



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	English
Level	Intermediate 1

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

There was an encouraging improvement in candidate performance this year. This was true across both papers, with a marked improvement in Close Reading, and a slight improvement in the Critical Essay paper.

Close Reading

Candidates continued to take advantage of the extra time introduced last year. Most candidates completed the paper and answered all questions.

The passage was a piece of autobiographical writing by Bill Bryson. Candidates seemed to find the piece interesting and engaging. There were indications that the passage had been clearly understood by those sitting the examination.

There were fewer signs this year of incomplete papers and of very low marks in Close Reading.

Critical Essay

The paper was again well received as it gave candidates the opportunity to answer on the texts they had studied in school. Most candidates found no problems in selecting a question, but a minority showed confusion over selecting a question from an appropriate section.

By far the majority of candidates selected a question from the Prose or Poetry sections (Scottish writers such as Morgan, McCaig and Duffy continued to be popular), rather than Drama. A significant number chose from the Media section, but very few were prepared to make a selection from the Language section.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Candidates appeared to engage with the passage and answered the questions with commitment. Most attempted to answer all questions.

Candidates had most success with Understanding questions (eg 6b, 7), but did less well in Understanding questions where there was a requirement for 'own words.'

Candidates were successful with some Analysis questions (eg 4, 13), but many did not achieve full marks in questions where two marks were available.

Critical Essay

Candidates continued to show a good understanding of the texts they had studied in school. In terms of the marking criteria, Understanding was the strongest element for most candidates. The majority of candidates found no difficulty in selecting a suitable question from the paper.

Most essays were of a fair length and contained clear signs of personal engagement.

Technical accuracy was acceptable in the majority of cases, and most candidates attempted to employ a basic paragraph structure in their essays.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Candidates found difficulty with questions 2b, 6a, 8a, and 16.

Question 2b was an Understanding question which called for an understanding of the word 'unnerving.' Candidates coped well with the other half of question 2, which dealt with the expression 'unspeakably exciting', but had difficulty with 'unnerving'.

Question 6a asked about the function of the words in parenthesis. However, most candidates offered a general comment on the function of dashes.

Question 8a asked candidates to discuss the expression identified (an Analysis question). Most candidates dealt only with content. (This was the focus of the second part of the question — 8b.)

It is acknowledged that question 16 was quite demanding for candidates at this level. Candidates tended to identify an important aspect of autobiographical writing, but failed to explain the effectiveness.

In general, with Analysis questions, many candidates find it difficult to achieve full marks. Some deal only with content, and others merely repeat back the stem of the question instead of attempting to make an analytical comment.

Critical Essay

Some candidates found difficulty with question 5 from the Poetry section. This question asked candidates to 'Choose a poem in which a person or a place is described clearly.' Some candidates struggled to make sufficiently relevant points about 'place,' but 'person' tended to be handled more successfully.

A number of candidates had difficulty in making a selection from the appropriate section of the paper, and were penalised as a result.

A significant number of essays relied heavily on narrative; analysis and evaluation were therefore thin.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

- ◆ Candidates should be prepared to demonstrate their understanding of the language and ideas of the passage in their own words where required. They should be aware that a 'full gloss' is not always required; credit is always given for some attempt at glossing.
- ◆ Candidates should try to read widely to develop a reasonable range of vocabulary. This will, of course, help to address the point above.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to address the key demands of the question (often in bold).

- ◆ The number of points or the fullness of the answer required is usually indicated by the number of marks available.
- ◆ Candidates should be able to recognise and be able to comment on the writer's use of word choice, imagery, tone, punctuation, etc.
- ◆ Candidates should be able to recognise features of structure, and be able to comment on their use (eg linkage, sentence variety, listing, etc.)

Critical Essay

- ◆ Candidates should take care with reading the question in order that an appropriate selection of text is made.
- ◆ Care should also be taken with understanding the question in order that the response is relevant in terms of the demands of the question.
- ◆ Candidates should be aware of the demands of 'mainly accurate' in terms of paragraphs, sentences and spelling.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to number clearly the question they have selected.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	6955
Number of resulted entries in 2010	6917

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	16.2%	16.2%	1119	68
B	26.4%	42.6%	1829	57
C	28.4%	71.0%	1961	46
D	10.4%	81.4%	718	40
No award	18.6%	100.0%	1290	–

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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 to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.