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# **GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
AS**

**SUMMER 2017**

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**COMPONENT 1**

Candidates were well prepared for this unit, showing generally sound understanding of the assessment objectives. Some candidates were able to make precise analytical responses which confidently probed specific linguistic aspects. The texts chosen for the examination proved accessible, resulting in some candidates being able to achieve the very highest marks, while also not disadvantaging the less able candidates. Overall, it was apparent that centres had addressed some of the issues identified in previous examiners' reports, such as the increasing importance placed on making and sustaining connections for AO4 in Section A, and on demonstrating a critical understanding of genre for AO2 in Section B.

**Section A: Spoken Language of the Media**

Candidates were required to analyse two transcripts of post-match analyses. The first transcript, Text A, was a post-match analysis by then-Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho in the immediate aftermath of a defeat of his team by Southampton; the second transcript, Text B, was delivered by Manchester Thunder netball coach, Tracey Neville, following a victory for her team over Celtic Dragons. In Text A, Mourinho gave his reaction to his team's performance in the just-completed game, a match which came in a sequence of games in which his team had been expected to win but failed to do so. This important fact was given to candidates in the contextual information which introduced the transcript. More able candidates were able to use this information purposefully to inform their analysis of Mourinho's frustrations. Text B provided an appropriate contrast to Text A in a number of interesting ways which the more successful candidates were able to fully explore. For example, Tracey Neville's post-match reaction was to a game from which her team had emerged victorious; this was an important contrasting feature of Text B. The most able candidates considered the subtleties of the distinctive uses of language by the respective speakers, and were able to link their analyses to the contextual point: whereas Mourinho was speaking as a manager who is uniquely cognisant of the public relations aspects of his role, Neville's language was that of a coach, and her emphasis was solely on the team's performance, not engaging at all with media or public perceptions of her and her team. Therefore, in order for candidates to achieve the highest marks, they must scrutinise carefully the contextual information supplied, as it will provide valuable and subtle guidance for their discussion.

In terms of methods and approaches to answering this question, as they did last year, many candidates demonstrated that it was possible to achieve well using a diverse range of successful strategies. For example, some chose to analyse Text A in detail, before moving on to a discussion of Text B, drawing out the points of comparison and contrast between it and Text A. Other successful candidates chose a different strategy, taking a more thematic approach and comparing and contrasting both texts throughout their response. There are merits in both approaches, and done well both can enable candidates to produce perceptive comparisons and increasingly insightful discussion of how the speakers' language use was distinctive in conveying complex pragmatics, e.g. the differing self-perceptions and self-representations of the speakers, and the impact of the differing outcomes of the two games under discussion. It is worth reminding centres that AO4 is worth two-fifths of the marks for this question. Therefore, connections across the two texts should be teased out. A further key point for centres is that AO1, which rewards candidates' methods of analysis and use of terminology, should cover not only spoken terms, such as utterance, prosody and emphatic stress, but also basic linguistic terms, such as word classes, clauses and types of noun phrases.

Text A, Jose Mourinho's post-match analysis of his team's performance in defeat against Southampton, provided fertile ground for analysis. Many candidates were able to comment on the use of non-fluency features and link these to the speaker being Portuguese-born rather than a native English speaker. However, the more able candidates were able to consider the varied factors, aside from his non-native status, which potentially led to the presence of non-fluency features; in other words, the immediacy of the defeat (it had only just occurred minutes earlier) and the effects of the match under discussion coming during a run of poor performances by his team, also contributed to Mourinho's use of language in the extract. In terms of the speaker's attitudes towards his team's performance, candidates made valid points about Mourinho's anger and frustration, and were able to support these points by drawing attention to key adjectives such as "hu:::ge" and "GIANT" in reference to significance of the penalty, and the verb "collapse" when speaking of team's morale. Sensibly, candidates explored Mourinho's distinctive use of emphatic stress throughout the transcript, and his use of the first person plural pronoun "we" to establish his sense of fellowship with his players. More able candidates also drew attention to Mourinho's use of the first person singular pronoun "me", to attribute the reasons for his team's misfortune on the pitch to his perception that the football authorities ("the FA") are determined to punish him by punishing his team. Less able candidates tended to generalise about Mourinho's attitude rather than focusing on those aspects of his spoken language which conveyed that attitude. They discussed his tone in generic terms, without being able to support their discussion with reference to precise evidence from the transcript.

