

GCSE

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/02 Summer 2023 series

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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. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 2 series overview

J351/02 GCSE English Language 'Exploring effects and impact' assesses candidates' ability to:

- read and respond to 20th century fiction texts and
- write imaginatively and creatively.

Candidates should answer the questions in the order that they are given, as each question is designed to prepare candidates for the next question. This includes responding to the writing, as the topics of both writing tasks draw on themes and ideas explored in the reading section, as well as encouraging candidates to demonstrate structure and language techniques and devices that they will have engaged with in the reading section.

The short answer questions in Question 1 require focus on an early section of Text 1. Question 2 and Question 3 draw candidates' attention to how the writers use language and structure to achieve effects. A short section of Text 1 is used for Question 2 and a longer section of Text 2 is used for Question 3. Question 4 uses both texts and requires candidates to respond to a question in which they will demonstrate their ability to compare the writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed as well as evaluate the texts in light of a statement that could be applied to both of them. Candidates are encouraged to recast appropriate material from their responses to earlier questions in their Question 4 responses.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read the texts carefully and thoughtfully • read the questions carefully • paid careful attention to line references in Question 1, Question 2 and Question 3 • selected relevant textual evidence/quotations • used appropriate subject terminology • analysed the effects of language and structure • compared writers' methods • planned and structured their writing response carefully for effect: there was a clear shape with a discernible beginning, middle and end • made effective use of sentence structures, punctuation and vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not read the texts properly • misread the questions • wrote about material from outside the designated lines in Question 1, Question 2 and Question 3 • asserted ideas without using support from the text • did not use subject terminology or used wrong subject terminology • made generic comments about the use of such devices as rhetorical questions • made no comparisons or limited comparisons to merely ideas and content • did not plan their writing response • made errors in sentence structures and spelling.

Section A overview

J351/02 'Exploring effects and impacts' uses two unseen literary prose texts, one of which may be literary non-fiction. Both texts were published in the 20th or 21st century and they are linked thematically. As this qualification is not tiered, either or both texts may be slightly edited to make sure that they are both accessible for all candidates and challenging for the most able.

Text 1, from *Enigma* by Robert Harris, published in 1995 but set during the Second World War, describes the hurried night-time bicycle ride of the character Jericho, who urgently wishes to inform his allies in the Hut that he believes he has worked out how an important enemy coding machine operates. Text 2, from *A Crossing: A Cyclist's Journey Home* by Brian Newhouse, published in 1998, describes Brian's day of cycling 175 miles to his girlfriend Karen's house in Twin Cities, America.

Almost all candidates recognised that, while both texts focused on cycle journeys, Text 1 was fictional and Text 2 was autobiographical.

Most candidates engaged well with the texts and appeared to relate successfully to the experiences of the two cyclists on their journeys.

OCR support



The OCR [delivery guide](#) for teaching how to read unseen 20th and 21st century literary texts may be useful.

Question 1

Question 1 assesses AO1: candidates' ability to select and interpret information. It uses a very short section (in this case one paragraph) from early on in Text 1. It is designed to provide an accessible start to the examination by helping candidates to read closely a small section of one of their texts. All candidates should be able to achieve some marks in this section.

Question 1 (a)

Reading meaning and effects

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Enigma* by Robert Harris.

1 Look at lines 5–9.

(a) Identify **two** phrases which show that Jericho left in a hurry.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

There were very few candidates who could not identify any of the following pieces of evidence that Jericho left in a hurry. Any two of the following were acceptable responses: '(He) **seized** (his dressing-gown)'; '(and) **pulled** (it over his pyjamas)'; '(He) **grabbed** (his overcoat, his scarf, his socks and his boots)'; '(and in) **less than a minute** (he was on his bike)'.

Just occasionally candidates offered an answer that wasn't a quotation or came from outside the prescribed lines. Sometimes they offered too much material, so that, while their response included a correct phrase, or correct phrases, the response could not be considered to meet the AO1 requirement 'to select'.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Identify **one** phrase which shows it is winter.

