

**GCSE**

**Examiners' report**

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**J351**

For first teaching in 2015

**J351/01 November 2024 series**

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction .....                     | 3  |
| Paper 1 series overview .....          | 4  |
| Section A overview .....               | 5  |
| Question 1 (a), (b), (c) and (d) ..... | 5  |
| Question 2 .....                       | 6  |
| Question 3 .....                       | 7  |
| Question 4 .....                       | 9  |
| Section B overview .....               | 11 |
| Question 5* .....                      | 11 |
| Question 6* .....                      | 12 |
| Copyright information .....            | 13 |

## 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, highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses are 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.

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## Paper 1 series overview

Centres are to be congratulated on their careful preparation of candidates for the November 2024 series of examinations. Almost all candidates clearly understand what each task on the paper requires and the most effective ways to organise their response to them. This means that candidates have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment in this examination.

It is pleasing to see how hard candidates are working to answer each question. There were fewer candidates in this session who did not attempt every question and almost all candidates' responses were of a reasonable length. There were no excessively long responses and very few additional answer booklets were used.

The generous allowance of pages on the question paper should mean that no candidate needs to use additional booklets. The number of pages allocated to each question – and the number of lines allocated to each part of Question 1 – are an indication of how much we expect candidates to write.

The number of word-processed responses continues to increase. This is a valid option, and centres should make use of this option, especially when candidates' handwriting is hard to read. There were several candidates in this session to whom it was difficult to award marks because their responses were illegible. Centres are reminded that candidates who use a word-processor should double-space their work.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally:   | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>made sure that they understood the two texts</li><li>read the questions carefully</li><li>matched time spent on questions to marks</li><li>selected material from the specified lines</li><li>used precise subject terminology</li><li>wrote legibly</li><li>corrected spelling, punctuation, and grammar.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>misunderstood key ideas from the texts</li><li>misunderstood the question</li><li>made no response to some questions</li><li>used irrelevant material</li><li>used vague subject terminology</li><li>wrote illegibly</li><li>made basic technical errors in writing.</li></ul> |

## Section A overview

The main points of the two unseen texts in this section were understood by the candidates. There was no evidence of significant misunderstanding of the texts and most candidates were engaged by the two women's generally sympathetic approach to helping their patients. The texts prepared the candidates well for the writing section by raising issues about what makes a job worth doing and about how the elderly are treated.

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

1 Look at lines 1–11.

(a) Give **one** phrase that describes the person who comes to see Mary Seacole.

..... [1]

(b) Give **one** phrase that explains why he has come to see Mary Seacole.

..... [1]

(c) Give the word that Mary Seacole uses to describe what the rain felt like for the inmates.

..... [1]

(d) Explain what this word suggests about the rain.

..... [1]

This question is designed to be an accessible start to the candidates' journey through the paper. Almost all candidates answered Questions 1 (a) and (b) correctly. Some candidates, however, were unable to identify the word 'searched' as the correct response to Question 1 (c) and were, therefore, unable to answer Question 1 (d) correctly as well.

## Question 2

## 2 Both writers describe how they helped other people.

What are the similarities between the people that they helped?

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

[6]

[6]

This question was responded to more effectively than usual in this session. Centres clearly understand that candidates could write about three similarities in three paragraphs. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence and contain evidence from each text that exemplifies that similarity.

Although this question does demand slightly more of candidates than Question 1, it is a low tariff question and can be answered effectively with straightforward points, e.g. that the people they helped were ill, or that they lived in inadequate conditions.

Most candidates were able to offer a response that reflected their level of attainment. Some, however, had not read the question carefully and wrote about similarities between the two nurses rather than similarities between their patients.

In previous sessions, there have been candidates who have misunderstood this question and treated it as a question about language and structure. There were fewer examples of that in this session and almost all candidates understood that they had to find similarities between what the two writers were telling the reader about the people that the writers helped.

