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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**AS ENGLISH LANGUAGE (NEW)**

**SUMMER 2016**

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# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## General Certificate of Education

Summer 2016

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 1: EXPLORING LANGUAGE

On the whole, the candidates were well prepared for this unit. Their analysis showed a mostly sound understanding of the assessment objectives; some candidates presented an ability to score precise analytical points, unpicking specific aspects of language. The choice of texts proved accessible, enabling strong candidates to obtain the higher marks, whilst giving enough opportunities for less capable candidates to construct often sensible discussions.

#### Section A: Analysing Language

Candidates were asked to analyse two texts about the deaths of adrenaline enthusiasts. One was an editorial from The Guardian online, written by Germaine Greer, where the author adopts a sarcastic and sneering tone in discussing Steve Irwin's hubris and self-delusion, which she views as a contributing factor in his death. The second text, published in the Adventure section of Men's Journal Online, tracks the events leading up to Dean Potter and Graham Hunt's last, fatal, BASE jump. Although both texts are connected by the nature of the events described - the dangers of thrill-seeking pursuits - the first text contains language which conveys strong personal opinions, while the second is more factual.

Most candidates demonstrated a firm understanding of the contexts of both texts, and produced many insightful comments on Greer's exploration of Irwin's popularity. Stronger candidates were able to deduce that, despite her recognition of Irwin's evident popularity, Greer's view of his television persona is disdainful. Stronger candidates also recognised that Text B, by contrast, portrays the daredevils, Potter and Hunt, in a much more measured manner, despite coming to much the same conclusion about risk-taking.

While many candidates were able to produce discussions which illustrated confident use of linguistic terminology and intelligent evaluation of contextual factors influencing the construction of meaning in both texts, some struggled to evidence the more subtle connections between texts. It is worth reminding centres that AO4 - connections across texts - is worth 20 marks out of a total of 55 marks in this section. Therefore, a focussed exploration of these connections is essential in ensuring candidates are able to access the higher marks.

Candidates who were more successful in achieving the top marks did so by adopting a range of different approaches, all of which are perfectly acceptable. For example, some candidates produced a detailed and focussed analysis of Text A, followed by an exploration of Text B which connected the presentation of the adrenaline enthusiasts across the two texts; other, equally successful candidates, chose to compare the texts' presentation of the daredevils concurrently, focussing on their personalities, the writers' description of them and the writers' discussion of the risks associated with the thrill seekers' chosen pursuits. Weaker candidates, by contrast, analysed each text in turn, only producing a short connecting paragraph at the end. This approach limited their access to the higher marks for AO4.

Most candidates were able to identify specific language features in each text, using terminology accurately. However, some candidates' responses suffered due to a tendency to make generic claims about the intentions of the writer 'to make the reader read on'. Other candidates made valid but underdeveloped points about Irwin's widespread television popularity, and contrasted this with Potter's more specialised fan base and appeal. Less successful candidates were unable to perceive Greer's distaste for Irwin's apparently casual attitude to risk. Therefore, the clause 'Irwin has died a hero', which is somewhat ironic, was taken literally by some candidates.

By contrast, more able candidates were able to contextualise the excitement generated by adrenaline-seeking pursuits - conveyed by the noun phrase 'wildlife warrior' and adjective 'superhuman' in Text A, and the dynamic verbs 'rocket', 'shock' and 'deploy' in Text B - as being not simply God-like, but hubristic.

Furthermore, more able candidates successfully examined the contrasting impacts of the deaths of Irwin, Potter and Hunt by describing Irwin's death as a 'global tragedy', while the deaths of Potter and Hunt registered only in the narrow field of BASE jumping fans. Perceptive responses demonstrated a developed discussion of the foolishness of all three adrenaline enthusiasts, by commenting on the effects of complements such as 'appalled' and 'revolting' in Text A, and the abstract nouns 'anger' and 'frustration' in Text B. A further sign of strong responses was the ability to tease out Greer's mocking use of the Australian vernacular frequently adopted by Irwin himself as evidence of his bona fides as an Aussie male, to ironise Irwin. By contrast, Text B lacks such irony and invocation of subtext.