Text B, the post-match reaction by Manchester Thunder netball coach Tracey Neville to her team's just-completed victory over Celtic Thunder, proved the more accessible of the two transcripts, enabling most candidates to establish sensible connections and points of contrast between Mourinho's defiance and disappointment and Neville's pride and satisfaction. Even though Text B was more accessible, it still provided ample challenge. Able candidates noticed that despite Neville being a native English speaker (unlike Mourinho), her use of language also featured a range of non-fluency, such as the incomplete utterance on line 1, "opportunity to s. expose" and line 8 "opp.". Subtle reading by the most able candidates of Neville's use of language could be discerned in their ability to compare her language use in reacting to her team's performance to Mourinho's reaction which overtly referenced his own clearly well-established ongoing relationship with the media; the most able candidates suggested that the lack of such references to the media could indicate Neville's relative inexperience as the public face of her team. This then enabled them to focus on her persona as a coach, rather than as a manager. Some weaker candidates generically latched on to Neville's emphasis on teamwork, and in the process misinterpreted her use of the simile "like bees round a honeypot" as implying that Neville wants her team to stick closely together during the game, when in fact she says "we've taken the honeypot away today" to indicate she wanted her team to spread out across the court.

### **Section B: Written Language**

Section B produced many highly successful responses. It was evident that candidates had been well-advised by their teachers to appropriately apportion their time on Section B so that they gave it half their time in the exam, to reflect that marks for Section B represented 50% of all the marks available in this exam.

Candidates were asked to analyse a 1918 opinion piece from the Men's Fashion section of *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper reporting on matters affecting members of the United States Armed Forces in World War 1. The text was unusual in that it was based on a highly distinctive conceit: it was written from the perspective of a wrist watch, which had become the latest must-have piece of equipment for military men. Candidates were asked to explore how the use of language presented the watch. The bullet points accompanying this question provided some useful guidance to candidates on how to construct an intelligent method of analysis for AO1: candidates were advised to explore how the language reflected the "changing appeal of the watch" and its "usefulness" for military men. As the text was obviously dated, most candidates were able to make sensible points for AO3 about how contextual factors affected the construction of meaning. For example, they discussed ideas about patriotism, as the text was a war-era publication, and sensibly commented on the old-fashioned turns of expression used in the text, such as the noun phrase "lounge lizards" and the plural noun "haberdashers". The text gave ample opportunities for candidates to explore concepts and issues related to language use for AO2. Many successful responses discussed the juxtaposition of language associated with femininity (such as the fronted adjectives "Bejeweled" and "fragile"), to refer to the wrist watch's previous status as a female fashion accessory, with the more masculine language of the military, such as the noun phrase "husky artillerymen". This enabled candidates to tackle the "changing appeal" bullet point in a focused manner.

More perceptive responses focused on the use of tense to present changing appeal of the watch. They were able to link the present tense verbs "I am" with its current military status, rather than its former associations as a fashion accessory, as conveyed using the past tense verb "hung". More able candidates appropriately noted that the fronted coordinating conjunction "But..." on line 12 also marked the aforementioned change in the watch's status.

Some weaker candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks, by discussing the watch's appeal in generic terms, struggling to examine the pragmatics of feminine and masculine gender stereotypes. There was some confusion in weaker responses between terminology used for the spoken and written mode. For example, some candidates persisted in referring to the sentences as "utterances". This was perhaps because the text adopted the first person persona of a speaking watch.

A common feature of many less successful responses was the imprecision in tackling linguistic features, and the unfocused approach to selecting textual illustration. Candidates are encouraged to use the question bullet points as the guide to their selection, and to source textual evidence which meets the requirement of the specified question focus, which in this case was the presentation of the watch. Random selection often leads to feature spotting, something centres ought to discourage.

Overall, the text provided ample opportunities for some insightful and imaginative exploration of the appeal of the watch for its chosen audience of US military men.

