OCR

Oxford Cambridge and RSA

GCSE

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/01 Summer 2024 series

Contents

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.

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Paper 1 Series Overview

Centres should be congratulated on their careful preparation of their candidates for this examination. It is clear that advice from previous exam reports has been taken into account and that most candidates have a clear understanding of what each task required them to do.

There were noticeable improvements in approaches to Questions 4 and 5. In Question 4 candidates made much more use of the 'more or less' formula to frame their evaluation of how far each writer successfully overcame the challenges that they faced. In Question 5 candidates more effectively adopted features of a speech such as deictic references to the context of their speech and the establishment of the persona who is making the speech.

There were fewer candidates who omitted responses but there are still too many candidates who write too little in response to a question to be given credit. Others, however, write too much and centres would be well-advised to train their candidates in the art of planning to avoid unnecessary repetition, and the art of concision to avoid excessive length.

There are still a number of candidates whose writing is illegible. It would be helpful for centres to arrange for these candidates to word-process their work so that what they have written can be both read and rewarded. Candidates who word-process their work should double-space it so that it can be more easily read, and so that annotations can be added effectively.

It is clear that candidates approached this paper confidently and found the texts and task engaging and accessible. Their responses to the texts were often perceptive and sophisticated, showing appreciation that each text could be interpreted in different ways. The maturity of most candidates' ideas in the two writing tasks were also impressive and some responses were truly remarkable considering that they were written in exam conditions within such a limited time frame. In general, candidates can be justly proud of their approach and their achievement.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• read the tasks and texts carefully	• misinterpreted the task
• chose suitable evidence to support their ideas	• did not explain the relevance of their evidence
• used subject terminology accurately	• used subject terminology inaccurately
• explained the impact on the reader	• did not explain the significance of the evidence
• considered alternative interpretations	• retold the text without comment
• planned their response to the written task	• wrote repetitive responses that were too long
• adapted their response to their audience	• misjudged the audience
• organised their response effectively	• did not use paragraphs to organise their work.
• used accurate punctuation.	• did not demarcate sentences accurately.

Question 1 (a), (b) and (c)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Autobiography* by Joseph Carey Merrick.

1   Look at lines 1–10.

(a)   Give **one** phrase that shows that Joseph Carey Merrick was like other children when he was younger.

.... **[1]**

(b)   Give **one** phrase that explains what Joseph Carey Merrick's greatest misfortune was.

.... **[1]**

(c)   Explain **two** reasons why Joseph Carey Merrick's stepmother made his life a misery.

1 ....

....

2 ....

.... **[2]**

These questions are designed to lead into some of the main ideas of the first text. The fact that Merrick was able to go to school like other children set the scene for Question 4 as it suggested that his life experience was different from Christy Brown's. The material required for 1 (b) and 1 (c) also suggested similarities and differences between the two writers. Noting the 'death of his mother' as the response to Queston 1 (b) makes clear that Merrick's mother was as important to him and Christy Brown's was to him.

The ways in which Merrick's stepmother made his life a misery provided a contrast to the support that Christy Brown received from his family. The majority of candidates answered these questions successfully but some did refer to material outside the specified lines, such as the way that his stepmother 'taunted' him, which could not be rewarded.

Question 2

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *Autobiography* by Joseph Carey Merrick and **Text 2**, *My Left Foot* by Christy Brown.

2   Both writers describe their early life.

   What are the similarities between the writers and their lives?

   Draw on evidence from **both** texts to support your answer.

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

   .... **[6]**

In response to this question candidates are required to show a secure ability to synthesise ideas and evidence from the two texts. A helpful framework has been suggested in previous exam reports: candidate should write three paragraphs, each starting with a clear explanation of one idea that connects the two extracts. This explanation should focus on just one idea. Some candidates made life more difficult for themselves by merging two ideas into their opening statement, e.g. 'both writers had disabilities which made their lives difficult'. Having disabilities and difficult lives could be treated as separate ideas and form the basis of two paragraphs rather than just one.

