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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
GCSE**

**NOVEMBER 2023**

## Introduction

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

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

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

## Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive annual programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	<a href="https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/">https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/</a>
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that past papers are published to WJEC and WJEC Eduqas public websites between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 31 <sup>st</sup> December, the year after the examination has taken place.	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">www.wjecservices.co.uk</a> or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the overall subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitised specifications click here: <a href="#">Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)</a>

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

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## Subject Officer's Executive Summary

The November 2023 entry profile had 2,547 entries for WJEC GCSE English Language, an increase of 9.2% on the November 2022 figures.

68.6% of candidates in November 2023 were aged 16 compared with 71.7% in November 2022; there has been a small increase in the proportion of over 16s sitting compared with November 2022 figures (+2.8%).

For Unit 1, the highest mark recorded was 80 with a unit total of 80. The mean mark achieved by 16-year-olds was 43.6 marks, just over 2 marks lower than the equivalent figure for November 2022 and 8.8 marks lower than the equivalent figure for the substantially larger June 2023 cohort.

For Unit 2, the highest mark recorded was 67 with a unit total of 80. There is a considerable difference between the November 2023 and June 2023 mean mark for 16-year-olds where the November 2023 mean mark is 9.3 marks lower than the June 2023 mean.

For Unit 3, the highest mark recorded was 68 with a unit total of 80. As with Unit 2, very few candidates achieved marks at the top of the range. The mean mark for 16-year-olds was 4.3 marks lower than that of June 2023.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
<b>Unit 1 task setting</b>	<a href="http://www.wjec.co.uk">GCSE English Language (wjec.co.uk)</a> <a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">WJEC (wjecservices.co.uk)</a>	SAMs, Additional SAMs, past stimulus materials, Guidance for Teaching
<b>Units 1, 2 and 3</b>	<a href="https://d3kp6tpchrvm0s.cloudfront.net/el21-22_4-1">HTTPS://D3KP6TPHCRVM0S.CLOUDFRONT.NET/EL21-22_4-1</a>	GCSE English and GCSE English Literature bridging unit
<b>Units 1, 2 and 3</b>	<a href="http://www.wjecservices.co.uk">WJEC (wjecservices.co.uk)</a>	CPD standardisation material

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

November 2023

### UNIT 1: ORACY

#### Overview of the Unit

The following comments indicate the broader trends from this series, as observed by a very small team of the most experienced moderators. Each moderator will have written your centre a tailored report, which you are strongly advised to read. We each recognise the limitations of reports that refer to candidates by number, not name. Despite the extra time required to decode elements of the reports, we feel it would be worthwhile. Your next cohorts will benefit from this investment of time.

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessments for November 2023 remained that of providing an opportunity for each candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language. Each task allowed for the expression of considered ideas, while leaving enough room for flexible thinking and verbal reasoning. In centres where due preparation time was afforded, individuality and independence were given the chance to flourish. Candidates were given a chance to voice their opinions and share their enthusiasms.

Since the start of the specification, it has been a theme in these reports that it only requires a few simple steps for centres to create a secure platform for their candidates to attempt to fulfil their potential.

Key amongst these is the chance for them to adequately prepare for their presentations. Fuelled with content and opinions, it is then less likely that candidates will run out of ideas. Unfortunately, a large number struggled to make progress and teachers needed to rescue them with early intervention. Many, however, simply did not receive any questions and recordings came to an abrupt halt.

For groups, those that performed in threes were advantaged. Pairs did not have enough sparring partners. Quartets always ended up with at least one candidate having to wait for a turn during long periods in the discussion. Again, this point has been communicated in previous reports and training for centres.

The final request put to centres has long been that they record performances audio-visually. Moderators need to get a holistic sense of the candidate's ability to engage an audience.

It was noted that audio-only recordings, uneven group sizes and a shortage of sustained ideas all featured heavily in the November 2023 samples. While the ideas shortage could be said to be a consequence of the nature of the November entry, the other elements are wholly the concern of those who conduct these assessments at the centre.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

The Individual Researched Presentations saw further progress in the way that centres are encouraging a pinpointing of topics, rather than a broad consideration of a WJEC theme. Moderators enjoyed topics considering the virtues of veganism, the rise of virtual reality, the influence of Welsh music, and aspects of traveller culture. Less engaging were some tired pieces on VAR, footballers' salaries, and social media.