.....
..... [1]

Again, there were very few candidates who could not identify a phrase which showed it was winter. Any one of the following was an acceptable response: '(He grabbed his) **overcoat**, (his scarf, his socks and his boots)'; '(his) **scarf** (his socks and his boots)'; '(the ground was iron-hard with) **frost**'; '(steering directly into the) **frozen puddles** (along the edge of the road)'; '(the) **ice crusts** (rupturing under his tyres like drum skins)'.
Just occasionally candidates offered an answer that wasn't a quotation or came from outside the prescribed lines. Sometimes they offered too much material, so that, while their response included a correct phrase, the response could not be considered to meet the AO1 requirement 'to select'.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Explain how we can tell that, as he rides his bike, Jericho is excited.

.....
..... [1]

Either an appropriate explanation, for example, 'he was cycling recklessly', or one of the following quotations from the text was acceptable here: '**wobbling**'; '(absurdly) **euphoric**'; '**laughing** (like a madman)'; '**steering directly into the frozen puddles**'.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *A Crossing: A Cyclist's Journey Home* by Brian Newhouse.

3 Look at lines 13–27.

Explore how Brian Newhouse uses language and structure to describe the speed of his journey.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

Question 3 assesses the same AO2 skills as Question 2 but uses a lengthier section of Text 2. Strong responses understood that this section of the text starts at a turning point for Brian on his journey to Karen's house, where the weather suddenly changes as if by 'magic'. He is able to cycle at a much faster speed than he expected, as conveyed through the way that he now perceives the elements (or at least the wind), which had formerly impeded his progress 'for days', as his ally or fellow 'racer' propelling him towards his destination. The last two paragraphs take the reader with Brian, and his thoughts, impressions, reactions are conveyed to us in a rapid sequence that mimics his speed. Good responses picked up on the dramatic effect of the impact sentences that don't 'conform' grammatically, but show that he is travelling so fast that the sights ('Raindrops dangling from the telephone wires or corn leaves turned to diamonds in the sunlight') are merely a fleeting impression. These responses also included details on how short sentences ('Another hill') leave us with the impression that he no sooner sees it than he is scaling it ('I flew up it in a second'). Some candidates also commented on the exaggeration for effect here. Many candidates identified the many verbs used to describe both Brian's actions and the actions of the elements and the most successful responses analysed the language choices here. They also discussed the imagery in some of the sights he passes – the 'phone wires swung on their poles like jump ropes', the 'waving corn', 'the jiggling store fronts' – to make meaningful comments on their activities in encouraging/applauding/participating in his huge bursts of energy and speed.

Most candidates did not employ material from outside the designated lines here, but some did misread the opening lines of this section (lines 12 -15), and thought that the simile describing how 'the overcast and fog were peeled like a blanket from a bed' was in some way depicting Brian's speed at this point. Another common misreading was that the wind was an obstacle for Brian and that he was battling against it. This is, of course, true in the early part of Text 2, but not in the section they were focusing on here.

Misconception



Candidates need to read their texts carefully to make sure that they pick up on 'changes' during the course of the writing. The early part of Text 2 described Brian's miserable battles with the elements. There is a turning point in the middle when the wind and rain stop. Then the wind changes direction and starts 'pushing' Brian in his desired direction, meaning that he is now very pleased and excited.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Enigma*, and **Text 2**, *A Crossing: A Cyclist's Journey Home*.

4 'Both texts powerfully present an exciting journey.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss what makes the journeys exciting
- explain how far the excitement of the cyclists is because of their journey
- compare the ways the writers present the journeys.

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

[18]

Question 4 assesses:

AO3: comparing writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts and

AO4: evaluating texts critically and supporting this with appropriate textual references.

The first three questions on this examination prepare candidates for Question 4, which is worth the same number of marks as Question 2 and Question 3 combined. For this reason, candidates should stop at this point and think carefully about how they will frame their response before they start writing. They might also consider any relevant material they have written in their responses to Question 1, Question 2 and 3 how it may be recast appropriately to address the question here.

