



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Standard Grade : Credit, General, Foundation

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

Markers and examiners reported that candidates' performance in the Folio element of the course was in line with or better than previous years. Candidates at all levels clearly made a conscientious effort to do their best, and were supported in their efforts by the commendable care and professionalism of their teachers. Markers commented that there were few Foundation grades awarded in the Folio and very few Grade 6s.

Most candidates and centres showed clear understanding of the requirements of the Folio: markers commented on the generally accurate labelling and appropriate range of genres in writing and selection of texts in reading. The quality of presentation was, overall, very good, with the majority of candidates and centres opting for word-processing the final drafts.

The internet was widely used as a source for W1 pieces. Many candidates researched W1 topics thoroughly and produced pieces of a high standard. In the W2 category, both personal and imaginative writing were popular and well-handled choices. In Folio Reading, candidates displayed genuine engagement with texts and, in many cases, appropriate tasks enabled them to show their analytical skill. As in recent years, some tasks were 'over-scaffolded', leaving the candidates little room for self-expression.

Markers commented on the relatively wide range of texts used in Folio Reading: as in previous years, 'tried and tested' texts were popular, as well as newer or more unusual choices. Some markers reported an increase in the use of Scottish texts. There were some innovative media pieces. Popular texts/writers included: (Drama) — Shakespeare was very popular, especially *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice*; other plays chosen by many were *An Inspector Calls*, *Our Day Out*; (Prose) — popular novels were *Lord of the Flies*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Animal Farm*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*; many folios used short stories, such as the work of Iain Crichton Smith, Ray Bradbury and Roald Dahl; (Poetry) — works by MacCaig, Duffy, Morgan, Heaney and Owen were popular choices. In media, many candidates wrote about Lührman's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Titanic*, *Jaws*, *Stand by Me*, *Braveheart* or *Pan's Labyrinth*.

As in recent years, candidates and centres chose to focus on critical responses to texts.

### Examination Writing

Markers and examiners reported that the Writing Examination offered a wide range of topics with which candidates clearly engaged and which allowed for good performance at all levels. Markers commented that performance was in line with or slightly better than previous years. Few Foundation grades were awarded and very few Grade 6s and 7s. Candidates responded with enthusiasm to this appropriately challenging and accessible paper. Markers commented that the paper inspired candidates to choose and perform well.

As in previous years, candidates had clearly prepared thoroughly for this examination, supported by their teachers. Overall, candidates made suitable choices and appeared to understand the demands of the questions. Length of examination writing responses was, generally, appropriate, with many candidates producing substantial pieces.

Popular choices were: (Narrative) Assignments 2, 5, 8, 10, 15; (Personal) assignments 1, 4, 7, 13, 14, 19. Questions 1, 4 and 14 prompted particularly sincere and emotional responses. Questions 2 and 8 (particularly the 'Darkening Skies' option) led many candidates to create effective short stories. Although chosen less commonly, discursive questions 9, 12 and 18 were well handled, as was descriptive choice 17 by the relatively few candidates who chose this option. There were several topics to which candidates could relate well. There were no questions which no candidates attempted.

### **Examination Reading**

Markers and examiners reported that performance was in line with or slightly better than last year. There appeared to be few issues with time management, with most candidates across all three levels managing to offer an answer for most or every question. The passages were appropriate in terms of level of difficulty, length and content. All three passages were fiction, and effectively engaged candidates at all levels.

The Credit passage was extracted and adapted from Sebastian Faulks's novel *The Girl at the Lion d'Or*. It describes the arrival of the heroine, Anne, in the small town of Janvilliers, to take up the position of waitress at the Lion d'Or hotel. A sensitive and accomplished piece of narrative, it gave Credit candidates appropriate opportunities to demonstrate their analytical skill by examining, for example, characters, setting and use of imagery.

The General passage was adapted from *The Distant Hours* by Kate Morton. It focuses on the arrival of a long-delayed, mysterious letter and the emotional reaction of the recipient, whose daughter Evie narrates the story. This intriguing story was appropriately challenging and accessible for the many candidates sitting General.

The Foundation passage was adapted from Cathy MacPhail's novel *Grass*. It describes the exploration of some empty buildings by the narrator, Leo, and his friend, leading to an unexpected discovery. This passage was particularly popular with candidates, who responded well to the strong narrative and characterisation elements.