Centres are again reminded that, for the presentation to be deemed effective (Band 3) or better, candidates must demonstrate their verbal reasoning skills with a relatively high degree of independence. Notes must be there only to initiate ideas and/ or support them if they stumble. Scripts are not permitted and, if notes are not submitted, they will be requested by the moderator in the first instance. Beyond that, the matter is referred to WJEC for further investigation.

### Group Discussion

Of the three options, space tourism and fast fashion again proved to be the most popular.

Eleven centres allowed candidates to consider tasks that were not yet options for this series. Instances of candidates discussing school meals or school proms had to be referred to WJEC for further investigation.

The most impressive responses came from candidates who had been given time to prepare for the discussion. By the time it came to the recording, they were ready to share thoughts without having to rely on overly prepared materials. It was always particularly pleasing to hear a range of ideas that were drawn from sources other than the sheet provided by WJEC; however, many candidates were simply allowed to read from these, with very few fresh ideas springing from them. Research is a key element of this task and the topics have been chosen with preparation in mind. Even the most minimalist approach, directing candidates to websites and printed resources, would reveal a rich seam of fresh ideas with which they can animate discussions.

Key points to consider ahead of the next submissions.

- Avoid audio-only recordings, as they create a barrier to moderation and the fair assessment of candidates. Robust internal moderation would soon draw attention to this.
- Use bullet points, not full prose, for notes. These should be uploaded along with record sheets and recordings.
- Please read your centre reports and share the observations with your departments. Where there is consistent good practice across a department, this has usually sprung from a response to advice given in earlier reports. There are still many departments where uneven assessment in a minority of groups has a disruptive effect on the centre's rank order.

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

The moderating team remains very appreciative of the efforts made by all involved in preparing, capturing, delivering, and assessing Unit 1 at the centres. We were also mindful that a third of centres were operating with new Examination Officers, which may have made life more difficult for departments. Hopefully, the experience of delivering the unit in November will stand all in good stead for the entries that remain for the life of this specification.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE

November 2023

## UNIT 2: DESCRIPTION, NARRATION AND EXPOSITION

### Overview of the Unit

This autumn's exam was based on the theme of the hospitality industry. The topic was well-received with most candidates appearing engaged across the paper. Five texts were presented in the Reading section. A range of text types were on offer including continuous and non-continuous writing. The chosen texts allowed for varied levels of challenge and response.

### Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were also required to compare (A10), analyse information in more challenging writing (A15) and edit texts (A16-A18). Careful evidence selection was required across both higher and lower tariff questions as was the ability to interpret meaning.

AO3 Writing – all writing skills relating to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested. These are listed on p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at: [WJEC GCSE English Language Specification](#)

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

Most candidates appeared to work diligently and manage their time appropriately across the exam. Set texts and questions appeared to be accessible, to varying degrees, and there were many enthusiastic responses. As ever in November, there were some candidates who were unable or unwilling to engage with some of the materials. This was probably a larger proportion of the total entry than we might see in the Summer examinations but still comprised a relatively small number of candidates.

The mix of question types and varied levels of difficulty were similar to previous Unit 2 examination papers. Like the Summer Unit 2 exam, the relatively early appearance of the comparison question (Question A10), which focused on Text B and Text C may have increased the candidates' opportunity to produce more detailed answers to this question. Anecdotally, examiners reported that the final higher tariff reading question (A15) perhaps featured more examples of relatively brief answers and this may be as a result of its position on the paper.

Candidates faced a choice between an exposition or a narration task in the Writing section. Although we have no way of determining which task was more widely chosen, examiners seemed to feel that there was a reasonably even balance between these task choices.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

## **Text A**

This text was taken from a Welsh Government careers information service document. The text provided information about careers in the hospitality sector in Wales. It combined continuous and non-continuous text and was intended to provide a relatively straightforward introduction to the topic.

### **Question A1**

The first question of the examination was designed to offer a clear introduction to Text A and the selected theme. This was a straightforward question and the answer 'more staff' was easily located in the opening sentence of the text. The majority of candidates did not struggle to locate the correct information and most were able to access the mark. Those who did not obtain a mark most often did not include sufficient detail to adequately answer the question. A number of candidates wrote 'staff' which was not sufficiently specific.

### **Question A2**

In this question, candidates were required to write down 'one of the top 10 jobs advertised in tourism and hospitality'. This question also proved straightforward and the vast majority of candidates chose a correct answer. There were ten 'jobs' to choose from and it was interesting that 'chefs' and 'cooks' as the shortest of the choices seemed the most popular. All of the different choices were accessed at different times though and there appeared relatively few barriers to success.

