

Moderators' report

GCSE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1)
in English Language**

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/03/04 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction	3
General overview	4
Administration	4
Assessment preparation and procedures in centres	5
Avoiding potential malpractice.....	8
Helpful resources	8
Additional comments.....	8
Summer 2026: Amended question paper layout for GCSE English Language	9

Would you prefer a Word version?

Did you know that you can save this PDF as a Word file using Acrobat Professional?

Simply click on **File > Export to** and select **Microsoft Word**

(If you have opened this PDF in your browser you will need to save it first. Simply right click anywhere on the page and select **Save as . . .** to save the PDF. Then open the PDF in Acrobat Professional.)

If you do not have access to Acrobat Professional there are a number of **free** applications available that will also convert PDF to Word (search for PDF to Word converter).

Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by the moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements, identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation, and comment on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. The report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

Online courses

We have created online courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

Cambridge Nationals

All teachers delivering our Cambridge Nationals suite are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

We recommend all teachers complete the module on Online courses – NEA for their subject. These courses provide subject-specific information about course content; how to prepare for planning, marking and submitting; and support with understanding the marking criteria.

Accessing our online courses

You can access all our online courses from our teacher support website [Teach Cambridge](#).

These free online courses currently cover the end-to-end NEA process for teachers. You'll find the link to the **Online courses** under the **Assessment** or **Training** tab – hover over **Assessment** or **Training** on the horizontal menu and select **Online courses** from the dropdown.

These self-paced online courses are intended for any teachers. During the course, you will engage with interactive content on subjects such as guidance on unit content, structure and administrative processes.

If you have any queries, please contact our Customer Support Centre on 01223 553998 or email support@ocr.org.uk.

General overview

The Spoken Language Endorsement is a compulsory component of GCSE English Language. The endorsement is reported as a separate grade (Pass, Merit, Distinction or Not Classified) and does not contribute to the result of the overall GCSE English Language qualification.

Candidates must undertake a prepared spoken presentation on a specific topic following which they must listen to and respond appropriately to questions and feedback. Presentations must be formal but may take a wide variety of forms.

The Spoken Language Endorsement is assessed holistically as a grade, using competency-based marking criteria. Competency means that a student must meet all the criteria in a grade to achieve it. If they only meet some of the criteria, they cannot be awarded that grade.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments across all teaching groups. Standardisation materials are available on [Teach Cambridge](#) and should be used to train all teaching staff involved in the assessments.

In this session the vast majority of centres satisfied the requirements of the monitoring process, submitting the recorded samples and documentation by the deadline. Monitors reported seeing some excellent work in centres of all sizes, with the full range of ability able to access and pass the assessment. The topics chosen were mostly appropriate and engaged candidates fully, and the questioning was generally helpful in helping candidates to achieve their potential.

Administration

Centres were required to submit recorded evidence of the assessments by uploading up to 30 recordings to the OCR Repository (or by sending them to the monitor directly on a USB) to allow the centre's grading to be monitored. Up to 10 recordings of assessments on all three grades, distinction, merit and pass, were required where appropriate. The majority of centres sent the correct number of recordings on each grade; however, a small number of centres did not send 30 recordings where they had fewer than 10 candidates on a particular grade. Centres are reminded that where this occurs, they should make the total number of recordings in the sample up to 30 by sending more recordings on the grades that they do have available.

Centres are also required to upload a copy of the centre mark sheet detailing the grades of all candidates, not just those in the sample, as well as teaching set details, but a large number of centres did not fulfil this requirement and had to be contacted by the monitor.

Misconception



Centres are required to send details of the teaching sets to enable monitors to sample candidates across teaching groups. Some centres had only recorded one or two teaching sets which meant this requirement had not been met.

Centres are reminded that their recorded sample of 30 should be drawn from different teaching sets so monitors can check that internal moderation is being carried out to ensure consistency of grading across different teaching sets.

Monitors reported that the vast majority of centres submitted their recordings by the deadline and the USB sticks were clearly and helpfully labelled with candidate numbers, names and the grade awarded. A small number of centres did not label them fully and had to be contacted to provide more details, usually

the grade awarded to individual candidates in the sample. At times monitors reported USBs having passwords which required them to contact the centre. Please avoid this in future submissions.

Centres should make sure that they have sent all necessary documentation to the monitor:

- Video recordings of 10 candidates on each grade (drawn from different teaching groups), clearly labelled with candidate name, number and grade awarded
- A copy of the centre grade sheet submitted to OCR for the whole cohort
- Teaching set details on the appropriate form.

