

## **AS LEVEL**

*Examiners' report*

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)**

**H074**

For first teaching in 2015

## **H074/01 Summer 2018 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

## Paper H074/01 series overview

As in previous years, all levels of achievement were represented in responses both to Section A and Section B. In general, candidates coped well with the time constraints, with the vast majority producing a response to each section of appropriate length and substance. A number of candidates found the links between Sections A and B helpful, apparently drawing for their original writing not only on the topics and techniques in the Section A extracts, but also their wider study of these and other Anthology texts.

### Question 1

**Text A** is an extract from Samuel Pepys' diary for 2 September 1666 describing the Great Fire of London.

**Text B** is an extract from Captain Scott's diary describing the final days of his return journey from the South Pole.

- 1 Compare the ways in which the writers use language to present and respond to their experiences.

In your answer you should consider:

- context
- mode and genre
- purpose and audience.

[30]

A number of responses were significantly more secure in their reading of Text B than Text A. Scott's explicit references to his difficulty in writing and to the extreme cold enabled all candidates to feel that they understood the content of Text B. Some candidates were less sure what to say about Text A, in ways that made it difficult for them to access the higher levels of the mark scheme for Question 1.

It is important to note that for the purposes of assessment, the texts printed in the exam paper may be extracts from the complete texts included in the Anthology. Almost all candidates seemed to respond well to each extract being shorter than the complete version they had studied in the Anthology.

A few candidates used this difference to good effect, for example referring briefly to the 'Impressions' section of Scott's diary in a way that demonstrated relevant understanding of his sense of audience, purpose and genre. In a small number of cases, responses included more detailed analysis of remembered quotes from the complete version of the text. Candidates could not receive credit for analysis of language not included in the given extracts; they need to be able to respond to the versions of the texts they are presented with in the exam.

#### • Connections across texts (AO4)

The diary genre of each text offered all candidates a way into making connections. For some, this led to 'Clearly developed exploration' (Level 5) through analysis of related connections, such as the extent to which each writer was and wasn't writing for himself, and their contrasting descriptive and referential functions. Candidates' linguistic knowledge generated several other opportunities for comparison. Different candidates effectively explored comparisons between, for example: the structure of the two texts; their use of discourse markers; types of noun (more proper nouns in Text A, more abstract nouns in Text B); sentence types and lengths, etc. Other candidates used more interpretive criteria to make connections, such as analysing the only occasionally emotive language of Samuel Pepys and comparing this more explicitly emotional content with the stiff-upper-lip restraint of Captain Scott. As in previous series, credit was given to any way of bringing the texts together such that they genuinely shed light on

each other. The above approaches were used successfully by candidates who explored and developed the connections through the analysis of meanings in each text. The same approaches were also used less successfully by candidates who didn't develop the connections through analysis.

- Knowledge and understanding of the texts; understanding of significance of contexts (AO3)

Candidates who explicitly weighed up the different, layered sense of audience in the minds of the writers were likely to show 'understanding of the significance and influence of contexts' (Levels 4–6). Many responses, for example, understood that Scott's account of the death of his companions was written in the hope that his diary would be found, and as such constituted both a justification of his leadership for a national audience and a message of comfort and reassurance to the families of the deceased. Fewer responses showed comparable insight into contextual factors for Text A: only a small number explored the extent to which Pepys was writing to create a permanent record of events both personal and private, and of wider public significance. The strongest responses to Pepys both analysed features of language that suggested he was writing for himself and features that suggested he was characterising himself in a certain way for some sort of future readership.

Some candidates followed similar lines of thought about the writers' sense of audience in ways that led to less convincing inferences – for example, asserting that Scott was writing only for himself, or that Pepys had in mind an audience of contemporary peers. Depending on the validity of other contextual inferences, these responses were likely to evidence 'some awareness' (Level 3) or 'some understanding of the significance of contexts' (Level 4).

Many candidates deployed biographical knowledge in ways that did not help them to address the assessment objectives. Often, for example, observations about the writers' extensive vocabularies were attributed to their educational achievement, in ways that took candidates away from rather than into the texts. Broad connections between Pepys' long sentences and his successful career, or between Scott's low-frequency lexis and his high rank in the Navy, were likely to be characteristic of 'some awareness of the significance of contexts' (Level 3), or possibly of 'limited awareness' (Level 2).