### **Question A3**

This question was worth one mark and asked candidates 'what evidence does the text give to suggest that there is 'high demand for people to work in the sector'? Candidates needed to provide an awareness that the number of online job advertisements for the tourism and hospitality sector is shown to be four times higher than in July 2020. Many candidates were able to access the mark here and the majority did so via the correct location of evidence. Those who only accessed part of the evidence or were vague in their answers did not provide sufficient information to answer the question and therefore were unable to access the marks.

### **Question A4**

This question presented candidates with four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was not made by the text. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the fourth statement, which suggested that 'there are only 10 types of job in the tourism and hospitality sector', was untrue. The task proved straightforward and success rates were high. It was essential that candidates read both question and text carefully in order to be sure of what they were looking for. A small number of candidates made more than one choice in relation to this question, ticking two or more of the boxes. These answers were not eligible for credit.

## **Text B**

This text was adapted from an article written for an online magazine for business leaders. The text reported on the unfavourable conditions faced by traditional restaurant businesses and the emergence of the 'dark kitchen' model.

### **Question A5**

This question was worth one mark and asked candidates to provide one reason for why ‘things are beginning to look bleak’ for restaurants based on their reading of the first paragraph. This question was designed to test the candidates’ ability to interpret meaning but was eased by giving them a defined area of the text to consider. Most were able to choose one of the four reasons which were permitted as valid answers. Those who were vague in their answers or who gave reasons drawn from outside of the specified area of text struggled to access the marks.

### **Question A6**

This question directed candidates to the second paragraph of the text and asked them to make two points about why ‘dark kitchens are becoming more common’. Many were able to access at least one of the two marks although relatively few were able to access both marks. There were some barriers to success as candidates needed to be careful to explain how their chosen evidence answered the question. Some answers were insufficiently precise to access the marks as candidates did not tailor their explanation of the evidence to answer the question. For example, there were numerous candidates who commented on the ‘financial boost’ which dark kitchens give to a restaurant business but did not reach the point that this is because it ‘keeps their staff and running costs down’. They did not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the question or evidence to access the available mark for this point.

### **Question A7**

This question required candidates to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the phrase ‘a broad spectrum’. The question proved straightforward and the vast majority (in excess of 85% of candidates) chose the correct answer. The correct answer was the second choice ‘a wide range’. Credible distractors were included, so it was essential that candidates read the text and question carefully and made sensible use of the context of the phrase. Whilst, all distractors were selected by a few candidates, the third and fourth ones were the next most popular of the alternatives.

### **Text C**

This text was adapted from an article about dark kitchens which appeared in *The Guardian*. The article unpicked some of the less widely known details about this business model.

### **Question A8**

This question required candidates to choose from four multiple-choice options to explain the correct meaning of the word ‘established’ in the context that it was used in the second paragraph. The question proved the trickiest of the multiple-choice questions and many candidates did not select the correct answer – which was the final choice ‘the restaurant has existed for some time’. Credible distractors were included, so it was essential that candidates read the text and question carefully and used verbal reasoning skills to deduce the correct answer.

### **Question A9**

This question was worth one mark and asked candidates what reason is suggested for the food-deliver business being likely to ‘grow tenfold by 2030’. This question was designed to test the candidates’ use of deduction skills to analyse meaning.

They needed to locate the quoted phrase in the penultimate paragraph and demonstrate understanding of the reason given. Most candidates scored well here but a few did not secure the mark because their answers were too vague to demonstrate understanding. Others did not seem aware that their answers must be rooted in the text and tried to offer their own reasons for why this might be the case rather than seeking to pinpoint the reason offered by the text.

### **Question A10**

This question asked candidates to compare the presentation of dark kitchens in Text B and Text C. The focus of the question was clear and this enabled many candidates to engage with both texts in a specific way. The mark scheme set out some of the possible areas candidates may choose to compare in their consideration of the presentation of dark kitchens - such as premises/facilities, what is offered and economic impact – and there was a multitude of evidence that was available for consideration in relation to those points (as well as numerous other areas of comparison). Examiners were advised to mark each answer on its own merits and that the marking bands were vital when deciding upon a mark.

As ever, the most successful candidates were able to discuss a range of relevant details in relation to both texts whilst making direct comparisons and contrasts. Candidates who looked at the texts separately, without making any attempt to offer a comparative point, struggled to demonstrate the skills required to move beyond the second marking Band (3-4 marks). As with the summer series, the appearance of the comparison question towards the middle of the paper appeared to encourage candidates to write in more detail in their answers to this question.