## Question 3

3 Look at lines 10–31.

Explore how Christie Watson uses language and structure to present Betty.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

There was some overlap between this question and Question 2 but there was no evidence that this helped or hindered the candidates. Question 2 was about what the writers were telling us about the people they helped whereas this question is about how the writer describes one of the people who was helped.

There was, as in previous sessions, some confusion about names from some candidates who thought Betty was the nurse rather than the patient. Candidates are advised to read very carefully the introduction to the text which makes clear which character is which. The introduction has now been separated from the rest of the text by being placed in a box but is still important for candidates to read.

The extract in this session was slightly longer than it has been in previous sessions. This did not stop some candidates using material from the first nine lines which was not part of the section of text specified by the question. Such material is not rewarded by examiners and so is not a good use of the candidates' limited time.

Those who wrote about the correct section had a wide range of features to discuss. Better responses often concentrated on the connotations of words like 'nuisance' (line 10) and 'gentle' (line 13) by placing them in context, e.g. the fact that Watson picked up on Betty's use of 'nuisance'. And the fact that 'gentle' was an adjective that modified the noun squeeze.

It is important to note that this is a question about language and structure rather than other choices that the writer makes. Some candidates commented on the writer's use of dialogue in her conversation with Betty and how it revealed Betty's character. That is a helpful approach for Question 4 but, for Question 3, comments about the actual language and structure of what they say is the focus rather than the fact that the writer is using dialogue.

It was pleasing to see that many candidates addressed structure by discussing the writer's use of a flashback in which Betty recalled her wedding day. Only some of those who referred to this feature of structure were able to take it further and comment on the effect of the flashback, i.e. the contrast it drew between Betty's past life and her current situation.

### OCR support



Centres would find it useful to access the guides OCR has created about writing about language and structure. There is a Teaching Guide and a Student Guide available now on the Teach Cambridge website.

## Exemplar 1

Watson uses short declarative sentences, a shift in focus and a metaphor to present Betty. Firstly, the declarative sentences in her speech such as 'I don't want to be a nuisance' and 'You're so kind', ~~do~~ convey she is a grateful and ~~kind~~ modest to the reader. The noun choice of 'nuisance' ~~even~~ implying her humility and fear to not disturb ~~them~~ her helpers as she thinks she could bother them. To add the word choice of 'so' establishes her extreme gratefulness by emphasising how helpful they are to her when in reality not much has been done. Moreover, the shift in focus from the present to the past where Watson writes that Betty ~~recalled~~ her 'wedding dress' connotes her positive outlook on life where she can remember such a happy time like and compare it to her 'wedding' in a moment where she is suffering. This leads the reader to empathise with Betty and feel sorry for her as Watson presents her as a genuinely good person. Lastly, the metaphor of her 'wolff[ing] down' her sandwich ~~and effects~~ emphasises her hunger and therefore suffering. This causes the reader to empathise with her further as she would not complain before, reinforcing her as a humble and kind woman.

This candidate shows the 'perceptive understanding' required for Level 5 by commenting in detail on the connotations of words like 'nuisance' and 'so'. The effects of the shift from the present to Betty's memories of her wedding day is also explained clearly. The candidate explores the text in detail and maintains a balance between language and structure. The response could be improved, however, by more precise use of terminology.

## Question 4

4 'In both texts the writers help because they sympathise with their patients.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss what makes the writers sympathise with their patients
- explain how far you agree that the writers sympathise with their patients
- compare the ways the texts present the writers' sympathy for their patients.

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

[18]

Almost all candidates understood the focus of this question and were able to make some kind of response to the idea that the writers sympathised with their patients. Most attempted to differentiate the degree to which each writer sympathised with her patients: the majority felt that Watson was the more sympathetic, but Seacole had some candidates making the case for her instead.

Responses to this question have improved. Candidates now understand the importance of finding differences as well as similarities and using words like 'more or less' to describe the writer's attitudes to their patients. An increasing number of candidates are also attempting to make their comparisons more detailed by moving back and forth more regularly between the texts.

