



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	English
Level	Standard Grade

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: Folio

As in previous years, most centres and candidates showed a sound understanding of Folio requirements. Experienced markers felt the overall standard of candidate work submitted has improved in terms of content and presentation. The folios of the best candidates display conscious editing and thoughtful and careful work. There is clear evidence of effective learning and teaching in the production of the five pieces.

As usual, markers commented on the continued popularity of texts such as *An Inspector Calls*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *Macbeth* but there is also evidence of more contemporary poetry being taught (particularly Carol Ann Duffy). Some of the best essays on these more 'traditional' texts were in response to some highly original and thought-provoking tasks. Some markers commented favourably on a rise in Scottish prose and poetry texts.

Media continues to rise in popularity at the expense of the Imaginative Response. There was also feedback from markers suggesting that too many folio pieces – in both writing and reading – were unoriginal and overly formulaic. Most candidates chose to word process their submissions and while this has led to an improvement in legibility and neatness, it has also led to some candidates having difficulty in proof-reading their own work effectively.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Folio Writing

- ◆ Many pieces were 'substantial' with 'detailed attention to purpose'.
- ◆ The best discursive writing showed evidence of considered argument and opinion within a coherent structure.
- ◆ There was some very effective writing on contemporary issues (the wars in Iraq question and Afghanistan, obesity and other health related topics, social networking sites etc).
- ◆ There were some excellent accounts of personal experience which showed candidates' ability to reflect on the events described.
- ◆ The best pieces of imaginative prose fiction revealed candidates' ability to 'manipulate language to achieve particular effects'.

Folio Reading

- ◆ Responding to texts and tasks which were interesting and thought-provoking.
- ◆ Producing evaluations of media texts which displayed a sound knowledge of the critical vocabulary appropriate to film.
- ◆ Responding to texts chosen for 'personal study' type assignments.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio Writing

- ◆ Making best use of source materials in W1 pieces.
- ◆ Proof-reading word-processed submissions effectively.
- ◆ Avoiding weaknesses in expression, comma-splicing, inappropriate use of tenses and careless punctuation.
- ◆ Responding to tasks which were too vague.

Folio Reading

- ◆ Responding to tasks which were too vague (although some markers did comment on a decline in the number of instructions to simply 'Write a C.E.L. about ...').
- ◆ Responding to texts which were not of sufficient literary merit or challenge.
- ◆ There were instances of candidates misinterpreting texts, perhaps due to over reliance on learning and teaching approaches which promote candidates 'discovering' meaning by themselves.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Ensure labels for folio pieces are completed in full.
- ◆ Show candidates how to keep to suggested word limits.
- ◆ Candidates should be warned against providing 'micro-analysis' of prose and drama texts where this is not appropriate – too often it leads to candidates losing sight of the main ideas and purposes of a text.
- ◆ Avoid submitting book or film reviews as W1 pieces 'to convey information'.
- ◆ While the study of imaginative literature should be at the heart of a Standard Grade course, candidates must also focus on specific writing skills.

General comments

Writing

Markers reported that candidate responses showed appropriate commitment to the tasks attempted and that a good standard of writing was in evidence overall. Most candidates' scripts showed evidence of planning and proof-reading, and responses were generally substantial.

There was clear evidence that candidates had been well prepared for the examination.

Candidates made effective use of the time available, and relatively few responses were inappropriate in terms of length. Feedback from markers indicated that the paper was fair with a good balance of purposes/tasks. All assignments were attempted and only a very few candidates attempted to provide more than one response.

There were relatively few candidates whose work did not convey meaning 'at first reading'. Candidates who attempted personal/expressive pieces tried hard to express thoughts and feelings, resulting in some strong responses. A number of candidates attempted to make apparently 'prepared' essays fit the demands of the rubrics, which sometimes made it difficult to show awareness of the 'purposes of the writing task'.

Areas in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Options 1, 3 and 8 were very popular with candidates, resulting in some interesting stories and effective accounts of personal experience.
- ◆ Options 3 and 15 in particular allowed the best candidates to display maturity and sensitivity in their writing.
- ◆ Option 5 ('Graffiti: art or vandalism') produced a good number of thoughtful discursive pieces.
- ◆ Imposed story openings (options 8, 13, 14) supported weaker candidates, although higher quality responses emerged from those options providing only a title.

- ◆ Specific instructions in the rubric to ‘develop setting and character as well as plot’ had a positive effect on many candidates’ short stories.
- ◆ Only a small number of candidates attempted option 17 (‘Describe the scene brought to mind by one of the following...’) but the outcomes were generally impressive.
- ◆ Overall there is a continued tendency for candidates to produce good quality accounts of personal experience and effective narratives in the examination, but to respond less successfully to the discursive options.