The senior examining team has frequently pointed out approaches to avoid when answering this question. Whilst these were perhaps less widespread in answers to this examination there was still a minority who took an approach which did not help them to achieve. To reiterate:

- bullet points/grids/table approaches should be avoided when answering this question - they do not enable a candidate to demonstrate skills of comparison
- the unselective copying of large 'chunks' of text significantly restricts a candidate's potential achievement – knowledge and understanding can only be demonstrated by clear engagement with evidence.

### **Text D**

This non-continuous text was adapted from an infographic featured in a report by the British Takeaway Campaign about the future of takeaway food.

### **Questions A11 and A12**

Both of these questions were straightforward and required candidates to locate specific factual information from the text. There was only one correct answer to each question and few candidates were unable to answer successfully.

### Question A13

This question presented candidates with a little more challenge as they were required to interpret meaning and explain evidence in order to answer the question. Two marks were available and candidates needed to demonstrate what they understood about the size of the takeaway market. The evidence made it possible for them to make a point about the size of the takeaway market in the five years which preceded the publication of the report and the suggested size of the takeaway market in the five years which followed the report.

Many candidates were able to successfully access at least one of the points available, although it was not clear which of the points was most popular. Those who copied evidence from the text without using some of their own words to demonstrate understanding were unable to make full progress. Some candidates were too vague or narrowed the evidence to the point where it was unhelpful. For example, comments such as 'rised 43%' or 'worth £22b' were insufficient. Those candidates who accessed other areas of the text, commenting on other statistics, were also unsuccessful.

### Text E

This text was adapted from *Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-maker and Apprentice to a Butcher in Tuscany*. This is an autobiographical account from a journalist who spent time learning to cook in a professional kitchen.

### Question A14

Candidates were asked to engage with meaning in this question. They were directed to the first paragraph of the text where the writer described working in the kitchen as 'like an army training camp'. Some candidates were able to engage fully with this phrase and explain that the work was intensive or demanding or suggest that there were high expectations within the kitchen. Examiners were instructed that there would be different ways to express this and to be mindful of synonyms and explanations which demonstrated understanding using different vocabulary. It was clear that a number of candidates struggled with this question. Some were too vague or imprecise in explanation – comments such as 'it was hard work' were insufficient to warrant the mark. Others copied the last part of the sentence from the text 'taught the basic techniques of being a cook' which did not demonstrate understanding nor engage with the meaning of the set phrase.

### Question A15

This was the second (and final) higher tariff reading question on the examination paper. The majority of candidates gave of their best in response to this question and it was clear that many had timed the exam successfully up to this point. There were some who wrote briefly or missed this question out and this will have been self-penalising.

This question was designed to encourage candidates to engage with and explore the language of the text. Most candidates were able to make some headway through appropriate evidence selection and discussion which demonstrated understanding. Some of the highest achievers of the paper made real progress through the bands because they carefully tracked the text and demonstrated a range of well-evidenced impressions.

Focus on the question was clearly essential and some candidates struggled to sustain this. Whilst most started by clearly discussing their impressions of 'working in a professional kitchen', some became distracted by wanting to write about their impressions of the writer which, unfortunately, diverted them away from the question.

## **Editing Section - Questions A16-A18**

This section did not present anything unexpected. All of the question types had been seen across past examination series and there was nothing out of the ordinary to report.

In question A18(a) the required answer was sentence 2. Some of the number formation in response to this question was very tricky to decipher. A few candidates were saved by the fact that they had shown their workings on the actual text above so it was clear which sentence they were selecting, but in other cases this was not the case. In cases where it is not clear which number has been selected then the mark cannot be given.

### **Question B1**

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this proofreading question. The text was presented as a paragraph written about an online food delivery system. There was little to separate which errors were identified and corrected most frequently, although 'garantee' was probably the error most often identified but not accurately corrected.

Credit can only be given to corrections which do not make further errors and all corrections must appear exactly as they would appear in the text. For example, no additional capital letters or punctuation should be introduced. Quite a number of candidates incorrectly used capital letters to begin their corrections and these were not eligible for credit.

### **Question B2**

Both writing questions proved to be accessible to candidates. Although we have no way of measuring this, anecdotally examiners reported that there was a quite an even balance between the two question choices.

