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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**SUMMER 2019**

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<b>Unit</b>	<b>Page</b>
Unit 1 Oracy	1
Unit 2 Written Paper	6
Unit 3 Written Paper	17

# WJEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2019

### UNIT 1

#### General Comments

The tasks for this series, which will also be for the November 2019 entries, remained the same for Task 1 – the Individual Researched Presentation – as previous series. The generic topics were: Wales, Leisure, The World of Work, The World of

Science/Technology and Citizenship. Task 2 – Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) was a choice between ‘Boxing – a sport for everyone’, ‘Volunteering – a valuable opportunity or a waste of time?’ and ‘The school curriculum – exam factory or education for life?’ These appeared to engage the candidates across the age and ability range.

#### Administration

The vast majority of the entries for this series were first time candidates with very few re-sitting. This made the entry more representative. There appeared to be fewer issues with lost or corrupted recordings, but centres must be aware that there is an expectation that all recordings are backed up or, if necessary, re-recorded to ensure all candidates have evidence of their contributions. Centres still, in some cases, had to be reminded to replace candidates’ work if they had not completed both tasks, and this sometimes caused delays in the moderation process. The majority of centres provided their samples in good time, but there were some very late submissions which had not been authorised.

The presentation of samples varied hugely, with the best arranging the samples in rank order of candidates with both tasks clearly labelled and with group tasks indicating if more than one candidate in the sample was involved. The worst were left to the moderator to try and work out which candidates were represented and often necessitated requests for several missing candidates’ work. It was helpful that the majority of recordings were provided on USBs, though the encryption of some was unnecessarily complex. Some centres sent multiple discs which tended to be less convenient to use and often succumbed to breakdown.

Despite clear instructions, many candidates were not introduced in the manner required – stating centre number, candidate name and number – and this was a particular problem with audio recordings of Group Discussions. In a few cases, the record sheet noted when a particular candidate spoke, or mentioned their first words, but this was not consistent.

It was very pleasing to find that the vast majority of Group Discussions comprised three candidates, which gave all a good opportunity to contribute. There were some instances of paired discussions, which were seldom successful. There were also a few groups of five, six or even seven which did not help any of the candidates.

Both tasks generally kept to the suggested time frames of between five and seven minutes for the Individual Researched Presentation and ten minutes for the Group Discussion. However, there were still examples of excessively long Group Discussions – many over twenty minutes – which were not productive. The art of concise and meaningful discussion is one that should be emphasised.

The issue of overly detailed notes and prompt cards was of real concern and a number of candidates' notes or cards were referred to WJEC for investigation. It is clearly stated in the guidelines for the Individual Researched Presentation that **It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate.** It is further stated that the role of the teacher is **'to ensure that the candidate does not read his or her presentation'**. In audio recordings it was often clear to the moderator that work was being read, despite no mention of this in the record sheet. Audio-visual recording were obviously clear in showing the amount of reliance on any notes used.

The same issue arose in the Group Discussion tasks, where again the instructions are clear: **No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.** It was again clear to moderators that many candidates had prepared their discussion and simply took polite turns in stating their views.

In a number of cases notes were not sent when it was apparent from the manner of delivery that they had been used. It cannot be emphasised enough that the approach involving reading contravenes the instructions, therefore candidates must be advised that they cannot read their contributions for either task.

The best record sheets were detailed and made reference to specific aspects of the candidates' work. The worst were very brief and simply copied a few comments from the criteria. There was little evidence of internal moderation which, in the case of audio recordings, is vital and would highlight shortcomings such as identification of candidates.

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

### **Task Setting**

#### **Individual Researched Presentation**

Moderators expressed real admiration for the way in which many candidates approached this task, showing real passion for their subject and conveying this to their audience. That so many were clearly choosing a topic of personal interest rather than being told what to speak about was encouraging. In one centre, candidates were all advised to speak about either the best or worst invention. Despite initial misgivings that this could be overly prescriptive, this did work and produced some fine pieces such as an outstanding presentation on the invention of anaesthesia.

It was a little disappointing that many candidates were not given the opportunity to respond to questions or responded to questions which were clearly prepared beforehand. For all candidates, the opportunity to respond to questions often enhances their performance and allows them to show their breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject. In many instances the audience appeared to comprise just the teacher or perhaps one or two other candidates. This again did not give a sense of how the presentation would work for a larger group. Clearly for some candidates this might be necessary, but others should really be presenting to more than one or two people.

PowerPoint was used on some occasions and was generally appropriate to the topic in hand. There were still a few occasions where the slides were read out rather than being an illustration of a point to be made. This practice should be discouraged.

There were fewer examples of candidates using the same topic for both this task and the Group Discussion, though there were some who used each of the Group Discussion topics – boxing, volunteering and the school curriculum for both. This is really limiting for candidates as there tends to be repetition of the same material. One centre's students all gave a pitch for a charity of their choice, which again had its limitations.

All five topics were used and again many candidates really shone. 'Wales' was covered in many ways, from discussion of the use of the language to promoting national sports' teams and areas of interest in the country. Persuading the audience to a point of view was very successful in engaging with the audience and giving shape to the presentations. Those who simply gave information about an aspect of Wales were generally less successful.

'Leisure' proved popular and again, persuading the audience to participate in a sport, for example, allowed for higher skills to be shown and credited. The range of topics was similar to those of previous years, including traditional and less traditional sports and activities and also the well-used areas of VAR technology and aspects of payment for footballers in particular.

'The World of Work' was perhaps the least common topic, and again tended to focus on particular areas such as hairdressing, a dream job or the value of work experience.

'The World of Science and Technology' proved a rich source of material with topics as diverse as cyberbullying, the impact of photo-shopping, robotics, AI and various aspects of social media. On a more scientific note there were presentations on electric vehicles, animal testing, black holes and the impact of nuclear waste among others. As previously noted, one centre used the area of the best or worst invention successfully.

'Citizenship' produced some outstanding presentations on topics as diverse as the changing face of racism, Brexit, views of Islam, gender bias in the workplace (which could also have been in the area of 'The World of Work') and knife crime.

There were only one or two examples where it was difficult to determine which topic area was being addressed – for example 'Poverty in Africa'.

As already outlined in the section on administration, the issue of the use of overprescriptive notes/cue cards which were read is of great concern and must be addressed.

