

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

English

Qualification area

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

English — Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2004	4,933
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	5,010
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

Entries for Intermediate 1 appear to be levelling off but it should be noted that the composition of the cohort will be different from previous years in that:

- ◆ potential presenting centres are now integrating Intermediate 1 into their curriculum
- ◆ some centres are offering Access 3 as a more suitable course for candidates who might previously have been presented
- ◆ some candidates previously considered for Intermediate 2 now correctly presented for Intermediate 1
- ◆ the percentage of candidates presented in S4 has risen

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2004	15,191
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	16,712
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

The present increased candidature reflects changes in presentation policies ie:

- ◆ an increase in the percentage of candidates being presented in S4
- ◆ more accurate/realistic expectation in that some candidates who might previously have been presented for Higher are now presented for Intermediate 2

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100	-	-	-	-
A	11.5	11.5	577	67
B	19.1	30.7	959	57
C	29.3	60.0	1,468	47
D	11.3	71.3	566	42
No award	28.7	100.0	1,440	-

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

The increase in the percentage of passes at A, B and C levels this year reflects:

- ◆ increased familiarity with the demands of the examination, resulting in more accurate presentation policies
- ◆ improved candidate performance in an appropriately demanding Close Reading Paper
- ◆ improved candidate performance in the Critical Essay Paper

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100	-	-	-	-
A	14.8	14.8	2,479	67
B	26.0	40.9	4,351	57
C	31.3	72.1	5,223	47
D	9.9	82.0	1,658	42
No award	18.0	100.0	3,001	-

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

A significant increase in the percentage of A grades, and consequent slight decrease in the percentage of B and C grades this year reflects:

- ◆ an increased number of S4 candidates presented for Intermediate 2
- ◆ improved performance in the appropriately challenging, yet marginally more accessible, Close Reading Paper
- ◆ improved ability of more able candidates to deal with the more challenging Close Reading questions
- ◆ more accurate presentation policies whereby candidates were presented for Intermediate 2 rather than for Higher

The composition of the cohorts at both Intermediate 2 and Intermediate 1 levels will continue to be affected as presentation policies change in the light of experience conditioned by results, social pressures, and the positive effects of the standards communicated through the Professional Development Workshops.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Intermediate 1

Close Reading

The passage, with the author's account of the revisiting of the place of his childhood and his attempt to understand the differences and similarities between his boyhood and that of the young boy, Daniel, proved interesting and accessible to candidates. On the whole, markers felt that the questions were, for the most part, pitched correctly and that content was both suitable and appropriate. Although most candidates appeared to have completed the paper on time, failure to do so was felt to have been caused by a failure to answer concisely, and wasting time by re-writing much of the question unnecessarily. Most candidates appear to have been presented at a level at which they could cope.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ in answering Understanding questions, particularly numbers 1 and 8
- ◆ in responding well to questions 3(b), 4(a) and 6, which required skills of Analysis to be demonstrated
- ◆ in showing commendable commitment to completion of the paper and leaving few questions unattempted

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In questions on Understanding:

- ◆ in question 3(a), where there was failure to deal with both sides of the contrast
- ◆ in question 9, where 'own words' were not used and all three points were not covered

In questions on Analysis:

- ◆ in question 4(b), depending on the example chosen to illustrate the point
- ◆ in question 7, where the word choice could be exemplified but not commented on
- ◆ in question 10, in attempting to explain the structural function of 'Yet'
- ◆ in question 12, where candidates recognised the 'question and answer' technique but found explaining its use difficult

In questions requiring Evaluation:

- ◆ in question 13, where humour proved easier to identify than to explain
- ◆ in question 14, where there was difficulty in taking a synoptic view of the passage

General comments

Critical Essay

Most markers thought that the paper was fair and accessible and provided the opportunity for well-prepared candidates to perform to their full potential.

