

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

H074

For first teaching in 2015

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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. 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 can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

As in previous series, all levels of achievement were represented in responses to both Section A and Section B. In general, however, a smaller proportion of responses reached Levels 5 and 6 in Section A than in previous years.

Section A

Question 1

Text A is an extract taken from an exchange of letters between the poet Edward Thomas and his wife Helen, while he was serving in the army in World War 1. The 'Postscript' is written after Edward's death and taken from Helen's *Commonplace Book*.

Text B is a live music review from *The Guardian* covering the opening night of Beyoncé and Jay-Z's *On the Run II* collaborative world tour, 2018.

- 1 Compare the ways in which the writers use language to comment on events and relationships.

In your answer you should consider:

- context
- mode and genre
- purpose and audience.

[30]

Concepts, methods and terminology (AO1); and Connections and comparisons (AO4)

Each year, the indicative content in the mark scheme has specified that lower-level responses will use 'some appropriate terminology, mainly at the level of word choice'. This described a greater proportion of responses this year than in previous series. A smaller number of candidates demonstrated security in their application of concepts and handling of terminology. For a significant minority of candidates, the range of terms used was limited to 'semantic field' and 'lexical sets' (e.g. Text A has a lexical set of war, whereas Text B has a lexical set of songs). The impression was of some candidates lacking detailed knowledge of language levels including discourse, syntax and even word class. This gap in relation to AO1 made it difficult for these candidates to reach halfway up the mark scheme.

Where a wider range of terminology was used, it gained significant credit only where exemplified with quotation. Candidates who used a number of terms but offered no supporting quotation to evidence their accuracy tended to be judged as 'limited' with respect to AO1.

Achievement in relation to AO4 was similarly affected by a tendency towards vagueness, sometimes inseparable from insecurity with concepts and terminology. Many responses made connections too broad to gain much credit, for example the observation that 'both texts use declaratives', or 'Text B doesn't have any lexical choices relating to nature as it would not be relevant to the content of the article. It does, however, have lexical choices relating to music.' Other connections were too tangential to enable the texts genuinely to shed light on each other, for example between the descriptions of the animals in Text A and Beyoncé 'barking' in Text B. Comparative observations as to the themes in the two texts were sometimes productive but were often also limited in their incisiveness (e.g. 'While Text B is about betrayal, lies but love coming back together, Text A is about love being apart but communicating through letters').

As in previous series, for an approach to connections to be consistent with descriptors in the higher levels of the mark scheme, it needed to be clearer what was being compared with what, with a genuine connection between the two. A few candidates did successfully make connections from one part of one text to one part of the other, for example comparing Helen's certainty that she and Edward will be together again at the end of Text A with the phrase 'which surely only death could do part' at the end of the review. The highest-achieving responses with respect to AO4 managed to develop a range of comparisons through analysis: language suited to the private audience in Text A was compared with language appropriate for the wide *Guardian* readership in Text B; the marital relationship was said to be foregrounded in Text A while the war was less of a focus, whereas the artists careers and the concert

was the primary focus in Text B and the relationship was more secondary; affectionate terms of endearment in Text A were contrasted with crafted noun phrases forming critical terms of reference in Text B.

Understanding of the significance of contexts (AO3); and Analysis of ways meanings are shaped (AO2)

Some candidates began their responses with an extended deployment of biographical knowledge (e.g. 'Edward Thomas is an English poet that went voluntarily to war ... they met casually one day and that is how their love story started ... as a poet he writes mostly about nature'). In many cases, despite being long, these openings did not in themselves help candidates to address the assessment objectives and reduced the time available for more creditworthy analysis. Knowledge that Thomas was a poet served to hinder some candidates' analysis, as they repeatedly attributed features to his job rather than exploring the meanings shaped (e.g. 'This simile is expected in Text A as Edward Thomas is a poet'). Other candidates used introductory paragraphs to show greater understanding of the significance of contexts. This often coincided with the use of connections between the texts as criteria for selecting contextual factors to discuss (e.g. 'Text A, which is an exchange of letters between two distant lovers longing for each other, consists of a spontaneous element of writing ... Text B is a live music review, making it a highly planned piece ... Edward's purpose in Text A is to reassure his wife that he is OK ... the purpose of Text B however is for entertainment purposes ... while Text A consists of personal letters to be read only by each other, Text B is published in a national newspaper'.)