### **Responding and Interaction – Group Discussion**

As has been mentioned in all previous reports, the issue of over-prepared, polite exchanges based on detailed notes or scripts continues to adversely impact on this aspect of Oracy. Those centres who encourage minimal preparation and spontaneous conversation give their candidates the best opportunities. It was encouraging that many more centres used groups of three for this task and also appeared to encourage mixed groups which generally provided a real range of ideas.

Unfortunately, some set this up as a mini debate, with a chairperson and two others with opposing views. This often resulted in the chairperson doing little more than facilitating the others and hence not achieving a great deal.

With audio recordings there was sometimes a real challenge for the moderators to identify candidates. Three girls with similar voices who were not introduced proved very difficult, as did larger groups. Introductions are vital if audio recordings are used. It was pleasing that more centres had heeded advice to use audio-visual recording for the group discussion as it allowed moderators to see how candidates responded to each other and to give credit for active listening. Placement of candidates in a line did not always encourage natural interaction, however.

It was also encouraging that some teachers reminded candidates to use each other's names when audio recordings were used, which greatly improved the ability to discriminate between candidates.

The three areas – 'Boxing – a sport for everyone', 'Volunteering – a valuable opportunity or a waste of time?' and 'The school curriculum – exam factory or education for life?' – were all popular and seemed to engage candidates across the ability and age range.

The topic of Boxing was popular, with many candidates able to bring their own experience to the discussion either as a participant or having a friend or family member involved. There were strong opinions expressed on both sides of the argument, and the idea of females being involved in boxing was strongly supported on the whole.

Discussions on the school curriculum were interesting with many expressing disappointment at the limitations of their current subjects. More mature candidates were often in a position to compare their own education with that of their children, which proved interesting.

Volunteering was perhaps the least popular and there tended to be something of a cross-over into the realms of work experience which was not always productive. Some were able to cite examples where the Welsh Baccalaureate or Duke of Edinburgh Awards used volunteering and how that impacted on the candidates.

In general, groups did interact with each other but there was again too much reliance on notes and over-rehearsed discussion which lacked spontaneity. The core aspect of this task – interacting and responding – should be emphasised as this is a transferable skill for all aspects of life.

Once again, teacher intervention was a feature of some higher band candidates' discussions and was both unnecessary and unhelpful. Conversely there were examples of sensitive and helpful intervention with less able and less confident candidates which were totally appropriate.

### **Summary of key points**

The best centres provided well-organised recordings, detailed record sheets and apt and challenging tasks suited to all abilities. Often it was clear there had been internal moderation and marks for such centres were accurate and realistic, based firmly on the criteria.

Conversely, a larger proportion of centres were disorganised, with samples provided in a random fashion, record sheets brief and unhelpful and marks given without consideration of the criteria. These centres' candidates were frequently overrewarded, with no allowance made for extreme brevity or reliance on notes.

As has already been mentioned, the reading of scripts, notes or prompts is a real area of concern. There is no excuse for candidates to read, and if they do, they should not be rewarded with high marks. Indeed, they should not be allowed to present a task in this manner and if they do, should be told to amend their notes to very brief bullet points and do their presentation again. Similarly, groups should not read out prepared views.

The use of audio recordings often lacks the transparency of audio-visual recordings, but it is clear to the moderators when candidates are reading, whether they can see them or not.

I see Oracy as a fundamental aspect of the English Language qualification which gives candidates skills for the outside world when taught and assessed properly. In the real world, speaking to people in an appropriate way, giving information and expressing a point of view is an essential skill.

# WJEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2019

### UNIT 2

#### General Comments

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. Candidates were provided with five reading texts of different types for this examination. All were based on the theme of Robots.

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 of Robots. There were no unexpected question types that had not been seen in previous examinations or the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs). The theme appeared to have been of interest to the majority of candidates and there was no shortage of effort or engagement with the questions and reading material across the examination. Overall, this question paper seemed well received.

The requirements of the full range of abilities represented by the untiered candidature were fully considered during the paper setting process. As with previous examinations, the texts proved accessible to the majority. There was a small minority who were less focused in approach. In most cases these were candidates who perhaps proved unsuccessful in their ability to gauge the timing of the examination or who were unwilling to apply themselves to the materials presented. As has proved the case in previous Unit 2 examinations, on balance these cases were relatively rare.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Reading

##### **A1. In what year was the word 'robot' first used?**

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

It seems widely understood that part of the purpose of the first question is to provide a straightforward introduction to the first text and also the theme of the examination. The expectation is that most candidates will prove successful in their response to this question and that was certainly the case. 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, an infographic taken from a magazine, provided a series of general facts about robots and proved a straightforward and useful introduction to the theme of this paper. This text was intended to hold few surprises and was easily navigated by most. The answer to this question was '1921' and this was easily located within the first section of the text. It was sufficient to copy out the date directly as it appeared in the text although some did elect to write it out in words. Overall, this question allowed a clear 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 was presented with a choice of five multiple-choice options and required candidates 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 date. 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 text. This was a straightforward task and success rates were high. Those who failed to read the instructions adequately, selected an incorrect answer or tried to tick multiple options were not rewarded.

**A3. List two facts you have learned about the ‘first humanoid robot’.**

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

This was intended to be a straightforward question to enable candidates to build further confidence. Candidates were awarded one mark for each appropriate answer, up to total mark of two. There appeared to be few barriers to success and, with at least five points to choose from in the text, attempt and success rates were high. As expected, incorrect answers were rare but appeared to occur where candidates did not focus on the detail of their answer to the required degree. For example, the ‘first humanoid robot’ was stated to be ‘just above two metres tall’. Candidates who declared that the robot was ‘two metres tall’ were not accurate and these answers were marked as incorrect. Similarly, those who stated that Elektro was ‘born’ or ‘designed’ in 1939 were not credited. The text made it clear that Elektro first walked ‘the ground’ in 1939, but dates for design or creation were not mentioned. Such answers did not receive marks, based as they were on unsupported assertion.

**A4. According to the text, what is the most appropriate definition of a robot?**

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

This was presented as a multiple-choice 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 four available answers, so it was essential that candidates read all elements of the text and question carefully. The fourth answer, ‘A machine capable of responding to its environment to automatically carry out complex or repetitive tasks with little, if any, direction from a human being’, was the correct answer, and this could be inferred from a careful reading of Text B. Candidates who recognised that the selected definition had to be the one which the text considered ‘most appropriate’ were unlikely to struggle here. All of the distractors received some interest from candidates, but the first answer was the next most popular. This answer stated, ‘A machine capable of carrying out a complex series of actions automatically, especially one programmable by a computer’ and was the wording quoted in the text as the Oxford English Dictionary definition of a robot. As intended, this question required more than straightforward location skill and candidates were required to analyse the information presented to work out which elements provided the best possible answer to the question being asked.