A good range of texts was covered. Understandably there was evidence of the status quo from previous years ('*Of Mice and Men*', '*Stone Cold*', '*Our Day Out*', '*Bold Girls*', '*Educating Rita*' etc) and answers to the Poetry section included reference to MacCaig, Morgan, Lochhead etc. Some markers felt that there had been an increase in the number of responses to poems, but drama and prose seemed well represented.

While question 9 in the Language section may have appeared to be an easy option for candidates unable to answer from another section, it did, in fact, produce some well-informed responses.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

An improvement in overall performance was detected and genuine and successful attempts to do well could be seen in:

- ◆ the appropriate length of most essays
- ◆ increased evidence of relevance, perhaps aided by the emboldening of the central stem of each question which assisted candidates in writing more clearly structured responses
- ◆ the use of topic sentences, reference to the question in the opening paragraph, and an attempt to 'round off' the essay, in the majority of cases
- ◆ clear understanding of the main points of the texts, even 'poorer' responses displaying an ability to recount accurately relevant plot/content within a recognisable sequenced framework
- ◆ use of apt quotation and the ability to identify and comment on literary techniques
- ◆ a sense of genuine engagement with texts (and a sense that evaluation was being attempted)
- ◆ meeting the criterion for technical competence ie 'mainly accurate' which must be demonstrated for a pass

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ lack of balance in answers due to over-reliance on narrative account of content with only cursory reference to analysis/evaluation 'tagged on' at the end
- ◆ ability to recognise analytical genre features not supported by the ability to comment on or show an appreciation of the impact or relevance of these features and their contribution to the conveying of the theme/ideas
- ◆ where, although genuine engagement was evident, the evaluation, in many cases, tended to be 'bald' or 'implicit'
- ◆ wrong choice of genre
- ◆ failure to number the question attempted

General comments

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

The vast majority of candidates appeared to find this non-fiction passage on hill-walking and its appeal accessible although markers were mixed in their views, some finding it ‘appropriate’, ‘accessible’ and ‘interesting’, others that it was ‘uninspiring’, ‘dry’, ‘irrelevant to teenagers’ and unlikely to engage their interest.

There was, however, favourable comment on the fairness, balance and mix of the questions and most candidates completed the paper with varying but appropriate degrees of success.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ in commitment to completing the paper
- ◆ when using ‘own words’ as required
- ◆ in showing an ability to recognise, if not fully explain, the effect or effectiveness of features of technique
- ◆ where the ability to recognise and explain ‘linking function’ was displayed in answering questions 5 and 9(a)

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ in answering sufficiently concisely in order to manage time efficiently
- ◆ in question 3(b), where the feature of structure was identified but there was an inability to explain how it ‘demonstrated the writer’s need’
- ◆ with understanding the concept of tone in question 9(b)
- ◆ with explanation of ‘linking function’ in questions 5 and 9(a)
- ◆ in answering fully, perhaps not recognising the relationship between the available marks and the number of points or the fullness of response necessary (eg question 6)
- ◆ when reading question 11 and missing the key element (lack of novelty) required in the answer

General Comments

Critical Essay

As at Intermediate 1, the paper was felt to be fair and provided the opportunity for well-prepared candidates to demonstrate their full potential in this area.

Responses were spread fairly evenly over the three main genres with answers on poetry proving slightly more numerous. A decline was noted in the number of responses to novels, candidates preferring to respond to prose questions using the short story.

In Drama, Miller and Shakespeare were well represented. In Poetry there was the usual selection ('*Glasgow 5 March*' etc) and also some newer texts, eg the poems of Carol Ann Duffy.

The language section elicited relatively few responses but there appeared to be an increase in the number of candidates using well-taught material to answer questions on media texts successfully.

