.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| He did not want know more ice cream. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| He did not want any more ice cream.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| He did not want many more ice cream. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

This question was presented as multiple choice with the third answer being correct. The success rates here suggest that most were well equipped to correctly answer this question.

**A17. Circle the pair of words that best fit the meaning of the sentence below:**

Gina had \_\_\_\_\_ to show she had experience as a volunteer for part of her Duke of Edinburgh Award. She had no idea how much she would end up \_\_\_\_\_ it.

required...loving  
needed...enjoying  
wanted...making  
worked...hoping

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

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out which answers were the best fit in the context of the sentence presented. It is a question type that has appeared numerous times on both papers and in the Specimen Assessment Materials, and candidates should have been prepared to select the pair of words which provided the clearest meaning when inserted into the sentences. Again, this did not prove problematic for the majority and success rates were encouraging.

Marks were not always awarded when candidates did not follow the instructions of the question in the presentation of their answer. A few, for example, elected to ignore the pairings and the instruction to circle, and wrote their answers into the blank spaces. Where the right answers were selected, examiners were instructed to mark these as correct. However, if candidates did not select the right words, perhaps choosing words from different pairings, for example, an accurate response to the question was not given and could not be credited.

**A18. Read the text below and show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:**

1. Eventually, the shutters were lifted and the doors opened.
2. Despite this, a queue was already forming outside the local bakery.
3. It was bitterly cold on the last shopping day before Christmas.
4. Iwan joined the people waiting, rubbing his hands together for warmth.
5. The shop was welcoming as Iwan finally stepped into the warmth.

(a) Which sentence should come **third** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]

(b) Which sentence should come **fifth** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]

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

As with the previous questions of this type, to answer successfully candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences in order to see which sentences fit best into the required locations. Looking at the sentences individually it may have been possible to come up with various orders which would appear to make sense. The requirement was to choose the order in which the meaning made the most sense. Again, there was some challenge, but most candidates proved able to determine at least one of these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. It was bitterly cold on the last shopping day before Christmas.
2. Despite this, a queue was already forming outside the local bakery.
3. Iwan joined the people waiting, rubbing his hands together for warmth.
4. Eventually the shutters were lifted and the doors opened.
5. The shop was welcoming as Iwan finally stepped into the warmth.

### **Proofreading**

B1. In this question, as with previous proofreading tasks, candidates were asked to read a text, circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.

*This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.*

Most candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The text was presented as an unbroken paragraph of continuous writing. Most were able to detect some errors here, although there were perhaps fewer candidates achieving full marks than in previous papers. This may well be as a result of the entry pattern of candidates with more, on the whole, struggling with aspects of Written Accuracy than we might see in a more standard entry. There was a range of examples of inaccurate corrections being offered than has previously been seen. 'Gratefully', 'toiletries', 'appeal' and 'tinned' were amongst the accurate spellings on the paper that were offered for correction on multiple occasions.

As with previous examples of this question type, candidates are advised to avoid introducing additional errors whilst making a correction. For example, any candidates who identified 'dried' as an error but corrected it as 'Dried' would not have been credited. The word needs to appear as it would in the text and clearly the introduction of a capital letter would render it incorrect.

### **Writing**

B2. Candidates were given the choice of which task to complete for this question. They were able to choose between:

- (a) Describe a time when you faced a challenge.
- (b) Write an essay explaining why charity is important, giving clear reasons and examples.

Both writing tasks proved accessible to students and some enjoyable accounts were produced. In so far as it was possible to tell, there appeared to be a reasonably even split between the two task types and it was clear that candidates had been prepared carefully for both types of task.

Task A was a description writing task and this produced some enjoyable accounts. In the main, candidates appeared to write from their own experience, but the challenges were diverse in scope. From mountain climbing and various other physical challenges, to the mental difficulties of tests and exams, to facing school and friends in challenging circumstances; there seemed to be a widely spread range of stimuli to enable candidates to produce specific and detailed responses to this task. Better writing tended to demonstrate a clear awareness of structure with appropriately developed content that sought to engage a reader. The production of a well-written, engaging piece of fluent writing that clearly responded to the set task is always the desired outcome.

Task A also seemed to produce some examples of work that followed a less desirable pattern. There was evidence of some candidates not responding to the task set but instead producing work that had clearly been predetermined and rehearsed. Given the lack of task awareness, this compromised the extent to which such pieces could achieve. It also, in some cases, raised questions as to the authenticity of the work produced given that it was potentially learned rather than created. Where there were multiple written pieces that followed a similar descriptive style, content and structure, in addition to being 'off task', this was a rather more worrying prospect.

