

INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(9270/2) Source-based reading and directed
writing

Report on the examination

June 2023

REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 9270/2 SOURCE-BASED READING AND DIRECTED WRITING JUNE 2023

Introduction

This series saw a further increase in entries, indicating a growing interest in the specification as a whole. As with Paper 1, most students completed both sections in the allotted time and the standard of responses was generally very good.

Section A

The topic for this year's paper was 'the written word'. Students were asked to read four extracts and look at a pair of photos. The extracts and the photos covered calligraphy, graffiti, and the power of writing. Students seemed to enjoy these topics; they wrote enthusiastically about the sources and showed real interest for much of the content. There were many opportunities for inference, analysis and supported interpretation throughout the text. The three bands in the mark scheme for each question, except question 1, which has two bands, reflect progression from literal responses with simple comment, to those that use detail to develop some comment/explanation, to those that explore and analyse aspects of the text, offering developed, considered comment and inference.

Centres should be aware that, although examiners will have expectations of the quality of responses at various levels, and the skills likely to be shown within each band, they have no expectation that specific content from the extract will be used and are instructed, through the mark scheme, that all valid responses should be rewarded. Students who have been encouraged to read a wide range in both fiction and non-fiction, explore meaning and stylistic qualities, and develop an independent response based on textual evidence, are likely to do well in this section.

Centres new to this specification are reminded that there is no set number of questions, nor any pre-determined area of focus for the questions. The questions arise from the chosen text. They are linked with the Assessment Objectives and are selected as the best questions to ask on the given text. The best responses are produced by students who have developed their skills of interpretation, inference, analysis and exploration of ideas, language and imagery, and are able to articulate their ideas in response to a range of questions.

QUESTION 01

This question was based on Source A, which was about both ancient and modern graffiti. Students were asked to write down the origins of graffiti.

This question required students to identify and use relevant detail in order to collate information and explain the origins of graffiti. Most students achieved marks beyond the 'identify relevant details' 1-2 band by referring to a range of detail and beginning to develop comment. Those who achieved the higher marks explained both the older origins of graffiti, as well as more recent developments, and used quotations from the source to support their answers. For example:

"Graffiti has been around for thousands of years, and is thought to originate in 'prehistoric' times, as it can be seen in the 'Lascaux cave paintings' in France. However, Source A also explains that modern graffiti developed in New York City in the 1960s, alongside 'street subcultures'. The rise of graffiti was aided by the 'invention of the aerosol spray can'."

QUESTION 02

This question asked students to read Source B, called 'Calligraphy: the art of handwriting'. The question asked students what we learn about calligraphy in the source, and required that they identify and collate relevant detail. Many students did well to identify information about calligraphy, and most were able to use quotations from the text to support their ideas. Better responses showed the ability to infer more subtle meaning by describing what the source suggests about calligraphy. For example:

"It is clear that although calligraphy is a craft, bound by 'consistency' and 'excellence of form', there is no requirement that all calligraphy is identical. In fact, each calligrapher has their own 'unique style' and Source B makes it clear that this is achieved through 'repeated practice of typical letterform features', so although there is a lot of work involved to become an expert, it is a beautiful and unique artform."

QUESTION 03

This question required students to read Source C, which was taken from the introduction to 'Calligraffiti', a book about Niels Meulman's artwork. Meulman paints a form of graffiti based on calligraphy, so this source brought together ideas from Sources A and B. Students were asked how the writer presents Meulman's art as unusual. The question used the stem of 'how' to elicit responses that focused on language and techniques used by the writer to describe his artwork.

This question was answered with enthusiasm and depth by most students; they identified the reasons why he is not a typical graffiti artist or calligrapher, and most wrote well to articulate their ideas. The better answers were able to identify the ways in which his art is unusual, as well as the methods used by the writer to demonstrate this. For example:

"The writer shows that Meulman's art is unusual because he has created a hybrid of both art forms; he has brought calligraphy to graffiti, and graffiti to calligraphy. The writer uses a metaphor to show this, as he describes how Meulman has 'built a sturdy and meaningful bridge across the chasm that separates the two art forms.' The image of a 'bridge' gives the reader imagery of Meulman developing a physical and conceptual connection between calligraphy and graffiti, across a 'chasm' which existed before."

QUESTION 04

This question required students to read Source D and look at two pictures in Source E. Source D was an article in defence of graffiti, and the pictures in Source E showed two urban graffiti scenes. The question asked students what is suggested about graffiti and street art. Students were required to identify and compare ideas in the sources. Questions 4 and 5 both have ten marks available; centres should guide students to consider the marks available for each question, so that they are able to plan their time accordingly.

