

GCSE

English/English Language

ENG1F – Understanding and producing non-fiction texts
Report on the Examination

4700/4705
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General Comments

This was an extremely small series and represented linear re sit circumstances, with an entry of just over 6,000.

As such, it was marked by an extremely small, experienced team. There was a noticeable divide in the cohort sitting the examination. Some candidates had clearly benefitted from some very good teaching in the first half of the autumn term and handled the paper and its demands extremely well – showing clear skills and applying sensible methods and planning to the questions. Other candidates, however, appeared to be just ‘having another go’ at the exam and seemed to have had, or done no preparation at all. It is costly for centres to make exam entries and it is advisable for all re sit candidates to have some targeted teaching and revision. In this exam, for example, there were almost 200 candidates who scored fewer than 20 marks. They would have clearly benefitted from having another year’s study before sitting the exam again.

Question 1a

Most candidates responded well to this task and answered correctly - with 75% gaining the full four marks. In a re-sit exam, however, where the emphasis is on improvement, it is still worrying that a quarter of the candidates could not list four things correctly from the text. This was, in almost all cases, due to careless reading – the most obvious mistake being to state the tree was 30 feet tall and not 30 feet behind the farmhouse or to write about Huw Williams and not the oak tree.

Question 1b

There seem to be many routes to gaining two marks for this question and 53% of candidates did just that. They made statements about people’s feelings, they made supported statements about people’s feelings, they made statements and an occasional inference. However, only 8% of candidates seemed familiar enough with the mark scheme to realise they needed to make more than one supported statement and more than one inference and thereby achieved full marks. Some candidates had helpfully noted ‘P.E.E x2’ by the question but then didn’t do that in the actual answer. The candidates who highlighted the focus of the task in their response – beginning sentences with ‘People felt ...’ tended to do better and stay on track.

Question 2

Again, in question 2 basic reading comprehension skills were sadly lacking by the vast majority of candidates. The question asked candidates what they understood about the woodlands in the UK from the letter, for which there was much to say and many interesting inferences to be drawn. 2.5% of candidates managed to make supported statements with more than one clear inference and achieve full marks. 18.9% of candidates remained in Band 1 because they wrote about the Woodland Trust and how they wanted members, how they persuaded us in the letter and what the logo was like.

Really, the lessons to be drawn from Q1a, 1b and 2 remain the same each series:

- Encourage candidates to read the question carefully as well as the text.
- Highlight the focus of the task and refer to it in each new point made in 1b and 2
- Use the mark scheme with candidates to ensure they know precisely what to demonstrate for Band 3 marks and have a clear method for basic comprehension – make a statement, support it, make an inference from it.

Question 3

The language question worked well for the majority of candidates, with many of them able to identify and exemplify the language features in the passage about autumn. 41% were able to show this skill. Some well prepared candidates were able to comment at Band 2 level or above – particularly on the listing of the plentiful produce of autumn and the beautiful descriptions of the forest floor, ‘thickly carpeted’ with leaves. 19.5% of candidates demonstrated the ability to comment on the effect and/or move into a more focused approach than mere feature spotting, which was very pleasing indeed.

DAFOREST was, somewhat ironically, a very unhelpful mnemonic meaning that many candidates ignored some of the obvious and interesting descriptive and literary devices in the passage to flag up facts and opinions (giving themselves a very hard task to comment on the effect in anything other than general terms), and made a desperate search for statistics. When candidates are reduced to telling examiners that the writer has used repetition of the word ‘autumn’ in a text entitled ‘Autumn’ rather than commenting on ‘bracken knotted in their antlers’, ‘plumes of steam’, ‘morning mist’, ‘abundance’ and ‘crisp quietness’, then it’s probably time DAFOREST was concreted over.

Those candidates with little or no preparation sadly fell by the wayside here, with many writing about the content of the passage or the picture.

Question 4

Question 4 remains problematic. Realistically, most candidates write far too much, achieving all of their marks within the first page and then just going on to do more of the same on more and more features.

There were many interesting and engaging visual images on all three texts and some contrasting and effective use of colours. However, many candidates still opted to write about bold headings, white backgrounds and paragraphs. Selecting a couple of the most interesting and obvious features to write about in reasonable detail really is the key to success in this question. Some candidates have now got into the good habit of providing examples, by employing a ‘say what you see’ method and this takes them up to 5 marks. Some candidates are also capable of comparing quite well. Once again, the comments on effect rarely move beyond ‘it stands out’ or ‘it grabs the attention’. Only 1.2 % of candidates moved out of Band 2. There is maybe some mileage in collecting together all of the S4 and S5 Standardising scripts that are available to teachers to help to model to students what a good Band 2 and Band 3 answer looks like.

Question 5

Candidates often enjoy descriptive writing and this was the case for many this time – *if* they read the question carefully. Again, selection is the key. Those candidates who made sensible choices of an aspect of nature they found beautiful tended to write pieces with good descriptive phrases, appropriate features – perhaps similes, metaphors, alliteration and in places, some super vocabulary choices. Those who wrote about winter, summer, their garden, flowers, bees, caves, volcanoes, thunderstorms, the beach, the sea, mountains, really gave us some good work to read that was purposeful. Approximately 20% of the candidates did this.

Many others touched on the Band 2 skills but lost their way by describing the Amazon or Mount Everest somewhat unconvincingly and being tempted to slip into narrative. Again, those who were hampered by DAFOREST failed to engage examiners with the statistics in their descriptive pieces. This series, which we have never seen before, we saw a large number of unprepared candidates simply lifting huge chunks from Source 3 and copying them out. In some cases, the whole answer given was Source 3 copied out. Such direct copying from source cannot be credited when marking.

Question 6

This question worked a treat for the vast majority of candidates – many of whom wrote well - planned, organised, structured, and purposeful pieces, which had just the right tone and register. They were mature, sensible and had really interesting and convincing arguments. A brilliant 14.7% of candidates made it into Band 3 on Q6 with a further 38% performing at the top of Band 2. Candidates chose to write about the loss of their local park, community centre, youth club, or library and took to the task with gusto and stamina at the end of a long exam. Really, these were a pleasure to read. The arguments showed that some candidates have a real sense of what might be important in a community. Occasionally some candidates slipped into a rant, and mishandled the right tone but still showed some awareness of the features of an argument.

Candidates were well versed in the skills of constructing a letter and structurally many of these were impressive.

Technical skills are, on the whole, very good for many candidates. Whilst sentence demarcation and issues with agreement or Standard English can be a problem for some, the vast majority are able to use varied sentences and some exciting structures for effect. Spelling is generally good, with most candidates showing they can spell at least some complex words. Many candidates writing at foundation level manage to write whole pieces with only the occasional slip in spelling, which is brilliant. The apostrophe is still alive and well and often to be found in the correct place.

Overall, there should be some well-deserved improved grades for many candidates in this series, who should be very proud of their progress and success.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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