AS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

7706/2 People and Places
Report on the Examination

7706
June 2016

v1.0

General

This has been a successful first series for Paper 2: People and Places. Schools and colleges are to be congratulated on their preparations with students for the three contrasting tasks on the paper – the analytical comparison, the re-creative task and the critical commentary. The majority of students were equipped to respond to all tasks within the time allotted and responded well to the varying demands of each task.

In all the tasks, the paper called upon the students' knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of:

- genre
- representation
- point of view
- register
- literariness.

It was pleasing to see them engaging with these concepts throughout the tasks, with some students actively exploring the significance of these explicitly through analysis (Question 1 and Question 3) and demonstrating understanding of these creatively (Question 2).

Where students perhaps did not perform as well as they could, this often occurred where they appeared to have overlooked the question wording. Many students would have performed much better if they had acted upon the bullet points in the rubric—particularly in relation to Question 2 and Question 3.

- In Question 1, students were reminded to *compare and contrast* how the speaker presents Paris, to refer to *language choices and their likely effects*, the different *audiences and purposes* of the texts and *aspects of mode.*
- In Question 2, direction was given to the *audience, purpose and genre* for the task in addition to some of the *content*—useful information for parents and the advantages and disadvantages of visiting different places with children.
- In Question 3, students were instructed to identify *four different* examples of language and advised that they should consider the importance of *purpose, audience, mode and genre* in their choices.

Clearly, there is still a sense of transition occurring between the style and approach of the legacy AQA specifications and the new English Language and Literature specification, most noticeably in terms of the application of the key concepts and level of linguistic precision in Question 1 in Section A, and the different requirements of the re-creative writing task based around a text transformation and a critical commentary requiring the student to be selective and judicious in their choice of language examples in Section B. However, examiners were really impressed by the students' understanding of the demands of the different tasks and their engagement with the activities, most notably the re-creative writing task where they adopted their online parental personas with enthusiasm.

Section A

Question 1 - Remembered Places

This question assesses the students' ability to discuss how the two selected extracts from the texts that they have studied in the *AQA Anthology: Paris*. The key focus is a comparison of how the speakers and writers (of the extracts selected) present Paris and students are being asked to call upon their classroom study of the texts within the Anthology to explore:

- the ways in which speakers and writers present places, societies, people and events
- the ways that narrative can sometimes be seen as a personal journey for writers and speakers
- the influence of contextual factors on the content and focus of narratives
- the affordances and limitations of different media
- different genre conventions and different purposes in communicating ideas and viewpoints about travel, people and place
- how people and their relationships are realised through point of view, attitude, specific registers, physical descriptions, speech and thought.

Section A assesses the students' performance in three Assessment Objectives:

- AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression (10 marks)
- AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received (20 marks)
- AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods (10 marks).

Nearly all students were able to engage with these two extracts, producing reasonable responses. Overall, nearly all students were able to apply some terminology with some accuracy, select language levels and explain the effects of features. Most students could identify and refer relevantly to specific language features in the texts using appropriate subject terminology and make some contextual comments, if not all fully engaging with aspects of mode, the audience of the personal narrative and wider considerations of contexts of production and reception.

Comparisons were usually evident somewhere in all scripts but those that foregrounded these and built upon these scored higher marks than those overlooked AO4 as the primary focus of the question. However, for some the 'compare and contrast' instruction was decoupled from 'how the speaker and writer in these extracts *present* Paris' and this also impacted the potential levels of achievement for AO1 and AO4, as both of these contain 'strands' that ask for reference to be made to representation (as outlined in the Assessment Guide).

As a general overview, successful responses:

- showed a more explicit awareness of the Assessment Objectives and their relative weighting in structuring answers and for informing decisions about which aspects of the texts to explore
- linked Assessment Objectives within paragraphs: for example, used AO1 to identify specific language features that reflected the presentation of Paris and linked these with AO3, the contextual motivations for presenting Paris in the ways identified

- used Text A and Text B's contrasting presentations of Paris as a means of making connections for AO4
- showed discrimination by making careful selections of linguistic features at different language levels to explore in relevant and interesting ways
- showed high levels of linguistic precision and confidence with identifying and analysing specific features from a variety of language levels
- appreciated the links between contextual factors and language use, and evaluated the effects of context
- wrote confidently about a range of contextual factors, showing some perception
- understood that the focus was on the presentation of Paris and foregrounded this in their discussion.

As a general overview, less successful responses:

- used very generalised labels such as 'words' and 'phrases'
- used specific terminology to identify features but did not offer exemplification as support
- listed terminology in a feature spotting manner and did not use these features as a tool for analysis of the texts
- made reference to individual word classes (nouns, adjectives and adverbs) but these were not always accurately identified or purposefully developed
- used signposting phrases such as 'in comparison' but actually offered an unrelated point to the previous paragraph or sentence
- lacked confidence in exploring spontaneous spoken language
- confused mode and genre
- misunderstood mode.