At all levels, candidates showed good understanding of the passages and tackled the range of question types well. Markers commented on the ability of candidates to identify and, often, to comment on techniques used by writers: this was the case at all three levels. Markers reported that, at Credit and General levels, some candidates found 'in your own words' questions challenging.

There was appropriate differentiation between the levels: often, candidates who narrowly missed the cut off score of 28 in their 'upper' paper, performed well in their 'lower' paper. There was aptly challenging vocabulary in both the Credit and General passages. There were no non-functioning questions at any level.

Markers reported that, for the most part, candidates were presented at suitable levels, and there were few cases of candidates failing to achieve the cut off score of 28 in either of their papers.

The success of this examination was due to the combination of excellent choice of passages, effective questions, and the clearly thorough preparation candidates had undertaken with the help of their teachers.

## **Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Folio Writing**

- ◆ W1: wide range of topics in discursive writing. Many candidates produced thoroughly researched and well-structured pieces, showing genuine interest in their chosen subjects.
- ◆ W2 (personal): at all levels candidates wrote genuine, heartfelt pieces which attempted to examine their experience sincerely. Many candidates displayed some maturity and insight. Some candidates achieved sincere and thoughtful reflection.
- ◆ W2 (creative): many candidates wrote impressive short stories, focusing on atmosphere and creating compelling characters as well as plot. Effective use was made of literary and language techniques to engage the reader.
- ◆ Most candidates wrote at substantial length, with many using mature and sophisticated vocabulary. Some markers reported relatively few technical errors.
- ◆ Candidates clearly made a serious and conscientious effort when redrafting their work.
- ◆ Some candidates wrote in Scots.

### **Folio Reading**

- ◆ Candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of texts and engaged in a genuine, personal way with texts at all levels.
- ◆ Many candidates demonstrated sound critical awareness when commenting on texts. They produced thoughtful and mature responses to texts.
- ◆ Texts were, generally, appropriate in terms of content and difficulty, allowing candidates to demonstrate their skill in analysis.
- ◆ Some media pieces were particularly insightful.

### **Examination Writing**

- ◆ Markers and examiners reported that candidates at all levels made genuine and serious efforts to create pieces of a high standard.
- ◆ Candidates showed, overall, good understanding of the demands of the tasks, with few cases of irrelevance.
- ◆ Length of responses was, overall, appropriate, with many candidates writing substantial and well structured pieces.
- ◆ Some candidates wrote exceptional pieces, particularly in the personal and imaginative categories. This was particularly impressive under examination conditions.
- ◆ A small number of candidates attempted poetry in the examination.
- ◆ Narrative options (eg Questions 2 and 8): many candidates developed setting and characterisation well.
- ◆ Personal options (eg Questions 4 and 14): many candidates expressed feelings with sensitivity and self-awareness. There was some effective reflective writing.

- ◆ Discursive options (eg 9 and 12): many candidates presented detailed, cogent arguments containing depth and complexity.
- ◆ Descriptive choices, though attempted by relatively few candidates, were generally done well.
- ◆ Markers and examiners commented on the high standard of submissions at all levels. Features mentioned included effective use of description to create atmosphere and character; use of dialogue; narrative structure and person; punctuation; imagery. As in previous years, it was clear that candidates had been carefully and thoroughly prepared for this exam by their teachers.

### **Examination Reading: Foundation**

Markers reported a wholeheartedly positive response to this entertaining passage. The strong, young, characters involved in an exciting adventure captured the interest of candidates, who performed well at this level.

- ◆ Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 14(a), 16, 17, 19(a) were, generally, answered well. These questions required candidates to show understanding of the passage — for example by quoting accurately or selecting evidence to support a statement.
- ◆ Questions 1, 10, 19(b): many candidates managed successfully to explain why the narrator acted or thought as he did.
- ◆ Questions 7, 11: many candidates tackled these vocabulary questions successfully
- ◆ Question 20: the majority of candidates worked out that the writer ended the passage in such a way as to create suspense/involve the reader

### **Examination Reading: General**

Markers and examiners reported that the General paper was appropriately challenging and supportive for the large numbers of candidates who sit this examination. As in previous years, areas of challenge included ‘use your own words’ questions, and questions requiring techniques to be identified and explained. It was noted that many candidates scored 1 mark out of 2 in these questions.

