

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/01 Autumn 2020 series

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

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.

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Paper 1 Overview

The J351/01 Communicating Information and Ideas component of GCSE English Language assesses candidates' ability to read and write non-fiction texts. The reading assessment tests candidates' critical evaluation and comparison of the ways two texts present a particular topic. The writing assessment tests candidates' ability to write in a specified form for a specified audience and purpose.

Candidates should respond to the questions in the order they are given. Each question is designed to prepare students for the next question so candidates would be well advised not to respond to the writing task until they have completed the reading section. Not only do the topics of both writing tasks draw on themes explored in the reading section but the close analysis in the reading section of how ideas are presented reminds candidates of approaches they can take in their own writing.

The short answer questions in Question 1 should help set the scene in task 1 for the candidates. The synthesis and selection task for Question 2 helps the candidates work out the similarities between the texts in preparation for Question 4 in which they explore comparisons further. Question 3 draws the candidates' attention to features of language and structure which the writers use to present their ideas. Candidates may reuse some material from their responses to earlier questions in their response to Question 4 because they are using it for a different purpose i.e., to critically evaluate the texts.


<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the reading tasks candidates supported their ideas with well-chosen evidence and explained the writer's purpose and the impact on the reader. In the writing task candidates explicitly addressed the audience and used paragraphs and punctuation within the sentence to communicate their ideas more clearly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the reading task candidates did not explain how the examples they quoted addressed the question by giving reasons for their interpretations of the text. In the writing task candidates did not show understanding of the generic conventions of different forms of writing or make effective use of sentence structure.

Section A: Reading – Overview

The reading section contains two unseen texts which have a thematic link. The first text will always be from the 19th century and the second from either the 20th or 21st century. As this qualification is not tiered, the texts may be slightly edited to make sure that they are both accessible for all candidates and challenging for the most able.

Candidates responded well to the texts chosen for November 2020, showing clear understanding of the main similarities between the two young narrators' experiences. The responses to the two writing tasks suggested that the ideas explored in the texts – the passionate pursuit of a favourite hobby and the restriction of freedom by parents – had caught the candidates' interest.

A significant number of candidates, however, quoted from the italicised introduction to the texts as evidence for their assertions. The introductions help to place the texts in context but should not be quoted from as they do not form part of the original texts.

	OCR support	<p>A teaching activity for this paper about comparing texts through themes can be found on the OCR website using the following link:</p> <p>OCR GCSE English Language - Planning and teaching - Teaching activities</p>
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Question 1

Question 1 is designed to be an accessible start to the examination. It should help all candidates, including the less able, to achieve some marks at the start of the examination. The question tests candidates' ability to select and interpret information.

Almost all candidates were able to respond to Question 1a successfully. They correctly identified that Harriet was required to sew, practise music and receive callers. However, it was not sufficient to state that she was required to sit down in the parlour without specifying the activities required as that was not the focus of the parents' expectation. Reading aloud was accepted even though it could be argued that this was permitted rather than expected.

Most candidates were also able to answer Question 1b correctly. The second two marks in this question raise the demand by requiring students to select and interpret information from the text. That can sometimes be done simply by selecting a relevant quotation but sometimes the evidence needs to be explained in the candidates' own words.


Some candidates only achieved one mark on this question, however, as they only gave one reason why Harriet found it hard to do what she wanted. The two marks available for the question made it clear that two reasons were required.

Question 2

Question 2 is more challenging than Question 1 but should be approached in a straightforward way. The question should help candidates to see the connections between what each of the texts are describing. It also sets the scene for Question 4 which requires candidates to explore further points of comparison between the two texts. In this question candidates should not comment on the methods writers use to

present their ideas as this will gain no credit. The expected similarities are listed in the mark scheme, but the list is not exhaustive. Examiners will reward any valid similarity identified by candidates.

Centres are to be commended for their careful preparation of candidates. Almost all candidates now understand that the best approach is to explain three similarities in their own words, providing evidence from each text as evidence for each similarity. Too often, however, candidates are quoting evidence to support a similarity without explanation. Unless the quotation provides obvious support, the best approach would be to explain the evidence in the candidates' own words.

	OCR support	A teaching guide about the reading skills required for this paper can be found on the OCR website using the following link: Reading Skills – Teacher Guide
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Question 3


The question asks candidates to explore how a writer has used language and structure to convey ideas about a theme. For this qualification structure includes any feature of a text beyond word level: at sentence level this could include alliteration, repetition, and listing; at text level this might include making contrasts within and between sentences and paragraphs as well as discussing the build-up to a climax. For more about how to write about language and structure, refer to the OCR support link below.

This question asks candidates to look at a specified number of lines. This should help candidates by giving them a smaller amount of material to focus on so that they can write a reasonable response within the time constraints of the examination. In this session, some candidates made reference to the last paragraph in their responses and it was decided to credit such responses as there were clear links between the last paragraph and what went before.

The candidates who performed best consistently linked their exploration of the text to the question of how Winterson was showing that books set her free. There was a good range of linguistic and structural features for candidates to write about including accessible features such as alliteration and repetition and more complex features such as metaphor.

At the lower levels of attainment some candidates simply explained what a quotation meant without identifying features of language and structure. Other candidates labelled some basic features but made no attempt to explain how they related to the question other than the assertion that the quotation showed how books set her free.