In terms of specific exploration of the extracts

Successful responses:

- identified features of spontaneous spoken language in Text A and explained these as Zara's attempts to articulate her point of view when a child or reconstructing her child self's thoughts and feelings
- focused on the representation of Paris and places within it through specific language choices in Texts A and B, as well as other meaning-making resources such as the visual aspects of the graphological and typographical choices of the text producer in Text B
- saw the tellability of Text A as an account of personal and first-hand experiences of visiting Paris as a child
- explored the literariness of Text B in its attempts to entertain and engage children
- identified the audience for Text A as essentially internal i.e. the listener/interviewer
- recognised that while the ostensible audience for Text B was children, the secondary (perhaps in some ways the primary) audience was parents.

Less successful responses:

- misunderstood the audience and purpose of Text A—some students considered tourists and people wishing to go to Paris as the intended audience for the text, others thought that it was aimed at young children and some misread the contextualisations, viewing this as conversation between mother and daughter
- identified the mode of Text A as either written or multi-modal

- although often more secure with the context of Text B, some regarded it as being an advertising text for a holiday company selling trips to Paris rather than a travel guide
- despite identifying Zara's negative attitudes to Paris, focusing on her choice of the adjective 'underwhelmed', many responses did not specifically refer to the fact that she was reflecting on past feelings of how she had felt when she was younger and what her first memories of Paris had been
- stuck to inflexible, pre-prepared structures to responses that could not be adapted to the specific extracts and texts chosen
- failed to consider the presentation of Paris and focused almost entirely on the ways in which the text was able to attract the intended audience and the effects of the features on the listener or reader
- made rather dubious links between the texts showing a misunderstanding particularly around points of comparison. For example, comparing the use of graphology in the texts and making comments about text A using 'boring graphology' or 'plain font' showing a lack of awareness of the transcript as a representation of the spoken mode.

Section B

Question 2 - Re-creative Writing

The sole Assessment Objective here is AO5: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

In this task students were being asked to make creative decisions about the presentation of locations, activities and experiences in Paris, conveying a subjective point of view from the perspective of a parent, consciously shaping the narratives through their language choices and working with the particular genre conventions of blog posts and travel forums.

This question required candidates to recast Text B as a post for a travel blog for parents, giving advice. This was enjoyable to mark as students of all abilities had clearly engaged with the re-creative writing task of a blog post, resulting from their familiarity with this genre in the Anthology.

Nearly all candidates were able to engage with this task at some level and most of those who to some degree followed the rubric could achieve a level 3 mark. The majority of students also reached (or exceeded) the word count as few wrote too little, showing that they were able to engage with the re-creative task. Some students wrote long answers with no regard to the word count at all, although this was more problematic where it resulted in a very short critical commentary. This task also enabled a number of students who had struggled more with the textual analysis of Question 1 to demonstrate creativity and competence in the manipulation of language for specific effects and gain solid marks in this question.

The majority of candidates interpreted the requirement to write a blog as a recount of imagined personal experiences, sometimes with advice woven into it. This is perhaps understandable since a blog is essentially a digital diary. Others created their blog post around a bullet point or numerical structure (firstly etc) to foreground the advice they were giving. Some candidates used graphological features to replicate a web page. This ranged from headings and titles, appropriate for a blog to signpost the topic, user names, hyperlinks to other topics/sections of the forum. Similarly the use of 'social media language' such as 'lol' or emoticons was sometimes felt to be appropriate in order to enhance the perceived authenticity of the created text. Nearly all responses

adopted an appropriately informal or conversational register, creating an online persona, and had some awareness of an audience of fellow parents. Others simply wrote in paragraphs but used the first person, the content and their chosen register to represent the style of a blog, rather than using graphological genre conventions. Examiners accepted any approach as valid as judgements on performance were based upon the three strands being assessed for AO5:

- creation of a new and original piece of writing
- use of the base text as a starting point/springboard
- control of any chosen style(s).

Successful responses:

- were not over-dependent on the base text and instead either made judicious use of relevant parts, or used it as a springboard for some ideas about advising parents about the advantages and disadvantages of amusing children in Paris
- paid due attention to the second bullet point which required a focus on some of the disadvantages as well as the advantages of visiting different places with children
- adopted a lively voice, reflecting the base text's positive and enthusiastic manner rather than slavishly using its content
- were able to integrate genre conventions of blog writing in convincing ways
- demonstrated a clear awareness of the wider anthology and were familiar enough with the blog texts to use those as style models, or for ideas about the content of the advice
- demonstrated 'flair' through their chosen register and their understanding of the needs of their parental audience in terms of the advice given and the ways they related to them.

Less successful responses:

- omitted reference to the second bullet point and wrote almost entirely positively about the joys and wonders of Paris with children
- offered advice revolved around 'pampered pets' and 'visiting caves of bones', where the inclusion of the base text in its original form resulted in clumsily lifted words and phrases used without manipulation; this hampered the fluency of the new text and often affected the sustaining of the chosen register
- overlooked the purpose of the text, to advise and hence the response read more like a recount of the holiday
- produced brief blog posts and were therefore unable to successfully fulfil the requirements of the task
- were too influenced by the specimen task on Café Denton and incorporated elements of this unnecessarily
- misjudged what parents would appreciate and relate to in relation to keeping their children occupied in Paris.