#### **A5. What do you learn about ‘human-looking’ robots in this text?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning.*

This question depended on a candidate’s ability to both understand the question and isolate the relevant information within the text. As intended, this question was a little more challenging than a straightforward location question but certainly proved accessible with most candidates able to provide at least one of the two required points. Possible answers to this question were not located together within the text. The first mention of ‘human-looking’ robots came in the first paragraph and this required careful reading. Candidates needed to be aware that although ‘many people think of robots as human-looking devices that carry out commands’ that was not what we learned from the text. The text is clear in its judgement that ‘human-looking’ robots were not a ‘common’ type of robot and credit was given to those who clearly identified that point. Some candidates were also able to make some headway by arguing that ‘human-looking robots’ are what people perceive or believe robots to be. The text does not state that human-looking robots ‘carry out commands’ – this is what ‘many people’ perceive them to do. A number of candidates had difficulty with the subtlety of this point and their approach may have been self-limiting. Copying down a chunk of information from the first paragraph without the ability to demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding will not have served them well. Those who were able to demonstrate the ability to read and understand both question and text, quickly identified themselves. There was a final clear point in relation to ‘human-looking’ robots which could be located in the final paragraph of the text and many were able to correctly identify that such robots are known as androids. The question did not specify a particular area of this relatively short text to focus on so candidates should have been prepared to read all of the information that was at their disposal.

#### **A6. According to the text, what percentage of existing jobs in the UK are potentially at risk of being automated?**

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

This was the first question on Text C and was intended to provide a straightforward introduction to this slightly more complicated piece of writing. However, the correct answer was surrounded by other statistics, so some interpretation was required. The candidates also needed to make the link between the word ‘automated’ in the question and ‘new technology’ in the text. Careful reading of the text, alongside the information provided in the question that the focus was jobs ‘at risk’, proved sufficient for the vast majority of candidates to access the relevant information and give the correct answer. Most candidates correctly identified 30% as the answer. Those who struggled here may have written down a different percentage from the text or misunderstood what the question was seeking, in some cases attempting to explain the risk of automation rather than answering the question.

**A7. Explain why some jobs are at more risk of being automated than others.**

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

Successful answers to this question were able to demonstrate an understanding that jobs of a 'routine' nature, or that involve manual labour, are more at risk because they can be 'effectively programmed' to be done by a robot. They were also able to distinguish that the jobs at less risk of being automated were those that required more of a 'human touch' such as health care. Candidates needed to demonstrate real clarity of thought here and express each of the above points clearly in order to obtain the marks on offer. Markers were instructed not to award any marks for candidates who copied unselectively from the text with no engagement with the 'explain' element of the question. Overall, there was a pleasing attempt rate with this question and most candidates managed to make some headway. Where they only attempted to explain the first part of the answer – focusing only on the programming of more routine work – they were only eligible for one mark. A few candidates struggled to engage with this question, perhaps struggling with the mention of 'safer' or safety in relation to the jobs that were at less risk, and misinterpreting this to mean jobs in which people were less likely to come to harm and/or injury.

**A8. Write down one way in which the economy benefits from the use of robots.**

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

This was quite a straightforward question with a number of potential answers and most candidates were able to access at least one of the potential points on offer. It was pleasing to see that most candidates were able to understand the question and the subtext of the article with few barriers to success. The most popular answers were probably that there would be 'better efficiency' or that automation would 'boost productivity' and/or 'increase incomes' but examiners reported that all of the possible answers were used on many occasions which suggests that there was some real understanding of both question and text across the cohort.

**A9. The text refers to the possibility that robots will 'revolutionise surgery'. Which of the following definitions best fits the word 'revolutionise' in this context?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills in context.*

This was presented as a multiple-choice question, asked in relation to Text D, which was a more complex piece of continuous piece of writing. The question proved reasonably straightforward although there were credible distractors included within the four available answers, so it was essential that candidates read all elements of the text and question carefully and use the context of the reading material judiciously. The fourth answer, 'something which will bring about fundamental change', was the correct answer. All distractors were selected by candidates, although the first one proved the most popular of the alternatives. The vast majority – in excess of eighty percent of the candidature – were able to identify the correct answer.

**A10. Give one reason why the robot Versius is more effective than other ‘surgical robots’. Explain why this is more effective.**

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

As expected, this question proved to be reasonably challenging although those candidates who engaged thoroughly with the text and kept the question firmly in mind generally produced successful responses. The question required candidates to give one reason why the robot Versius is ‘more effective’ than ‘other surgical robots’ and then offer a linked explanation of why this is the case. It was imperative that candidates kept the question firmly in their sights, answers which explained why Versius is more effective than human surgeons were not worthy of credit. There were multiple reasons to find as to why Versius is more effective than other ‘surgical robots’ and these related to its ease of use, the fact that it takes up less space, it is relatively inexpensive and its versatility. A valid linked explanation of any of these points – and there were certainly possible areas of overlap within the explanations – was required to secure both of the marks available. Those who struggled here were most likely to have misread the question, or part of the question at least, and tried to write about how Versius compared to human surgeons. Some candidates misused evidence that did not relate to Versius or attempted to make points that did not answer the question. As ever, maintaining focus on the question is essential and often proves the key to a candidate’s success in accessing the relevant information.

**A11. Synthesise the information in Text B, Text C and Text D to show what robots can be used for.**

*This question tested the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text, interpret meaning and ideas in a text and to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse details.*

The synthesis question was undoubtedly one of the more challenging questions on this paper given the necessity for candidates to range across three texts and provide quite specific information. However, the attempt and completion rates on this question were very positive and it was pleasing to see that so many of the messages given at CPD and through reports such as this one had been taken on board. It is hard to imagine this question contained many surprises for candidates, especially if we consider that in both November 2018 and Summer 2018, the two most recent examinations prior to this one, the synthesis question required a focus on three separate texts. The question perhaps appeared a little earlier in the paper than candidates might have been used to, but this may also have aided them in planning their time wisely so that this high-tariff question received the necessary attention.