Most candidates offered similarities that could be found in the mark scheme but examiners did reward other similarities too. The explanation of the idea that links the two texts should be supported by specific evidence from each text. This may take the form of a quotation with an explanation but is often far better presented as an explanation with a key word of phrase embedded within the explanation.

Candidates sometimes used material from the introduction in the box above the extract as evidence to support their point. This was not rewarded as it was not from the text itself. Quotations without explanations were sometimes offered in response to this question but could not always be rewarded as the quotations' relevance was not always clear. Similarities based on language – such as that they are both written in the first person – are not relevant as the question is not about the texts but about the writers' lives.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *My Left Foot* by Christy Brown.

3   Look at lines 17–33.

Explore how Christy Brown uses language and structure to describe the moment he began to write.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.   **[12]**

It was pleasing to see how well-prepared candidates were for this question. There were more examples than in previous sessions of a sophisticated appreciation of the writer's use of language and structure to achieve effects and influence the reader. There were also far fewer examples of candidates referring to sections of the text which were not in the specified lines.

Candidates responded well to the text and clearly empathised with the joy that Brown felt when he finally managed to write a recognisable letter A. Most were also able to show some awareness or understanding of fact that the text builds up to the moment when he wrote the letter, and how Christy Brown's feelings changed during the course of the extract.

Lower attaining candidates in Level 2 tended to narrate what happened in the extract with some vague reference to emotive language. Some candidates quoted the reference to Christy Brown's mother having 'tears on her cheeks', which is a reference that is more appropriate for Question 4 or Question 2 as the choice of language is not significant. They could improve their attainment simply by identifying significant words from the extract and explaining why they think the writer chose those words rather than another word. The words 'frozen' and 'immobile', for example, from line 18, have a similar meaning but the word 'frozen' provides more opportunity for interesting comment.

Where longer quotations are used to put a key word in context, it is important to identify which word within the longer quotation is being referred to, e.g. in the quotation 'a wild, jerking stab which produced a very crooked line', which words are adjectives and what does each one convey. The word 'wild' might refer to Christy Brown's emotional state whereas the word 'crooked' describes the inadequacy of what he wrote. Some useful work could be done to help candidates differentiate adjectives from adverbs, and dashes from hyphens.

Candidates could also improve by using terminology more precisely. Many were able to select significant words and phrases but did not always describe them accurately. There were perceptive comments about the auditory imagery used to describe the sounds in the kitchen as Christy Brown prepared to try again but few identified specific words as examples of onomatopoeia.

It was also pleasing that many candidates were able to make meaningful comments about the use of sentence structure. There were several significant uses of short declarative sentences such as 'I couldn't' when Christy first tries to write the letter, and 'I did' when he tries one last time. Candidates often made the link between these various uses of shorter sentences and their cumulative effect. They were less successful, however, when discussing the length and variety of paragraphs which were not perhaps as significant as many candidates thought.

Exemplar 1

At the start of the extract, Brown describes the moment he began to write as eagerly anticipated by his peers. He describes them as 'excited faces that were ... frozen immobile, eager'. The tricolon of 'frozen, immobile, eager' communicates just how much they want this to happen as the juxtaposition of 'immobile' and 'eager' implies the conflict of excited emotions they are feeling which clearly demonstrates how eagerly anticipated him beginning to write is. Brown also uses the aural imagery to emphasise the anticipation for this moment because he 'could hear the water-tap dripping...., the clock ticking...., and the soft hiss and crackle of the logs'. This aural imagery emphasises how anticipated this moment is because it implies that everyone around him is so quiet because they're so keen to watch it happen that he can hear 'water-dripping' and 'clock ticking'. As well as this, another use of a tricolon further emphasises the intensity of this situation and how much they are anticipating it.

This response to Question 3 is thorough and effective. It shows clearly how language and structure are integrated by taking two tricolons from the extract and examining individual words within the tricolon. The candidate could improve by identifying 'frozen' and 'immobile' as adjectives and 'dripping' and 'ticking' as onomatopoeia. In each case the candidate goes on to explain clearly the significance of each example and what they convey to the reader.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Autobiography* by Joseph Carey Merrick and **Text 2**, *My Left Foot* by Christy Brown.

