

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

English and Communication

Qualification area:

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

**English — Standard Grade
English — Alternative Communication
English — Spoken
Foundation, General, Credit**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	Standard Grade
Pre appeal	59,900

Number of entries in 2003	Standard Grade
Pre appeal	60,646

Number of entries in 2002	Alternative Communication
Pre appeal	11

Number of entries in 2003	Alternative Communication
Pre appeal	6

Number of entries in 2002	English Spoken
Pre appeal	2

Number of entries in 2003	English Spoken
Pre appeal	3

General comments re entry numbers

- ◆ Numbers presented for English — Standard Grade have remained steady at around 60,000 for the last four years. If anything there is a slight trend upwards.
- ◆ Fluctuation in the numbers in the small cohort for Alternative Communication is to be expected and is not significant.
- ◆ Entries for English Spoken remain low since the re-introduction of scribes and, perhaps, because of the organisational requirements for teaching and examining candidates.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Grade Boundaries — Standard Grade — Reading
— Alternative Communication — Reading
— English Spoken — Understanding

(All other elements are directly graded.)

Available Score — 50

Minimum Score for Grade

Credit	1 — 31	2 — 21
General:	3 — 27	4 — 20
Foundation:	5 — 29	6 — 18

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

As in previous years some account was taken of the degree of difficulty of the passages, and questions which proved less than fully effective in the General and Credit papers.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

English — Standard Grade and Alternative Communication Folio

Of those markers who commented on general standards:

- ◆ 83% thought standards in the Folio had improved
- ◆ 12% thought standards were the same as last year
- ◆ 5% thought standards had deteriorated
- ◆ 61% of those commenting directly thought the range of texts represented in the Folio too narrow. As in previous years most Folios were reported as showing evidence of the candidates' commendable commitment to the tasks undertaken in both Writing and Reading. Most tasks were carefully worded and, in critical evaluations of Reading, appropriate texts were chosen to allow candidates to perform at a level commensurate with their interests and abilities. Length of submissions, in the main, complied with recommendations in the Grade Related Criteria.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Folio — Writing

- ◆ Effective use was noted of internet research to inform transactional writing.
- ◆ Continued improvement of presentation due to increased use of word processing was evident.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Folio — Writing

The following were noted:

- ◆ occasional problems in placing pieces of writing in the appropriate category (W1/W2), but these were not significant
- ◆ occasional examples of insufficiently careful redrafting
- ◆ some increase in the inappropriate use of "text-message" English.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Folio — Reading

- ◆ A “wash-back” effect from Intermediate and Higher performance criteria was generally welcomed by many markers. Candidates responded well to tasks inviting analysis of named key features of the genres studied.
- ◆ 39% of markers noted that the range of texts offered had widened/was satisfactory.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Folio — Reading

- ◆ Less successful submissions showed difficulty in providing appropriate evidence of understanding of techniques used in analysis of specific genres, most particularly in Media responses.
- ◆ Imaginative Responses to Literature often failed to show an understanding of the demands of the Grade Related Criteria.

General comments

External Test of Writing

Overall, markers identified a number of positive trends in the responses of candidates to this year's paper. Generally, performance was felt to be in line with that of previous years. Similarly, responses indicated a good spread across the range of tasks/genres. Another notable feature was that many candidates managed to write extensively, bearing in mind the time constraints of the examination. Equally, many markers commended candidates at all levels for their commitment to the demands of the examination.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Markers noted a wide range of positive features including the following.