Candidates were required to produce a piece that detailed all the different things that robots can be used for, based upon what they had read in the three texts. There were a number of straightforward ideas that could be accessed from Text C – such as some of the ways we might interact with a robot on a daily basis and information about the Mars Curiosity Rover, and most were able to access at least some of the ideas from this text. Text C and Text D were perhaps a little more difficult in terms of the immediate availability of points but neither presented significant barriers to success and it was clear that candidates proved able to build on what they had already read for previous questions and use that knowledge to their advantage. Overall, it was pleasing to see some quite detailed and wide-ranging accounts of what robots can be used for.

For candidates to demonstrate the required skill of synthesis and access the highest marks it was necessary for them to consider, with quite even levels of detail, all of the texts specified. Those who wrote briefly, did not cover all of the texts, or who were uneven in coverage, were less likely to make significant progress through the marking bands. Finally, those who failed to engage with the question and attempted to offer a comparison of the texts will have been self-penalising. These answers were not on task and unfortunately proved wasteful of a candidate's precious exam time.

**A12. According to the text, what is the 'First Law' of robotic existence'?**

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

This question was deliberately positioned to encourage candidates to read a good way into a more complicated fictional text before locating the relevant information. Overall, the success rates were very good on this question and it was clear that most were able to identify the necessary information. Where candidates struggled it may have been because a few did not have the necessary understanding of the phrase 'robotic existence'. A minority of candidates appeared to search out the 'First Law' part of the text and copy out the next nearest words which were 'the prime rule of robotic existence'. This showed a real lack of understanding of both question and text.

**A13. How does the writer show that Professor Goodfellow is uncomfortable about the robot?**

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

Overall, the responses to this high-tariff question were extremely pleasing and there was no shortage of effort from candidates across the ability range. There were significant numbers of candidates who proved able to answer this question in a focused way. The ability to combine a clear and detailed range of evidence with skills of inference and analysis was crucial to success and a pleasing number were able to show this, albeit some in a more sustained way than others. It seems clear that candidates were engaged by this piece of writing and this may have influenced them to respond with such enthusiasm.

Clearly this is a different kind of 'how' question to the one that candidates might encounter on Unit 3 and yet the requirement to answer the question and demonstrate awareness of language does apply to both. Examiners were struck by how refreshingly few of the candidates came to this question with pre-prepared ideas of what was expected of them – there were noticeably fewer 'aide-memoires' being used to trigger a would-be 'analytical' response that often does not engage with the actual language. Responses to this question suggested candidates are able to engage with vocabulary and implied meaning, and in the case of a few with more sophisticated skill, really drill down into some of the subtleties of language. In short, some really demonstrated the ability to show perceptive awareness of language and meaning and clearly deliver analytical content, despite there being little in the way of a 'naming of parts' approach that can do them such a disservice on these question types.

The vast majority of candidates made some progress with this question and there were responses that covered the whole range of marks on offer. Those who were prepared to look at a range of evidence whilst trying to infer meaning in relation to the question were able to progress to the middle of the mark range. Those who failed to make such progress were perhaps hindered by an unwillingness to demonstrate a range of evidence, or perhaps confused by the sequence of events and actions that took place. A few candidates confused evidence which related to the two main characters in key places. There were some who may have struggled due to their timing of the exam, this was the last of the high-tariff reading questions and there were certainly a few candidates who paid the price for not allowing themselves enough time to complete this question.

Overall though, it was pleasing to see how well and willingly candidates can engage with the creation of meaning in a piece of writing. Examiners on the whole were delighted by the ways in which many were able to respond here.

### Editing

**A14. Circle the word that best fits the meaning of the sentence below:  
I would not..... attended the meeting if I'd known.**

*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 'of' and the misuse of the preposition in this context is perhaps indicative of the way words in spoken English may sometimes blur and then become misused when it comes to written English.

As with the November series, there seemed to be fewer issues with candidates not making their selections clear. Even where choices were changed, for the most part this was done with clarity so that an examiner would be in little doubt as to the candidate's choice.

**A15. Tick (✓) the box of the sentence you think is grammatically correct.**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>When she opened her eyes, she was seeing the strangest of sights.</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>When she opened her eyes, she saw the strangest of sights.</b>        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>When she opened her eyes, she seen the strangest of sights.</b>       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>When she opened her eyes, she sees the strangest of sights.</b>       | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

This question was presented as multiple choice with the second answer being correct. The success rates here suggest that most were well equipped to answer this question correctly. The next most popular choice was the third answer on the list but, again this was chosen by a relatively small proportion of candidates.

A few candidates chose not to follow the instructions of the question and this was a barrier to success. Some, for example, elected to tick more than one box. These answers received no marks.

**A16. Tick (✓) the box of the sentence you think is NOT grammatically correct.**

**Do you have time for this now?**

**Do she have time for this now?**

**Do they have time for this now?**

**Do we have time for this now?**

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

Again, this question was presented as multiple choice. The second answer was grammatically incorrect and therefore the correct choice. The success rates here were high with around eighty-five percent choosing the correct answer. As with the previous question, a few candidates chose not to follow the instructions of the question and this prevented them succeeding.

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

1. A sandwich has been left out for him in the kitchen.
2. Jacob's shift finally ends just before ten in the evening.
3. He drives home, looking forward to getting something to eat.
4. After parking the car on his drive, he heads inside.
5. Happily, he picks it up and begins to eat.

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

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

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

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. Jacob's shift finally ends just before ten in the evening.
2. He drives home, looking forward to getting something to eat.
3. After parking the car on his drive, he heads inside.
4. A sandwich has been left out for him in the kitchen.
5. Happily, he picks it up and begins to eat.

## 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.*

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The text was presented as a job advertisement which featured some continuous writing. Most candidates were able to detect some errors here although as with the November series some stumbled a little with words that were correct but clearly unfamiliar to them, such as 'annum'. In a situation where unfamiliar vocabulary arises, candidates should be reminded to read through the whole text to ascertain whether there are five errors in addition to the word that initially seems unfamiliar. After the November series, the Principal Examiner's report made mention of another potential stumbling block, and for some candidates this is perhaps still something to consider. If candidates are able to identify and correct an error but in doing so include a further error this would render the answer unworthy of credit. For example, some candidates identified 'ambitious' as an error but rewrote it either as 'ambition' or 'ambitous'. Both of these would be marked as incorrect. It is essential that the correction be written exactly as it should appear in the text. If corrections appeared with unnecessary capital letters or punctuation, they would also be incorrect. For example, where the previous error was corrected to 'Ambitious', this would also be incorrect in the context of where this word would appear in the text. The correct answer is 'ambitious'. Candidates must make each correction exactly as it would appear in the text and strive not to make further errors during that process.