Task B was an exposition task, and this also produced some very detailed responses. Candidates were engaged by the task and some were able to effectively draw upon their own experiences, and indeed what they had read in the reading section, to write convincingly on the subject. At times, given the nature of the topic of this paper, there were some quite sobering accounts but also considerable empathy and social awareness from the young people taking this examination. It was interesting that some candidates used the materials from the reading section of this paper as a 'springboard', whereas others appeared to have been influenced by previous papers such as the Voluntourism and Fairtrade papers which, presumably, they had worked on for exam preparation. In some cases, candidates appeared to have run out of things to write about and did not have enough awareness of specifics or personal opinions to carry them through. These were often the candidates who had not taken advantage of the planning space, or, where used, had done so very briefly. As mentioned previously in these reports, this type of writing really benefits from thinking through the direction of the essay in advance of writing.

With both Task A and Task B, there was also plenty of evidence of careful planning and, as with previous examinations, timing did not appear to be a problem with the vast majority of candidates able to write in some detail. Brief or incomplete work tended to be self-penalising. As ever, errors in written accuracy proved a significant area of concern and, as with last November, it became clear that this may have been a recurring issue for many of those who were re-sitting this qualification. Written work which is characterised by numerous errors, a struggle to control tense and agreement, or an inability to punctuate with control and coherence, will struggle to progress through the Bands of the Assessment Criteria. An awareness of basic sentence punctuation (including the use of capital letters and full stops) and the avoidance of comma splicing are key areas which would benefit from a heightened focus.

## **Summary of key points**

Candidates who do not respond to the focus of a reading question cannot be considered 'on task' and this will be reflected in the marks that are awarded.

As with previous examples of the proofreading task, candidates are advised to avoid introducing additional errors whilst making a correction.

In the writing task, errors with written accuracy proved a significant area of concern and, as with last November, it became clear that this may have been a recurring issue for many of those who were re-sitting this qualification.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**  
**GCSE (NEW)**  
**November 2019**  
**UNIT 3 WRITTEN PAPER**

**General Comments**

A breakdown of the Unit 3 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. For this examination, candidates were provided with five different reading texts. All were based on the theme of swimming.

With a range of text and task types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical GCSE English language examination. Prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being assessed or the positive achievement of outcomes. The texts provided readers with a wealth of positive details about the benefits of swimming but also gave some valuable tips on how to remain safe when swimming, particularly when doing so outdoors. Over 200 deaths are caused by drowning in the UK each year, so the topic was a valuable one.

Although this was predominantly a re-sit cohort, some year 11 candidates had been entered for the examination. Across the whole ability range, most candidates worked diligently and carefully considered the most effective use of their time.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**1. List two things that are strengthened by swimming.**

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

Text A, a poster produced to detail the benefits of swimming, was a visually attractive and accessible text which allowed all candidates to immediately engage with the theme. The text gave an even balance of illustrations and text and most did not struggle to identify the information required to successfully answer the first two questions.

The first question required candidates to locate information from two different areas of the text. Most managed to find at least one correct answer. Separate marks were awarded to each part of the question, so it was possible to gain credit for one correct detail. Most candidates were able to locate the detail about swimming 'strengthens your lungs' (which was found in the middle section of the page) although some were a little careless in the transfer of this information and incorrectly suggested that swimming 'strengthens asthma'. The other piece of correct information was located around the illustration of the swimmer where candidates were told that swimming 'increases upper body strength', although some focused incorrectly on the 'tones your muscles'. The two correct areas of the text both contained a reference to 'strength' or 'strengthens' and it is worth suggesting that candidates may look for keywords from the question when answering lower tariff questions.

As with all questions which contain the word 'list', it was perfectly acceptable to copy down the answers directly from the text. Candidates who did not manage to gain credit for this question usually had not read the question correctly or did not read the text closely enough.

## **2. How many calories are burned during a moderate 30-minute swim?**

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

This question tested the ability to locate the correct piece of information from the poster. Careful reading was required for candidates to isolate the word 'moderate' and then locate the exact numerical information. At the bottom of the poster there were three boxes which gave information about the calorific expenditure during either a recreational, moderate or vigorous swim. Candidates who correctly transferred the '150-370' from the middle box were awarded one mark. Most candidates were successful in their approach to this question, but some chose to write down all three number ranges and therefore rendered a potentially correct answer, incorrect.

