AQA

AS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 2 People and Places
Report on the Examination

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General

Now in its third series, this has been another successful year for Paper 2 People and Places as schools and colleges have clearly become more confident with the demands of the paper.

Examiners reported that the questions provided students of all levels with stretch and challenge and the paper proved accessible. Students were able to manage their time effectively to complete all three questions although there was evidence of technical inaccuracy and issues with expression particularly on Question 3 at the end of the paper. Students would benefit from spending some time proof-reading their work for errors as Question 3 awards marks for AO5.

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).

Almost all students showed clear engagement with the texts selected from the Paris Anthology for Section A although there was evidence of less secure understanding of Text A's contextual factors mainly due to confusion around its audience. There was less evidence of feature-spotting than last year and it was clear that centres had prepared students well in terms of their linguistic knowledge as the vast majority were able to successfully apply at least some labels with a degree of accuracy.

For Question 2, although examiners reported some confident and imaginative writing, it was apparent that some students were less familiar with the stylistic conventions of travel memoirs and their purpose. Centres would do well to encourage students to examine the conventions associated with the full range of texts in the Paris Anthology and experiment with replicating them successfully in their own writing.

It is clear that most candidates had a sound understanding of the assessment objectives and requirements for the tasks with many able to identify language features relevantly with accurate terminology (AO1). However, students should also take care that they always exemplify as full credit cannot be given where linguistic terminology is provided without an appropriate example from either the texts in Section A or from their own writing in Question 2 in their commentaries. This sometimes affected the marks examiners were able to award particularly for AO2 on Question 3.

As for previous years, it is worth remembering however, that AO1 refers to more than just the ability to apply linguistic terminology and credit will also be given for the understanding and use of relevant concepts (ideas from language study eg synthetic personalisation) and methods (tools of analysis eg conversational analysis) to help students meaningfully explore the use of language either in the Paris Anthology or in their own recreative writing.

Section A

Question 1 – Remembered Places

Nearly all students were able to identify at least some relevant language features with some degree of accuracy in both texts. More successful responses explored the effects of language features and applied a good range of linguistic terminology with a high degree of accuracy. It was clear that students engaged well with both texts and there were far fewer instances of imbalanced responses this year. However, there was some misunderstanding of contextual factors particularly when commenting on Text A. Some students identified the audience as being for young children purely based on the images and comic-style format overlooking the fact that very young children are unlikely to have knowledge of Wilde, Hemingway and Atwood.

In addition, it would be helpful for students to keep in mind the three bullet point descriptors that refer to aspects of mode, genre conventions and the contexts of production and reception in order to access the full range of AO3 marks available. It was fairly commonplace for students to address only one of these descriptors within their response and so not get full credit. Although mode was less frequently addressed by students, some were able to provide a purposeful discussion of the multi-modal nature of both texts and the inclusion of spoken mode features within Text A.

In terms of AO4, there were far fewer occurrences of students discussing the texts separately and most were able to make at least some connections. It was pleasing that in this series, there were also fewer instances of students decoupling the instruction to 'compare and contrast' from 'how the speakers and writers *present* Paris'.

Most students were able to compare specific features within the texts themselves and comment on how they linked to the issue of representation rather than merely comparing content as had been seen in the first two series of this new specification.

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 work with different concepts and methods and to identify specific language features that reflected the presentation of Paris. They were able to link 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' or applied language labels inaccurately throughout
- used specific terminology to identify features but did not offer exemplification as support
- neglected to link language features to relevant contextual factors
- focussed their discussion of context on a slim range of factors and did not discuss mode
- used signposting phrases such as 'in comparison' but actually offered an unrelated point to the previous paragraph or sentence.

