

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/01 Summer 2022 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 1 series overview	4
Section A overview	5
Question 1 (a) and (b)	6
Question 2	7
Question 3	9
Question 4	11
Section B overview	13
Question 5	14
Question 6	15
Copyright information	15

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. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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Paper 1 series overview

J351/01 – Communicating Information and Ideas is one of two examined components for the GCSE English Language examination which was first examined in 2017. The other component is J351/02 – Exploring Effects and Impact. The main difference between the two components is that J351/01 bases its questions on non-fiction texts whereas J351/02 uses literary texts.

Both components follow a similar structure and test the same assessment objectives with one exception. The exception is that in Question 2 of J351/01 candidates must synthesise information from two texts. Candidates often forget this and treat Question 2 as a language analysis question. The skill of synthesis is part of AO1 and is not tested in J351/02. To do well in this component candidates must be able to read unseen texts with confidence and understanding, selecting relevant details from the texts and explaining features of language and structure. They must also be able to compare texts and evaluate their impact on the reader.

This is the first year since 2019 that this component has been tested in the summer series due to examinations being cancelled in 2020 and 2021. In both 2020 and 2021, however, the component was examined in the November series. Despite the gap it was clear that centres had prepared their candidates well. Most candidates understood what was required by each of the questions and were able to attempt them successfully. It was also much rarer in this session to find that candidates had not responded to questions. There were some problems, however, with the responses to Question 2 which did not state clearly enough the points of comparison being made. Please see the link to the OCR guide below for support.

Many examiners expressed concern about the quality of candidates' handwriting and it was sometimes very difficult to read what a candidate had written. Centres must make sure that candidates with poor handwriting can use a scribe to record their work or type their work out themselves. To support examiners, it is recommended that candidates use point 12 and double-space their responses. Centres must also use the JCQ sheet to indicate clearly what support candidates have had in the production of their responses as marks can only be given for what candidates have produced independently.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked over the whole paper before starting • responded to all the questions • allocated suitable time to each question • understood what each question required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not read texts carefully enough • spent too long on Question 1 and Question 2 • misunderstood what Question 2 requires • wrote illegibly.

OCR support



[GCSE English Language Teacher Guide - Reading Skills](#)

Section A 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 does not have foundation and higher tiers, the texts may be slightly edited to ensure accessibility for candidates as well as challenge.

Candidates are well-advised to spend the first part of the examination reading both texts and the whole exam paper. Reading the whole of Text 1 before responding to any questions, for example, will help candidates appreciate which details in Text 1 are significant and vice versa. Looking at Question 4 is also very helpful because that usually identifies the key issues that connect the two texts and may give the candidate a clue about a connection they can use in Question 2. The writing tasks in Section B may also be helpful as they both draw on themes raised by the two texts.

The texts used in the June 2022 examination series both described the challenges faced by children growing up in London. Each text described the difficulties the children faced both inside the home and outside the home and the different ways that, with different degrees of success, the children tried to escape these difficulties.

The first text was written by an outside observer, a member of a more privileged class, who observed the lives of poor children in 19th century London. The children's home lives were miserable and they had to work all day long to earn enough money to survive. The text describes how some people provided some relief for the children by building them a playground.

The second text was an autobiographical account of the writer's childhood. The writer explained how he sought refuge from the fights that broke out regularly on the streets of 1950s London by playing imaginary games in his bedroom. He could not escape completely, however, as his father forced him to learn how to box so that he could defend himself.

The key idea that connected the two texts was that the children in each had difficult childhoods. In the first text the children suffered poverty as well as violence whereas, in the second text, the writer's main difficulty was the violence that was prevalent in his neighbourhood. The children in both texts were able to escape these difficulties to some degree but their escapes were only ever temporary.

Candidates showed good understanding of both texts and were able, in their responses to Question 4, to engage successfully with the issues that were raised. They expressed sympathy for the difficult home lives of the children described so dramatically in Text 1 and noted the contrast with the vivid description of the beautiful playground constructed for them by 'wise and kind-hearted people'. They were equally sympathetic towards Johnson in Text 2 whose escape from the violence on the streets into the safety of his home was made less successful by his father's attempts to toughen him up.

There were some misunderstandings, however. Many candidates confused Lily and Linda and were unsure which was the mother or the sister, but this did not have a significant impact on their achievement. There were more significant misunderstandings: some thought that Johnson wanted to take up boxing so that he could defend himself on the streets; others thought that reference to fighting as 'common' meant that it was a regular occurrence even though the word was clearly contrasted with the idea of 'gentility' and 'a more refined life'.