## **3. Text B helps children to swim safely outdoors. Put these stages into the order in which they should be completed by numbering them.**

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

Text B was produced by the Swim Safe website to encourage safe swimming. A series of steps were included to suggest the actions which are required to remain safe whilst swimming. These steps were not presented in chronological order (i.e. in the order in which they should be followed) and it was the job of the candidate to sequence the information correctly. To answer successfully, candidates had to determine the most likely order of steps. The second answer had been completed to help candidates towards success.

As mentioned in previous reports, candidates have a range of approaches when tackling this question type. Some try to complete the question at speed and tend to scan the first word of each section to look for obvious literal clues. This approach is not always helpful and candidates who read the whole text box undoubtedly help themselves. Candidates should have spotted the 'before you start' and when reading the rest of this section, it makes sense that some research would be helpful before embarking on a swim. With only two bubbles remaining, it was possible to deduce that one was concerned with safe entry into the water while the other referred to being safe while swimming. The former of these would logically be the next step in the process. While most chose the correct sequence, there were some who did not manage to answer correctly. In many cases this was perhaps due to not reading carefully.

During CPD and examination reports, it is stressed that candidates must take care in their application of numbers (for example, numbering their responses: 1-3, or 2-5, rather than 1,3 and 4). Some candidates used the same number on more than one occasion (2,1,2 and 3) which is impossible to credit. It is imperative that candidates are careful when competing their responses to ensure they optimize the number of marks available to them. Most candidates who used a word processor chose to hand write this answer in the answer booklet, a decision that ensured their answer was clearly and accurately presented.

**4. In Text B, the writer states that swimmers should ‘Stay alert while you are swimming’. What is meant by the word ‘alert’?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas.*

This was the first multiple choice question to feature on the paper. Four possible answers were provided for candidates to select from. As with all multiple-choice questions, credible distractors were included to increase the demand and challenge. All distractors were potentially sensible actions that could be taken by a swimmer, but only the reference to ‘attentive’ is suggested by being ‘alert’. Candidates should ensure that their final choice is clearly demarcated and those who correct their answers must take care to ensure corrections are both clear and legible.

**5. What is the name of Gabby Dickinson’s outdoor swim company?**

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

This was intended to be a straightforward question as an introduction to the more demanding Text C. Candidates were simply asked to locate the name of Gabby Dickinson’s swim company. The correct answer was located in paragraph three and the capitalisation of the company name should have further helped candidates. While most were able to see that the correct name was, ‘Gone Swimming’, a not insignificant number of candidates copied down the entire sentence, ‘...Gabby Dickinson, who runs outdoor swim firm Gone Swimming,...’ some were a little more selective and copied down, ‘outdoor swim firm Gone Swimming’ but both approaches were deemed to be incorrect. Some candidates put the correct title in a sentence of their own to engage with the task, but those who simply copied unselectively and without precision were not considered to have been able to locate and isolate the correct company name.

**6. List two natural features that can be enjoyed during an outdoor swim.**

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

Similar to the task set in June 2017, where candidates were required to identify two things that watching kite flying kept Paul Birmingham’s children away from, this question required candidates to locate two pieces of information to achieve one mark. The question proved to be a straightforward one and most were successful. A range of details could be taken from across the text, (for example, details about the clear lakes, picturesque rivers, waterfalls and untouched landscapes) but two correct details were essential. Adjectives were not essential to achieve marks for all the possible responses; it was the feature which was essential. Overall, this question appeared to allow candidates across the cohort to engage with the text and the question with few barriers to understanding.

## **7. What is meant by the writer when she refers to a ‘secluded location’?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

This was a multiple-choice question with four possible answers to choose from and which most candidates managed to answer successfully. The phrase in question was located in the second paragraph of the text. Those who found it and read the information in context would have found further details (such as the comment suggesting that the activity is ‘away from the hustle and bustle...’) to aid their comprehension. All possible answers had the word ‘place’ to support candidates with their understanding of ‘location’ and this meant that they were only required to deduce the meaning of the word ‘secluded’. The first answer, ‘a place that is quiet and isolated’ was the correct answer and impressively over 90% of all candidates were successful in their ability to answer correctly.