- ◆ Questions 1, 5(a), 10 (a), 15, 17, 18: these questions required candidates to show understanding of the passage by, for example, quoting accurately or selecting information to support a statement. They were handled well by the majority of candidates.
- ◆ Question 9: most candidates were able to explain why the narrator thought as she did.
- ◆ Question 11: many candidates correctly identified the technique as metaphor or personification.
- ◆ Question 12: most candidates made inferences that enabled them to select appropriate evidence to support the idea that the morning was both ‘normal’ and ‘unusual’
- ◆ Question 16: in this case, many candidates managed to use their own words correctly to describe what the narrator imagined

### **Examination Reading: Credit**

Markers and examiners reported that this paper was appropriately challenging at Credit level and, due to the balance of analysis and understanding questions, provided a suitable preparation for Higher. As in previous years, some candidates found using their own words and explaining the effects of techniques challenging. It was noted that, in these areas, a

number of candidates scored 1 mark out of 2. In some cases, therefore, these questions were effective discriminators at Credit level.

- ◆ Question 1: the majority of candidates successfully explained why the passage opened as it did.
- ◆ Question 6(a): many candidates made appropriate selections to illustrate effective word choice, and a number successfully commented on these.
- ◆ Question 7: a significant number of candidates successfully explained the effects of repetition.
- ◆ Question 8, 22: most candidates used evidence from the passage to make appropriate statements about the main character.
- ◆ Questions 9, 14, 19: these questions required the candidates to show understanding of the passage by, for example, quoting accurately or selecting evidence from the passage to support a statement. These questions were handled well by the majority of candidates.
- ◆ Question 15: in this case, many candidates managed to use their own words successfully
- ◆ Question 20: most candidates managed to comment accurately on Mme Bouin's opinion of the main character, and to support their view with evidence.
- ◆ Question 21: many candidates successfully made an inference about the main character's motives.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Folio Writing**

- ◆ Using W1 sources (for example the internet) appropriately, avoiding 'lifting' sections of text directly from a website.
- ◆ Careful proof-reading, to avoid errors in punctuation, tenses, comma splices, use of capitals and direct speech. In word-processed pieces, spell checkers can cause errors.
- ◆ In some cases, use of appropriately formal register for discursive writing.
- ◆ In a minority of cases, writing well when tasks are vague or overly detailed.
- ◆ In some cases, keeping to appropriate length — pieces that are extremely long can become self-penalising.

### **Folio Reading**

- ◆ Analysing two or more texts fully in one critical response.
- ◆ Demonstrating flair and personal engagement when responding to tasks that provide over-prescriptive scaffolding or when tasks are vague.
- ◆ In media pieces, in some cases, including enough analysis of techniques.

### **Examination Writing**

- ◆ Technical accuracy issues include: sentence punctuation (especially comma splicing), misuse of capitals, inaccurate paragraphing, spelling errors, uncertainty when punctuating direct speech, omission of sentence subjects.
- ◆ Inadequate planning and proof-reading.
- ◆ Some candidates wrote plot-driven, often unconvincing, stories with insufficient character development.
- ◆ Clichéd expression in personal writing.

- ◆ Confusion between imaginative and personal writing
- ◆ Clichéd metaphors and similes.
- ◆ In 'free choice' options some candidates struggled to make a clear link between the photograph and their piece of writing.
- ◆ The handwriting of some candidates was difficult to read.

### **Examination Reading: Foundation**

- ◆ Question 5: many candidates scored 1 mark out of 2 when asked to describe 'exactly' where the tenements were.
- ◆ Question 8: approximately half of candidates correctly identified the technique as a simile.
- ◆ Question 9: many candidates scored 1 mark out of 2 when attempting to explain the reasons why the narrator was amused.
- ◆ Question 18: a significant number of candidates found difficulty in making the inference about why the narrator stopped for a mint at a significant moment.
- ◆ Question 21: many candidates scored 1 mark for providing one piece of evidence that Leo was adventurous, but they were asked for two.

### **Examination Reading: General**

- ◆ Question 2: when explaining the function of a list, many candidates commented on number of items, but fewer mentioned the idea of variety.
- ◆ Question 6(b): many candidates struggled to explain in their own words, particularly the expression 'fallen into a slumber'.
- ◆ Question 13: many candidates found difficulty in explaining the function of the inverted commas.
- ◆ Question 14: a number of candidates found using their own words challenging.
- ◆ Question 19: many candidates experienced difficulty in explaining 'bruised silence' in their own words.
- ◆ Question 20: many candidates correctly identified parenthesis but were less successful in explaining its function.
- ◆ Question 23: a significant number of candidates struggled to identify features of the opening of a novel.