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**COMPONENT 2**

Candidates were generally very well prepared for this unit. Across the range of questions provided, candidates demonstrated an increasingly sound understanding of the Assessment Objectives and were able to apply linguistic terminology with precision and probe for meaning. As with the paper for 2016, the corpus of data within Section A proved to be accessible for candidates, enabling stronger candidates to obtain a range of marks within the top band, whilst also giving less able candidates the opportunity to create competent discussions. The creative tasks in Section B encouraged a wide range of interesting responses, with candidates demonstrating a range of successful and engaging approaches. Candidates were generally very well-prepared for the commentary task in Section B and demonstrated a range of solid responses for this question. Overall, it was apparent that centres had addressed some of the key issues outlined in the 2016 Examiner's Report for Component 2, such as the need for more extended and wide-ranging discussion and comparison in Section A d). However, some issues still remained regarding the lower tariff questions, such as candidates struggling to identify specific linguistic techniques and failing to differentiate between the different language levels.

**Section A: Investigating Data**

Candidates were required to analyse a corpus of political speech extracts. The corpus provided a varied range of different political ideologies and rhetorical approaches for candidates to examine, including some of the most significant political addresses delivered within the 21st and 20th century. Each extract offered candidates an increasingly complex range of linguistic techniques to unpick, such as grammatical patterns (e.g. Extract 9's use of listing: "cut child benefit, cut housing benefit, reduce nursery schooling..."), figurative language use (e.g. Extract 6's metaphorical use of "the economic prison of the Euro") and direct address (e.g. Extract 4's imperative use of "ask what you can do for your country"). The questions in the section are designed to provide an increased level of challenge as the questions progressed, and this was generally reflected in candidate responses. Responses to the grammatical section were strongest overall, with many candidates receiving higher marks for this question.

**1 (a)**

This 4 mark question required candidates to identify two different phonological techniques and briefly explain the effects created in each case. Candidates generally responded well to this question, with many successfully identifying the implied use of emphatic stress in "CAN DO SCOTLAND" (Extract 10). Candidates were generally able to successfully analyse the effect of these techniques, however in some cases there was no focus on sound or the aural qualities of these examples. Some candidates also incorrectly identified repetition as a phonological technique, analysing the syntactical and grammatical qualities of phrases such as "education, education, education" with no reference to the polysyllabic rhythm of the nouns, or their phonological impact. Candidates gaining full marks were able to analyse the subtlety of phonological features, such as one candidate who commented upon the alliterative use of "bite back" and analysed its "phonological emphasis upon a passion for a cause, with the repetition of aggressive sounds demonstrating the need for determination against such a fight".

## 2 (b)

This 6 mark question required candidates to identify four lexical and semantic effects and briefly explain the effects created in each case. Candidates were well-prepared for this question overall, although some issues still remained with a minority of candidates being unable to differentiate between the language levels, and some failing to provide any textual support. Centres are again reminded that candidates receive no credit for identifying word class without identification of a lexical/semantic technique (such as metaphor, direct address or semantic field), as is clearly outlined in the Specimen Assessment Materials. Despite these minor issues, the majority of candidates were able to successfully identify a wide range of lexical and semantic effects, with many responses focusing on the use of word-play (e.g. “You turn if you want to; the lady’s not for turning” in Extract 3), direct address and inclusivity (“Out of many, we are one” in Extract 7) and use of semantic fields (e.g. “independent, forthright, passionate” in Extract 8). Candidates receiving full marks were able to successfully unpick linguistic effects, such as the biased presentation of the European Union reflected in the semantic field employed in Extract 6.

## 2 (c)

This 10 mark question required candidates to identify four different grammatical structures and briefly comment on the effects created in each case. Candidates were generally better prepared for this question than they were for 1 (a) and (b), demonstrating a more advanced ability to differentiate between the language levels. Most candidates were able to successfully identify an impressive range of grammatical techniques, correctly identifying the use of the imperatives (e.g. “ask not what your country can do for you...”), listing and grammatical patterning (e.g. “Our top priority is, was and always will be”) and syntactical elements, such as deliberate repetition (such as the repeated declarative “We shall” in Extract 2). Grammatical analyses were varied and included some sophisticated responses, such as the inspirational qualities of Churchill’s grammatical patterning and its ability to encourage unity and a sense of pride, patriotism and fearlessness during a time of great uncertainty.