Centres using the OCR Repository

Centres should make sure that they have uploaded all necessary recordings and documentation:

- Video recordings of 10 candidates on each grade, clearly labelled with candidate name, number and grade awarded

And using the Administration Tab:

- A copy of the centre grade sheet submitted to OCR
- Teaching set details on the appropriate form.

Monitors reported that the majority of centres using the repository to submit their samples did not use the Administration Tab and therefore had to be contacted directly.

Monitors also reported that many of the uploaded files took a long time to download. It is the centre's responsibility to make sure that all recordings are compressed and can be accessed easily.

Assessment preparation and procedures in centres

Where centres had enthusiastically embraced the demands and challenges of the Spoken Language Endorsement, candidates had produced some outstanding work. Monitors reported seeing a great deal of excellent presentations where the candidates were enthusiastic about their subject and fully engaged the audience. OCR recommends that all candidates are given opportunities across the GCSE English Language course to develop a range of oracy skills in preparation for this final assessment.

Centres are required to agree a topic with the candidates and offer them sufficient preparation and guidance for the assessment. The filmed assessments should take place in a suitable setting, which can be during a lesson. The camera should remain focused on the candidate, offering a clear view, and the sound quality should ensure that every word can be heard clearly, including the questions. Questions can come from other candidates or the teacher, but it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that all questions are appropriate and helpful in terms of inviting the candidate to extend their talk rather than repeat material.

This session the topics chosen varied widely and it was clear in the majority of centres that students had made choices which were judiciously guided by the teacher allowing for personal engagement with the subject-matter as well as an appropriate level of complexity for the grade awarded. This session no monitors reported seeing centres where talks were based on literature texts, or other syllabus-related topics where candidates had clearly not had much choice in their subject-matter. As a result, there was a pleasingly high level of candidate engagement in the assessments. Centres are reminded that for any candidates awarded merit or distinction grades, the topics need to have a level of complexity and interpretation. Less complex topics, such as work-experience, or my favourite football club, should be reserved for candidates aiming for a pass grade.

Monitors reported that the filming of the assessments was mostly very helpful and with appropriate levels of visual and sound quality. However, a small number of centres did not provide a recording of the whole assessment, including the questions. Centres are reminded that the whole assessment must be filmed

with the candidate clearly in view. There is no need to film the person asking the questions or to scan the audience. Occasionally the sound quality on the recording was poor, sometimes due to extraneous noise in the background and sometimes due to the camera being positioned too far from the candidate where projection was poor and could not be picked up fully by the camera's microphone. It is crucial that monitors can hear every word of the presentation and the questions for effective monitoring to take place. It is also fairer to candidates if background noise and disturbances are kept to a minimum during these assessments. A few centres only sent audio recordings which were not sufficient for full monitoring to take place.

Monitors reported seeing a great deal of good practice, where candidates had planned their presentation carefully and used a wide variety of presentational skills and rhetorical devices to engage their audience, effectively using a PowerPoint or short notes to assist them.

Unfortunately, there was still too much reliance on whole scripts in some centres where candidates were simply reading a pre-prepared script, sometimes with very little emphasis and often far too quickly. This led to ineffective talks with no communication established between the presenter and the audience. The presence of the script hindered rather than assisted the candidates and limited their scope to demonstrate good presentational skills and awareness of audience needs. At times these candidates had been given higher grades that seemed to be based on the content of the script rather than considering how effectively the content was delivered. These higher grades could not be justified, as the requirement to engage the audience had not been met.

The presentations and questions should last approximately 8-10 minutes. Monitors reported seeing a number of presentations that were too short – between 1 and 2 minutes at times. Some of these presentations had been awarded distinctions and merits. Although at times the questions allowed candidates to expand their talk through extended answers justifying a higher grade, this was not always the case. Centres are reminded that candidates aiming for higher grades should present an extended talk on their topic, allowing them to fulfil all the criteria for these grades. Conversely, a few presentations were too long, and some monitors reported seeing individual presentations and questions lasting up to 25 minutes. This is not helpful for either the candidate or the monitoring process and centres are reminded that 10 minutes is the maximum time recommended. Teachers should work closely with candidates to make sure that their presentations are an appropriate length.