4 'Both texts show how the writers successfully overcame the challenges they faced.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

*   discuss what we learn about the challenges each writer faced
*   explain how far you agree that the writers overcame their challenges successfully
*   compare the ways the texts present the writers overcoming challenges.

Support your response with quotations from **Text 1** and **Text 2**.　　　　　　**[18]**

Question 4 is at the heart of this exam paper. That is why candidates are advised that, before they answer any questions, they should read not only both texts but the whole question paper as well. Question 1 outlines some of the challenges that Merrick faced, and Question 2 focuses candidates' attention on similarities between the two texts. Question 3 is about the way in which Brown overcame his challenge and the degree to which he was successful. The writing questions are also helpful: Question 5 asks candidates to consider what we mean by 'success,' and Question 6 draws on the ways in which Merrick was judged on his appearance.

Candidates responded well to this question. Many showed great empathy and understanding for the writers' situations and were able to make thoughtful evaluations of the how successful each of them were. Some thought that Merrick was the more successful because he overcame without a supportive family and found a way of earning an independent living. More nuanced responses did, however, question the kind of success he had achieved: had he successfully used his disability to his advantage or was he demeaning himself by appearing as an exhibit in a 'freak show'?

Other candidates regarded Brown as more successful. Although his family was much more supportive than Merrick's, his disability was much more severe and his exclusion from society much starker. Merrick may not have been able to run but he could walk, and, unlike Brown, he had had some form of education at school until he was 11 or 12 years old. It was pointed out by some that Brown's journey from scrawling a single 'wobbly' letter A to writing a complete autobiography was a more successful journey than ending up displaying your disabilities to a paying public.

More successful responses began with a clear statement of the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement and a brief explanation of why. This stance was then illustrated by a series of paragraphs which compared significant details from each of the texts. Better candidates looked at both similarities and differences, and the best candidates showed how similarities were not as similar as they might seem. Brown and Merrick both has support but the support given by Brown's family was more emotional and the support given to Merrick by Ellis and Torr was more practical but, as some pointed out, perhaps less altruistic as they stood to make a profit from the help they gave.

A critical evaluation of the writers' methods was characteristic of the highest-level responses and included not just language and structure but any choice that the writers made. Good answers included some of the following: the development of significant details such as the tears on Brown's mother's face and the soundscape in the kitchen; the less dramatic tone of Merrick's piece compared to the joy and despair expressed by Brown; the recount of Merrick's journey from youth to adulthood compared to the intense focus on one key moment in Brown's account.

Section B overview

Candidates have a choice of writing tasks in Section B. The key to both tasks is an understanding of the situation in which the text is being produced and received. Once this is understood, candidates should be able to adapt their style and content to suit a specific form, audience and purpose. It is pleasing to note that more candidates in this session did this successfully than in previous sessions.

There has been some improvement in the structure of candidates' responses. Evidence of planning, however, is still limited and this leads too many candidates to write responses that are too long and too repetitive. The best responses were well-planned and concise, and followed a clear line of argument supported by clear discourse markers between each paragraph.

Too many candidates do not use paragraphs. These candidates sometimes present a single block of text without any breaks, or a text divided into subsections that are not coherent or cohesive. The use of structure is a significant component of the AO5 mark and well-written responses are often given a mark in the lower end of a level because of a lack of control of the structure of the piece. The best responses have paragraphs that focus on one main idea and are introduced by a suitable discourse marker and a topic sentence.

Candidates' vocabulary is almost always appropriate and many use words that are precise, subtle and effective. Occasionally more able candidates try a little too hard and use ambitious words which do not mean what the candidate thinks they mean. Spelling is generally accurate and it is rare for a candidate to achieve below Level 2 for spelling.

The use of punctuation usually reflects the range of ability but it is good to see candidates at all levels of ability using dashes, quotation marks and 'full stop but' for effect. At all levels of ability, however, the use of commas is inconsistent; even higher-attaining candidates will use commas either to open or close a parenthetic comment but not at both ends. Centres would be well-advised to spend some time working with their candidates on how to use commas to control more complex sentences.