## **Section B: Contemporary English**

Section B produced many highly successful responses, and it was clear that candidates had been appropriately advised by centres of the need to apportion their time in approaching Section B according to the marks available to responses in this section.

Using knowledge of contemporary English, candidates were asked to analyse the ways in which contextual factors affect how writers use language in Twitter posts to register or mark their opinions about the naming of a royal baby. It was clear that many candidates enjoyed the opportunity to engage with 21st century English features, and many successfully commented on the colloquial features of some of the tweets, discussing the stylistic features of these multimodal texts.

On the whole, candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of meaning and genre for AO2. For example, the 140 character limit, the trending of topics, the use of the hashtag to connect contributors to threads and the heavy use of deixis, reflecting the fact that language is situation- dependent. However, it is important to remind centres that in order to gain marks in Band 4 and Band 5, candidates are required to produce intelligent and perceptive discussions of the issues the data present. For example, more successful candidates were able to explore the contributors' attitudes (for example, excitement or mock excitement), as well as tease out the subtle class- based and political attitudes evinced by some of the texts. Such perceptive exploration of the issues led to confident analysis of contextual factors (for example, how a tweeter's status, political views or attitudes towards class and celebrity affects the construction of meaning), thus connecting AO2 to AO3.

It is worth also reminding centres that selection of textual support is essential in this section. Some weaker responses presented a list of features associated with Twitter, without illustrating their points with evidence from the data in front of them. While it is useful to bring in a mental list of expectations associated with the genre, having studied it in class, candidates must very quickly be able to relate those genre conventions to the specifics of the data in front of them, engaging with the specific issues thrown up by the texts themselves.

Centres are also well advised to point out to candidates that in order to demonstrate concise or even apt textual selection the more successful candidates were able to take a thematic approach to the texts, making points that encompassed discussion of a range of the tweets, whereas weaker candidates tended to take a tweet-by-tweet approach, discussing issues in isolation. For example, successful candidates were able to explore the presentation of attitudes to the monarchy in the corpus of data by discussing the social class stereotypes 'Tracey' from Text 4 and the abstract noun 'propaganda' from Text 5.

Most candidates were able to produce sensible analysis of contextual factors given to them about the personae of the tweeters. For example, they were able to differentiate between the more personal opinions expressed by ordinary members of the public (Text 1 and Text 6) and the more political public opinions expressed by the contributors in Text 2, 3 and 5. Some weaker candidates seemed confused by Text 4, produced by Mike Stokoe, a cartoonist, but stronger responses made fruitful reference to his use of capitalisation in the minor sentence 'AT LAST!' to create a mock sensationalist tweet. Furthermore, successful candidates made sensible points on the differing pragmatics of the name choice of the royal baby; these ranged from discussions of cultural references to Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Diana in Text 2, to some fruitful exploration of celebrity children names conveyed by the compound noun phrase 'celebrities-crazy-baby-name bandwagon' in Text 6.

Finally, it is important that centres be reminded that candidates would benefit from using linguistic terminology to label their selection, such as, for example, adjective, noun, noun phrase; it seems that some candidates had abandoned the use of such terminology when exploring the issues presented by the tweets.

On the whole, the tweets provided opportunities for some often insightful and imaginative exploration of the pragmatics surrounding the naming of the royal baby.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## General Certificate of Education

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#### UNIT 2: LANGUAGE ISSUES AND ORIGINAL AND CRITICAL WRITING

On the whole, candidates were well prepared for this unit. Their essays showed a mostly sound understanding of the assessment objectives and topic areas: Language and Power and Language and Situation. The essays and stimulus material proved accessible, enabling strong candidates to obtain the higher marks, whilst giving enough opportunities for less capable candidates to construct often sensible responses. Candidates clearly enjoyed the creative writing tasks.