One final point in relation to the proofreading question, candidates should be aware that this is a test of their ability to write accurately. They are not expected to determine whether the information presented is realistic or accurate. For example, some candidates identified the wages on offer for the job and suggested this was an error because the figure given was unrealistic.

## Writing

**B2. For this task the specification states that 'one writing task' is to be chosen 'from a choice of two that could be either description, narration or exposition'. On this occasion, candidates were able to choose between:**

- (a) Describe an occasion when technology made a difference to your life.
- (b) Write an account of a time you were unwilling to do something.

Both writing questions proved to be accessible to candidates, many of whom wrote with enthusiasm and engagement.

Task A was a description writing task which produced some really enjoyable accounts. The task was designed to allow the candidates some flexibility in the way they answered and the form that their writing took. Better writing tended to feature a clear demonstration of the ways in which technology has improved or significantly worsened their lives. The task called for 'an occasion' in order to focus candidates on being specific and to encourage the development of descriptive detail. Those who elected to describe more than one occasion where technology had affected them were not penalised for doing so, although it is possible that in doing so, they self-penalised, limiting as they did their opportunities for writing developed and meaningful detail. There was no right or wrong way to approach this task, as ever markers were keen to see well-written, engaging and coherent writing that was task aware.



The content of these accounts demonstrated some real variety at times. There were occasions where technology had been beneficial in medical emergencies or had provided vital educational value – particularly for one or two hearing or sight impaired candidates whose school lives were significantly improved by the intervention of technology. A few candidates drew upon the reading stimulus and wrote about interactions with robots, although these were relatively few and far between. The most popular responses to Task A, were probably the descriptions of when mobile phone technology saved the day in a wide variety of emergency situations – from people giving birth, getting lost or being burgled – there were very few situations where a mobile phone could not help. Mobile phones and social media also came in for some significant criticism and it was clear that these aspects of technology had also contributed quite extensively to people’s more negative experiences with technology.

Overall, there also seemed to be quite a number of responses that described how technology had influenced lives for the worse, but it seemed that candidates both knew and accepted this fact. Markers reported seeing quite a number of accounts which detailed how teenagers organised their time around gaming devices or mobile phones whilst being fully aware that their lives did not contain the beneficial relationships, activities or variety that they may once have done. Many seemed to recognise this was a negative but seemed firmly of the opinion that there was nothing to be done about it. This proved thought-provoking indeed for many examiners.

Task B was a narration writing task and also produced some detailed responses. Candidates were certainly engaged by this task and it was attempted by students across the ability range. They were asked to write about a time they were ‘unwilling to do something’ and there were a great many things that fell into that category! First and foremost, exams were clearly something that many candidates were unwilling to do and there were some lengthy and detailed accounts of the pains that they had experienced in the weeks, hours and minutes prior to them picking up the pen to write their exam. Some wrote about how they were unwilling to complete the task in question – one or two even managed this with great flair and humour as well as a few well-aimed jokes at the expense of the examiner.

Elsewhere, theme park rides and white-knuckle experiences were often the focus of some reluctance as were visits to family members and parental requests for help around the house. In fact, there was little that did not receive a reluctant attitude from at least one quarter with even holidays and trips out being met with an unwilling recipient from time to time. Structurally these accounts tended to be where the more sophisticated approaches were showcased with some candidates proving adept when using flashbacks or starting their narrative with the ending and working backwards. The most entertaining of work was often as a result of entertaining characterisation and plotlines that fully engaged the reader. The most able were able to handle language, imagery, structure and plot with a deftness that was lovely to read.

There was significant evidence of the effectiveness of sensible planning and this was generally of most benefit where candidates gave clear forethought to the ultimate direction of their piece of writing. Timing rarely proves problematic on Unit 2 and the majority of candidates were able to write in some detail. Where very brief work or incomplete work was produced, this tended to be self-penalising. As ever, there were candidates who wrote with little sense of either of the set tasks, perhaps writing in response to something they had faced previously or putting forward work that was pre-prepared. This work struggled to make much progress. Occasionally, a candidate attempted both of the tasks which was clearly self-penalising, diminishing as it did the time available for writing and the detail which each piece could command.

Once again, errors in written accuracy were often detrimental to the overall effect of a piece of writing. Candidates whose work is characterised by numerous errors, a struggle to control tense and agreement, or an inability to punctuate with control and coherence, will struggle to make progress. As we often see on Unit 3, some students planned a checklist of punctuation and structures to include and carefully ticked each one off once they had used it. It seemed to make little difference whether these features had been correctly used or not and as a result this often had quite the reverse effect to the one which was being aimed for. There is no doubt that some candidates are very able to use a wide range of punctuation types and these are often integrated seamlessly into their work, creating a sophisticated response which has been enhanced as a result of the punctuation. Elsewhere, the checklist approach is less than helpful and creates less coherent writing as a result. An awareness of basic sentence punctuation (including the use of capital letters and full stops), comma splicing, apostrophes and the punctuation of direct speech, are all areas which would benefit from a heightened focus.

### **Summary of key points**

For candidates to demonstrate the required skill of *synthesis* and access the highest marks it was necessary for them to consider, with quite even levels of detail, all of the texts specified.

With the 'How does the writer...' question, the most successful candidates demonstrated the ability to show perceptive awareness of language and meaning and clearly deliver analytical content, without having to resort to the 'naming of parts' approach.

For the *proofreading* exercise, it is essential that the correction be written exactly as it should appear in the text. If corrections appear with unnecessary capital letters or punctuation, they will be incorrect.

With the extended writing responses, candidates whose work is characterised by numerous errors, a struggle to control tense and agreement, or an inability to punctuate with control and coherence, will struggle to make progress.

## WJEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2019

### UNIT 3

#### 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 Plastic.

With a range of text types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical English language examination. Across the paper there were no question types that had not been seen in a previous examination series.

The topic was extremely well received and exceeded our expectations in this respect. The response to the topic was both astounding and humbling. So many young people are deeply concerned by the state of our environment, particularly our consumption of plastic, and this has made for an examination series with some particularly poignant writing. Prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being tested or the achievement of outcomes, but candidates were very familiar with the theme and the wider threats that plastic poses.