Task A was an exposition task which produced some thoughtful responses. There were many balanced pieces which reflected on both the positives and negatives of home-delivery services. As we would expect given the topic of Section A, many elected to concentrate on the home-delivery of takeaway foods and the emergence of 'dark kitchens' as a force to be reckoned with. There were also a number of responses which took a wider view, and whilst many may have started their Writing based on the Reading section, they successfully drew upon other home-delivery services which have affected the way that we 'live our lives'. This provided plenty of opportunity for thoughtful and nuanced discussion.

Task B was a narration writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their own experiences of feeling 'under pressure'. Unsurprisingly, many candidates elected to write about their experience of exams, whether in the Summer or the ones that they were currently undertaking, and the varied ways in which they were placed under pressure as a result. Other common themes were the varying types of peer pressure which had been experienced and the pressure which came through sporting or theatrical performance. Overall, it was clear that candidates were willing to write about their feelings when under pressure and many proved well able to engage their examiner audience.

Timing did not appear to be an issue for many candidates who wrote extensively in Section B as well as in the reading section. There was a clear minority of candidates though who wrote quite briefly or missed out B2 altogether. With a total mark tariff of 35 out of 80 this will have made a considerable difference to the final marks of these candidates. There was also a number of additional concerns, some of which are similar to those which have been raised in the past:

- Written accuracy was an area of significant weakness for many candidates and is likely to be the single biggest factor in candidates not achieving the outcome they desired. In many cases, limited accuracy affected the quality and coherence of writing. Struggles with tense and agreement as well as the omission of basic punctuation are the areas of most particular concern.
- As in the summer, some handwriting was very difficult to read and in some cases almost illegible. If the majority of words in a piece of writing are unreadable this has a serious and damaging effect on the coherence of a piece of writing and significantly limits the marks that can be awarded.

Some candidates did not answer either of the set tasks in a straightforward way. In a few cases, it seemed that they may have been writing in response to a previously practised question. In other cases, candidates attempted to write very briefly in response to both tasks or tried to combine the tasks in a way that was not helpful. Knowing what they are being asked to write and how to deconstruct and plan a response to a task is all-important in setting candidates up to succeed.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE

November 2023

#### UNIT 3: ARGUMENTATION, PERSUASION AND INSTRUCTIONAL

##### Overview of the Unit

This Unit 3 examination was based on the topic of walking. The topic was a familiar one and candidates appeared to enjoy both reading and writing tasks based on walking. Five texts were presented for exploration and a range of text types allowed for different levels of challenge and engagement.

##### Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested mostly across a range of lower tariff questions (A1, A2, A3, A5, A13, A14). Candidates were required to use both synthesis (A12) and summary (A8) skills during the examination. Careful selection of and reference to evidence was required across a range of higher tariff questions (A10, A12, A16) alongside the ability to interpret texts. Sequencing skills were also tested (A5).

AO3 Writing – all writing skills appertaining to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested. These are listed on p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at: [WJEC GCSE English Language Specification](#)

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

The paper appeared to have been well received and examiners noted a general enthusiasm about the topic and tasks. The cohort felt like a typical November entry with many candidates either struggling to complete the paper or to extend their answers to some of the higher tariff questions.

Candidates responded well to the reading materials. Virtually all candidates completed the first 6 tasks which were lower tariff questions. The ability to locate information via careful reading of the texts was vital when completing the lower tariff questions. Tracking of the text was essential when tackling the more challenging reading questions. The quality of responses varied in terms of detail, focus and clarity.

Writing tasks appeared to be accessible and candidates across the ability range were able to engage with the tasks and to produce appropriate writing. A number of candidates produced rather brief writing which instantly restricted the number of marks that they were able to achieve.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

###### Section A

###### Text A

This text was a non-continuous infographic which gave information to get people to start 'thinking and walking'. The text was intended as a straightforward introduction to the topic in which key information and facts could be explored.

### Questions A1-3

Questions A1 and A3 required candidates to use close reading skills to locate key details from the text and to then deduce and retrieve information. Question A1 required candidates to find the 'recommended number of steps that a person should walk each day.' Success rates were high with candidates locating the correct information and copying down the number carefully. Examiners reported fewer issues than in previous Autumn series during the transfer of numbers from the resource material to their answer booklets.

Question A2 was the first of three multiple-choice questions on Unit 3. Candidates were asked to deduce: 'How many muscles are used every time a step is taken?' The correct answer, 200, could be found in the bottom right-hand corner of the resource material and was the first multiple-choice option. Only a handful of candidates were unable to answer the question correctly with an impressive success rate of over 99%. Fewer presentational issues were evident, and most were able to present their selection clearly.