As in previous series, higher-scoring responses were those which skilfully slotted each text back into its original context and considered different aspects of these contexts throughout their analysis, consistently considering the readers in the writers' minds. Background knowledge of Text A was important in this respect, and was not evident in all responses. Although most candidates understood that Helen was writing for herself after Edward's death, a few suggested that her main purpose in the last part of the text was to make Edward feel better. In discussion of Text A, a range of references to 'the reader' betrayed a lack of sensitivity to context (e.g. 'In Helen's letter to Edward she writes in a childish sociolect "give Daddy 100 loves" to make the reader sympathise for Edward leaving his family to be in the front line'). Some candidates argued tenuously that, in the extract from her commonplace book, Helen was consciously writing for publication, and that her prose was 'polished'. Others referred explicitly to Text A as a construct (e.g. 'Text A's purpose is for us to give empathy as a secondary audience'). However, only a very small number of candidates successfully articulated distinctions between pre- and post-publication readerships for the letters, and managed to comment on how knowledge of Edward's death affected the meanings in the letters for modern readers.

A number of responses explored the significance of social and historical context for Text A, attributing Edward's lack of explicit emotion to men not being allowed to show their feelings in the early twentieth century. Few candidates expressed this claim in a sufficiently nuanced way for it to feel relevant. It led others to make more sweeping and less convincing claims about Edward's letter as a whole (e.g. 'Text A uses a formal register throughout as this was typical for a man of his time'; 'There is no sign of any affectionate language being used in his letter ... Edward didn't want anyone to see him being affectionate as during those times it would make him seem weak and vulnerable').

As in previous series, responses which were rewarded highly in relation to AO2 were characterised by a careful selection of quotation and apt use of candidates' own vocabulary. Higher-level responses generated insightful interpretations of language use in the texts, developed through sustained analysis. Where seen, this kind of analysis tended to combine achievement in relation to AO1 and AO2. For example, analysis of 'As self-mythologising couples go ... The pair's first collaboration '03 Bonnie and Clyde' including these points: 'the compound premodifier "self-mythologising" suggests that Beyoncé and Jay-Z are continually rewriting legends ... the plural "couples" makes them sound less unique, as if their legend is the product of cynical marketing ... the fact and figure in "03 Bonnie and Clyde" is a testament

to their longevity'. This kind of interlacing of language features and meanings shaped was rare in the responses marked, and was consistent with the highest marks given for Section A.

Exemplar 1

Throughout the letter and post script by the Thomas' there is numerous examples of understatement exaggeration, one of these being, 'It was quite fun for me', taken from Edwards letter. We know this is an exaggeration as he is fighting in a war, where the chance of death is very high. The use of the understatement has a heavy purpose linking to the primary purpose of writing the letters, to comfort his wife, who would have been petrified, so by doing this and not telling the complete truth he is easing her worry gently and achieving his narrative purpose. However in the Guardian report the use of hyperbols is scattered

through the majority. Agents, the writer, states uses the post-modifier 'betrayal and rage' as an example of this. Using this creates the sense of drama and deceit between the two after Jay-2 reportedly cheated on his wife. Not much detail is given on this as the writer is expecting the reader to be aware of the events as it was Global news and most would also know that this was a make up tour.

Both texts also contain different semantic fields which are used to contrasting effect. The letters between Helen and Edward Thomas has a positive natural field including words like 'trees', 'sun' and 'larks'. This again creates the idea that Edward Thomas is comforting his wife by not telling her the truth and enabling her to keep hope of his safe

return home. It could also be suggested that this group of words is a reflection of their love and marriage, which is happy and solid, a complete difference to the more matrimonial relationship of Beyoncé and Jay-Z. This opposite feeling between the two is created by a negative lexical group containing, 'hammering', 'death' and 'unfaithful'. This links to the fact the rapper had involved himself in adulterous behaviour and the trust may have vanished. Yet this negativity does transition to a more positive note, and may be a way for the writer to keep the hardcore fans reading the report happy.