### **Examination Reading: Credit**

- ◆ Question 2(a) and (b): a number of candidates selected appropriate examples of word choice, but fewer provided suitable explanations.
- ◆ Questions 3, 10 (a), 11: many candidates struggled to explain 'martyred', 'grudging' and 'traumatised' in their own words.
- ◆ Question 4: many candidates successfully identified a technique, but fewer provided suitable comments on its effectiveness.
- ◆ Question 6(b): many candidates found difficulty in commenting on sentence structure.
- ◆ Question 10(b): many candidates struggled to show how the writer continued an idea.
- ◆ Question 12: although many candidates struggled to explain 'shambling' fully in their own words, a number showed understanding of why this word had been used.
- ◆ Question 18: many candidates explained 'interrogative' successfully but struggled to explain 'menacing'. Context may have helped with part of this question.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

As 2013 is the final year of Standard Grade, the advice given below (although taken from this year's Standard Grade Folio and Exam) is general, given to support centres when preparing candidates for future qualifications.

- ◆ Ensure all SQA paperwork, including flyleaves and labels for pieces submitted to SQA are filled in correctly.
- ◆ Urge candidates to use internet sources carefully.
- ◆ Ensure that literary and media texts selected are appropriate for candidates.
- ◆ Provide an appropriate level of support, avoiding over-prescriptive planning.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates plan and proof read their work thoroughly.
- ◆ Ensure that length is appropriate to task and the demands of the course.
- ◆ Media pieces should focus on analysis of techniques.
- ◆ Ensure that tasks are sufficiently challenging and accessible for candidates.
- ◆ Focus on technical accuracy when preparing candidates for writing examinations.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates are aware of the importance of careful choosing and producing an answer that is relevant to the question chosen.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to leave enough time to check over their work in an examination.
- ◆ Handwriting should be clear and legible.
- ◆ Although practising skills is clearly important, candidates should be advised against using a pre-prepared response in an examination.
- ◆ In preparation for reading examinations, centres are advised that candidates should read a range of fiction and non-fiction texts.
- ◆ Candidates should not waste time copying out part of the question.
- ◆ Candidates should be urged to use their own words if asked to do so and should practise this skill.
- ◆ Candidates should be advised to read questions carefully and make sure they understand exactly what they are being asked to do.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to attempt all questions, rather than leaving any blanks.

## Thanks and appreciation

As this is the final year of Standard Grade, particular thanks and appreciation should be expressed to teachers, markers, examiners, setters, qualifications managing teams and SQA staff for the excellent work over the years.

- ◆ It is clear that this year, as in previous years, a high standard of commitment and professionalism by teachers has enabled their pupils to achieve their best at all levels, in both Folio and Examination elements.
- ◆ Markers of Folio, Writing Exam and Reading Exam have, again this year, shown high standards of professionalism in upholding national standards, providing a rigorous and fair assessment system for all candidates.
- ◆ Markers are also to be thanked for their excellent reports, which have informed this report. Many markers have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to mark Standard Grade over the years and their sadness to see this qualification go: further evidence of their committed and conscientious approach.
- ◆ Members of the examining team deserve thanks and praise for the extremely professional approach they have shown to all procedural tasks. Markers have repeatedly expressed their appreciation of the usefulness, directness and clarity of presentations at markers' meetings.
- ◆ We wish to express appreciation and thanks to the setters of Writing and Reading Examinations, both this year and in previous years. The skill and commitment shown by setters has enabled the Standard Grade qualification to maintain a high standard of consistency and appropriate challenge.
- ◆ The leadership of Qualification Managers and the support of their teams and SQA staff has ensured the smooth running of the Standard Grade English qualification throughout the years.

**Statistical information: update on Courses**

**STANDARD GRADE**

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2012</b>	49089
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2013</b>	45565
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**Statistical Information: Performance of candidates**

**Distribution of overall awards**

Grade 1	11.1%
Grade 2	34.2%
Grade 3	34.2%
Grade 4	17.7%
Grade 5	2.1%
Grade 6	0.0%
Grade 7	0.0%
No award	0.7%

**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	35	24	50	30	23	50	31	22