Across the whole ability range, it was evident that the majority were working diligently. As with all examinations, a very small minority did not use their time effectively, but in most cases, there was no shortage of effort.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### A1. How many tonnes of plastic are used in the UK every year?

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

Text A was an accessible text, which allowed all candidates to immediately engage with the theme. The text gave a relatively even balance of illustrations and text and most candidates did not struggle to identify the information required to successfully answer questions 1-3.

The first question was relatively straightforward in that candidates were required to locate a piece of information and write it down. The question required some careful reading as several numerical facts were contained within the article. Most candidates managed to answer the question both successfully and efficiently. There were a small number of candidates who were less careful in their copying of the correct number. For example, some wrote 60,000 rather than 600,000. For these questions, candidates can write their answer in numbers or words, but the most sensible approach is to carefully copy the answer from the text.

## **A2. What percentage of recycled bottles go to UK recycling plants?**

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

This was a multiple-choice question. The correct answer was to be found in a section of the text where several other percentages had been included so careful reading was required to enable candidates to select the correct answer. Most gave the correct answer of 30% although a range of incorrect options was also selected. It was reassuring to see that fewer candidates ticked multiple boxes for this question (thus rendering any potentially correct answers not worthy of credit). As with all multiple-choice questions, careful presentation of a correct answer is helpful.

## **A3. What is Ecover's Green Plastic made from?**

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

This was the final question based on Text A and the majority found this to be an accessible and straightforward task. The correct answer was 'sugarcane' which could be located in the middle section of the bottle. Most candidates simply wrote down the correct answer (without any accompanying text or explanation) and this was both accurate and economical.

## **A4. In text B, the writer states that tiny particles 'contaminate our soil and water'. What is meant by the word 'contaminate'?**

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

As with all word meaning questions, the most sensible option for candidates is to locate the word in the passage and to then use the context of the passage to enable them to produce a clear (and relevant) explanation. While most candidates are familiar with this question type and work hard to put the meaning of the word or phrase into their own words, there is still a temptation for some to simply copy down one or two sentences from the text which contain the word. This approach is not advised and does not receive any credit. While many tried to explain the process involved in contamination, others focused on its by-products or the result of contamination and some of these answers were more difficult to credit. Some candidates tried to be overly precise regarding the cause of the contamination rather than explaining the meaning of the word. A small minority tried to give several interpretations of the word and the information they included sometimes meant that they contradicted themselves and therefore made it difficult to gain reward. A significant number used words such as 'infect...pollute...mix with a foreign substance...dilute with something that does not naturally occur within a substance' and all were credited. Some candidates used external knowledge of what contamination can be used to describe (such as a contamination zone) but if not linked clearly to the text, this approach was sometimes inappropriate with candidates suggesting results like, immediate death and terminal illness.

**A5. Text B explains what happens to a plastic bottle when it is thrown away. Put the information into order according to what happens to the plastic bottle.**

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

Text B was an advertisement which aimed to encourage people to recycle plastic bottles. A series of steps was included to suggest what happens to a plastic bottle after it has been thrown away. These steps were not 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 first answer had been completed to aid candidates.

A significant number of candidates successfully sequenced all three steps correctly, which was most encouraging. A small number were careless 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, 3) which was impossible to credit. Candidates who used a word processor usually chose to write this answer directly into the answer booklet, a decision that ensured their answer was clearly and accurately presented. Others (also word processing) who tried to sequence the information and then present it using different numbers/letters to the original text, often became confused and sometimes struggled to gain reward. A small number of those who included typed answers, typed each sentence in full (in the correct order) and were credited. Several candidates chose to tick the boxes. We can only assume that this is because they thought that the order was already correct. It is helpful for candidates to ensure numbers are used to indicate the correct sequence rather than a tick.

It is worth reinforcing the message that candidates who complete any rough work to help them answer this question, should do so in the space below the question or in the text booklet. Several candidates who tried to work out the sequence in their answer space, made errors, and then struggled to communicate their final answer clearly.

**A6. In your own words, summarise the reasons why the writer thinks plastic is important in modern society.**

*This question tested the ability to summarise information.*

Text C was an article taken from a blog about the benefits of plastic. It was the only article across the examination to present a positive and opposing view about the use of plastic.

Summary continues to be a challenging task as it requires close reading, understanding and an ability to write succinctly. 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. Overall it was possible to see some changes in approach with candidates writing more concise summaries and focusing more closely on the task in hand. The skill of summary is one which will be valuable to candidates beyond their school years and the ability to digest and condense information is a useful one.

In terms of presenting this year's answers, a number used bullet points to present their information and these proved to be helpful. Not only did bullet points serve as a helpful tool for encouraging clarity of thought and organisation, but they also appeared to encourage candidates to write briefly. Bullet points are not a pre-requisite for success but for those who are tempted to overwrite, they can be helpful. Candidates who are most successful at this question usually have an incisive ability to produce an overview and this skill undoubtedly helps them when tackling other questions. There was still a tendency to use quotation and copy down lengthy chunks of the text. This approach is self-penalising and should be avoided.

Finally, it is worth stressing to candidates that they will be helped by adopting a chronological approach to their own reading/analysis of the text but that answers can be presented in any order.

**A7. The writer refers to 'material consumption' in the text. What is suggested by the word 'consumption'?**

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

This question was a multiple-choice question with four possible answers. The possible answers were all intended to be credible distractors. All possible answers contained the word 'materials' to give a general focus on what is being consumed and these were accompanied by a series of different verbs. The correct answer was the third option 'to use materials.' While the majority successfully selected the third option, a considerable number opted for options 1 and 4. As with all multiple-choice questions, it is worth reinforcing that the correct answer should be clearly presented. Selecting multiple responses will render a potentially correct answer, incorrect.

**A8. What evidence is there to suggest that the plastic bag ban has been successful?**

*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 read through the whole passage and locate the correct piece of information. Most candidates spotted the information about the charge for plastic bags and were able to include the statistical evidence (85% drop in their use) to enable them to achieve credit for their answer. Overall, this question was answered well, and few struggled to select appropriate supporting evidence.

**A9. How does the writer persuade us that it is easy to reduce our use of plastic?**

*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.*

The 'how' question is one that challenges the full range of abilities. Text D was a natural choice for a 'how' question as it was rich in both technique and content and allowed all candidates to engage with its aims. The whole focus of the article was on how it makes reducing the use of plastic seem so straightforward and easy and it was hoped that candidates would find this text and task one that would prove to be straightforward.