To move into Level 3 candidates must give a clear interpretation in their own words of what a detail or quotation from the text conveys. To develop their response into Level 4, candidates must explain how they worked out their interpretation of the detail or quotation. Moving beyond Level 4 required candidates to give a precise and accurate explanation of what Winterson intends to convey through particular choices of language and structure.

	OCR support	A teaching guide about writing about language and structure can be found on the OCR website using the following link: Language and Structure - Teacher Guide
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Question 4


The first three questions on this paper prepare candidates for this question. As the question is worth 18 marks, candidates should allocate 20-25 minutes to completing this question and should stop and think and plan carefully before they start writing. This question requires candidates to make independent judgements about the two unseen texts. This question builds on the work candidates have already done for Question 2. In this question, however, the candidates consider not only the similarities but also the differences between the texts.

The best approach to this question was a sustained comparison between the limits on free expression the narrators in each text experienced as a young person. Most candidates were able to explain how each text presented the limits placed on these young women by their families and a small number expressed some sympathy with the parents in Text 1, recognising that the text was written in a different context.

Better responses explored nuances by commenting on which text made life 'more' or 'less' difficult for the narrators. Words like 'more' or 'less' allow candidates to express some of the more subtle differences between the texts and access the higher marks for comparison in AO3. The mother in Text 2, for example, was seen as 'more' controlling than the parents in Text 1 who did not try to control what Harriet read.

Some candidates were able to access higher marks for critical evaluation by exploring some of the differences within each text. In Text 1, for example, it was clear that it was not the whole family that made life difficult as Harriet's brother James was supportive of Harriet's ambitions if slightly patronising. Only a few, however, commented on the way that it was Jeanette's mother who endowed words with power because she restricted her daughter's access to certain texts while encouraging her to read others.

More successful candidates would achieve an interwoven comparison by starting each paragraph by identifying a specific similarity or difference between the texts. Candidates would then illustrate the similarity or difference between the texts with detailed evidence from the text and conclude the paragraph by evaluating how beneficial this evidence made the relationship seem. Some took it further and compared specific examples of language used by each author; in Text 1, for example, Harriet was 'permitted' to read and in Text 2 Jeanette was 'allowed' to read some books.

	OCR support	<p>A teaching guide about writing about comparing and evaluating texts can be found on the OCR website using the following link:</p> <p>Comparing and Evaluating Texts – Teacher Guide</p>
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Section B: Writing - Overview

In this component there is a choice of writing tasks which can both broadly be described as non-fiction. Each task specifies a clear context for the writing and candidates are expected to adapt their style of writing to suit the form, audience and purpose of their chosen task.

The writing tasks are designed to build on what candidates have read in Section A of the examination. It is unwise to advise candidates to do the writing task first because candidates may be able to use what they have read to inspire the content and style of their writing.

It is pleasing to note that very few candidates are writing excessively long responses. Three pages is enough for candidates to demonstrate their skills. A shorter piece of writing also allows candidates to spend more time planning and crafting the quality of their writing. It is clear, however, that some candidates spent too long on the reading section and had too little time to write a full-length response to this task. It is difficult to reward excessively short responses because they cannot demonstrate enough structural development.

Examiners were pleased to see that most candidates spell most words correctly and can write coherent complex sentences. It would be good to see candidates using more ambitious vocabulary as long as they use it precisely and accurately. It was notable, however, that very few candidates were able to use accurate punctuation within sentences. Time spent teaching candidates how to use paragraphs to organise their ideas and to create effects would help the more able candidates to achieve the highest levels.

	OCR support	<p>A teaching guide about spelling, punctuation and grammar can be found on the OCR website using the following link:</p> <p>The little book of spelling, punctuation and grammar</p>
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Question 5

Candidates clearly enjoyed writing about how they prefer to spend their time. Most candidates were able to write at length about a hobby or interest but only a few were able to organise their ideas in a way that was clear and effective.

There were a significant number of candidates who fulfilled the purpose of the task by describing their interests clearly but made no effort to address an audience of young people. Some reference to the audience and an occasional use of a more colloquial register is a simple way of improving attainment.

To achieve higher levels candidates must also have a clear and consistent understanding that a talk is being given. References to fact that a talk is being given and to the context in which it is being given would make clear that the candidate understands the task.

Improving candidates' understanding of how to organise their ideas into paragraphs and whole texts would help them to improve their attainment. It would also be helpful to give candidates guidance about how to end a talk effectively as very few were able to do more than tell the audience they had finished.


Question 6

This task was equally popular and candidates were generally able to fulfil the purpose of the task. Most included elements of argument, persuasion and advice to varying degrees and all were rewarded by examiners.

The best responses maintained a clear focus on an audience of parents. Reference to the experience of parenting and the parents own younger days clearly established a rapport between the candidate and the reader.

Most candidates wrote as one parent giving advice to other parents or as a teenager sharing a younger person's perspective. Some candidates, however, lacked a firm control of their point of view and moved rather uncertainly between the two.

Although candidates should not lay the article out in columns or add pictures, the use of a heading and subheadings is a simple way to indicate awareness of form and was used effectively by some candidates to control the structure of their text.

	OCR support	A teaching guide about writing skills can be found on the OCR website using the following link: Writing Skills – Teacher Guide
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