Question 1 (a) and (b)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Walks in and around London* by Uncle Jonathan.

1 (a) Look again at lines 5–13.

Give **two** things which make the poor children's houses less comfortable than the rich children's houses.

.....
..... [2]

(b) Look again at lines 9–13.

Explain **two** ways in which the family life of the poor children is also less happy.

.....
..... [2]

Question 1 is a gentle introduction to the exam paper which tests candidates' ability select information from a text and make inferences. Some candidates sometimes find this question difficult because they try to do more than the question requires.

The question is always worth 4 marks and is usually divided into several parts. Here the question is divided into 1 (a) and 1 (b) and each part is worth 2 marks. The way the marks are divided between different parts of the questions will vary from year to year. Candidates can gain the first 2 marks for Question 1 (a) on the June 2022 paper by identifying two relevant words or short phrases and copying them into the space provided. They do not need to provide any explanation or comment.

Some candidates wasted time by writing extended responses which included relevant quotations embedded in full sentences. They gained the marks but likely lost valuable time. Other candidates gained no marks for Question 1 (a) because they explained in their own words. They misunderstood what the question requires them to do and did not use any quotations.

Explanation in your own words is, however, the right approach for the second question. The command word, 'explain' is used to make clear that the response should be in the candidate's own words. For example, the candidate could simply write that the children in the text suffered verbal and physical abuse and would not need to provide supporting quotation to gain 2 marks.

Exemplar 1

In both texts there are children who have idyllic parents. In T1 children "are more used to kicks than kisses" and in T2 Johnson sees his father "as a foe rather than as a friend" and his mother "was used to taking his punches".

In both texts children happily play outside. In T1 there is "expressions' movement" in the playground and in T2 ~~Lucas~~ Lucas is his "effeminate sister, who was usually to be found outdoors" playing.

This candidate explains two links clearly which shows an ability to synthesise effectively. Evidence from each text is drawn on and offers clear support for the link that is being made between the texts.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *This Boy* by Alan Johnson.

3 Look again at lines 10–28.

Explore how Alan Johnson uses language and structure to describe attitudes to violence when he was growing up.

Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

In Question 3 candidates move on to do some more focused work on language and structure. To enable them to make good use of time and to focus their attention, the question will always ask the candidates to write about specified lines in one section of the text. It was pleasing to see far fewer candidates than in previous sessions made the mistake of using material from outside the specified lines.

More successful responses saw candidates read the question carefully and write not just about 'violence' but about 'attitudes to violence'. The work candidates did on how the writer used language and structure to represent violence was rewarded but not as highly as work which explored attitudes to violence. There was much material about attitudes for candidates to respond to in Text 2: the mother's 'mission' to keep Johnson off the streets so that he would be less 'common' is in clear contrast to the father who saw boxing practice as 'necessary' to 'toughen' Johnson up.

It is helpful for candidates who are aiming for higher grades to start their response with an overview of the ideas they intend to explore, for example which attitudes to violence they will be discussing. To avoid a random collection of quotations and to show some awareness of structure, it is also helpful for candidates to follow the development of the text by writing about how the extract from the text begins, what happens in the middle, and how it ends. Where possible, sections of text are chosen by the author of the paper which contain some elements of development and contrast that candidates can write about.

Less successful responses in this session tended to retell the passage in the candidates' own words with a few random quotations scattered here and there and no reference to features of language and structure. Others applied linguistic and structural labels fairly accurately to quotations but made no clear comment on the significance of the writer's use of these techniques. Too many candidates applied subject terminology randomly with no apparent understanding of the difference, for example, between adjectives and adverbs.

A few candidates used more unusual subject terminology which was rarely applied accurately and almost never cast any light on the effect on the reader of using the technique. For AO2, candidates need to be able to comment on effects. The favoured term in this session was 'parataxis' and its more sophisticated cousin 'hypotaxis', neither of which proved helpful to candidates. It is good for candidates to be ambitious, but centres would be better advised to make sure that basic terms are more thoroughly understood before introducing more unusual terminology.

Exemplar 2

This extract both starts and ends with Johnson admitting he [never] felt safe on those streets' and as such 'was largely compliant with [his mother]'. The fact that this remains a theme throughout emphasises how opposed Johnson was to being involved in street violence. 'The threat of violence' is personified in the metaphor: 'bubbled perpetually beneath the surface! This metaphor becomes extended when later described as 'erupting] frequently'. This lexical field of volcanoes fully emphasises the danger in these fights. The fact that it is 'beneath the surface' denotes a sense that ~~it~~ it is always in the back of people's (especially mothers') ...minds. The writer assigns an ominous nature to these kinds of fights, that may strike at any moment.