In terms of specific exploration of the extracts

Successful responses:

- identified the genre and purpose of Text A as an illustrated journal functioning as a published diary to recount personal experience and explored how this is reflected in the language features utilised by the writer
- explored the mode of Text A demonstrating understanding of its multi-modal affordances and ability to interact with its wide audience of those interested in Paris or fans of Knisley's work
- explored the way in which the writer of Text A used language features to both inform and engage its audience
- identified the influence of the writer's nationality of Text A on specific features in the text and their experience of Paris as an outsider
- recognised the literariness of text B and its crafting of language to present a positive representation of the journey to Paris
- identified the wide audience for Text B as being possible rail enthusiasts, historians or tourists interested in travelling to Paris from the United Kingdom
- focused on the representation of Paris 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 producers
- explored the significance of journeys and the way they are presented in both texts

Less successful responses:

- overlooked the multi-modal affordances of both texts
- misunderstood the audience for Text A as being aimed at primarily young children
- made speculative comments about audience for Text A being uneducated because of informal or colloquial aspects used by the text producer
- feature-spotting in Text A; alliteration of 'familiar friends', 'beautiful books', with little meaningful discussion of effects
- misunderstood the genre of Text B by considering it as an advertisement for Eurostar
- compared the content of the texts rather than how it is presented by making basic comparisons for example, they both discuss Paris, use images etc.

Section B

Question 2 – Re-creative Writing

This task 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.

In this task students were being asked to make creative decisions about the presentation of Paris by recasting the base text as a travel memoir written from the perspective of a tourist arriving in Paris by train. The task required students to shape writing through their language choices by working within the genre conventions associated with travel memoirs and writing from imagined personal experience.

Some students appeared unfamiliar with the genre of travel memoirs and struggled to adopt an appropriate register for the new form. Although the vast majority of students recognised that travel memoirs reflect personal experiences and adopted the first person pronoun, some students chose to write in present tense and so lacked the retrospective quality associated with a reflection on past events. Tenses continued to give students problems with some confusing shifts from past to present that were the result of a lack of grammatical control rather than a narratorial decision.

Where students were less successful, it was largely because they stuck very closely to the base text. As in last year's series, some students simply lifted phrases from the base text that described the journey into Paris. Students should be reminded that in order to gain marks higher than level 2, they should use the base text as inspiration and as a springboard to demonstrate their own creativity. Less successful responses misunderstood the genre and wrote in a persuasive fashion using direct address and rhetorical questions to convince the reader to visit Paris and so employed a register more appropriate for a persuasive advertisement for Paris rather than a travel memoir.

Students who understood the requirements of the task and employed genre conventions associated with travel memoirs effectively, produced some highly successful and entertaining responses. Some students used humour appropriately to recall amusing incidents that had happened on the journey into Paris or to describe their fellow passengers on the train. Other students took a more nostalgic tone and focussed on their intense feelings as a result of witnessing the changing landscape of Paris highlighting the event as a memorable personal experience.

Some students offered some very lively responses which were successful in infusing their writing with a real sense of the personality of the imagined writer and which made it highly entertaining for the reader. 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 interesting ideas to entertain the reader about their imagined personal memories of the rail journey into Paris
- adopted a convincing voice and appropriate register for its adult audience and purpose to both inform and entertain

- utilised details from the base text in appropriate and often imaginative ways rather than repeating part of its content
- used genre conventions associated with travel memoirs confidently
- demonstrated a clear awareness of the wider anthology and were familiar enough with travel memoirs to use those as style models
- demonstrated flair through their chosen register and sustained this throughout their writing

Less successful responses:
- used lifted words or phrases from the base text most notably 'Aubervilliers to the left and St Ouen on the right', 'arrived into the heart of the city', 'galleries, museums, boulevards and restaurants', 'picturesque locations', etc showing little signs of manipulation or originality
- lacked genre conventions associated with travel memoirs
- wrote in an inappropriate style and register to sound more like an advertisement for Paris or a travel guide rather than a travel memoir
- lacked control of tenses.

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.