The extract from Exemplar 1 demonstrates an approach to comparative analysis which integrates all four assessment objectives. The organising principle is a use of concepts to explore connections; the same language features are used to analyse the ways meanings are shaped (euphemism in Text A is contrasted with hyperbole in Text B; the positive, natural connotations of the lexis in Text A and the happy marriage they suggest are contrasted with the more negative lexis and more troubled relationship in Text B). Insight is shown into specific aspects of contexts (Edward writing to comfort Helen in Text A; Aroesti catering for fans in Text B). The consistency with which all assessment objectives are addressed helps the candidate to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Section B overview

Section B offered candidates considerable scope to generate content from their own experience and enthusiasms. Questions 2 and 3 were more popular choices than Question 4. In a few cases, it was not possible to tell whether the candidate was responding to Question 2 or Question 4. Across all three questions, there was a strong sense that the highest marks went to candidates who spent some time planning a whole-text structure before writing.

Question 2

- 2 Write a report or review of a live event such as a concert, performance or sporting event for a website or magazine. [20]

This was the most popular of the Section B questions. Although the popularity may have some connection to the presence of Text B in Section A, this connection was not clear in most of the responses marked. A very small number of candidates imitated the layout and content of the *Guardian* review; most responses showed little evidence that any insight into text type or style had been drawn directly from Text B.

Secure knowledge of text type tended to be a discriminating factor between higher- and lower-level responses. Some candidates, drawn to the idea of a 'sporting event' and perhaps confused by the phrase 'live action', overlooked the words 'report or review' and produced a running commentary on imagined action unfolding in the present tense ('The match has begun ... it's only 10 minutes into the game and already we've had some action going on'). These seemed to belong more to a spoken mode than a minute-by-minute written report. The breadth offered in the phrase 'a website or magazine' proved unhelpful to some candidates, whose responses were less convincing because of a lack of clarity as to what kind of publication they had in mind.

The strongest responses appeared to focus on an artist whom the candidate had seen perform live, making it easy for them to generate content and a passion that fuelled some highly engaging writing. Where this coincided with a journalistic register and whole-text shaping, responses tended to be placed in Level 6.

Exemplar 2

Justin Bieber at the O2 Review

~~Walking into the v~~ Over the past few years, ~~few things music~~.

Walking into the venue, I was unsurprised at the makeup of the crowd: quickly forming around the stage; a small army of tiny teenage girls, every now and then a bald-headed father looking out across them all with a pained expression. We are, of course, at a Justin Bieber concert: the latest ^{in a long line} of blond-haired, bright-eyed ^{carefree} teen popstars ready to steal the hearts of a generation of pre-teen girls.

He kicks off the evening later than advertised with the stunningly repetitive "1 girl", which the crowd chants back like holy scripture. When he breaks out into the more well-known "Love me" - a ~~de~~ crooningly desperate kind of love song - even more join in. At this point, as I watch him step and move to the rhythm, I am reminded of the artists before him; the backstreet boys, Nsync, the ^{dancing} heartthrobs of the 90s. ~~The~~ Time has taken its toll on these acts, their facade crumbling slowly away to reveal their secret shames. Sometimes drug addiction, sometimes alcoholism, sometimes a tendency for anger and mayhem. ~~It is~~

Often, as in Exemplar 2, candidates writing as fans lacked the critical, analytical tone of a review lavishing praise on musical acts or football teams without the more factual recount of action which is central to the genre (e.g. 'Faultless, perfect and sorrowful are words to use to truly capture this concert'; 'Great and epic are the only two words that come to my mind when thinking of the performance. It's hard to forget a great and epic performance like that'). Some responses felt unplanned and would have benefited from being shorter; some candidates seemed to lack the confidence to spend time shaping their response before starting to write, and to stop writing before time had run out.