In this series, Question 4 asked candidates to consider how far both texts powerfully presented an exciting journey. Most candidates recognised that in Text 1 the excitement felt during the journey derived from Jericho's 'discovery' whereas the excitement in Text 2 was a consequence of Brian's personal reactions to his cycling exploits. Many candidates were also able to observe that Jericho spent the duration of his 15 minute journey in a 'euphoric state' whereas only part of Brian's day-long journey might be considered exciting (for Brian at least).

Many candidates looked for ways both to agree with and challenge the statement.

It was clear that centres are preparing candidates well for AO4. As ever, the expectation of 'powerfully' here challenged the most successful responses to consider the writers' craft. Middle range responses tended to focus more on the experiences of the cyclists or the reader's reactions to the journey (it was 'fast', 'dangerous', 'tense' etc) rather than the effectiveness of the actual writing. Weaker responses tended to open by agreeing with the statement then offer some evidence of the writers experiencing excitement.

The comparative element to this task (AO3) was quite often less successful, either because candidates did not really link their comparisons to the actual statement (for example, 'Both men are riding bikes') or because they offered alternating blocks of evaluation for each text without making it clear how they were being compared.

Misconception



Candidates struggled to draw meaningful comparisons in their writing. The bulleted prompts that form part of Question 4 are helpful here. More focus on the third bullet ('Compare the ways the writers present the journeys') could have helped some candidates.

OCR support



Teacher guide: [comparing and evaluating texts](#). Additional support to teachers about Question 4, the highest tariff reading question in components 01 and 02.

Section B overview

Question 5 and Question 6 assess:

AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.

Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Candidates are offered a choice of writing tasks. They choose either Question 5 or Question 6.

The writing tasks are designed to build on what candidates have read in Section A of the examination. It is worth reminding future candidates to do the writing task after they have completed Section A because candidates may be able to use what they have read to inspire the content and style of their writing. Indeed, this series saw many candidates employing devices such as short sentences and images that recalled (but didn't copy) images used in the texts.

Many candidates understood that the purpose of their writing was to engage and entertain and they often went to great lengths to achieve this end. The quality of some writing in response to both questions was quite often astonishing given the time constraints of the examination.

Mostly candidates wrote in coherent sentences and they were often ambitious (if not always precise) in their vocabulary choices. However, a number of candidates are not using accurate punctuation either within or between sentences.

OCR support



[The little book of spelling, punctuation and grammar \(SPaG\)](#) – Intended as a handy reference tool for students.

Question 5*

5* 'At that moment she realised...'

Use this as the opening words of a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore your characters' thoughts and feelings about their experience.

[40]

Candidates quite often used this 'starter' phrase to offer a flashback-style narrative that ended back at its starting point. Where this had been planned and the story had a convincing beginning, middle and end, it could be very successful.

As ever the best stories were ones that came from the candidates real, or easily imagined, experience. The least successful responses were clearly derivative, based on film or video game genres.

Question 6*

6* Write a description of an exciting journey you have made.

You should write about:

- things, people or places that were connected with the journey
- how the journey affected your thoughts and feelings
- the way you feel about that journey now.

[40]

In Question 6, most candidates wrote about a real or imagined journey in some kind of vehicle. Some offered more metaphorical interpretations of a journey, and the latter often worked well.

The best responses heeded the requirement to make their journey somehow 'exciting'. The weakest responses lost focus on the idea of 'a journey': the importance of writing a plan first was very evident.

Exemplar 1

~~I ride off~~ I kicked off ~~s~~ and began my journey.

It came down faster than I thought. First, I could smell the vapour in the air, angrily brewing, ready to unleash an assault on me. I could taste the salt on my lips; I was nervous to get back to camp. It was a long way to ride. ~~As~~ I could see - well, hardly anything. My front headlight was ~~as bright as lightning~~ but a candle in the wind. My engine was audible, the constant churning of my trusty steed, ready to carry me into battle.

Exemplar 1 illustrates part of a response to Question 6 in which the candidate is describing an exciting journey. It is clear that the candidate, through their use of personification of the weather and the short opening sentences, has been very much influenced by Brian Newhouse's style in Text 2. This impacted well on the candidate's overall achievement.

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