- ◆ Candidates at Foundation level were often attempting to use language to achieve particular effects.
- ◆ The number of Credit grade 2 awards was felt to have increased, most notably in response to the picture and stimulus of No. 6.
- ◆ The number of Foundation Grade 6 awards was felt to have decreased.
- ◆ Candidates, generally, made appropriate choices and wrote according to their strengths.
- ◆ The range of options was felt to have motivated boys in particular to respond well to personal experience topics suggested by numbers 5, 9, 13 and 15.
- ◆ Candidates generally displayed awareness of both purpose and genre requirements. Most responses were relevant.
- ◆ Generally, there were fewer misinterpretations of rubrics/instructions.
- ◆ Options 1 and 6 in particular produced a number of fresh, lively responses with some displaying a high level of maturity, sensitivity and insight.
- ◆ More evidence of planning, proof reading and correction was noted in some cases.
- ◆ As expected, topics relating to personal experience were generally well handled.
- ◆ Option 1 with its opening, together with the atmospheric stimulus of the picture, produced some strong responses, as it established character and a plot idea.
- ◆ The wording of the rubrics was felt, on the whole, to be clear and helpful to candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Markers highlighted a range of concerns:

- ◆ the number of technical inaccuracies in eg sentence construction, spelling, subject/verb agreement, paragraphing, punctuation of direct speech, layout of dialogue, omission of both definite and indefinite articles, use of apostrophes, and confusion of tenses
- ◆ the growing use of "text-messaging" language
- ◆ the standard of both handwriting and punctuation
- ◆ the lack of evocation of thoughts and feelings in personal experience tasks, despite boldening of key words in the rubrics

- ◆ the self-penalising nature of some overlong pieces allowing an accumulation of errors
- ◆ attempts at discursive/argumentative topics of which candidates had little background knowledge
- ◆ too many candidates not numbering their choice of essay
- ◆ candidates apparently less confident when writing in the third person narrative (short story) mode
- ◆ very few attempts at options 7, 16, 19, 20 or 21.

General comments

External Test of Reading

- ◆ Candidates' responses, in the main, indicated that they found the passages accessible and interesting. Foundation candidates in particular responded well.
- ◆ Candidates across the levels were clearly committed to doing well and had engaged with the texts presented.
- ◆ Candidates managed their time well and there appeared to be a reduced number of incomplete papers.
- ◆ Markers were of the opinion that the passages offered suitable progression between the levels.
- ◆ Markers indicated that the Credit paper offered a degree of challenge in terms of some of the vocabulary.
- ◆ It was felt that there was an increasing ability of General candidates to explain aspects of writer's craft.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Areas worthy of note include the following.

Foundation Level

- ◆ sound performance by candidates who demonstrated a full range of reading skills
- ◆ clear demonstration of the skill of understanding — a key strength at this level
- ◆ an overwhelming majority of candidates answering all questions, thus demonstrating their ability to access the text and manage their time effectively

General Level

- ◆ clear evidence of many candidates' ability not only to identify but also to explain irony, pun and humour
- ◆ increasing ability to analyse aspects of writer's craft

Credit Level

- ◆ evidence of candidates' ability not only to understand, analyse and evaluate aspects of the text but also to provide clear, concise and well-expressed answers

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Foundation Level

- ◆ Q2 (b) Many candidates were unable to identify the second point — “chance remark”.
- ◆ Q7 Some candidates experienced difficulty in analysing the simile and explaining the writer's purpose.

General Level

- ◆ Q1 Many candidates made reference to the first paragraph instead of the opening sentence, as required by the question.
- ◆ Q12 Many candidates experienced difficulty in identifying the aspect required.
- ◆ Q22 Many candidates were able to recognise the word-play/pun but were unable to identify the summarising function of the sub-title.

Credit Level

- ◆ Q1 Many candidates failed to identify the dual purpose of the initial word “Dodo”.
- ◆ Q7 Many candidates dealt poorly with this question, focusing on meaning rather than function.
- ◆ Q8 Candidates had some difficulty in dealing with “unfeasible”.
- ◆ Q9 Many candidates were unable to explain the writer's use of the question or offered an answer that was unrelated to the use of the question in this context.
- ◆ Q10 Many candidates did not offer a full answer to this question, offering only two points as opposed to three points required for the full two marks.
- ◆ Q13 Many candidates did not identify the required quote “misrepresented”. “Sadly” was a popular choice.
- ◆ Q14 Many candidates were unable to identify the two required sets of contrasts.
- ◆ Q18 Very few candidates identified the allusion to modern-day backpackers.
- ◆ Q24 Many candidates did not focus on “adding weight” to the passage but rather focused on any aspect of technique in the passage.