## **8. In your own words, summarise why Gabby Dickinson enjoys wild swimming.**

*This question tested the ability to summarise information.*

Text C gave a series of clear points celebrating the joys of outdoor swimming. Gabby Dickinson is an ambassador for the pursuit and was unequivocal in her praise. Throughout the article it was possible to note a wealth of encouraging comments aimed to persuade others to try this activity. The mark scheme shows that these reasons were collated into six key areas. Candidates who covered any of these areas were rewarded according to quality and skill.

Although this examination was the sixth since the onset of the Specification, summary still proves to be a challenge. A good deal of input has been given at CPD/webinar sessions and in all Principal Examiner Reports to convey a clear message about the most successful approach to summary. Those who require additional information about this skill would also be well advised to check the OER materials and the Teacher Guide.

Feedback from the examining team suggests that many candidates still fail to summarise efficiently. Many insist on using an ‘evidence-explain’ approach, which is wholly inappropriate for a summary, whilst others include lengthy quotations and copy huge swathes of text. It is clear which candidates have grasped summary skills as they produce concise and clear responses. The best candidates disentangle the key details and then present these clearly and separately.

Bullet points and continuous text are perfectly acceptable when presenting a summary. However, lengthy paragraphs where candidates quote, explain or elaborate, are unhelpful and struggle to access the full range of marks. It is worth stressing that candidates will be helped by adopting a chronological approach to their own reading/analysis of the text but that answers can also be presented in any order.

## 9. Explain what is meant when the writer refers to 'sedentary time'.

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas.*

This was the final multiple choice question on the paper. For this question, candidates were asked to deduce the meaning of the phrase 'sedentary time'. The phrase was used in relation to people who have 'back injuries' and 'desk based jobs' and could be found in the third paragraph of the text. With four possible options, and a less commonly used word, this was arguably the more challenging of the multiple questions which can be evidenced by the statistics - approximately 80% of candidates answered the question correctly (compared to a slightly higher figure for the other two multiple choice questions). When setting the paper, it was decided that two opposing pairs of words would be offered (active/inactive and bored/dynamic) to ensure there is no predictability in the types of credible distractors. The fourth bullet, 'time when you are inactive' was the correct response for this question.

As with all multiple choice questions, candidates must not tick multiple boxes as this will render a potentially correct answer incorrect.

## 10. How does Text D persuade the reader that swimming is good for everyone?

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

With the title 'Why swimming is so good for you' there was no mistaking the direction and aims of Text D. With such a positive and persuasive article, it felt like a natural choice for a 'how' question. As with previous 'how' questions, the specific wording of the question was key to success and the question posed here, 'How does Text D try to persuade the reader that swimming is good for everyone?' aimed to encourage as many candidates as possible to engage with the task in hand and answer the question appropriately.

This question is one that challenges the full range of abilities. The text was both rich in technique, language and content and allowed all candidates to engage with its aims. Indeed, the text was so overwhelmingly persuasive and positive that there really was no excuse for a candidate not to focus on the content of the passage and to consider why swimming is 'good for everyone'. Unfortunately, as usual, a number produced generic 'technique driven' responses which showed no real understanding of the text or the task. Rather than referencing a statement such as, 'Who wouldn't want a swimmer's body?' and stating that the rhetorical question appeals to those of us who want to not only feel good but look good too, some candidates wasted a significant amount of time writing hypothetically about questions and their generic role in a persuasive text. The same can be said for language, some candidates opted to comment on the use of pronouns and imperative verbs (in some cases without even quoting any) and did not link these to the text.

The key messages regarding this question type remain the same across all exam series. 'How' can be answered in different ways but focus on the question is essential. This question does not intend to encourage a relentless hunt for technical devices (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question). Instead, the aim is to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer's arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader (any techniques used when conveying their messages can be mentioned and explored, where relevant, but should not be commented on at the expense of clarity and focus on the question). Many who make a decent attempt when answering this question do so by mainly concentrating on the content of the passage. Additionally, those who work chronologically through the text often produce more coherent and methodical responses. Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information. The very best answers respond to language and consider the way in which the writer's argument develops (with a constant eye to the question).

### **11. What do you learn about the writer before she takes up swimming?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing and understand and recognise the reliability of texts.*

Overall, candidates excelled at this question. The question required candidates to locate details from the first five paragraphs (before the writer starts to swim). Range and variety were important as in some places the details were closely packed together. For example, some candidates simply copied out the first paragraph, whereas others were more selective, separating the ideas into two separate points (and they were usually rewarded for their efforts). The mark scheme allowed for six general areas of coverage and examiners were instructed that using their own words, paraphrasing and or quoting were all perfectly acceptable.