It is important that candidates focus on the critical element of their evaluation. To do this they should discuss the choices the writer has made about how they will present their material. For example, the use of dialogue does not fit into Question 3 but is a good example of the writer of Text 2 making choices about how she will present her interaction with Betty.

The best candidates will make comparisons between the ways each writer has presented their material. Some successful responses discussed the way that Watson presents her experience by focusing on one individual patient and giving her name and describing her background whereas Seacole was ministering to a range of anonymous individuals.

Less successful candidates tended to narrate sections of each text which showed the writer being sympathetic but made too little comment about it. Others made broad general statements about each writer with too little evidence from the text to support their point. Good responses must be rooted in a detailed discussion of the text.

## Exemplar 2

Both writers sympathise with their patients through the time spent with them. In 'Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands', Seacole writes how she "stayed until midnight" and describes how "the long night passed away". This describes how long Seacole chooses to help for even though the experience is unpleasant. Even though she does not like the experience she spends more time through her sympathy which is really powerful. On the other hand, in "In 'The Language of Kindness: A Nurse's Story'", Watson explains how she "can't stay for long" but stays "another minute". This is significantly less caring of Watson as opposed to Seacole but there are signs of sympathy through her choice to stay a little longer even though "there's too much to do." This could be to do with the fact that Watson may be in a more pressured environment as she works in a hospital but overall Seacole's decision to spend the entire night is a greater display of sympathy that should be appreciated.

This candidate provides a useful model of how to organise a response to Question 4. It begins with a clear topic sentence which explains that the candidate will compare the time each writer spends with their patients. Evidence is taken from each text and its significance explained with support from some embedded quotations. The candidate concludes the paragraph by weighing up the evidence and coming to a considered conclusion. To move to Level 5 the candidate would need to demonstrate critical evaluation by explaining the choices the writer has made.

## Section B overview

Both tasks were successfully attempted but Question 5 was more popular. That is surprising as the format of the letter required for Question 6 provides a clearer framework and structure than the talk required by Question 5. It may be that the audience for Question 6 – a newspaper editor – was unfamiliar to many candidates which could be a prompt for further work in the classroom.

The 16 marks for technical accuracy in AO6 could also be a helpful focus for work at centres. Sentence construction is generally accurate but too few candidates are using sentences for effect. Punctuation between sentences is usually accurate but very few candidates are using the comma accurately or effectively. Vocabulary is another strength and spelling is generally accurate.

### Question 5\*

5\* Write the words of a talk to persuade young people to work in a job which involves helping others.

You should:

- describe what the job involves
- explain what might make the job challenging for a young person
- persuade young people that the job would be worthwhile.

[40]

Candidates undertook this task enthusiastically, often adopting the persona of an upbeat motivational speaker or a past pupil at a school who has gone on to great things. Many drew on their own experience of less than enthralling assemblies and worked hard to make their speech engaging and meaningful for the imagined audience.

Most candidates rooted the speech in a specific time and place by references to their audience and a range of deictic features, e.g. here now today. There were references to aspects of the common experience of young people to demonstrate an understanding of the audience. Although sometimes clumsy – e.g. reference to ‘the boy in the third row with red hair’ – showed some attempt to address the task.

## Question 6\*

6\* Write a letter to a newspaper editor to argue for better support for elderly people.

You should:

- describe what life is like for an elderly person
- explain the challenges that elderly people face
- describe the support that elderly people need.

[40]

Although fewer candidates chose this task, many of those who did choose it wrote with real insight into the lives of elderly people. Some candidates offered lengthy anecdotes about their own aged grandparents which were often touching but distorted their argument by being too long and detailed. The impression that most candidates had of the life experience of elderly people was that it was a fairly depressing experience.

In more effective responses the candidates often took on the persona of an elderly person, or one of their adult relatives, which gave the response a much clearer context. Very few, however, were clear about who they were writing to, and what the role of a newspaper editor might be. Those who were often appealed to the editor to promote the cause of better support for elderly people in quite effective ways.

## Copyright information

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