#### **Question 1(a) Language and Power**

Candidates were asked to analyse and evaluate the ways in which people in positions of authority use language to influence others. It was clearly stated that they should use examples from the extract and **their own knowledge** to answer the question. The extract was a written record of a woman's final interview with police just before she was charged with double murder.

Most candidates demonstrated a firm understanding of the context and issue, and produced some insightful comments, using the example and their own knowledge to illustrate their points, using a wide range of terminology. Most candidates demonstrated a detailed understanding of concepts and used a range of theories to support their answer. The best candidates were able to use the example as a starting point to an intelligent discussion of the issue and then were able to use a range of supporting examples from their own knowledge and experience.

Most candidates used a wide range of accurate linguistic terminology to analyse the example and their own supporting examples; however, it is worth remembering that the weighting of AO1 is double in this question so those candidates who used very little terminology lost a lot of marks.

Most candidates were able to use a wide range of theories (AO2) to support their answer, but there were some weaknesses in this area. Some candidates had obviously learned gender theories and wanted to use their knowledge regardless of the question; they presumed that the police officer was male. Saying that the officer displayed some typically male features of speech was Ok as long as they didn't over emphasise this. Some candidates saw it as a gender question with the female using submissive language and the male using dominant language. This is an over simplification of the situation. The officer could have been female. Some wanted to apply Sinclair and Coulthard's exchange theory but there was not a third part to the exchanges; the conversation was structured through adjacency pairs. The accomplice to the murder was referred to as Clive. Someone thought it was "Bonny and Clive" (rather than Bonnie and Clyde, which it clearly wasn't).

Candidates have clearly been taught Grice's maxims well but again it was an over simplification to say, "everything they say is relevant; they don't say too much or too little; the woman tells the truth and there is no ambiguity". Grice is more interesting when the rules are broken with an exploration of why the rules are broken.

Many candidates used a wide range of theories well. Austin's speech acts were applied relevantly; several discussed how the police officer seemed to be taunting the female, citing relevant examples from the text in relation to the speech acts theory. The difference between instrumental power and influential power is a useful distinction to make and many candidates discussed this with relevant examples from the text. (Andrew Moore's Language and Power site is useful for an exploration of this.) Brown and Levinson's politeness theories were explored relevantly in relation to the example with some reference to Face Threatening Acts, as were Goffman's theories. Some used Geoffrey Leech's politeness maxims, a politeness principle with conversational maxims similar to those formulated by Paul Grice. He lists six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Many candidates seemed familiar with Wareing (1999) Political, Personal and Social power. Some candidates referred to Karpman's drama triangle. Karpman used triangles to map conflicted or drama-intense relationship transactions. The Karpman Drama Triangle models the connection between personal responsibility and power in conflicts, and the destructive and shifting roles people play. He defined three roles in the conflict; Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim. This seemed quite a useful theory with some candidates suggesting that the police officer played the role of the persecutor and the rescuer. Some essays were over reliant on theories as if they had learnt a theory based essay that they thought would fit any title; AO2 is worth 10 marks and covers concepts (turn-taking, modality etc.) as well as theories so it is important to keep a balance between analysis of the example, their own examples and theories. It is important to use theories to illuminate the example alongside analysed examples using terminology in order to cover all Assessment Objectives.

In analysis of the example, most candidates were able to use a wide range of terminology accurately but some lack of precision prevented candidates from gaining higher marks. Many said the officer repeats "many phrases". Phrase lacks precision, unless they are discussing, noun phrases, prepositional phrases etc. Most intended it to mean a stretch of language. It would have been better to say, "the police officer repeats the clause open, "Do you accept.."

There was some misunderstanding of the term, hypophora. This is a rhetorical feature, meaning a question followed immediately by an answer (same speaker). Some candidates insisted that the officer used rhetorical questions. Three out of the four questions were, in fact, genuine leading, closed questions.

### **Question 2(a) Language and Situation**

This question was not as popular as question 1(a). Candidates were asked to analyse and evaluate the linguistic devices used in signs and notices to communicate important information. It was clearly stated that they should provide relevant supporting examples from the text and **their own knowledge** to answer the question.