Most candidates were able to score at least one or two marks for this question and those who struggled to score more highly usually produced responses that were either characterised by brevity, unselective copying or a lack of focus.

### **12. Explain what the writer means when she tells us that she ‘felt the black cloud ebbing away.’**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

Word meaning questions usually pose a challenge and this question was no exception. To answer correctly, candidates were required to explain the meaning of the phrase, ‘felt the black cloud ebbing away’. This phrase itself is quite a complex one as candidates are required to explore the notion of both the ‘black cloud’ and the ‘ebbing away’. Mental health is such a prevalent issue that the majority were able to link the ‘black cloud’ to her dark state of mind and her bleak outlook on life. Many also recognised the writer’s signs of depression and despair in the first part of the quotation. The second part of the quotation proved to be more of a challenge as candidates were required to wrestle with the meaning of ‘ebbing away’. The concept of something ebbing away is that is slowly dissipating but candidates who recognised the fact that her despair is going away or gradually leaving her were credited.

The examining team was pleasantly surprised to note the wide range of explanations offered with some thoughtful and mature wording.

### **13. Look at Text D and Text E. Synthesise the benefits of swimming using information taken from these two texts.**

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

CPD feedback received by WJEC suggests that this is one of the skills that generates most concern. However, the experiences of markers indicate that there is little evidence to suggest that candidates are unable to complete these questions. Most can complete these questions in detail and there are very few instances where candidates have no real concept of how to respond to the task set.

Synthesis requires candidates to draw on information gleaned from the texts indicated and to produce a new document. Close reading of the question is essential as this provides the steer for the content of the response. For example, for this question, candidates were asked to consider the ‘benefits’ of swimming and this is literally all they ought to have included. A small minority still tried to compare the two texts but thankfully this approach was relatively rare.

As with all reading questions, the ability to produce a coherent response, to disentangle information and to remain on task is essential. There are two main approaches that candidates tend to adopt when approaching a synthesis – some like to deal with each text separately and others tend to integrate details from both sources. There is no preferred style and both are treated equally.

As a higher tariff question (with 25% of the marks for the entire reading section), the space provided for an answer will have indicated to candidates that some time should have been spent providing a full answer to this question. Very brief answers with little range in the points presented were self-penalising and often low scoring. Answers which misjudged the evidence in front of them also may have struggled to access marks. For example, those candidates who wrote at length on one aspect of swimming (such as the inexpensive nature of swimming) and ignored other benefits, will have found that their marks were perhaps lower than those who included a range of different points and ideas.

As with all examination questions for this paper, it is definitely worth accessing the OER materials which provide clear exemplars for each task and will aid teachers in their understanding of what constitutes a specific mark in each Band.

## **Section B**

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one argumentation and one persuasion) linked to the topic studied during the reading examination.

### **Task 1**

For their first writing task, candidates were asked to produce a talk for their classmates:

According to your PE teacher, 'Swimming is the very best form of exercise'. You have been asked to prepare a talk for your classmates in which you give your views about swimming.

This task aimed to encourage argumentation writing and candidates readily grasped the fact that the talk should focus on the topic of swimming. A range of different approaches was offered, and this report aims to reflect on some of the more common approaches and areas to note.

Candidates and teachers are familiar with the format of talks. During the CPD and webinar sessions, the message has been clear in relation to a talk: work out who the audience will be and then produce a piece of continuous prose/paragraphed writing to appeal to them. The majority produced somewhere ranging between 3-6 paragraphs of writing focusing on the given topic. Very few candidates produced writing which could be considered 'off task' or unfit for purpose. Some chose to place speech marks at the beginning and end of their talk. While unnecessary, candidates are not penalised for adopting this approach. Despite commenting on the pitfalls of scripted talks during Principal Examiner reports, a small minority chose to produce writing using this style. It was a much less successful approach and should be avoided. Too often, candidates who attempt to use this format end up focusing on stage directions and the delivery of the speech (sometimes from multiple speakers) rather than its content. Those who produce a script, especially with two or more speakers, often find that they dilute the level of detail in their writing and thus restrict the impact of their talk.

The topic seemed to be a straightforward one and almost all candidates were able to give a range of their own experiences and anecdotes. While most chose to agree with their 'PE teacher' some chose to dispute the claim and, if well supported, performed equally as well.