There were also many candidates for whom some factual knowledge of Pepys' life and times helped them towards tenuous or partial readings of Text A. A number of candidates' central response to Pepys' diary was a conflict-based account of 17th century social class. Some argued that Pepys' primary purpose was to show off how rich he was; others that he didn't care about the fire because he didn't care about the poor, that his getting up on 'one of the high places' enabled him to look down on the proletariat, or that his contempt for the working class was evident in his keenness to pull down their houses. Some developed the interpretation that Pepys was a sociopath who described people's suffering without doing anything to help. A number of candidates seemed preoccupied with extra-textual knowledge of Pepys' sexual infidelities, focusing disproportionately on his reference to 'pretty Mrs. —' in a way that seemed responsive neither to the majority of the given extract nor to the need to make connections with Text B. Some latched on to his role as an MP (not realising that he was elected to Parliament after the Great Fire) to suggest that the purpose of his diary was to take formal minutes from Parliamentary proceedings to share with his colleagues. In all these cases, it seemed that candidates would have benefit from an approach to AO3 that guides them to keep a tighter focus on the text, selecting aspects of contextual knowledge to shed light on salient meanings, rather than searching for textual content to support biographical nuggets.

- Concepts, methods and terminology (AO1); analysis of ways meanings are shaped (AO2)

Most candidates used a range of linguistic terms, and in most cases used them accurately. Some had little sense of purpose or selectivity in their use of terms, including some which used terms so profusely as to obscure rather than make meanings, particularly in relation to word class. A small number of

responses foregrounded their feature-spotting approach by including an accurate term in brackets after every quotation, without any attempt to make something of the feature identified; these tended to show very little analysis of ways meanings were shaped, and to be placed in the lower half of the mark scheme as a result.

It is the quality of the application of the concepts, rather than the quantity of terms used, which is described in the higher levels of the mark scheme. The most successful candidates were discriminating in their use of terms, adapting their choice of framework to suit the texts in front of them. For example, in addition to those mentioned above in relation to AO4, areas of language explored in higher-level responses included: frantic verb choices and present participles in Text A; Scott's tendency towards euphemism in Text B; a discussion of Scott's use of modal verbs; Pepys' use of compounding and listing; Scott's simple sentences and occasional ellipsis.

Some terminology, although valid, was deployed too little effect by most candidates who used it. The term 'archaic lexis', for example, demonstrates some study of language, but was usually not made relevant to the task; in practice, it enabled candidates to say little more than that one text is old and the other not so old. A number of candidates spent time discussing semantic fields, picking out words in Text A belonging to 'the semantic field of fire' and words in Text B belonging to 'the semantic field of cold', despite the neutrality of such lexical choices in one text about a fire and another about the South Pole. Particularly where candidates lacked their own interpretive vocabulary, the same term was used to similarly little effect to make other points, 'the semantic field of bravery is evident through the repeated adjective "brave"'. Despite its two accurate terms, this fragment is characteristic of a 'Limited attempt to apply relevant concepts' (Level 2) and 'Very little analysis of ways meanings are shaped' (Level 1).

Mid-level achievement in relation to AO1 was sometimes characterised by a more purposeful use of terminology which could nonetheless have benefited from greater selectivity. Personal pronouns, for example, were applied as a framework to the two texts with varying success. A large part of some responses consisted of discussion and analysis of how both texts used 'first-person perspective'. These and other candidates argued that first-person pronouns were used 'to make the diary more personal'; such an interpretation was usually considered less than competent, and as likely to correspond to Level 3 as Level 4 in the mark scheme. In higher-level responses, there was acknowledgement that pronoun reference was more significant in Text B than Text A, with only brief mentions of Pepys' use of the first-person and a greater focus on Scott's use of plural pronouns and the range of his terms of reference for his team.

Some lower- and mid-level responses were characterised by strained attempts to explore literary devices. In some responses, points made about the effect of alliterative plosives in 'poor pigeons' and 'blowing a blizzard' were not entirely convincing, particularly within a response that had little sense of the context and genre of the texts. Perhaps more tenuous were discussions of Scott's use of 'pathetic fallacy': in as much as there may be validity in the application of this concept to Scott's diary, it necessitates a conscious detachment from the context of production which tended not to be acknowledged by the candidates who used it (ie they seemed to regard the weather as something Scott had created rather than documented). In all these cases, the main issue seemed to be the candidates' uncertainty as to what they should say about the texts. The overriding impression was that, at this level, candidates need support to produce strong, framework-based and context-rich interpretations of each Anthology text.