Most candidates used the signs to discuss different contexts and the lexical and grammatical choices made. Some candidates were able to link similar signs together and use examples of their own, the use of bold numbers on MPH signs, abbreviations or images on W.C. signs, blunt imperatives on No Smoking signs. Some discussed brevity in relation to danger, e.g. "Warning" or simple monosyllabic language suited to the audience, "Children keep out", at school, "Keep to the left", "No running". Some brought in their knowledge of power, "By order of the management"; although it would have been good if this had been correctly identified as a prepositional phrase. Some misread, "Polite Notice" as "Police Notice".

This is possibly the reason for the “Polite Notice” heading, although no one speculated this. Unfortunately, a lot of candidates went through the signs one by one. This was not the intention; many could be linked by politeness, audience, purpose etc. Many spent too long discussing the use of capitals and graphological features rather than the linguistic features. Some referred to the “capitalism” of the signs rather than the use of upper case letters. Politeness theories could usefully be applied to this question. Some candidates considered synthetic personalisation (Fairclough), the process of addressing mass audiences as though they were individuals through inclusive language usage and used the example of, “We are happy for you to walk your dog..” and the use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun, you, and determiner, your.

However, unfortunately, there was some misapplication of theories; Grice’s maxims and Brown and Levinson (Politeness is the expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward the listener.) are speech theories. Some candidates wanted to apply their knowledge of gender theories and said that it is proven that males prefer short, relevant information and by using these features, it will make more females comply or suggesting that the sign about, “controlled bollards” was for men because of its brevity.

### **General Advice**

- For the essay question, candidates need an introduction which discusses the topic, different contexts and issues, then paragraphs with topic sentences that link their points together with supplementary examples.
- The Specimen Assessment Materials (SAMs) make explicit reference all the way through to the need for wider knowledge; this is an essay question, not an analysis of data alone question. For reference see:
- SAMs page 39, “Analysing the data will provide a starting point.”
- SAMs page 40, “Before moving on to a wider consideration of dominance in a range of spoken language contexts”
- SAMs page 46, “In a wider sense, they may address the idea of politeness”
- The Teacher’s Guide, pages 90 – 92, gives a range of examples that can be used to demonstrate wider knowledge.
- The CPD Autumn 2015 material, on the secure website, gives a range of candidate responses with commentaries, drawing attention to the need for wider contexts.

### **Question 1(b)**

Candidates clearly enjoyed writing an opening to a detective novel. There were some good examples of original creative writing. Some created character well while some created a real sense of place.

Some were too long. It is recommended that candidates get used to writing approximately 350 words. It is better to have a piece of crafted writing of the right length, than an over long piece that is rushed and has technical errors.

Some were not strictly detective stories; candidates should prepare for this question by reading a range of genres and practising writing openings.

Technical accuracy is assessed; many responses were not proof read. Many candidates do not know how to set out speech.

### **Question 2(b)**

The Give up your Seat card – many candidates enjoyed this task and produced good informative/persuasive writing, using structural devices, a suitable register and addressing the audience successfully.

Some pieces were too short.

There is advice on practising writing effectively for an audience in the CPD materials.



### **The Critical Commentary**

The recommended length of approximately 250 words is a guide. Candidates need to select some clear examples from their work to illustrate how they have written the piece. They should concentrate on what they consider to be the strengths of their creative piece. Candidates should not bring weaknesses to the attention of the examiner; these weaknesses should, where possible, be corrected in the creative task. For example, one candidate wrote, “I ramble on in this paragraph.” The assessment objectives are AO2 and AO3. AO2 is about how they have written for their chosen audience, genre and purpose, register – mode, tenor, field, the audience, etc. This is not really about theories; some students wanted to restate their knowledge of theories.

In this piece they need to succinctly discuss:

- their use of language and their stylistic choices
- the distinctive features of the text type (with accurate terminology and examples)
- the significance of the contextual factors
- how far their intended effects were achieved.



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