Although candidates are reminded constantly by their teachers to read this question carefully and despite a huge focus on 'how' at CPD, an overwhelming number of candidates still choose to produce vague responses that appear to try to engage with a pre-prepared question. Many candidates appeared to be answering a question in which they were explaining why a reader may choose to 'read on' or indeed why a reader ought to 'believe' the writer. There is a distinct difference between why we should reduce our use of plastic and how the writer persuades us that it is easy to do so. Moving forward, candidates must not make any assumptions about the question they expect to see and must read closely to determine the focus of the question they have been given. Unit 2 also contained a 'how' question this series and perhaps as this did not have the expectation of 'persuasion', candidates focused much more closely on what was being asked of them.

Although less common, there were some who produced technique driven responses which showed no real understanding of the text or the task. Rather than referencing the straightforward nature of the steps that can be taken to make a significant difference, some candidates wasted a significant amount of time merely writing hypothetically about lists and their generic role in a persuasive text. The same can be said for language, some candidates took words like 'ridiculous' out of context rather than commenting on how easy it is to avoid excessive food packaging. Steps such as 'try a foldaway one' made it seem like anyone is able to reduce their use of plastic with minimal effort, but many candidates made generic comments about the imperative verb rather than the ease with which it could be achieved. When preparing for 'how' questions, candidates are given a range of possible areas that they may wish to consider. Many candidates enter the examination with pre-prepared acronyms and lists to serve as an aide memoire for this question. It is essential, however, that the predominant focus is to look at the question they have been given and then to focus on the content of the text. Any techniques or skills that they explore during this process may enhance a response but should not be the sole driver.

As commented in the previous report, 'How' can be answered in different ways. 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), particularly when some usually identify devices correctly but have a limited sense of how they work and even then, they do not always link them to the relevant section of text/evidence. 'How' questions aim 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). Those who work chronologically through the text often produce more coherent and methodical responses. Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of relevant 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 ways in which the writer's argument develops (with a constant focus on the question).

**A10. Explain why Prince Charles is worried about the plastic that ends up in our oceans.**

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

On the whole, candidates performed well in response to this question. It was reassuring to see that the main focus was on explanation and, across the cohort, there was a real attempt to explore the reasons why Prince Charles is worried. Candidates across the ability range were horrified by the statistical information and made good progress when explaining why these startling figures are a cause for concern. Most tracked through the article, selecting a range of details and then (to varying degrees) managed to explain why the details selected were causing apprehension.

To achieve more than one or two marks, it was essential that candidates sought to include not only a range of details in their responses but some level of explanation. It was difficult, for example, to move beyond two marks without some focus or explanation of the details selected. This question was marked as a banded response and individual answers were awarded marks based on the quality of their response, their coverage of the text and their understanding of Prince Charles' concerns.

**A11. What does Prince Charles mean when he says, 'It may not be too late to turn the tide?'**

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

This word meaning question required candidates to examine a phrase and to explain the meaning of the phrase included. When given a series of words, it is sometimes impossible to select synonyms or alternatives for each of the words and therefore, candidates are required to show overall understanding of the phrase selected. Some candidates, for example, used the 'too late' during their explanation but qualified this by using words such as, 'still...now...imminent'. Most were able to see that something needs to be done quickly although a few focused more on past actions. The majority were able to see that 'turn the tide' is indicative that change is required but a number simply explored the idea of water and the ocean rather than grasping what was implied by Prince Charles. Overall, there were some thoughtful and carefully considered responses to this question which demonstrated real engagement with the topic and the resource material.



**A12. Look at Text D and Text E. Compare what the two texts say about the amount of plastic that is thrown away each year.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and comparing and evaluating the texts.*

The key to successfully answering a comparison question is to read the question carefully. The question will always give candidates a steer on what they need to compare. In this series, candidates were asked to compare what each text says about the amount of litter. While many grasped this key word (amount), there were a significant number who embarked on a generic comparison of features, information and style. When preparing for this question, it is helpful for candidates to work through a range of texts and to compare the content, however, some enter the examination with a preconceived idea of exactly what they will include in their answer to a comparison question. This is an ill-advised approach. Another skill required to be able to compare correctly is to find relevant evidence. Both texts were rich in detail about quantity/amount. With relevant evidence and a close focus on the question, candidates should be able to collate their ideas which will then allow them to produce a valid and relevant comparison.

The same message applies to all comparison questions, those who embark on a generic comparison usually find that they only achieve low marks. Those who focus clearly on the question and include a range of supporting details from across all of the texts, perform best. There were some centre patterns where candidates produced grids or bullet point (and largely evidence based) responses to this question. Candidates undoubtedly benefit from writing in continuous prose (unless desperately struggling for time).

The following may help to refine teaching techniques for this question:

- Candidates must read the question carefully and remain on task
- In a comparison question, it is imperative that they make the text clear from which their information came
- Candidates need to refer to both texts, not just one
- Candidates need to make as many points as possible from each of the texts. Those who simply write down one or two points will only gain a small number of marks.

## **Section B**

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one argumentation and one persuasion) which were loosely linked to the topic studied during the reading examination. This year, the examining team was staggered by the quality of some of the writing and ideas presented. It has been a deeply humbling experience to see the depth of concern demonstrated by young people in Wales for the future of their planet. The political awareness, social and scientific understanding and emotional investment in this topic exceeded all expectations. Hopefully the passion demonstrated during the writing section of this examination will continue to drive these young people to make better environmental choices in the future.

### **Task 1**

For their first writing task, candidates were asked to produce a letter to a newspaper:

‘Plastic is one of the biggest problems faced by our planet. Why would we use something for a few minutes that has been made from a material that’s going to last forever?’

This task was clearly an argumentation one and candidates across the cohort readily grasped the fact that the content should focus on the problem of plastic. Many included the quotation in the opening section of their letter and very few wandered off topic. I shall aim to comment on format, content, organisation and common issues during this section of the report.

Candidates and teachers are familiar with formal letters although not all interpreted this as a formal piece of writing. Salutations such as, 'Hi...hello...alright...' are not suited to a formal letter and should be avoided. Teaching the correct format for a letter remains a key life skill and teaching this should not be avoided in the classroom. There is a significant number of candidates who are unable to accurately sequence an address (starting with postcodes and country, for example) and this is a cause for concern. Candidates do not lose or gain marks depending on whether they have the correct format as this is all considered in the global mark for communicating and organising. However, correct addresses will be ticked and will be factored into the holistic achievement of the letter.