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 and there was less confusion about what constitutes an example of language than last year. 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, sentence types, 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. While there is no hierarchy in the type of language level selected by the candidate, it is evident that some students selected language features that leant themselves towards a tendency for more broad or generalised comments than others. For example, some candidates chose to write about declaratives but frequently the comments on meanings and effects referred to 'tell the audience about the journey' and lacked a sense of development.

Some students referred to a language feature in the text without offering an example. Conversely, some students offered the example but lacked the linguistic terminology to describe it. Full credit can only be given in AO2 where a language feature has been correctly identified using accurate linguistic terminology and exemplified. The best responses focused carefully on different levels of language that also enabled them to explore AO3 in meaningful ways for example through the use of different types of sentence (eg complex, complex/compound, simple, minor), specific lexical choices such as different kinds of adjectives, verbs, nouns and pronouns.

It is still worth repeating the guidance from last year's report on the exam that it is acceptable for students both to comment on isolated language choices, particularly when they are used in striking and clearly intentional ways and to write about how they create textual cohesion through patterns of language use. This means that they could comment both on one single use of a minor sentence for effect and on the use of various groups of adjectives 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. Both documents can be found on the AQA website.

It was pleasing to see that this year there were far fewer cases of students overlooking the guidance in the rubric to select four features and of instances where students chose to select upwards of six or more features. However, some students did not identify at least three language features and so missed out on AO2 marks. This was due to a lack of precision in the use of language terminology or a lack of exemplification of the feature identified.

As for last year, a recurring theme was that students often neglected to look at all four contextual bullets in the mark scheme and sometimes focussed their entire responses on one or two contextual factors most notably purpose and audience with less discussion of genre and mode. This may have been reflective of the fact that some students appeared less familiar with the genre conventions of travel memoirs and hence were unable to reflect on this in their commentaries.

Mode was the least well done with relatively few students commenting on it. A few students were able to write relevantly about the written mode and the planned, highly crafted nature of the writing and to demonstrate how this influenced the language features they had chosen in their recasts.

In terms of AO5, the majority of students were able to successfully organise their ideas and there were far fewer occurrences of a lack of paragraphs this year. More students were able to use signposting to clearly identify the feature being discussed from the outset with some choosing to use clear topic sentences and others using sub-headings. Examiners were instructed to accept either approach as a perfectly acceptable way for students to choose to structure their writing.

Although the structure of students' commentaries has improved this year, the technical accuracy of students' writing was a barrier to enabling them to access AO5 marks. In some cases, there were spelling errors of fairly commonplace vocabulary eg sentence/sentance, audience/audiance, writer/writter. Some students used very little punctuation for almost an entire paragraph perhaps because of time pressures encountered near the end of the paper. Students would do well to manage their time effectively, leaving time to carefully proof read their commentaries so that they can achieve well on AO5.

More successful responses:
- identified language features with precision —such as 'verb phrases', 'proximal deixis' and 'subordinate clauses' etc
- carefully selected language features that enabled them to make meaningful comments about meanings and effects
- showed selection in the four examples chosen using these to link to the four different aspects of context
- showed range in their choices of language examples by selecting them from a variety of language levels

- recognised the genre of travel memoirs and could explore its effects on their choice of language features
- discussed the mode of the text and its influence on the selection of language choices
- explored and evaluated other aspects of context that were relevant to the examples of language
- produced a commentary that was well-structured with clear identification of features to be discussed either by using headings or paragraphs with clear opening topic sentences that referenced the language feature
- took care with the technical accuracy of their writing.

Less successful responses:
- identified language features but did not give specific examples from their own text as support
- incorrectly labelled language features for example, choosing the third person pronoun when the example offered was 'you'
- offered an example from their own writing without any linguistic terminology to describe the feature
- overlooked some of the contexts listed for discussion especially genre and mode
- misunderstood the purpose of the writing due to confusion about the genre of travel memoirs
- demonstrated errors in expression, punctuation and spelling.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.
UMS conversion calculator