Areas which candidates found demanding

- ◆ Candidates seemed to find discursive options 2, 4, and 9 more challenging.
- ◆ Although option 3 (‘Write about an occasion when you had an experience that changed your life’) was generally well done, some responses did not have enough focus on the ‘life-changing’ nature of the event.
- ◆ Weaker candidates struggled to sustain a description of one fairground attraction in response to option 10.
- ◆ Candidates struggled with the genre and format requirements of option 12 (magazine article).
- ◆ Some responses to option 16 had only a tenuous connection with the picture stimulus.
- ◆ Many responses from candidates who selected the short story options failed to display the requisite knowledge of the ‘conventions of the chosen literary form’.
- ◆ Punctuation of direct speech.
- ◆ Making appropriate use of tenses.
- ◆ A number of candidates continue to have difficulties with paragraphing, sentence construction, and spelling.
- ◆ A number of candidates continue to have difficulties in differentiating between options requiring a short story and those requiring an account of personal experience.
- ◆ As in previous years, some candidates’ poor handwriting meant that there were issues with ‘intelligibility and correctness’.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Candidates should take pains to read the wording of the assignments carefully to ensure appropriate responses are offered.
- ◆ Candidates should practise proof-reading their work in order to do so more effectively in the examination.
- ◆ When selecting ‘Write in any way you choose’ options, it is advisable to demonstrate a clear connection to the picture stimulus.
- ◆ Candidates should not rely on ‘prepared’ essays.
- ◆ Handwriting should be legible.
- ◆ Candidates should continue to be taught: punctuation of direct speech; tenses; paragraphing; sentence construction; use of prepositions.
- ◆ Discursive writing needs to be structured appropriately with evidence of a clear line of thought.

General comments: Reading

Feedback from markers and examiners indicated an overall feeling that passages (fiction at Credit and Foundation; non-fiction at General) and questions were appropriate, and that most

candidates had engaged successfully with them. The papers were praised for fulfilling the expectations of centres and candidates.

Some markers considered that the Credit and General papers were closer in terms of difficulty than in previous years. The General paper was thought to be challenging; Credit and Foundation less so. As in previous years, candidates seemed to respond very positively to the narrative and characters of the fiction passages. The handwriting of a number of candidates was criticised by some markers.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Foundation

- ◆ Candidates seemed to respond well to the intriguing nature of the situation the central character finds himself in (a young boy's encounter with a strange creature in a lift).
- ◆ Candidates are becoming more confident at handling 'technique' type questions (12, 16).
- ◆ Questions most successfully answered: 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15

General

- ◆ Although this paper was thought to be challenging by markers, in the main candidates responded positively to the subject matter of the passage (a new chimpanzee enclosure at Edinburgh Zoo).
- ◆ Candidates are becoming more confident at handling 'technique' type questions (15).
- ◆ Questions most successfully answered: 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, 17b, 18, 23.

Credit

- ◆ Candidates responded well to this more 'literary' text – an Iain Crichton Smith short story used in its entirety.
- ◆ Particularly at this level, candidates are becoming more confident at handling 'technique' type questions (3, 4b, 6a, 7, 10, 17, 19).
- ◆ Questions most successfully answered: 1, 3, 4b, 5, 11, 12, 13, 19, 22.
- ◆ Questions 11, 12 and 13 in particular were regarded as being very straightforward for this level.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Foundation

- ◆ Question 13 — the word 'realised' in the question was misunderstood by many candidates, who described what Theo *noticed* in the garden instead.
- ◆ Question 20 — most candidates found it difficult to explain the 'mother hen' image in terms of the mother's 'behaviour'.
- ◆ Question 22 — many candidates gained one mark only, finding it hard to give a second reason from the passage.

General

- ◆ Many candidates continue to find 'own words' type questions challenging, with too many simply copying words from the passage despite clear instructions (8, 12, 16, 19, 20).

- ◆ Question 11 — some candidates seemed to misunderstand the question as the word ‘serious’ is in the question *and* the passage, which may have misdirected candidates to the description of the ‘glass panels’ (which was close to ‘serious’ in the passage).
- ◆ Question 21 — many candidates scored one mark only.
- ◆ Question 22 — many candidates scored one mark only, with few able to explain the link between ‘go ape’ and extreme behaviour.

Credit

- ◆ Question 6b — few candidates scored two marks, probably because the wording of the question directed candidates to the ‘moonlight’ rather than its effect.
- ◆ Question 9 — many candidates continue to find ‘own words’ type questions challenging, with too many simply copying words from the passage despite clear instructions.
- ◆ Question 10 — the marking instructions did not indicate if ‘minor sentence’ (offered by a number of candidates) was an acceptable answer.
- ◆ Question 17 — few candidates gained two marks, with many finding it difficult to provide the three elements required (identification of appropriate technique, quotation of example, *and* a suitable explanation).
- ◆ Question 20 — both 20a and 20b demanded a quotation and comment from candidates, while the very similar Question 18 simply required two quotations.
- ◆ Although candidates can accurately identify technique in ‘writer’s craft’ type questions, providing suitable comment/explanation is more challenging.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

This advice remains essentially consistent with that given in previous years in light of candidates’ performance in this element. Candidates should read a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction texts during the two years of the Standard Grade English course. Passages used in the Reading papers are likely to be taken from novels, short stories, memoirs, travel writing, newspaper and magazine features and other non-fiction sources.

In terms of particular skills, candidates should be given the opportunity to practise paraphrasing and glossing for ‘own words’ type questions. They should also receive guidance on how to deal with questions which require additional comment or explanation (usually indicated by the words ‘Show how ...’ or ‘Explain fully...’).

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	53927
Number of resulted entries in 2010	51962

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of overall awards

Grade 1	10.4%
Grade 2	31.7%
Grade 3	32.2%
Grade 4	21.1%
Grade 5	3.6%
Grade 6	0.1%
Grade 7	0.0%
No award	0.9%

Grade boundaries for each assessable element in the subject included in the report

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
R	50	37	26	50	29	22	50	31	22