The questions asked should help candidates to extend their talk rather than repeat information. Monitors reported seeing many excellent examples of pertinent questions which enabled candidates to achieve a higher grade in many cases; these questions tended to probe and challenge using precise language. Other questions were less helpful and sometimes too detailed, leaving the candidates with little to add, or they were asked closed questions which invited very perfunctory responses. Occasionally candidates were asked very challenging questions which they were unable to answer. It is essential that the questions are teacher-led rather than allowing other students to freely ask questions, as often student-led questions were far less helpful to the candidates. Candidates should not be told the questions in advance: monitors reported a few instances of candidates reading out answers to pre-prepared questions – this is clearly not in the spirit of the assessment and did not help those candidates to demonstrate further skills.

Some centres adopted a format where the teacher used questions to structure the candidate's talk for them. This is a supportive format, but it is one that should be reserved for candidates aiming to achieve a pass grade. Candidates awarded a merit or distinction must show evidence of the ability to structure their talk effectively to meet the needs of the audience independently.

The vast majority of centres used the competency-based mark scheme accurately and put candidates in the correct grade band. As the marking criteria for the Spoken Language component is competency-based, candidates must fulfil all the criteria in the appropriate grade descriptor to achieve that grade.

There was some evidence in a few centres that a 'best-fit' approach was being taken, and candidates were awarded a higher grade based on fulfilling one of the descriptors in the grade above. Centres are reminded that internal moderation must take place to make sure that the mark scheme has been applied fairly and consistently across all teaching sets.

Assessment for learning



Where candidates had been over-marked, it was usually for one of the following reasons:

- the presentation was too short and undeveloped
- the candidate read aloud a pre-prepared essay with no attempt to engage the audience or meet the needs of the audience
- the candidate did not use the range of presentational strategies to deliberately engage the audience required for a distinction grade.

Centres are advised to prepare candidates carefully for the assessment, teaching them to plan and structure their talks effectively.

Candidates should be offered opportunities to practise their talks to reduce reliance on their notes and develop their confidence.

Candidates should be supported with bullet-point notes, or a PowerPoint rather than a script. This will support them without tempting them to read aloud.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
• chose a suitable topic in which they had genuine interest • prepared their talk carefully, structuring it effectively to engage the audience • used their notes or a PowerPoint effectively without being reliant on reading aloud • used a range of rhetorical devices and strategies to arouse and sustain the interest of the audience • answered questions confidently using the opportunities offered by them to broaden their ideas.	• chose a topic in which they did not seem to have much interest, or that they did not know much about • gave a brief outline of the topic without developing their talk through using examples • read aloud from a prepared script without communicating with the audience • spoke too quickly without considering the audience • answered questions very briefly or repeated the content of their talk in their answers.

Avoiding potential malpractice

Centres should follow the guidance and instructions for monitoring procedures carefully. Monitors cited the following reasons for referring centres for potential malpractice:

- not sending a full range of filmed samples
- not covering a range of teaching groups in the filmed sample
- recordings that missing sound or video
- no questions asked or scripted responses to questions that had clearly been shared with the candidate in advance.

Helpful resources

The standardisation videos are available on [Teach Cambridge](#)

OCR has published a guide on the OCR website called [Preparing candidates for their spoken language assessment](#).

OCR has also published a guide on the OCR website for providing recorded evidence for the monitoring of the Spoken Language assessment called [Instructions for conducting and recording audio visual evidence](#).

Additional comments

Working on the skills required for the Spoken Language component is essential throughout the course, to enable candidates to develop effective strategies for this final assessment. It was clear that some candidates were not aware of the need to engage with their audience using gesture, eye-contact and body language to make their presentations effective. Spoken language skills can be developed through group and paired presentations when studying literature texts or developing ideas for non-fictional writing tasks. They should be built into the GCSE Language and Literature schemes of work to develop the candidates' skills and confidence gradually.

Summer 2026: Amended question paper layout for GCSE English Language

As part of our accessibility principles, we're making improvements to the question paper layout for GCSE English Language (J351). These changes apply to live assessments taking place from the **June 2026** series onwards.

Component 01: Communicating information and ideas (Paper 1) and Component 02: Exploring effects and impact (Paper 2)

To provide clarity and better guidance for students on what they should answer in their exams, we're making the following changes:

- For Paper 1, Section A, the relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside questions 1 and 3, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract.
- For Paper 2, Section A, the relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside questions 1–3, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract.
- Clearer and more consistent presentation to reduce cognitive burden for candidates.
- Accessible fonts will be used.
- The front cover of the extract booklets will include summary details such as genre, author's name, and publication date.
- For both papers in Section B, we are adding more planning space to support and encourage students to think about their work.