This candidate starts by showing an overview of the structure of the text by linking quotations from the beginning and end of the extract. The effect of this is concisely explained as showing 'how opposed Johnson was to being involved in street violence'. The candidate then correctly identifies the reference to the way violence 'bubbled perpetually beneath the surface' as a metaphor (not personification – an error this candidate was not alone in making). The comment that this emphasises the danger is clear but could be developed by explaining how the extended imagery of volcanoes conveys the danger. The comments about 'beneath the surface' could be enhanced by labelling the phrase as an adverbial but do show perceptive insight into what this conveys to the reader – 'it is always in the back of people's minds'.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Walks in and around London* by Uncle Jonathan, and **Text 2**, *This Boy* by Alan Johnson.

4 'Both texts describe how poor children were able to escape the misery of their lives.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss what the texts show us about the lives of poor children
- explain how far you agree that poor children were able to escape from misery
- compare the ways the texts present attempts to escape.

Support your response with quotations from **both** texts.

[18]

In Question 4, the highest tariff reading question, candidates will draw on the connections made in Question 2 and the analysis of language and structure they have done in Question 3 to inform their response. Even Question 1 is designed to point them towards information they may want to include. Question 4 is always framed in terms of a debate in which candidates are invited to consider how far they agree that a statement about the texts applies equally to both. The statement is designed to apply more to one text and less to the other but examiners are instructed to be open-minded about which way a candidate might decide to take their argument.

Candidates are advised to read the statement carefully because they are designed to have several elements to unpick. In this year's session candidates could gain some reward by considering how the misery of the children in each text was presented and which perhaps was worse. They are likely to attain a higher mark, however, if they go on to consider the degree to which the children in each text actually escape the misery of their lives. It could be argued, for example, that Johnson does not really escape from the misery of his life because he is threatened with violence not just on the streets but also in his home when he is forced to box with Steve.

The question tests the skill of critical evaluation. Evaluation is the weighing up of arguments referred to in the previous paragraph and should lead to judgements expressed in clear terms by using words such as adjectives, abstract nouns, and comparative adjectives. Judgements can also be expressed with a basic 'is' or 'is not' statement of opinion or a more nuanced 'is more' or 'is less' statement. In these texts, for example, it could be argued that the children in Text 1 have a more miserable life because of their poverty and their experience of domestic abuse but that they also have a more successful escape from their misery because their time in the park is so full of 'uproarious merriment'.

The critical element of critical evaluation refers to comments about how the writers have presented their ideas. Presentation is much broader than the analysis of language and structure and includes features such as the perspective from which the subject of the text is given, as well as the choice of which information to deploy when. More successful candidates were able to achieve Level 4 in the mark scheme by making some reference to the writers' presentation of their ideas and higher levels when they explored more thoroughly the impact of different forms of presentation.

This question also tests the ability to make comparisons not only of content but also of presentation. Some candidates wrote about both texts without making any explicit comparisons between them but most candidates were able to make some form of comparison. The most straightforward comparisons referred to straightforward similarities between the texts such as the presence of violence and the care offered by others. More sophisticated comparisons discussed more abstract ideas such as the difference between the mental escape into 'imaginary worlds' in Text 2 and the physical escape offered by the playground in Text 1.

Exemplar 3

Text 1 ~~un~~ shows very clearly the joy and ~~enjo~~ enjoyment the poor children experience at the playground, escaping their misery. ^e ~~myriads~~ myriads of children from the courts and alleys around come to forget the hardness of their life in the beauty and merriment of the playground. 'Beauty and merriment' are very evocative nouns that contrast directly to violence mentioned earlier. ~~They~~ The children here can ~~escape~~ 'forget the hardness of their life', showing us that this is their form of escape from misery. Text 2, on the other hand, shows that violence itself was a ~~lot~~ short-term means of escaping their misery. 'Gangs of boys, keen to prove how tough they were, would attack if provoked.' By going down the road of violence, these poor boys can form a community and bond, shown by the word '~~gangs~~ gangs'. Violence was also an outlet for the poor boys to escape their misery and show their strength. Thus, both texts show some form of escape from misery, but again Text 1 has a much more distinct and clear representation of that escape via the playground, whereas Text 2 has a more unanced ~~and~~ ~~center~~ focus for escapism in violence.