Much use was made of rhetorical devices, which were mostly effective. Some drew on the linguistic and structural features used in the two reading texts to enhance the style of their response. That is why it is always wise to answer the reading questions first as the reading material should give the candidates ideas about what to write about and how to present it.

Many candidates used anecdotes to draw on their own personal – or imagined – experiences, which can be helpful. Sometimes, however, candidates developed these anecdotes in too much detail, which created an imbalanced response with too little focus on the audience and purpose of the talk. A brief account of their experience with a few vivid details would be more effective.

OCR support

> (i)   Please consult the Teaching Guide to Writing Skills on Teach Cambridge

Question 5*

5* Write the words of a speech to advise young people how to achieve success.

You should:

- describe what makes it hard for young people to achieve success
- advise young people how they can achieve success
- explain how young people will realise they have succeeded. **[40]**

Candidates found this an enjoyable and accessible task and many gave wise and sensible advice to their young audience. It was more popular than Question 6, perhaps because the candidates themselves had had similar motivational talks during their own school experience. It was good to see that candidates had taken note of advice from previous exam reports. There were clear attempts at the start of most responses to establish the context of the talk with specific references to times, places and dates. Occasionally candidates included specific references to members of the audience and imagined interactions with them. This was generally acceptable but more subtle forms of synthetic personalisation may be more effective. Candidates often took the time to establish their own persona – often an ex-student from the same school, a tech company CEO or a famous sportsperson – and made specific references to the audience's own life experiences. The responses often used a lexical field that drew on the contexts of family life and school which firmly established the audience for the speech.

Question 6*

6* Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper to argue that people should not be judged on their appearance.

You should:

- describe how people are judged on their appearance
- explain why people are judged on their appearance
- argue why people should not be judged on their appearance. **[40]**

Although this task was slightly less popular than the first writing task, it was approached with equal engagement and effectiveness. Most candidates were sensitive to issues around the judgement of people based on their appearance and appealed persuasively for a greater understanding of those who are different from a perceived 'norm' in some way. Occasionally candidates adopted a tone that was too aggressive rather than persuasive, sometimes condemning the newspaper editor on vitriolic terms. Not all candidates understood the audience and made too little adaptation of their content to reflect the responsibilities of a newspaper editor. Others, however, made reference to an offending article or advert in the newspaper or commented on the influence an editor could have by more careful choice of material on their publication. The letter format was generally used effectively. Some candidates, however, were perhaps confused by the reference to a newspaper and wrote an article instead, complete with headings and sub-headings. They could still achieve well for fulfilling the purpose of the task but would be given a mark in the lower end of a level because they had written in an inappropriate form.

Exemplar 2

Dear Mr Monroe,

I would like to commence by sharing with you how much I love, and have loved, reading your phenomenal weekly publication over the past few years. Your masterly supervision over the town's favourite newspaper is incredible. And, I wish for it to continue to be incredible, ~~but~~ however recently I have been made aware of a certain controversial article included in last week's paper. I assume that you, as a reasonable man, can agree when I say that nobody should be judged solely on their physical appearance and be subject to untrustworthy, hate-filled stereotypes. Unfortunately, your newspaper has perpetrated these harmful stereotypes in last week's article about travel abroad. I believe one of your writers was recounting their recent trip to India, and wrote that they, now supposedly omniscient about Indian culture, claimed that all the locals were either "gullible beggars" or "dirty, shorter versions of British people". I sincerely hope I don't have to explain to you why this is an issue. No community of people should be ~~victims~~ of this kind of explicit racial discrimination. I have been implored to ask you to rectify this situation immediately, and sack the ignorant person who wrote this article — whether they meant it as an unamusing joke or not.

This response to Question 6 adopts a polite and respectful tone but makes its points forcefully. The context is clearly established by reference to an offending article in the newspaper and understanding of the editor's situation is shown by reference to his ability to sack the offending journalist. It would be helpful for the writer to establish their own persona more clearly at the start of the letter. The candidate could make use of paragraphs to make the stages of his argument clearer and there are some lapses of punctuation and some awkward sentence structures which could be easily improved.

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