## Section B overview

Section B offered candidates considerable scope to explore their creativity and to use language for emotive effects. The vast majority of candidates chose Question 2 over Question 3 or Question 4.

### Question 2

#### Either

2 Write a diary entry describing an experience of isolation.

[20]

Many candidates seemed drawn to the openness of this task, using it to produce a wide range of different sorts of diary.

In general, lower-level responses struggled to grasp the diary genre. Some candidates, perhaps influenced by Scott's implied address to those who would find his diary in Text B of Section A of the paper, wrote in a form closer to a letter than a diary, for example directly appealing to loved ones as if in an SOS. Others seemed to lack a sense of the complex range of functions of diary-writing, particularly that of recording events. A few candidates struggled to get away from their immediate context, producing amorphous writing about exam stress; in practice, these responses tended to lack creativity or control.

As has been the case with Section B questions in previous years, a degree of verisimilitude was central to achievement in relation to AO3. Many responses consisted entirely of the expression of heightened emotions, lacking any situation and action. One response explicitly stated 'I have no idea where I am or how I got here'; the same sentiment characterised many responses, in which overwritten prose felt categorically different from writing for self, and closer to a stream-of-consciousness approach to first-person narrative than a diary entry. Such responses tended to demonstrate 'Some awareness of the significance of contexts' (Level 3).

Candidates who were able to imagine a detailed, convincing context into which to project themselves tended to produce more authentic uses of genre, often integrating 'control and creativity' (AO5, Level 5) with 'clear understanding of the significance of contexts' (AO3, Level 5). These factors were present and high marks were credited in a wide range of different kinds of response, including the following themes and content: school bullying; depression; shipwreck survival, after Robinson Crusoe; abduction and imprisonment; a refugee in hiding from state persecution, after Anne Frank; a fresher failing to make friends at university.

### Question 3

Or

- 3 Write the introduction to a book of Antarctic photography. Your aim is to explain the continuing appeal of the region. [20]

This proved to be the least popular question. The influence of the 'Impressions' section of Scott's diary was prominent in responses, with some candidates combining figurative verb choices with crafted noun phrases and alliteration to sustain a poetic register that quickly accessed the higher levels of the mark scheme for AO5. Some were less convincing in relation to AO3, slipping into a register than felt more suited to a spoken than written mode, as if delivering a talk.

More successful responses included a number of different approaches, including some who wrote as if introducing their own photographs in an expensively produced coffee-table publication, and others who wrote with a more academic register, as if introducing someone else's photographs. Higher-level responses were characterised by a strong sense of the physical book, combining a crafted interactional voice with deictic references to the photographs so as to personalise the imagined work that followed and invite the reader to enjoy it.

### Question 4

Or

- 4 Write the opening section for a documentary that re-visits the events of a disaster such as a fire or accident. [20]

More candidates answered this than Question 3, though still considerably fewer than Question 2. Some very high ability responses were produced by candidates who seemed to be experienced viewers of television documentaries. A range of styles was evident in higher-level answers, from a fairly dense, referential voiceover for a specialist historical documentary, to the more populist overview-intro of contemporary BBC documentaries.

In all cases, higher-level responses were characterised by: a sense of the interplay between the scripted voice and imagined moving images, sometimes through deictic reference; the use of direct address to draw the viewer in, often with inclusive pronouns and interrogatives; a journalistic use of metaphor, introducing the programme to follow as a 'journey' of sorts; the creation of a problem to be resolved, and a tendency to sensationalise the solutions that would follow.

In contrast, lower-level responses had a more confused sense of genre. There was some conflation of documentary with live news report, in a way that produced neither one thing nor the other. As in the previous two series, a small number of responses consisted not of a text prepared in the written mode to be delivered in speech, but of the transcription of a series of imagined exchanges. Candidates need to understand the text type of scripted speech, written for oral delivery, so that they are able to recognise a Section B question asking for such a text.

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