As mentioned in previous reports, the content of a candidate's writing is essential. When embarking on the writing section of the examination, candidates will have spent approximately one hour immersed in a topic and when they then move on to writing, it becomes essential that they not only stay on topic but that their contents are carefully considered. While candidates can 'borrow' statistics, details and the odd phrase, it is not acceptable to copy whole chunks of a text and submit this as their own work. A number of candidates chose to work through the reading resources and then write down a few sentences from each and submitted this as their own work. Examiners are extremely familiar with the reading materials and will recognise what has been copied. Wholesale copying is difficult to credit, and marks are limited depending on the quantity of copied work. Candidates are not tested on the accuracy of statistics and details but should aim to be as realistic and convincing as possible. Careful planning will enable candidates to select an area for discussion and then move seamlessly to another. Those who do not plan, often find that the contents of their writing ends 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. When producing argumentation writing, candidates may include some counterarguments but must ensure that these do not undermine the points that have already been written.

While most candidates wholeheartedly supported the quotation and sought to argue why people should limit their use of plastic, there were some who produced letters in which they were able to sympathise with the view presented in Text C. These candidates wrote about the essential nature of plastic and how it would be impossible to banish it from our lives. Both approaches were equally acceptable and were able to access the full range of marks, depending upon quality. Those who argued to limit our use of plastic were particularly convincing. Letters detailing the 'Doomsday' effect of plastic, which pointed the finger directly at mankind, were both thought provoking and well informed. Many of the candidates cited Sir David Attenborough and had not only watched documentaries such as 'Blue Planet' but had reflected upon the content of these. Comments about the bleak future for marine life and consequently mankind were all too familiar and made for some sombre and insightful reading.

The organisation of writing is often key to its coherence. Organisation does, of course, include obvious indicators such as paragraphs and headings but direction and content are also closely linked to organisation. Candidates who do not plan their writing often appear to be disorganised and this has a serious impact on the quality of their work. A series of disjointed ideas is far less successful (usually restricted to Band 2) as opposed to something that flows fluently and links up ideas and concepts. It is certainly worth sharing examples of disjointed writing with candidates to ensure they work to avoid this approach in their own writing.

Finally, the audience for this task was of importance. Candidates ought to be reminded that when they are given a specific audience, they are expected to tailor their tone, style, content and language for that specific audience. Too many candidates produce generic writing that lacks any strength or passion because they simply do not make a clear appeal to their given audience.

## **Task 2**

For their persuasive writing task, candidates were asked to write an article for a school/college magazine, persuading their classmates to lead a more environmentally friendly life.

This type of task is a familiar one and tied in neatly with text D. Candidates seemed confident with this style of writing and, although timing proved to be an issue for some, there was no shortage of things to say. Both tasks were based on the same topic and although both had a completely different angle, candidates certainly had no shortage of things to say in response to either. A small number misread the task and focused on how to gain friends or persuade people to be friendly with you. However, overall, this task was pleasingly received. There seemed to be fewer candidates who either ran out of time or were unwilling to complete the writing, which was pleasing.

Planning was evident across many responses. As mentioned in the previous section, those who plan usually find that they are able to write in more detail and demonstrate greater understanding than those who do not consider the content and direction of their writing before they begin. Structure and sequence are also key to success. Many used the planning page not only to plan their writing but to give an indication of sequence. Quite often, those who do not plan or consider sequence, produce writing that is disjointed or aimless in direction and often undeveloped.

In terms of format, candidates have the option to add some format features when it comes to an article. Heading, subtitles, columns, picture boxes and so on, are all perfectly acceptable. One or two candidates chose to ignore the lines on their paper and turned their examination booklet to allow them to write a landscape version. This approach is to be avoided as it usually results in untidy chaotic work that is not easy to assess on screen. If candidates find that structural features help them to organise their thoughts, then that is perfectly acceptable. In previous series, reference has been made to the inclusion of detailed illustrations, graphs and diagrams. Occasionally candidates included a rough sketch or a box with an instruction ('picture of turtle') but these were rarely included at the expense of written detail. Some candidates were unable to finish their article due to time constraints and it is worth reinforcing the value of careful time management to avoid having to cut writing short.

As always, technical accuracy remains a concern across all writing tasks. Some candidates struggled to punctuate from the beginning with strangely placed commas in titles. Some produced entire paragraphs with no punctuation. Comma splicing continues to be a common feature in written work and should be avoided. Some candidates include a tick list of different types of punctuation on their planning page, which they then try 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, especially basic homophone errors are frequent (our and are, there and their, where and were etc.) across both writing tasks and should be targeted by those who lack confidence in this area. It is also disappointing when candidates do not manage to spell words correctly that they have been given in the task or text (especially when copying them out).

In terms of content, as mentioned above, it was truly humbling to read some of the poignant details and carefully considered pleas for help. Candidates seemed to be emotionally invested in the topic and many included personal anecdotes about their own behaviour. It was saddening to read comments where candidates berated an ambivalence towards recycling in their own families but encouraging to see that so many young people intend to champion this issue as their own. The articles took many directions with some focusing on small and personal lifestyle changes to those hoping to see global changes. Comments such as, 'we are spending billions in the hope of exploring space when our own planet is at risk...' and 'our disposable society is slowly decomposing' were common and most thoughtful.

As mentioned above, copying was a concern and those who copied out the whole of Text D received little credit for doing so. Thankfully such instances were infrequent and most sought to share their own views (with some occasional referencing of the statistical evidence).

Overall, and in keeping with feedback from many of our examiners, I would like to extend our thanks to the young people for producing such though provoking and genuinely engaging writing.

### **Summary of key points**

For the *how* question, candidates must not make any assumptions about the question they expect to see and must read closely to determine the focus of the question they have been given.

With the *compare* question, candidates who focus clearly on the question and include a range of supporting details from across all of the texts, perform best.

For the extended writing responses, candidates need to be reminded that when they are given a specific audience, they are expected to tailor their tone, style, content and language for that specific audience.

With both extended writing responses, those candidates who plan usually find that they are able to write in more detail and demonstrate greater understanding than those who do not consider the content and direction of their writing before they begin.



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