



General Certificate of Education

English Language 5706
Specification B

ENB3 Original Writing

Report on the Examination
2007 examination - June series

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General Comments

Senior Moderators reported that candidates in most centres had been thoroughly prepared in the requirements of the assessment criteria to produce original work of a high standard in specific genres for identifiable purposes and readerships, based on the writers' own interests and experiences. Very often commentaries reflected sensitively on the writers' linguistic choices and how these related to the perceived readership's needs. In the vast majority of cases the quality of the candidates' output was matched by the careful and accurate assessments submitted which often rendered the moderation process quite straightforward and at times both enjoyable and rewarding!

The following remarks are designed to address the major issues which the latest round of moderation highlighted; many of them are basically positive in nature – some unfortunately less so – but none is really brand new. They are, however, worth re-iterating, as personnel in centres is constantly changing and the points made will doubtless be fresh to some.

Popular Topics

Most centres presented folders featuring a wide variety of tasks. In general, unsurprisingly, the effectiveness of the writing was directly linked to the level of interest and expertise in and commitment to the topic demonstrated by the writers. Amongst the most frequently submitted were - re-worked fairy tales, monologues, film and band reviews and the ubiquitous 'magazine article'. Children's stories were fairly frequently attempted but the difficulties of producing something effective and convincing were often underestimated and the results were disappointing. 'Size Zero' related features were very popular - replacing drugs and smoking related pieces as the default topic in cases of inspiration shortfall! Several centres also encouraged candidates to imitate the style of a particular broadsheet columnist like Jon Ronson or Lucy Mangan of *Guardian* fame [or even Jeremy Clarkson in the *Times*]. This worked well in some cases but less able candidates obviously found the form difficult and, missing the subtlety and wit of the originals, ended up with nothing more than a manic rant. Other popular topics this session were monologues and articles which were based on *A Day in the Life Of*, or *A Life in the Day Of...* and there are suitable style models for both of these. It is worth reiterating what makes these genres successful. Candidates are most successful when they choose a monologue which has a voice and a range of experience with which they are familiar. Alan Bennett was conversant with the speech and experience of an older generation, but many candidates have a more limited view, but could write much more interestingly about the experiences of youth with a young voice. There were many monologues, too, which simply had someone talking with no particular end in view; monologues need to be given a shape by having a storyline, gradually revealing a character, or conveying a character/situation in such a way that the audience can see what the character cannot. *A Life in the Day Of* articles were more successful than *A Day in the Life Of* in that they were able to engage an audience with an insight into the mind of the writer. No matter how well written, a straight catalogue of daily activities is difficult to present in such a way as to demonstrate higher level writing skills and thus will be of limited interest and unlikely to fit happily into the higher mark bands.

Use of Style Models

Style models can be a useful tool, and indeed they will be of increasing significance in the revised specification from September 2008 - but ultimately they are a means to an end, a way of giving originality a sense of definition and reality. For this reason they should be carefully selected in terms of appropriateness for the task and used as a guide rather than a straightjacket. One centre studied quite appropriately the best examples of rhetorical speeches, [eg *Martin Luther King – I Have a Dream etc.*] but then went too far in trying to incorporate all

the features of such speeches into the writing, ending up with tasks which were inappropriate to a large extent for the more modern and less 'weighty' topics being written about, where heavy rhetorical flourishes were inappropriate. This close replication was encouraged by the centre which criticised drafts which had not used all the persuasive features of the model.

Self Limiting Tasks

Centres should continue to be aware that some tasks are limiting and do not allow able candidates the scope to write originally. These limitations can take the form of the final format, eg leaflet, but they can also be limited in that they depend on the writing of others which is not being transformed into a new context which allows originality. Source material on healthy eating, and the dangers of eating related diseases was very popular, but rarely was it able to be changed into something that was new with the usual run of magazine articles, leaflets. It is relatively unusual to see high-performing candidates producing good leaflets or booklets, usually because the bitty nature of many of these does not require the writer to sustain an argument or set of ideas. Generally speaking, rather too many of the leaflets that are being submitted are on topics where the candidate needs to research it first (usually on the web) and then repackages it with very little hope of demonstrating originality. In the worst cases, where no bibliography or print-outs from source materials are appended, and there is evidence of dubious practice, candidates may find their folder forwarded to AQA. Far better for everyone would be the scenario where the candidate says (for example) "I want to write a leaflet on diabetes" and the supervising teacher says "Why?". When it emerges that the candidate's sister/mother/uncle suffers from the disease, the way is open for something far more likely to be original, such as a health-based feature article, mainly human-interest story, and partly a boxed text with the medical facts or social issues. Other examples of successful writing to inform pieces were when a candidate used factual source material to create a monologue by someone suffering from an eating disorder and a play script for a school assembly which effectively adapted information about drug use and abuse.

Commentaries

There was some evidence that the standard of commentary writing is continuing to improve, as centres become clearer about what needs to go into them, though some centres continue to place too many in the top two bands.

