

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

(9820/W) Writing
Report on the examination

June 2019

REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (9280/W) – JUNE 2019

GENERAL COMMENTS

Many students performed successfully in response to this year's 9280/W examination. It was impressive to see how many students could produce clear and often interesting responses in timed conditions. Students and teachers are thanked for their engagement with this specification and the resulting success in this exam.

On the whole, it is clear that many students have approached this series with a real grasp of effective exam technique. Unfinished papers and misunderstood tasks were rare and there were many students whose work led them to the top mark bands. Centres will note that the mark scheme has been streamlined this series to make it clearer to students how the skills in each mark band build on each other. The underlying assessment philosophy and standard remains constant, but it is hoped that these minor phrasing changes will be of benefit to students in seeing how skills build up over the mark bands.

Previous reports on the exam have noted that one of the first things an examiner checks is question relevance. Each task has specific focuses: the content of the picture is central to Question 1, and Question 2, 3 and 4 are accompanied by bullet points to guide the student towards ideas for content. Successful answers always make sure the question is being addressed in all of its details: where students addressed one of the compulsory bullets insufficiently, or avoided it altogether, it impacted on the mark that could be awarded. Fortunately, the vast majority of students comprehended the tasks and addressed them in full detail.

As with the November 2019 series, more students were producing effective answers without resorting to writing overly lengthy responses. Exceeding suggested word counts never results in a reduction of marks, but it can be the case that students who overwrite produce more errors and therefore achieve a lower mark than they might have done for a shorter, more accurate response.

This paper invites students to demonstrate both technical accuracy and their ability to produce engaging responses: content/communication and quality of language go hand-in-hand with successful writing. The mark scheme recognizes this balance, but it is worth students being aware how the relative balance between content and accuracy shifts towards the end of the paper. Students who used the final task to show off their sentence variety, secure sentence boundaries, spelling and range of vocabulary gave themselves a good chance of success. It was very pleasing to note how many students had been well prepared for the different question types. Examiners remarked how impressed they have been with the quality of many responses this year.

Some specific points about each task on this year's examination follow.

QUESTION 01

The first question on the paper always invites a descriptive response based around a picture. It is important that students know that they do not need to cover all of the detail in the picture. This year, more students responded to this question by selecting some (not all) details from the picture and building detail. The dramatic nature of the image produced responses which dwelt on the crashing waves and isolated scene. Other students explored the natural beauty of the scene, producing writing which captured a sense of pastoral splendour. Many students used colour terminology or focused on the appearance of the house to show the detail of their writing. One or two less successful responses imagined details about the family who might live in the house. Such responses were largely unrelated to the detail of the picture and couldn't be credited highly.

In terms of the Language mark in Question 1 (worth 3 of the 9 marks available for this question), only spelling and punctuation are assessed. It is not necessary to use complex punctuation or overly ambitious vocabulary to achieve full marks: doing so runs the risk of misspelling or the misuse of words

which affects clarity. A sensible approach to this task is to select some detail and write about it clearly, using spelling, full stops and commas accurately.

QUESTION 02

This task led to some very interesting responses. The concept of ‘voluntary work’ was understood by most to mean charitable acts. For some students, they read it as ‘any unpaid job’. Examiners credited both approaches and as ever, focused on how well the bullet points were addressed, the clarity of the writing and the technical accuracy and range. The second and third bullet points offered the greatest challenge, given that they required the student to justify matters. It was sometimes the third bullet - ‘why your friend should help’ - which determined the level of response. Simplistic reasons such as ‘I like you’ were not as effective as those which gave thorough explanations. Going forward, students might wish to refine these types of writing as a method of maximizing marks.

The assessment of Language in this question (worth 6 of the 12 marks available) offers marks for variety as well as spelling and punctuation. The rationale for giving students bullet points which invite justification is that they can lead naturally to sentence variety: it’s often the case that complex sentences are required to justify an opinion. This is another good reason why spending time on the third bullet also helped students access the marks for Language. Constructing responses which not only used punctuation correctly and accurate spelling, but also employed a variety of sentence structures, led to responses achieving a high mark for Language.

QUESTION 03

The third task on the paper appeared to be enjoyed by many students, perhaps because it allowed them to write about an experience they knew well and also it gave an opportunity to write enthusiastically about a recent film. Accounts were generally well-shaped and as expected, much weight was given to the final two bullet points. Where shortcomings occurred, responses tended to overwrite about film content and minimize the justification bullet point (‘why you liked the film’). It’s worth stating that some bullet points naturally lead to minimal writing (‘the name of the film’), yet the ones which suggest detail is required are worth spending more time on.

The 8 Language marks (of the 16 marks available for this question) are awarded for accuracy and variety, therefore students who structured their writing in suitable, varied constructions were successful in achieving marks. As noted above, bullet points requiring the student to justify ideas invite them to use complex sentences with accurate subordinating conjunctions and dependent clauses. It was clear that many students can construct such sentences; for those students who only wrote in simple and compound sentences, it is advised that this may be a fruitful area to develop.

QUESTION 04

As mentioned earlier in this report, the balance of marks available between Content/Communication and Language changes. For this question, 8 marks are available for Content/Communication and 15 marks for Language use. Unlike previous tasks, the bullet points on Question 4 are not mandatory, so students were free to determine the content of their piece as long as it addressed the task (‘an article for your school or college website about healthy living’). Having said that, the vast majority of students did use the bullet points to shape their response. This was a sensible idea, because the two bullet points (‘how’ and ‘why’) led to explanatory and justificatory writing.

Being able to spell and punctuate accurately is important in all tasks, but here variety is important, not least because of the way marks are weighted. Many students were good at producing complex sentences and vocabulary, yet it should be noted that packing a response with overly complex language is counterproductive. Clarity is vital, so any desire to use complex vocabulary should be tempered by the importance of readability. In short, students should ensure their work still makes sense when they include elaborate lexis.

Although this report has, by necessity, explored some areas where responses were less successful in answering the questions on this examination, it is important to state how impressed examiners continue to be by the quality of writing produced by students. Centres and students deserve much praise for their successes in this series.

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