Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

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General overview

As the A level coursework component, 9EN0/04, continues to grow and it was evident from the work submitted how varied and rich the creativity of English Language at A level can be, with moderators commenting on the high quality of some of the work that they saw. It is clear that teachers increasingly understand the demands of the qualification and that students are rising to the challenge of the tasks, valuing the chance to pursue their own creative interests and skills. It was encouraging to see how many centres had learned lessons from last year's work and ensured that student were able to produce lively, original writing supported by rigorous, analytical commentaries.

There was plenty of evidence that most centres had made use of the face-to-face meetings or the online feedback events together with the exemplar material provided by Pearson. Online events will be taking place again in the Autumn of 2019/Spring of 2020 and a further set of exemplar materials, based on work submitted this summer, will be made available in the Autumn half term. It was encouraging to see some centres referring to the standardising materials in their own marking and internal moderation and it is strongly advised that all centres make use of the materials to provide benchmarks for the marking of the work for submission in 2020.

This report will look at the trends in the work seen by moderators and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the work submitted and advise on ways to improve student performance in both the original writing and commentaries for next year.

Original writing

Moderators frequently remarked on the knowledge student had obviously gained from their other A level subjects to inform their original writing. This was particularly noticeable in non-fiction responses, which included topics inspired by History, Psychology, Philosophy and Modern Foreign Languages, whilst the fiction was often stimulated by Music and Drama. Most centres encouraged student to follow their own ideas and interests rather than teaching a 'one size fits all' approach. Very few centres offered identically themed submissions, where it was often difficult to distinguish between folders.

A few centres used the writing styles suggested in the specification or ideas from previous exemplar material and training events, but many students offered their own ideas, some of which were variations on a particular genre that the student had read or watched. Where a controversial and current topic was explored such as knife crime in the community, the best responses focused on specific aspects of the subject, such as changing attitudes or the effects on particular groups and individuals.

As with last year, there was a clear connection between the quality of the style models used and the overall achievement of the folder. Those students who had personal experience of a subject or completed detailed research were much better served than those who offered writing on a general topic or theme, but had clearly never had any experience of or read any corresponding style models. Students whose research and reading were more ambitious usually produced more convincing pieces than those who had taken an easier option of reading a single, undemanding style model. Whilst I do not wish to restrict specific texts for research or writing preparation, students would be advised to consider the quality of their

style models when it comes to their commentary, particularly when using the internet for their research.

Having a secure awareness of generic conventions is a key discriminator in the original writing. Many students were willing to experiment with language devices and structural features to create a believable voice and engage their reader. When producing fiction, this included, dramatic monologues, split and fragmented narratives, and play and screenplay formats. These enabled the student to offer detailed and specific commentaries about the shaping of texts at both a lexical and syntactical level and to offer a developed evaluation of whole text features. The best non-fiction work was rooted in a secure understanding of genre, purpose and audience, with submissions including opinion journalism, music and film reviews, travel writing and blogs; stronger student were able to produce commentaries which often offered subtle, nuanced discussion of the nature of their original pieces and how they had been shaped to converge with or subvert the audiences' expectations.

Students were prepared to attempt ambitious narratives, often inspired by challenging style models. The best folders had been scrupulously edited and proof-read; those which stayed within the word count tended to fare better than those who ignored the maxim that less can sometimes be more. Some students had conducted interviews, which they re-shaped into reported speech, precis, biographies and autobiographies.

When it came to travel writing or travelogues, the ones based on personal experience were often more successful. Some of the topics covered included; DofE expeditions, 10 Peaks Challenge, school visits linked to other areas of A Level study and were a rich source of material. As previously stated, a personal experience often produces work of a higher and more believable quality than for example trying write as a survivor of an earthquake when you have never been to the country affected. What would be good to see in future series are student using accounts from members of the public who have experienced personal challenges or been present at particular events and then to re-work the interview into engaging pieces of original writing.

One positive feature that had been noted by moderators was the decline in the journalistic pieces being presented in columns, with a multitude of colour pictures and links to various unrelated websites. This enabled the focus to be on the quality of writing and not the student's media skills.

Commentaries

The best commentaries were all well within the word count and avoided explanation and observation, instead focusing on evaluating the effect of linguistic and structural choices within their original writing pieces. Discussion of the influence of style model texts was also a key discriminator and some excellent examples of this will be provided in the exemplar material and online training events later in the year. Weaker commentaries often described the content of work or quoted at length without developed analysis at either word, sentence or whole text level. Conclusions about particular choices were often limited to superficial references about making the work easy to relate to or making the reader want to read on.

Assessment

In most cases the quality and accuracy of centre assessment was very good and teachers had applied the Assessment Objectives (AOs) accurately. There was the occasional under- and over-rewarding of work and this was most prevalent in the original writing, where allocating one mark for two pieces of work can be problematic. However, on the whole, centres did seem willing to use the full mark range, although responses below Level 3 were few and far between.

The annotation of work to justify the awarding of marks allows moderators to see how these outcomes have been reached by centres. Where possible, two markers should read, annotate and initial scripts, although I appreciate that in some centres this is not always practical. The best annotations address the candidate's personal achievements, rather than highlighting any errors, and reflect the key features of each piece of writing. Annotations should be individual, highlighting a specific aspect of the writing rather than merely copying level descriptors from the marking criteria. Achievement in relation to specific AOs should be highlighted and supported by comments on the nature of the work. Some centres provided separate marking grids and there were many examples of such good practice.

Presentation of work

On the whole, folder presentation was of a very high standard and made the moderation process extremely straightforward. A few centres still submitted work which was not presented in an orderly manner due to papers being out of order or lacking treasury tags to secure each candidate's work. With a large number of centres to moderate and in a short amount of time, having to collate work is time consuming for the moderator. Please can centres ensure their students' folders are presented in order and with secure fastenings.

A large number of centres provided very detailed information sheets including a synopsis of the student's work – genre, purpose, audience, word count etc. Although this is not a requirement as the Authentication Sheet is sufficient, by supplying this additional information really assists in guiding the moderator and clarifying what work the student have produced.

A large number of centres sent their work to moderators in plenty of time to meet the 15 May deadline, with all the requested folders, including the highest and lowest, online printout, authentication sheets completed accurately, with work arranged in uniform order and collated with treasury tags.

Administration reminder

Work should be:
* printed single-sided, in a font such as Times New Roman or Arial – font size 12
* it should be held together by a treasury tag
* candidate and centre numbers and names should be checked and each piece of work should have a word count
* the submitted sample must contain the highest and lowest candidate's work in addition to the requested sample.

The majority of comments from moderators referred to how enjoyable it was to read work from student who had entered clearly enjoyed the qualification and produced entertaining, engaging and creative work, supported by thoughtful commentaries evaluating the shaping of their texts. It is to be hoped that centres will be able to develop this even further in future, maintaining a balance between creativity and analysis.

Finally, I would like to thank teachers, student and the moderating team for all their hard work over the year and for making this moderation series both successful and enjoyable. I wish you a very successful 2019/20 academic year and look forward to working with you all again next summer.