



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	English
Level	Intermediate 2

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Close Reading

Candidates were able to relate to and to understand the passage which dealt with the effects of books by Charles Dickens on black South African children during apartheid. Candidates showed commitment towards the exercise, and their answers showed signs that they found the language and ideas of the passage stimulating and thought-provoking. A small number of candidates confused the words "Afrikaans" and "Africans", but this kind of misunderstanding was not evident in significant numbers.

Care was taken over the wording of the questions to ensure clarity. Key terms were highlighted in bold.

Critical Essay

The range of texts chosen by candidates was similar to previous years. However, that range was reasonably wide. Shakespeare (Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and less frequently, Hamlet and Othello), and Miller (The Crucible, All My Sons) were the two most popular writers chosen for Drama. Next in popularity would be *Bold Girls* and an Inspector Calls. Scottish writers were often used for the Poetry Section (MacCaig, Morgan, Duffy, Burns, Rush). Scottish or American short stories featured in the Prose Section. Novels tended to be *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Animal Farm*.

There was a small increase in uptake for the question dealing with non-fiction texts in the Prose Section of the paper. Similarly, there was a very slight increase in the number of candidates attempting to answer from the Language Section. Most of these chose Q15 which was concerned with the language of groups. Those who had made a study in this area did well.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

- All questions were attempted by the overwhelming majority of candidates who had no difficulty in completing the paper.
- Many candidates were able to provide lengthy detailed answers to many of the questions.
- Questions on Understanding were handled well, although some candidates had difficulty in demonstrating their understanding through the use of their own words.
- The opening sequence of questions was dealt with effectively by most candidates.

Critical Essay

- The vast majority of candidates produced two relevant essays of relatively equal quality.
- Candidates showed commitment in their attempts to answer the questions set.
- Recent signs of improved technical accuracy were maintained.
- There were clear signs from the candidates' responses of personal engagement with texts.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

In general, questions on Analysis and Evaluation were less well handled than those on Understanding (eg Q12 which asked for an analysis of imagery). However, in Understanding questions some candidates were losing marks by failing to use their own words where required.

The candidates found difficulty with the question relating to linkage [Q6(a)].

Questions dealing with Evaluation (Q8 and Q13) also caused difficulty. Some candidates were not aware that Q13 required reference to the whole passage.

Critical Essay

A significant number of candidates did not realise that Q6 from the Prose section required the selection of a non-fiction text or group of texts. A fiction text was not an appropriate choice.

The few candidates who relied on learned essays had difficulty in achieving sufficient relevance.

Candidates who chose Q8 from the Poetry section, and concentrated on "a particular place," often had difficulty in achieving relevance.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

- The following may be useful.
- The advice, as always, is to encourage candidates to read widely in order to deal with challenges presented by subject matter, ideas and vocabulary at this level.
- To look out for Understanding questions which require the use of own words.
- To answer fully questions which require the identification of a technique and an explanation of its effectiveness.
- To recognise a writer's use of word choice, imagery, tone, etc, and be able to comment on use and effectiveness.
- To recognise the effect (and effectiveness) of a particular structure (eg sentence variety, linkage, balance, inversion, etc).
- To recognise the overall structure of a passage, and be able to comment on how the key elements of introduction, topic sentences and conclusion link the central ideas and themes.

Critical Essay

- The following may be useful.
- To remind candidates to read each question carefully. Failure to do this properly caused problems for some candidates with Q6.
- Candidates should attempt to develop a line of thought in their essays which answers the questions chosen.
- To stress the importance of commitment to Analysis and Evaluation in addition to the demonstration of Understanding.

- Genre features should be analysed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to the conveying of the writer's main ideas and themes.
- Care should be taken over paragraphing, sentences, and spelling in order to meet the demands of "sufficiently accurate."

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	20345
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	21025
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	17.5%	17.5%	3670	67
B	25.9%	43.4%	5452	57
C	30.1%	73.5%	6337	47
D	10.3%	83.8%	2164	42
No award	16.2%	100.0%	3402	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.