Question 3 – Critical Commentary

In this critical commentary students were asked to *identify* 'four specific examples of language' and explain their reasons for using them. They were also guided to contextual aspects that they should consider (purpose, audience, mode and genre), the meanings that they intended and the overall organisation of their commentary. These instructions directed them to the Assessment Objectives being tested in this question:

- AO2: Analyse the ways in which meanings are shaped in texts
- AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received (20 marks)
- AO5: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

AO2 awards both the *quantity* of features identified (ie the extent to which they meet the four required examples of language) and the *quality* of the students' discussion of these. It is also the choice of features that drives their ability to meet AO3, the exploration of contextual factors. The organisation of the commentary —ie the structural presentation of the examples selected—and the accuracy of expression is assessed in AO5. Students could score well in AO5, even if other aspects of the commentary were weaker, just by taking care in their own writing.

Overall, the majority of students were able to select some examples of language but there was some confusion as to what constitutes an example of language. For example, there were a considerable number of students who identified the use of 'an informal style' as a language feature. While the use of an informal style may be appropriate it is not, of course, a feature. There were similar references to 'a colloquial style' which could be rewarded where it was convincingly exemplified and explored. The best responses focused on different levels of language such as the use of different types of sentence – declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamatory—specific lexical choices or the use of first person or second person address.

By 'language feature', we mean a specific example of language that students have chosen to use at any of the language levels (grammar, lexis, discourse and so on). For example, students could make reference to their use of a group of modified noun phrases, a certain kind of pronoun, terms of address, lexical fields, the active or passive voice, superlative adjectives, deictics and so on. These should have been consciously chosen by the student with particular interpretative effects in mind, and consequently allow them to explain why they included them. Whilst it is acceptable for students to comment on isolated language choices, particularly when they are used in striking and clearly intentional ways, students should also be aware of and write about how they create textual cohesion through patterns of language use. This means that they could comment both on *one* single use of the passive voice for effect and on *the use of various pronouns* across their writing as examples of one 'language feature'. To help students and direct their choices more successfully, it might also be helpful to use the 'Key terms and guide to methods of language analysis: Glossary'. As an overview, the Assessment guide for Section B also outlines what is meant by an example of language, relating this to the Specimen Assessment Material.

Comparatively few students followed the rubric and only selected four features. A general stylistic analysis was quite common, including potentially a dozen features. However good the quality of discussion, some students missed out on the top level because they had referred to an extensive range of features rather than the four specified and hence lacked the sense of careful and 'judicious' selection of examples that the level 5 descriptor requires. A more focussed response referring to

four language examples would have allowed students more time to write meaningfully about the reasons for their selection and would have potentially earned more marks. Pleasingly, there were few who could not find any features to select and most candidates were able to identify at least three language examples from the recast and offer comments which demonstrated at least some awareness of how they had used language to create meanings and effects.

General introductory paragraphs often took up time and words at the expense of a more detailed exploration of the chosen features. These introductory paragraphs also focused on contextual factors, overlooking that AO3 does not exist in isolation and needs to be linked to the examples of language that they have chosen to explore and the ways in which their use linked to purpose, audience mode and genre.

There is no one prescribed way to set out the answer and students took different approaches to layout and organisation. Important to examiners was the ability to see what examples of language were being selected and some students made this more difficult as it took a whole paragraph of discussion before it was evident what specific feature was being discussed.

More successful responses:

- identified language features with precision and relevance—such as 'noun phrases', 'modality' and individual word classes (such as types of nouns)
- showed range in their choices of language examples, selecting from a variety of language levels
- showed selection in the four language examples chosen, using these to link to different aspects of context in the ensuing discussion
- recognised the blog genre and built this into their discussion of features, evaluating the effects of the genre on their language choices
- offered thoughtful discussion of mode and the ways that the influence of mode shaped their choices and intentions
- also considered other aspects of contexts of production and reception that were relevant to the examples of language
- structured the commentary around the rubric, either by using headings or by using paragraphs with the feature selected identified clearly in the first sentence.

Less successful responses:

- offered vague suggestions for language examples such as , 'humour'
- used very generalised labels such as 'words' and 'lexis'
- did not signpost the examples of language clearly
- identified features but did not give specific examples from their own text as support
- gave incorrect examples to support the example of language chosen—for example, choosing the second person pronoun example to support a language feature of first person pronouns
- 'feature spotted' without an explanation of meanings
- chose examples of a feature that seemed placed in the recast simply as something to identify in the commentary (such as a simile) and this then could not be easily explored in terms of context
- selected examples of language that they had copied from the base text—for example, the alliterative 'pampered pets'
- overlooked some of the contexts listed for discussion, especially mode and genre

- only addressed purpose for AO3
- demonstrated errors in expression, punctuation, paragraphing and spelling (sometimes of key terminology such as 'grammar', colloquial', 'deixis').

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results Statistics** page of the AQA Website.