



Oral Examination

It was pleasing to note that the vast majority of candidates were able to participate effectively in the oral examination.

The A candidates engaged fluently and actively in the interview, using a broad range of vocabulary and complex structures. They were able to argue against or defend points of view, explain critical concepts in their research paper and articulate ideas clearly. There was a high level of accuracy (not necessarily error-free), and contributions to the conversation were delightfully spontaneous, with appropriate intonation and pronunciation.

The B candidates offered some complex phrasing and a broad vocabulary, with 'reasonable' accuracy. Pronunciation was clear and intonation appropriate, though some were not able to engage in discussion of more complex ideas related to their folio. There was some spontaneity in exchanges and fluency although some candidates (in both the B and C categories) appeared to possess a native-like fluency, frequently using words such as 'like', 'you know', etc without the complexity of phrases or vocabulary required for an A rating.

Those candidates who could handle only simple ideas and opinions and offered basic responses fell into the C category. Their language production lacked a range of vocabulary and complex structures. There was some degree of accuracy, but the interaction was limited.

Again this year, those who did not pass had difficulty in presenting even simple ideas and made very few contributions to the conversation. They had errors in basic grammar structures and a very narrow vocabulary. These were candidates who were obviously not at level 3.

Some (even very able) candidates showed up with poorly presented folios, based on topics that clearly did not allow for the kind of enquiry that would befit a research paper. The course outline states that 'candidates should produce a research paper' and goes on to specify that 'the research folio forms the basis of the discussion during the oral examination.' It was apparent to some examiners that there was a need for more teacher guidance in choice of research subjects/topics and more emphasis on the study skills needed: 'acquiring, recording, analysing, evaluating and presenting information.'

Teachers must bear in mind that, while candidates are not assessed on their folios during the oral examination, they are disadvantaged if they do not come armed with a good folio upon which a meaningful discussion can be based.

Some candidates showed up with a sheet containing internal ratings in their folios. This is to be discouraged as it is distracting for oral examiners, who only have a short time in which to look at the folio and use it for a basis for the conversation. Teachers are requested not to write comments on the folios as this can also be distracting.

Listening and Responding

The texts were well chosen, of a suitable length and clearly presented. However, as the questions were very straightforward and a fairly high proportion of marks were awarded to questions of the true/false variety, it was difficult to ascertain which candidates truly deserved A or B ratings. Consequently many candidates may have scored higher marks than expected/predicted in this section.

Writing in English

There was a good range of topics and they were mostly well tackled, though perhaps some candidates would have been better to avoid topic d (the advantages of having children when you are over 35 rather than when you are younger). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the age of the majority of the candidates.

Some candidates did not really address the topic; this was particularly apparent in the case of topic b: Think of someone you respect. Describe why you respect them. Many candidates wrote about respect in general, not about a person. There was some evidence of prepared answers but it was hard to find fault if the writing was well structured, appropriate and really addressed the topic.

All topics were well represented, with the most popular being the Descriptive (b: 46 candidates), followed closely by the Comparative (d: 38), the Narrative (a: 37), the Reflective (c: 34) and finally the Discussion (e), which was selected by 24 candidates.

The best essays were well structured and very accurate, though not perfect. Candidates were able to use a good range of vocabulary and idioms and to write concisely and coherently. At the other end of the spectrum some candidates were very weak, with poor grammar and spelling and weak vocabulary, and unable to structure their writing. It was felt that they were not really ready to sit the external exam, which is, after all, a pre-tertiary English examination.

Reading and Responding

The texts were nicely contrasted and of an appropriate level, though some of the questions did not really challenge the more able candidates. On the whole candidates coped well with this section, particularly with the second passage.

Texts

The first two questions on the film poster were competently handled, with candidates correctly identifying the target audience and the parts that showed it was an action film. However, very few were able to explain how stereotyping was used.

The second text which was an advertisement for a new fragrance was well done, with most candidates demonstrating their solid understanding of how the text appeals to its audience and commenting on its effectiveness. Here it must be noted that many candidates did not take the mark scheme into consideration, some writing up to 10 lines in response to a 2 mark question. They must aim to be more concise.

The third text was a popular choice and candidates had little difficulty in identifying the audience and justifying their answer, though a number of candidates thought that it was a commercial advertisement, inviting readers 'to buy this milk'. Again for the last question which carried only 2 marks, candidates offered long-winded responses.

Whilst many candidates demonstrated that they had a good understanding of the way the persuasive texts are constructed to appeal to a particular audience, there was still evidence that many lacked the language skills to adequately express their ideas. Furthermore, quite a few candidates attempted all 3 texts, when they were instructed to choose 2. In this case the examiners only assessed the first 2 responses.

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