English — Spoken

General comments

Few candidates (three) were presented for this option this year.

Folio

The taped folios were complete, and contained the range of submissions required. Tasks allowed candidates to demonstrate an appropriate competence.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Commendable commitment was shown to producing “best work” in both Communicating and Understanding pieces submitted.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ Both Communicating and Understanding submissions could have been improved if more attention had been given to having a clearly-planned and thought-out structure delivered with due consideration to appropriate pace and tone.

External Tests of Communicating and Understanding

General comments

As with the external tests of Writing and Reading for the main Standard Grade cohort, the candidates were provided with the opportunity to demonstrate competence in line with their abilities.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ There was evidence of engagement and ability to cope at the levels attempted in Understanding and evidence of preparation for production of responses in Communication.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ As with Folio submissions, external examination Communicating pieces lacked the coherence of a well-planned structure and adequate attention to pace and tone as required by the Grade Related Criteria for English — Spoken, Communicating.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

English — Standard Grade and Alternative Communication

Folio — Writing

Care should continue to be exercised in the following areas:

- ◆ identification and submission of Writing pieces with due regard to the appropriate Writing Purpose criteria
- ◆ avoidance of submission of the content of a text as evidence of Writing Purpose 1 (“...to convey information”)
- ◆ observance of word limits recommended in the Grade Related Criteria for both Reading and Writing
- ◆ continued emphasis on careful redrafting/proof reading, particularly of word-processed pieces
- ◆ avoidance of “text-message” language unless appropriate to the style of the submission.

Folio — Reading

- ◆ Tasks which are framed so as to direct candidates towards analysing features particular to the genre studied are more likely to produce successful critical evaluations than vague or less focused tasks, eg “Write a C.E.L. of ...” or “Write about ... and say why you found it interesting.”

External Test of Writing

Where appropriate, centres should give consideration to the following:

- ◆ due focus on improving technical aspects of writing — in particular:
 - sentence construction
 - paragraphing
 - punctuation, with particular reference to direct speech
 - handwriting and presentation of finished work
- ◆ continued focus on teaching the features of the various writing purposes and genres
- ◆ continued emphasis on the evocation of thoughts, feelings and reactions in Personal Experience writing
- ◆ raising of candidates’ awareness of:
 - the danger of attempting argumentative/discursive topics of which they have little background knowledge
 - the potential differences between first person/personal narrative and the short story form
 - the particular importance of relevance in the Writing paper
 - the requirement to write the number of their choice of essay clearly in the margin of the answer book (since failure to do so can lead to the award of a lower grade where relevance cannot be established)
 - the inappropriateness of “text-messaging” language unless it is a feature of the style suggested by the rubric.

External Test of Reading

- ◆ Centres should continue to ensure that candidates are presented at appropriate levels.

- ◆ Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of genres to equip them with effective analytical skills and knowledge of appropriate aspects of technique and terminology.
- ◆ Candidates should be made aware of the range of reading purposes and be encouraged to think about aspects of purpose.
- ◆ Candidates must be made aware that reading the question and analysing the question are as important as reading and accessing the text of the passage.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged not only to identify aspects of writer's craft but also to apply their knowledge to explaining/analysing its use in individual contexts.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged
 - to express their answers clearly, legibly and concisely
 - to answer questions fully and, when required, in their own words
 - to spell correctly both in their own answers and when quoting from the text
 - to quote accurately and as precisely as required by the wording of the question
 - to avoid using vernacular and colloquial expressions when answering questions.

English — Spoken

- ◆ Care should be exercised so that folio submissions are clearly structured so as not to become repetitive, hesitant or over-long.
- ◆ In the external test of Understanding, time should be managed carefully and answers recorded clearly and at a reasonable pace so that none is omitted accidentally.
- ◆ A well-planned, coherent structure in which due emphasis is given to pace and tone is necessary for more successful Communication pieces in both the Folio and the external examination.