The final question based on Text A was question A3. This task required candidates to locate the number of calories 'burnt if a person walks 1 mile.' The '1 mile' was emboldened in the text and should have aided location. Many candidates were successful. For this type of response, candidates can use numbers of words to record their response (there is no preference) with the focus being on accuracy. The word 'calories' was not expected in a correct answer as this was implied by the question. Professional learning and previous reports have stressed the importance of legible numbers and there was a marked improvement in this series.

Overall candidates performed well when answering questions based on Text A.

### Text B

Text B gave information about how people can prepare when taking up walking as a hobby. The text was entitled 'Walking for Health' and contained 4 text boxes (randomly arranged) around an image.

### Question A4

This question asked candidates to: 'Name one thing you need if you intend taking up walking as a hobby.' The '**one**' was emboldened to avoid any confusion or excessive detail in answers. Three possible areas were available for credit (comfortable, supportive shoes, a raincoat or a schedule). 'A comfortable, supportive pair of shoes' was by far the most popular response to the question. It is worth reminding candidates of the need to be precise when working through a text. Candidates missed the opportunity to score here by either shortening their response or changing the information to something not found in the text. For example, 'a shoe' lacked the precision required to gain a mark.

### Question A5

Text B tested sequencing skills on Unit 3. Candidates were required to order the information found in Text B to show the steps that need to be taken when taking up walking as a hobby. The first step (and perhaps the most contentious) was provided to enable candidates to sequence the information logically. It is essential that candidates pay attention to the number that is given to them and account for this in their answers. This prevents duplication of numbers. Attempt rates were high for this question and candidates appeared to score well. It was pleasing to note that most candidates were able to present their answers clearly and very few used the same number more than once.

## Question A6

The final question on Text B was the second multiple-choice question on the paper. This time candidates were asked to deduce the most likely meaning of the phrase 'overly exert yourself'. Four possible options were given in the mark scheme. The word 'excessive' was used in two of the answers to allow candidates to see that the 'overly' could be interpreted as 'excessive'. Two of the answers 'walk' and 'money' were deliberately precise in naming specifics as the original phrase did not – it was hoped that this would help candidates to refine their final choice. Those who worked through the options logically usually found themselves arriving at the most appropriate definition.

## Text C

Text C was taken from a woman's blog about her decision to walk more as a lifestyle and health choice. The text was upbeat in tone and style and most candidates seemed to engage with the information. The main thrust of the article was that by changing small habits, on a daily basis, rewards can be reaped, and candidates certainly adopted some of the information and the writer's style in their own B2 articles.

## Question A7

Candidates were asked to explain 'in their own words' the meaning of the phrase 'Easy wins'. As with all word meaning questions, context was useful. Candidates usually took one of two routes when answering this question. Some took the word 'easy' and substituted it for a different synonym, such as 'simply or straightforward', they then took the 'wins' and tried to substitute it for something that could suggest 'win' for example 'achievement or, successes. A few candidates took the phrase in its entirety and tried to give a more holistic interpretation of its meaning. For example, it is something that can be achieved without much 'fuss' or 'a goal you can reach without trying too hard'. Candidates are well advised to seek alternative synonyms to those used in the original phrase as this helps them to demonstrate their understanding of its meaning.

## Question A8

Although only worth 4 marks, the summary question worked well. Candidates are becoming increasingly familiar with the requirements of this question type and hopefully the close reading and summative skills developed in the classroom will serve them well. Bullet points are becoming an increasingly common feature in summary answers, and this is perfectly acceptable. Indeed, it is the only place on entire Unit 2 or Unit 3 where we welcome and reward them.

Several broad areas of the text were available for response and candidates often chose the idea that the writer 'gets off her bus early to walk' and 'wears a smart watch to motivate her to count steps'. These two response types were, by far, the most common. Several other options were available for credit and those who included sufficient range were usually rewarded for their reading stamina.