We are **not** changing the structure of the papers. There are the same number of questions on each paper with the same number of marks and the same assessment objectives (AOs) allocated to each. There's **no change** to how students are expected to answer the questions in the exam.

Please note: These changes affect students taking exams in **summer 2026** and onwards. Students resitting exams in November 2025 will not see any changes to the GCSE English Language exam papers.

The latest information is available on the [OCR website](#) and on the [Sample assessment materials section on Teach Cambridge](#).

Supporting you

Teach Cambridge

Make sure you visit our secure website [Teach Cambridge](#) to find the full range of resources and support for the subjects you teach. This includes secure materials such as set assignments and exemplars, online and on-demand training.

Don't have access? If your school or college teaches any OCR qualifications, please contact your exams officer. You can [forward them this link](#) to help get you started.

Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#).

Access to Scripts

We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our [website](#).

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, [sign up here](#).

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is the exam paper builder platform for a range of our qualifications. [Find out more](#).

Free for all OCR centres with an Interchange account, it allows unlimited users per centre. We require an [Interchange](#) username to verify your centre's users for ExamBuilder.

If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

[Find out more](#).

Online courses

Enhance your skills and confidence in internal assessment

What are our online courses?

Our online courses are self-paced eLearning courses designed to help you deliver, mark and administer internal assessment for our qualifications. They are suitable for both new and experienced teachers who want to refresh their knowledge and practice.

Why should you use our online courses?

With these online courses you will:

- learn about the key principles and processes of internal assessment and standardisation
- gain a deeper understanding of the marking criteria and how to apply them consistently and accurately
- see examples of student work with commentary and feedback from OCR moderators
- have the opportunity to practise marking and compare your judgements with those of OCR moderators
- receive instant feedback and guidance on your marking and standardisation skills
- be able to track your progress and achievements through the courses.

How can you access our online courses?

Access courses from [Teach Cambridge](#). Teach Cambridge is our secure teacher website, where you'll find all teacher support for your subject.

If you already have a Teach Cambridge account, you'll find the link to the **Online courses** under the **Assessment** or **Training** tab – hover over **Assessment** or **Training** on the horizontal menu and select **Online courses** from the dropdown.

If you don't have a Teach Cambridge account yet, ask your exams officer to set you up – just send them this [link](#) and ask them to add you as a Teacher.

Access the courses **anytime, anywhere and at your own pace**. You can also revisit the courses as many times as you need.

Which courses are available?

We recommend all teachers complete the module on Online courses – NEA for their subject. These courses provide subject-specific information about course content; how to prepare for planning, marking and submitting; and support with understanding the marking criteria.

The subject-specific courses are tailored for each qualification that has non-exam assessment (NEA) units, except for AS Level and Entry Level. They cover the following topics:

- the structure and content of the NEA units
- the assessment objectives and marking criteria for the NEA units
- examples of student work with commentary and feedback for the NEA units
- interactive marking practice and feedback for the NEA units.

We are also developing courses for some of the examined units, which will be available soon.

How can you get support and feedback?

If you have any queries, please contact our Customer Support Centre on 01223 553998 or email support@ocr.org.uk.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions on how to improve the online courses and make them more useful and relevant for you. You can share your views by completing the evaluation form at the end of each course.

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our resources.



Designing and testing in [collaboration with you](#) and your students



Helping young people develop an [ethical view of the world](#)



Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) are [part of everything we do](#)

Contact the team at:

☎ 01223 553998

🖥 ocr.org.uk

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about our qualifications, register for email updates at ocr.org.uk/updates

Visit our Online Support Centre at support.ocr.org.uk



OCR is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

OCR is a Company Limited by Guarantee and an exempt charity. Registered in England. Registered office: The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number: 3484466.

We operate academic and vocational qualifications regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA as listed in their qualifications registers.

We are committed to providing a fully accessible experience across all our products, platforms, and websites. Find out more about our [accessibility standards](#).

© OCR 2025. All rights reserved. We retain the copyright on all our publications. However, our registered centres are permitted to copy and distribute our material for their own internal use, in line with any specific restrictions detailed in the publication. Find out more about our [copyright policies](#).

We update our publications regularly so please check you have the most up-to-date version.

We cannot be held responsible for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and do not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

When we update our specifications, you'll see a new version number and a summary of the changes. While we do our best to reflect these changes in all associated resources on [Teach Cambridge](#), if you notice any discrepancies, please refer to the latest specification on our website and [let us know](#).

Our resources do not represent any teaching method we expect you to use. We cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions in our resources.