This candidate shows evidence of an informed critical evaluation by immediately identifying two nouns as key to showing how the children escaped their misery and neatly contrasts it to the earlier description of the misery. Evaluations often take the form of an abstract noun as in the word 'enjoyment' here. The candidate makes an evaluation of how the violence forms a bond between the boys on the street and explains clearly how the writer chooses particular words to convey this bond. Having explored each text in detail the candidate ends the paragraph successfully by revisiting each text and reiterating the difference between them using the quantifier 'more' as a useful tool for evaluation.

Section B 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. Both writing tasks in this session were accessible and challenging and both were taken up by candidates at all levels of attainment.

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.

In this year's examination, for example, writing about games that might cause parents some concern in Question 5 drew on the sense of threat Johnson felt about the 'rough and tumble' of gangs of boys on the streets of London and the children in the playground 'jostling one another in their uproarious merriment'. Question 6, on the other hand, drew on the construction in Text 1 by 'wise and kind-hearted people' of a playground for the poor children.

There are still too many candidates writing excessively long responses to the writing task. As a guide, 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.

Examiners were pleased to see that candidates spell most words correctly and can write coherent complex sentences. Centres should, however, teach candidates how to use accurate punctuation between and within sentences and how to use paragraphs to organise their ideas with clear discourse markers to show the relationship between their paragraphs.

If work has been type-written, candidates should double-space the work for clarity and the front sheet must confirm that spelling and grammar checks were disabled. If work has been scribed, the front sheet should specify whether spelling and/or punctuation has been dictated.

Question 5

5* Write a newspaper article for parents to express concern about a childhood game.

In your article you should:

- describe in detail the kind of game played
- explain what parents could do about their concerns
- explain the results of this game going wrong.

[40]

Candidates engaged confidently with Question 5, often drawing on their own experience to write informative and entertaining pieces full of a mature wisdom beyond what some might expect of a teenager.

The range of games about which parents might be concerned in responses to Question 5 were vast. They ranged from playground games such as Tag and Bulldog to computer games such as Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty. Some candidates even detected dangers in seemingly innocent games like Snakes and Ladders. Many candidates adopted an entertaining and humorous tone which examiners very much enjoyed reading and marking.

Although this was clearly more of an opinion piece, some candidates treated the task as an article about a specific game that had gone wrong. This was treated as a valid response and the marks they were given were not affected.

Less successful responses tended to describe the game with little sense of either the newspaper article format or the audience of parents which was specified by the question. They used everyday language with little attempt to use vocabulary or sentence structure for effect.

It was good to see some improvement in the use of paragraphs. In this task some candidates found it helpful to use sub-headings to organise their response and this often gave their work greater coherence. It often led, however, to a reduction in the use of discourse markers which are a useful way of meeting the 'controlled structure' criteria in Level 5 of the mark scheme.

More successful responses included some simple elements of the newspaper article format such as a headline and a subheading. Candidates also addressed the audience consistently throughout the text and showed awareness of the concerns a parent might have. It may be helpful for candidates to think about checking in with the audience at the beginning, middle and end of their piece of writing.

Question 6

6* Write a letter to the local council to persuade them to provide better outdoor facilities for young people.

In your letter you should:

- explain why better outdoor facilities for young people are needed
- describe what kind of outdoor facilities you would like the council to provide
- explain how this kind of outdoor facility would benefit young people.

[40]

Question 6 was slightly more popular with candidates. The straightforward letter format helped many lower attaining candidates to achieve the 'clear overall structure' required by Level 3. Almost all candidates began with a clear salutation – to 'the council' or the made-up name of a council member - and ended with an appropriate valediction. It was noted, however, that a significant number of candidates have not yet mastered the spelling of 'sincerely'.

Candidates were all able to make sensible suggestions for the kind of improvements to local facilities that would benefit young people's mental and physical health. Less successful responses did sometimes become simple lists – and sometimes quite extensive lists - of the facilities that could be built with no sense of the limitations that the town council might face. They also sometimes adopted an inappropriate tone, sometimes insulting and sometimes unpleasant and aggressive.

More successful responses often placed the improvement of facilities in the context of its wider benefits for the community as a whole and the council in particular. They showed an awareness of the concerns of the council – whether that be for their re-election at the next ballot, or a more altruistic desire for the greater harmony in the community that proper care for the needs of disaffected teenagers would bring.

There were some very vivid descriptions of the run-down state of existing playground equipment and enthusiastic evocations of the idyllic conditions of the renovations the candidates were proposing. These descriptions were often inspired by – and sometimes heavily dependent on – the descriptions by Uncle Jonathan in Text 1 of the playground before and after its restoration. For this reason, centres would be well-advised to advise their candidates to respond to the reading section before writing their response to Section B.

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