To reiterate previous advice. A good summary:

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

## Question A9

Text C gave candidates another opportunity to use their deduction skills when asked to give the meaning of the phrase, 'you won't even think about your old stop.' While question 7 gave candidates the opportunity to show their understanding by simply providing a substitute for each of the words, this question allowed candidates to demonstrate their comprehension and understanding skills. The 'old stop' referred to the writer's old bus stop, a stop which she previously used before making the decision to 'walk more'. This phrase was used to highlight the fact that now that the writer has made the decision to incorporate changes into her routine, she has forgotten what it was like before the changes were made. In essence, the new routine has caused her to forget the old one. Many candidates used phrases such as 'the new routine has become natural' or 'she has forgotten what she did in the past to show how easy the transition was. A wide range of different responses were offered and those which stepped back to consider the phrase in its entirety usually made good progress. Those who became bogged down by one or two individual words often struggled here.

## Text D

This text was taken from a webpage that suggested the many benefits of walking. The text made a strong argument that the only way to reap the benefits from walking is to walk in a specific way. Once again, the text was upbeat in style and the persuasive content gave it great scope for a 'how' question.

## Question A10

The first question based on Text D required candidates to consider: 'How does the writer of Text D try to persuade you that we need to "walk quickly"?' The question required close reading, interpretation and analytical skills. Tracking of the text was also key to success.

Close task focus enables candidates to see exactly what is required in an answer. Being able to access the full range of marks hinges on close reading/text tracking. Those who were less successful often answered a generic 'how does the writer' question without the specific focus required or went off at a tangent, focusing more on the writer's methods than the text's key messages. A minority sought to answer a question about 'reading on' and this approach must be avoided. Although these may seem like subtle lapses in focus, they can cause a candidate to be classified as 'struggling to engage' as they become side-tracked. Brief answers were not uncommon. Appropriate comments and a range of supporting details were essential for the accumulation of marks.

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

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

In this series, the ‘how does the writer’ question was attempted by most candidates. The main barrier to success was for those who did not read the entire question. Too many argued that we ‘need to walk’ rather than ‘need to walk quickly’ and this hindered their focus on the question. There is an increasing tendency for some candidates to simply copy out the source material with no sense of the task. Some candidates even copy the text wholesale. This type of approach is ill-advised. All examiners are very familiar with the materials and those who simply copy receive no marks. Even a limited level of engagement is preferable to copying with no real purpose. Please help to share this message with candidates.

### **Question A11**

Candidates were directed to paragraph 3 and asked to consider what the text suggests can be done if ‘you have been unwell or inactive.’ Although only worth one mark some deduction skills and close reading were required in order to elicit a clear sense of the writer’s advice. Again, unselective copying was less helpful although candidates could use key words and phrases in order to answer the question. Success rates were pleasing for this question.

### **Question A12**

The final question based on Text D tested the ability to synthesise information from Text D and Text C. Candidates were asked to ‘synthesise the benefits associated with walking’. A wide range of possible answers could be used and those who included a decent level of relevant detail from both texts were usually rewarded. Those who understood the requirements and expectations of a synthesis task did not struggle and many completed efficient and detailed responses. Those who scored less well either attempted to compare the information or simply did not read the question carefully. Brevity or lack of detail was an issue for some.

Please note the following key details about synthesis questions:

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

### **Text E**

Text E was the final resource in the Reading section of the examination. The extract was taken from ‘The Salt Path’ by Raynor Winn. In this extract, Winn documents a few of the struggles encountered by herself and her husband Moth and she shares her delight in the natural surroundings and stunning landscapes.

## Questions A13 – 15

Questions A13 to A15, based on Text E, all carried a 1-mark tariff but tested a variety of different skills. Question A13 was a location question and required candidates to ‘Name one of the most photographed spots on the West Coast Path...’ Although the question may appear straightforward, it required some close reading in order to extract the correct answer, Lulworth Cove. The correct answer required candidates to read in context in order to score 1 mark. Some candidates simply wrote ‘the cove’ which was deemed a little too vague for credit. Please remind candidates that precision is required even in lower tariff questions.

Question A14 asked candidates to ‘Name the **two** things that the writer buys for herself when visiting Lulworth Cove.’ Two details (chocolate and hot tea) were required for one mark. Candidates should be familiar with this question type which has appeared both in Unit 2 and Unit 3 examinations. The majority were successful, but a minority chose to include things that would not be paid for.

A15 was the final multiple-choice question on the paper. With four options and three credible distractors, A15 was not without challenge. Candidates were asked to find the closest meaning to ‘picturesque’ with the correct answer ‘something visually attractive’ proving most popular. The success rate of 72% indicates that this was a more challenging multiple-choice question with option 1 being the most credible distractor.

## Question A16

Text E was rich in detail about Raynor Winn’s emotions and personality so an impressions question seemed to be the best way to allow candidates to engage with her character through some closer reading. Across the cohort, candidates were able to identify some of the character’s traits and behaviours, and many were able to comment on the impressions created of her.