This question produced some detailed responses from students, in which they demonstrated their understanding of what they had read and considered it in a wider context with the photographs. Responses in the higher bands showed inference and/or exploration of the issues. For example:

"The writer demonstrates that the disempowered members of society may use graffiti as a way of 'needling, in some small way, those who have money and power'. While some may see the pictures in Source E as vandalism, and therefore supportive of Source D, it could be considered that the artists in Source E are simply expressing themselves in an open forum. It seems that the painting has been created in a collaborative space, and so perhaps this is how the disempowered members of society are able to display their work without the luxury of an art gallery."

QUESTION 05

This question required students to read Source F, which was an extract from Andrea Levy's 'The Long Song'. In this extract, a printer describes his mother's relationship with writing, and how he has been able to tell her story. The question asked students to use the source to write about how the writer conveys the power of writing, and the importance of his role in the writing process. The question used the stem of 'how' to elicit responses that focused on language and techniques used by the writer. As with question 4, this question carried 10 marks. Centres are reminded of the importance of timings for students, to ensure they leave enough time to achieve the full range of marks available.

Responses in the higher band showed a detailed level of analysis of the methods employed by the writer, and the effect of the language on the reader. It was pleasing to see more students responding to the methods, rather than just summarising the printer's role. Students found metaphors, similes and other devices and many wrote about them with confidence. The impact on the reader was articulated well by many students too. For example:

"The writer illustrates the power of the written word, of which the thought was 'alarming' for his mother, given her background in slavery. The writer describes how his skill as a printer is to transform any text – regardless of its quality – to something beautiful and powerful. The powerful imagery in his metaphor 'Give me writing that looks to have been made by some insect crawling dirty legs across the paper' gives readers a tangible sense of how weak and scribbled some texts seem, yet he will transform it to something 'clear and precise'."

Section B

Students are advised to spend an hour on Section B. Whilst students are not given a guide as to length of writing, the size of handwriting being such a variable factor, it is expected that the essay will be suitably developed and structured. Students who offer very brief and/or undeveloped responses inevitably limit their potential achievement.

The mark scheme is divided into two parts. The first part is designed to assess W1 (communication and content), W2 (variety and effectiveness of sentence structure) and W3 (organisation and structure), with each strand being represented by a bullet point. The second template is used to assess W4, technical accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

For some students taking this exam, English was a second language. Whilst this, understandably gave rise to grammatical errors, it remained possible to gain marks in the higher bands through sophisticated use of detail and vocabulary, effective sentence structures, sound organisation, and high levels of accuracy in spelling and punctuation.

It is always a pleasure to engage with a wide range of responses to the writing section, with students offering interesting responses to the available questions. There was evidence of some excellent vocabulary use, sometimes very effectively and thoughtfully placed, as well as some students demonstrating interesting structures to their writing.

Something to bear in mind when teaching the writing section would be to model the use of a range of punctuation and sentence structures as a way of creating effects, encouraging students to consider more than just the words they are choosing and to think about how they are using sentences to convey ideas as well.

The better responses showed evidence of planning for their Section B responses, and it would be worthwhile for teachers to model and encourage planning for the different writing styles to ensure that responses are well organized, clear in their purpose and students are able to concentrate on the quality of their writing over the content. Students without a clear plan often repeated ideas, or included several ideas into one paragraph, making the argument difficult to follow.

QUESTION 06

This question gave a statement: 'Graffiti is not art; it's vandalism!' and then asked students to write an article for their school magazine in which they explain their views on this statement. Students who selected this wrote with great enthusiasm and passion, with many students feeling that graffiti should be permissible across the world. There were occasional responses which suggested an alternative viewpoint, but the majority lay in favour of graffiti. This meant that students wrote with strong voices, emotive language, and several rhetorical devices. Writing was lively and engaging, and often well structured. Some students attempted to draw columns for a magazine, and included illustrations and even advertisements. Centres are reminded that this is not necessary to access the full range of marks; careful planning, well structured paragraphs, and effective linguistic devices are advised rather than presentational features. Many students used the sources from Section A well, although centres are reminded that students will not be credited for copying out sections or simply paraphrasing the sources.

QUESTION 07

This question posed the scenario that a local newspaper was running an essay writing competition. Students were invited to write their competition entry, with the stimulus: 'Handwriting is a dying art; everything is written on computers and phones these days.' Again, responses to this question were crafted with enthusiasm. Many students felt strongly that computers are the way forward, although it was clear that others felt proud of their handwriting and wanted to preserve the 'dying art'. Students who planned their responses wrote with a stronger sense of purpose and their pieces were generally better in structure. It was clear that many students have learnt how to write formally for an adult audience too.

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GREAT CLARENDON STREET, OXFORD, OX2 6DP
UNITED KINGDOM

info@oxfordaqaexams.org.uk
oxfordaqaexams.org.uk

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