The content of a talk is crucial especially when considering the fact that it ought to appeal to a given audience on a specific topic. When candidates embark on a writing task, they will have spent approximately one hour immersed in the topic and should therefore be able to think widely around the theme. A small minority chose to copy virtually word for word from the source materials. While candidates are able to use some of the details or statistics from the source materials, they should refrain from simply copying down huge chunks. It is difficult to credit candidates who copy unselectively or try to 'pass off' the sources as their own. Examiners know these materials all too well and are immediately aware of what has been copied.

Careful planning is key to success. Those who do not plan, often find that the contents of their talk end up lacking in direction and detail. A five-point plan, for example, can help candidates to cover a range of different areas and avoid duplication of coverage. Checklist plans where candidates simply jot down techniques or types of punctuation seem to work less well. For example, candidates who try to force a range of punctuation into their writing often lose focus on the content and the fluency of their writing. As mentioned in previous reports, organisation is key. Paragraphs and headings are the more obvious features of structure but direction and content are also closely linked to organisation. Candidates who do not plan their writing often produce work that appears to be disorganised and this has a serious impact on the quality. A series of disjointed ideas will be far less successful (usually restricted to Band 2) as opposed to something that flows fluently and links up ideas and concepts.

Very few candidates lost sight of the task although a number produced writing that was particularly brief and lacking in detail. Careful timing during the examination will help candidates to apportion their time wisely.

Overall, we saw some very engaging writing in which candidates passionately argued for the benefits of swimming (or more general exercise). Many candidates talked about their current passion for swimming and quite a number spoke with great fondness about childhood swimming lessons. Humorous anecdotes worked well as did the occasional water-based pun. Several candidates suggested that they might turn to swimming next time they are feeling under pressure and there was a genuine engagement with the topic as a whole.

## **Task 2**

For their persuasive writing task, candidates were asked to:

Write a letter to your local council persuading them to improve the leisure facilities in your area.

The formal letter is a format that candidates are familiar with. As with a talk, the organisation and content are key. In terms of organisation, a formal letter layout was required. It never ceases to amaze how many are unable to structure a formal letter. While the addresses and salutations have no specific marks awarded to them, they are credited under the holistic Communicating and Organising mark. Some candidates chose to simply write 'address' and, while it is accepted that this may be done under time constraints, it is no substitution for accurate addresses (and sometimes a little too vague when a candidate simply writes, 'address' twice, rather than indicating the placement of each address). A considerable number of candidates are unaware of the sequence in which an address should be ordered. Again, this is an essential life skill and something that they ought to go to the effort to learn. Salutations in these answers varied hugely – some were correct, and some were either incorrect or far too informal.

Although it was clear that timing was an issue for several candidates, the contents in many of the letters were engaging. Many candidates waxed lyrical about the unhygienic and dilapidated state of their local leisure facilities and took joy in expressing some of these gripes in great detail (for example: disgusting showers and toilets alongside some pretty hazardous swimming pools and gyms). Very few took the opportunity to present some ridiculously improbable findings and most took the task seriously. Overall, there was no shortage of things to say and candidates seemed to genuinely enjoy berating the local council! Interestingly, for this task, candidates (with the odd exception) seemed more comfortable to move away from the source materials and were comfortable writing about their own experiences and familiar locations. Disappointingly, there were, however, a small number who simply copied out the information from the reading source materials. Again, this is to be avoided at all costs.

Technical accuracy, as mentioned in all previous reports, remains a concern across all writing tasks. Some candidates struggled to punctuate from the beginning with strangely placed commas in addresses and some managed to write entire paragraphs with only one full stop at the end. Comma splicing remains an all too common feature in written work and randomly placed semi colons and colons are still evident. As mentioned earlier, some candidates included a tick list of different types of punctuation on their planning page, which they then tried to force unconvincingly into their writing. It is far better for candidates to simply write naturally than to force punctuation where it does not fit. The usual spelling errors continued with basic homophone errors occurring frequently (our and are, there and their, where and were etc.). It was also disappointing to see candidates who could not spell words given to them during the reading materials or even in the writing tasks (for example: council, leisure, facilities).

### **Summary of key points**

The best high tariff reading responses always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information.

While candidates are able to use some of the details or statistics from the source materials in their writing responses, they should refrain from simply copying down huge chunks as very little credit can be awarded with this approach.

A five-point writing plan can help candidates to cover a range of different areas and avoid duplication of coverage.



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