## 2 (d)

This 30 mark question required a more extended and in-depth analysis of the corpus and the advertising genre as a whole. Candidates were required to analyse and evaluate the ways in which political speeches engage their specific target audiences. Centres have clearly addressed issues outlined in the 2016 Examiner’s Report, as very few responses were limited by brevity, and the majority of responses were extended and allowed for some sophisticated evaluation of the corpus and the genre of political speeches as a whole. Stronger candidates were able to show a sophisticated understanding of political rhetoric and its function of manipulating opinion and political persuasion, addressing all Assessment Objectives equally and engaging confidently with a range of textual examples. As was mentioned in last year’s report, some weaker candidates continue to fail to engage with the corpus of data and to produce a broad and unproductive overview of the genre of political speeches as a whole. Centres are reminded to discourage this rather fruitless approach; engagement and discussion of the corpus is essential if candidates are to be successful in this question.

In terms of methods and approaches to the question, as they did last year, candidates demonstrated that it is possible to deploy a varied range of successful strategies. For example, some candidates chose to use the bullet points within the question to structure their response, whilst others used the language levels as a logical framework (e.g. writing one paragraph on each level: lexis, semantics, grammar, phonology etc.). Others adopted a different strategy, which entailed taking a more thematic approach of comparing and contrasting the texts through theme and context (e.g. bias and propaganda; inspirational lexical choices; national moments of crisis/celebration). It is to be noted that there are significant merits with all of these approaches, and centres are reminded that when these strategies are applied they enable candidates to produce increasingly perceptive and sophisticated analyses. As was mentioned in last year's report, it is important to note that AO2, AO3 and AO4 are equally weighted in this question, so candidates should familiarise themselves with these objectives in order to ensure that these are addressed equally within their responses. It was encouraging to see that many issues that were identified in the 2016 series, such as candidates failing to demonstrate connections across the corpus, have been largely resolved. However, centres are once again reminded of the central importance of terminology across all three Assessment Objectives, and candidates should be aware that this extended question gives them the opportunity to 'showcase' their linguistic knowledge across all language levels.

Successful responses for this extended task were able to unpick subtle similarities and differences in language use across the corpus of data, analysing an impressive range of linguistic techniques with increasing flair and sophistication. Most candidates were able to make intelligent comments regarding the binary opposition and political bias employed by parties to disadvantage their opponent, such as Neil Kinnock's repeated use of the harsh dynamic verb "cut" and its emotive connotations of violent heartlessness, or Nigel Farage's damning indictment of the European Union through pejorative noun phrases such as "low growth", "mass unemployment" and "economic failure". Candidates in the upper bands were also able to comment upon the marked differences in tone within the corpus, such as Vermin Supreme's humorous and satirical approach, Sturgeon's inspirational and patriotic rally for support, Barack Obama's emphasis upon political and social unity, and Margeret Thatcher's determination to create a trustworthy public persona. Discussions relating to the use of rhetoric across the corpus were generally insightful and detailed, including varied analyses of the use of interrogatives and their ability to engage whilst simultaneously questioning opposing parties and their policies (e.g. "Is that the mark of 'the family party'?"); the use of patterns such as triadic structures (e.g. "independent, forthright, passionate") in their ability to 'hammer home' a message; and the use of direct address in order to create a sense of unity and a belief that change is possible (e.g. "Yes, we can").

### **Section B: Creative Writing**

Section B produced many highly successful and original responses. As was mentioned in last year's report, it was again clear that the majority of candidates had been appropriately advised by centres to apportion their time according to the 50:50 weighting of the marks available across both sections. On the whole, answers for both questions were detailed and reflected good time management, although a very small number of candidates had clearly run out of time when reaching their commentary. For example, a very small number of candidates across the cohort produced creative pieces that far exceeded the 350 word limit and this generally led to commentaries that were brief and undeveloped. Where candidates had correctly observed timings and word limits, answers were generally competent and engaging, with thoughtful analytical commentaries that were well developed.

Candidates were required to write one creative piece followed by an analytical commentary of their own writing.