As at Intermediate 1, the emboldening of the stem of each question was felt to have helped candidates to write relevantly.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ in showing understanding of the key elements of the works they had studied
- ◆ in showing appropriate engagement
- ◆ in improved relevance
- ◆ in writing analytically about features of the chosen genre and particularly where some arguably less able candidates showed some improvement in attempts to explain the contribution of features of technique
- ◆ in achieving the technical competence of 'sufficiently accurate' so that few candidates failed wholly as a consequence of having inadequate writing skills

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ in understanding some of the key words in the Poetry section, eg 'reflection', 'nostalgia' and 'human nature'
- ◆ where the key incident (question 6) had to be related to the text as a whole
- ◆ where answers were based on wrong genre choice
- ◆ where answers were inaccurately numbered or numbers were omitted
- ◆ where answers were uneven and occasionally irrelevant due to over-enthusiasm to display learned knowledge in a full answer booklet at the expense of the considered use of that knowledge to satisfy the demands of the question
- ◆ where analytical features were not understood as being instrumental in supporting and/or illustrating the writer's theme/idea(s), nor used to pursue a line of thought in supplying answers to the questions chosen

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Intermediate 1

Close Reading

Candidates presented at this level should be aware that they are required to demonstrate competence in being able:

- ◆ to answer briefly and concisely, perhaps with the help of ‘bullet points’
- ◆ to deal with both sides when answering questions on contrast
- ◆ to recognise that the number of points or the fullness of answer required is usually indicated by the number of available marks
- ◆ to recognise features of structure and to be able to explain their effect or effectiveness when chosen for particular use, eg listing, sentence length, inversion, linkage, balance etc
- ◆ to recognise and comment on writer’s use of tone, word choice, imagery, punctuation, italics etc
- ◆ to answer using ‘own words’ when required
- ◆ to take a synoptic view of examination passages and recognise how the paragraphs have a structure coherence and how the key elements of introduction, topic sentences and conclusion link the central idea(s) or theme

Critical Essay

While most candidates continue to show improvement in coping with the demands of this paper, performance could be further improved through attention to the following:

- ◆ care in reading the rubric so that the terms are fully understood and the response then clearly numbered and written as a relevant, considered response to the correct genre
- ◆ avoidance of answers featuring over-long narrative accounts with analysis/evaluation ‘tagged on’ at the end
- ◆ attention to correct spelling, sentence construction and paragraphing etc since ‘mainly accurate’ technically must be achieved if a critical essay is to be awarded a mark of 12 or above

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

Candidates should be reminded of the need to develop and demonstrate the following skills:

- ◆ reading questions carefully so that key elements required in the answer are not overlooked
- ◆ answering fully questions requiring the identification of a feature of technique and explaining its effectiveness
- ◆ answering concisely ‘using own words as far as possible’, perhaps using ‘bullet points’ so that time is managed more efficiently in examinations
- ◆ recognising that the fullness of response or the number of points to be included in an answer is reflected in the number of marks assigned to the questions
- ◆ recognising and explaining the effect or effectiveness of the use of a particular structure – listing, sentence length, inversion, linkage, balance etc
- ◆ recognising and commenting on the reasons for a writer’s use of a particular tone, word choice, image, punctuation, italics etc
- ◆ recognising the requirement to refer to both sides when answering questions on contrast
- ◆ being able to take a synoptic view of examination passages and recognising how the paragraphs have been ordered to have a structural coherence with the key elements of introduction and conclusion linked through a sequence of topic sentences inter-relating and/or developing the writer’s idea(s) or theme

Critical Essay

While the following points are probably self-evident, it may be worth re-stating them:

- ◆ rubrics should be read carefully so that the terms are fully understood and the answer then clearly numbered and written as a relevant, considered response on the appropriate genre
- ◆ essay writing skills should be exercised carefully since the failure to demonstrate ‘sufficient accuracy’ brings automatic failure
- ◆ in more skilful responses, genre features should be analysed and evaluated in terms of the extent of their contribution to the conveying of the writer’s theme or ideas, and used to develop a line of thought which answers the chosen question