Question 3

- 3 Write an introductory script to be read by the presenter of a radio phone-in entitled 'What makes for a happy relationship?' [20]

This was another popular choice of question. Most responses showed some evidence that candidates had previously heard a radio phone-in and had some experience of the genre, most candidates also struggled to grasp the mixed mode central to the question: a crafted script to be delivered in the spoken mode. A small number felt too written in the syntactical and lexical complexity, and were unsuited to being spoken aloud. A greater number lacked attempt at craft, featuring an imagined presenter speaking spontaneously in shapeless sentences, with little planned content and no evidence of forethought or structure. Only a small number, such as Exemplar 3, achieved a voice that used the task to demonstrate control and creativity in their writing.

Exemplar 3

B3

"Hey ~~hey~~ hey hey and welcome to Love radio. the show that keeps you ~~is~~ updated on the love scene. With celeb relationships, heartbreaking love ballads, and wondergull advice from our love doctors for those who need a little love potion or 2. ~~For~~ For those of you who don't know I'm your host Isla View and I'll be takin' you on a little ride called the love train. On with the first Lovers tigg of the day ~~is~~ we're gonna be taking your lovely calls and helping you with whatever you need. Are you a Beauty stuck with a beast? Or maybe you're a Kathy who doesn't know what to do to please her Heathcliff? Could you be a Diana who thinks her Charles has met a Camilla? Or you might be a Romeo searching for his Juliet? Well don't you worry Romeo because we'll help you find her, hopefully without the not-so-happy ending. Personally, ^{or} if you want

?	Misconception	A number of responses made the same category error identified in all three previous reports: they consisted of the transcription of a series of imagined exchanges (see Exemplar 4).
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Exemplar 4

"oh we're getting a call! Hello? ... Hello?"

"Hiya! I can't believe you answered my call! Hi Chris, Hi Jan!"

(Jan) Hi, what's your name and where are you from?

My names shan, I'm from Birmingham. How are you?

(Chris) Hi shan, great to have you on the show! I'm good thank you! So shan, what do you think makes a good relationship?

(shan) ~~My name~~ well, I have a story. ~~me~~ My husband and I, we've been married for 4 years, went on holiday recently.

(Jan) oh, God! A holiday sounds great right now! where did you go?

(shan) we went to Bali; amazing place, amazing people. It was just stunning absolute brilliant place.

Anyway, our hotels got muddled up and because we've had tried to bypass a step in the proceeding and booking, we ended up in a hostel. 50 miles away from where we needed to be.

(Chris) Bet he was in the doghouse for that! I don't envy him. Not one bit!

As explained in previous reports, candidates need to understand the text type of scripted speech written for oral delivery, so that they are able to recognise a question asking for such a text.

Question 4

- 4 A publisher is producing a large-format book of photographs of significant artists/performers entitled 'Creative Icons of the Modern Age'. Each photograph has an accompanying written text that explains the artist or performer's importance. Write the text for someone you think should be included. **[20]**

This task was the least popular choice, perhaps offering a text type least familiar to most candidates. Among those who chose it, a significant number seemed not to have experience of an actual published text in mind as a style model. In some responses, the positioning of the reader seemed more consistent with a newspaper or a website than a book, lacking a sense of permanence and authoritative retrospective. In a few cases, there was a deeper lack of craft and a voice more consistent with the spoken mode (e.g. 'At the time the fans of Tyler did not like this change (looking back I realise that this was one of his greatest albums ever). But anyway! Tyler disappeared...')

Some responses which did seem to produce a voice consistent with the task slipped into making a case for the inclusion of their chosen artist, producing a text which was more persuasive than informative. A small number of candidates did manage more of a focus on a referential function: responses which were crafted, structured and appropriate for the given purpose were not disadvantaged by the relatively more neutral tone demanded by this question, and were placed in Level 6. Some candidates approximated a more journalistic register, skilfully combining key facts about their chosen icon with flair in their written expression (see Exemplar 5).

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