Centre standardising material and Coursework Advisers can provide useful guidance, but a rule of thumb continues to be that commentaries placed in bands one and two will display most, if not all, of the following features:-

- remaining within the suggested word limit. This suggests a degree of understanding which allows candidates to select the factors which are most significant to the writing
- having the ability to handle the complexities of purpose, reader/writer relationship, genre etc.
- exemplification of significant points where appropriate
- demonstrating an overview which suggests a complete understanding of the writing through the controlled structure of the comments.

On the other hand, less worthy commentaries will:

- either not use the words available or, more likely, will go beyond the suggested limits by trawling through every aspect of the piece, treating each aspect as of equal significance
- not focus on 'difficult' or more complex aspects or, more likely, see them in simple terms, eg reader/writer relationship being merely a matter of the choice of pronoun, or tone being established by way of some contacted forms

- settle for bland generalisations or fail to illustrate potentially valid points with suitable examples
- log every language feature in a paragraph by paragraph approach which fails to show an overall grasp of what is really significant.

This latter approach is one where the candidate is usually following a centre-dictated “one-size fits all” formula. This can, of course, be perfectly proper and acceptable, but the best candidates will always be able to go beyond the template and show the ability to think for themselves and to select the really significant features.

Writing for Listening audiences

The range of scripts of various types being submitted seems to be on the increase. Some centres are specialising in the dramatic monologue (and not always with Alan Bennett as style model). At the highest level of achievement there is a clear and complete narrative, a developing, and sometimes unreliable narrator, a convincing spoken voice, and humour. As a result, the criterion by which they are best assessed – success as entertainment – is amply satisfied. Other scripts have been for theatre – school sixth form review sketches and theatre in education are two examples – while others have been for debates and speeches. In the latter two cases, it must be emphasised that the candidates should avoid writing transcripts of spontaneous speech (“*scripting the unscriptable*”). Less successful speeches are written as exercises in rhetoric, with in one memorable example, an address to a meeting in a village hall beginning “*My fellow citizens*” with the writer perhaps not fully believing in what is being written (but who may not have been given an alternative). One test that centres might suggest to these writers is pretty fundamental: can the piece be convincingly spoken? Part of the demands of this kind of writing, after all, is that they should be ‘speakable’, as well as easily understood by listeners, and it is possible to present a strong spoken argument, and succeed in persuasion, without over-egging the style with rhetorical flourishes. There were, however, some excellent speeches submitted, especially where the candidate had actually delivered the speech in some context such as a debating club. However, even having had to deliver their speech to the class obviously had an impact and gave them something meaningful to put into the commentary. Another point with speeches is that they should be written for real contexts; for example a speech given to a group of IT businessmen on ‘*the perils of the advance of technology*’ is decidedly unlikely; it was obvious that many speeches submitted had never been, nor would ever have been able to be spoken aloud.

“Verisimilitude”

Discussion at centre standardisation meetings and calls to coursework advisers throughout the year have often centred around the extent to which texts submitted for assessment should physically resemble the models on which they are based. It is worthwhile pointing out here that page design in terms of attractiveness or ‘verisimilitude’ is not something that is part of the assessment objectives, although awareness of genre – and associated structures - certainly is. Candidates who are prepared to present their materials as they might appear if published, force themselves to address something that is assessable, ie the manner in which ideas are structured in ways appropriate to the genre. One would expect, for example, most magazine style models to suggest engaging titles, standfirsts between title and intro, pictures that are captioned, introductions that are not essayish, and possibly boxed text with its own title. It is not necessary for candidates to be a computer expert or a graphic designer to demonstrate this knowledge: it is quite possible, as in ENB5, to attach a sketch of the proposed layout to the text. If they do spend time producing a piece of desk-top published work, that is fine – but (to reiterate) – if the end result looks amateurish, it doesn’t matter as long as there is a clear understanding of the underlying structure and genre conventions.

The “Opening Chapter”

Much has been said on the topic of candidates providing the opening chapter of a novel as a piece of writing to entertain. It appears to be a staple task amongst some centres, while others say that they have been told that it is not a permissible type of task. It is worth re-stating advice which has been regularly given since the inception of this specification. Writing first chapters can be a way of avoiding the construction of a complete plot and/or dealing with complexities of characterisation, and arguably candidates who construct a complete short story – perhaps as dramatic monologue for TV – are being more ambitious. Good practice therefore is to level the playing field by asking candidates to supply a synopsis of the plot of the remainder of the novel, and in the commentary explore the ways in which the introduction is successful.

Thanks are due to all the centres who significantly contributed to the ease of the moderation process in a number of ways. It is very helpful and always appreciated by moderators when centres submit treasury-tagged folders rather than work placed in plastic wallets. Detailed and pertinent comments about how the work submitted fits the marking criteria for the mark awarded, either on the CRF or on an additional sheet, have also facilitated moderation. Finally, centres are reminded that when twenty or fewer candidates are entered for the unit that all the folders and centre mark sheets must be submitted directly to the moderator by the due date.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.