### 1 (a)

Candidates were required to write a dramatic monologue from the perspective of an audience member attending a political speech. This question was slightly more popular with candidates overall, and successful responses were characterised by the construction of a believable persona and a confident and sustained voice. Extract 2 was most popular overall as a stimulus, with many candidates relishing the opportunity to present an intimate view of war-time Britain, including responses in which the speech was heard on the “wireless” from the perspective of a soldier, young child or widowed housewife. Many other candidates selected extracts that resonated with their own political views, with many animated responses commenting on Nigel Farage’s controversial political agenda, or celebrating Barack Obama’s inauguration as the first black president of the United States and its impact upon society. Theatricality and dramatic techniques were also considered with increasing success, such as one candidate whose stage directions demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the genre: “he glances up at the champagne socialist and inches his pen closer to the surface of his worn notepad”. Centres should also note that candidates success did not depend upon the ability to use conventions such as stage directions, although candidates that did not employ a first person view point failed to meet the brief set out in the question.

In terms of the genre of a monologue, the majority of candidates were clearly well prepared for this task, however, a minority of students appeared to be confused, with some writing short stories in the third person and others producing generic descriptions of a crowd or a political rally. Candidates in the lower bands had a tendency to adopt an omniscient narrative perspective with no sense of personal voice and a lack of engagement with the task. However, many more perceptive candidates were able to create and sustain a range of vibrant and charismatic voices that were a pleasure to read.

### 1 (b)

This question was slightly less popular with candidates overall, and responses were generally successful, but there were clearly a minority of candidates who struggled with the format and tone of a formal letter. The question required candidates to compose a formal letter to the editor of a broadsheet newspaper, responding to an article that claimed “political speakers today are dull and uninspiring”. Most candidates were able to successfully replicate the persuasive and linguistically complex quality of a formal letter to the editor, creating some highly engaging debates and employing rhetorical devices similar to those used within the corpus in Section A. Perceptive candidates also saw the opportunity to use quotations from the corpus to structure their letter, with many choosing these as the successful basis to their debates.

Some weaker candidates struggled with the concept of a formal letter to the editor, with a minority failing to use basic conventions of letter writing, such as “Dear Sir”, and almost all candidates making the mistake of signing off with “yours sincerely” without knowing the name of the person that they were writing to. Many candidates used idiosyncratic forms of address such as “Dear Mr Daily Mail”, “Dear Mr Editor”, reflecting a lack of understanding in terms of the genre of the task. To avoid this, centres are reminded that candidates must be exposed to a wide range of creative writing stimuli: short stories, letters, diary entries, monologues, speeches, novel extracts, articles etc. Exposure to a wide range of texts ensures that students understand and are able to apply the conventions for each specific mode of writing.

## 1 (c)

Candidates were generally very well prepared for this question and most responses demonstrated the linguistic focus that is expected from a commentary of this sort. The question required candidates to write a commentary analysing and evaluating the linguistic and grammatical choices made in their creative response to 1(a) or 1(b). The question highlights that there should be focus upon language features and their effectiveness. Centres have clearly acted upon advice within the 2016 Examiner's Report, as short and undeveloped responses were rare.

More insightful responses were able to produce an extended and detailed analysis that successfully identified techniques from across the language levels and demonstrated perceptive and increasingly sophisticated skills of analysis. A common feature within the upper bands was the ability to reflect on personal language choices in an intelligent and thoughtful way, especially where candidates had made original and experimental choices in their creative tasks.

Within the lower bands, candidates were unable to identify linguistic features, with some making generic comments regarding paragraph lengths and others failing to use textual support to support their claims. A feature of less successful responses was a complete failure to engage with AO3 (to analyse the construction of meaning and relevant contextual factors) but these cases were rare.

As with the 2016 series, candidates adopted a varied range of approaches, but it should be noted that more successful answers ensured even coverage of the language levels, including detailed and perceptive analysis of more challenging areas, such as grammatical choices and employment of specific genre conventions (such as declaratives used in stage directions).



WJEC  
245 Western Avenue  
Cardiff CF5 2YX  
Tel No 029 2026 5000  
Fax 029 2057 5994  
E-mail: [exams@wjec.co.uk](mailto:exams@wjec.co.uk)  
website: [www.wjec.co.uk](http://www.wjec.co.uk)