The best approach when completing this type of question is for candidates to work chronologically through the passage noting specific details and characteristics or actions that might suggest something about the individual in question. Many candidates, for example, chose to focus on the ‘toenail’ and gave a range of impressions about her suffering and being in pain. While many were able to extract some information about Raynor, quite a number of candidates lost focus and, instead, commented on her husband and their relationship. It is imperative that candidates retain question focus.

As mentioned in the summer report, range (both quotations and impressions) and coverage are important for those who wish to achieve top Band marks. Candidates who are struggling to focus helped themselves by simply writing, ‘We get the impression that the writer is..... because it says....’ Candidates can develop their skills and variety once they have a basic answer structure.

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

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

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

## Section B

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

As with all writing, the content of written work is vital and careful planning usually helps candidates to generate some ideas which can then be developed into coherent writing. Although many candidates produced plans, a significant number did not and the effect on their writing was evident.

The copying of source materials from the Reading section remains a major concern. Many candidates copied whole chunks or paragraphs of text in the writing section. Candidates must realise that all examiners are very familiar with the materials and recognise when copying has occurred. While it is perfectly acceptable to use *some* of the ideas from the reading materials, the way in which these are incorporated into a candidate's writing is important. Some candidates borrow the odd word or phrase from the reading materials while others quote key details in their own work. Both are acceptable approaches, as is using the reading materials as a springboard to generate ideas or introduce new points. However, those who copy swathes of text struggle to move beyond Band 1 and this approach should be avoided.

Technical accuracy remains an issue. Paragraphing writing, using capital letters and full stops alongside the correct spelling of basic homophones should be a priority for many candidates. When assessing writing, examiners try to reward positively but must account for all of the errors evident in a piece of writing. Errors can affect not only the mark awarded for writing accurately, but also cause lapses in cohesion which have to be factored in when assessing a candidate's ability to communicate. Any additional attention that can be given to this area would hugely benefit candidates.

Handwriting is a barrier to success. Many candidates appear to struggle to write clearly, and intervention would be advised in this instance. It is impossible to award a fair mark to something that cannot be read.

## Question B1

B1 directed candidates to produce a formal letter in response to a statement. 'Children should walk more. Walking builds character and is an excellent form of exercise. Those who do not walk everyday are simply lazy.'

Format and tone are important when producing a formal letter. These help to establish the right style and direction for the task. It was clear that many candidates were unable to adopt the appropriate tone and formality for a letter. Few were able to write using formal letter conventions and a significant number were unable to paragraph their writing. Marks are not added or deducted for format, but the correct conventions do help to convey an appropriate style.

Brief writing was an issue for some who simply did not develop ideas or observations. Some simply rewrote the quotation and expressed a minimal view about it. Others produced several statements or views that lacked any real development. Work could possibly be done on how to develop ideas and expand views. Some candidates produced quite chaotic writing in which they contradicted some of their own views. Again, careful planning would help to avoid such issues.

## **Question B2**

B2 asked candidates to produce an article for a school or college magazine based on the 'benefits of a healthy lifestyle' This task was a familiar one and candidates are likely to have worked on similar tasks in school. The magazine was aimed at 'classmates' and this also allowed candidates to write with some familiarity. Those who worked to extend their writing often performed best and produced a range of interesting texts. Some chose to focus predominantly on 'walking' but most adopted a broader approach to the task, focusing on exercise, health, diet, walking, supplements and so on. It was interesting to read about some candidates' exercise regimes and the commitment shown to living 'clean' and 'healthy' lives. Others chose to share details about their health 'transformations' moving from obesity to healthy eating.

Overall, many examiners enthusiastically reported creative, interesting and thoughtful writing. Many candidates appeared to be achieving in the Band 2 to 3 area but there was often room to develop detail and increase accuracy. Planning and practise are key to success when writing and candidates ought to be reminded of the need to take the examination seriously (quite a number chose to inappropriately draw pictures, doodle and write messages to the examiner).

## Supporting you

### Useful contacts and links

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

Tel: 029 22404289

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

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

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245 Western Avenue  
Cardiff CF5 2YX  
Tel No 029 2026 5000  
Fax 029 2057 5994  
E-mail: [exams@wjec.co.uk](mailto:exams@wjec.co.uk)  
website: [www.wjec.co.uk](http://www.wjec.co.uk)

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