

GCSE

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/01 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 1 series overview

Centres have clearly prepared their candidates well for this examination. Centres have clearly taken into account the suggestions and advice offered in previous examination reports and most candidates understand what each question requires and how best to approach answering it.

There were far fewer scripts in this session in which candidates had left questions unanswered. Responses were generally more concise and fewer candidates made use of the extra page or additional answer booklets.

Some candidates who typed their work, however, were not restrained by the page count in the exam papers and wrote at excessive length, often repetitively, and sometimes at great detriment to their overall achievement.

It was pleasing to see how well most candidates presented typewritten work. Questions were almost always clearly labelled, and lines were usually double-spaced which allowed examiners to annotate the responses in detail.

Candidates clearly understood each of the reading texts and were able to relate to discussions about the importance of what people eat. Most were able to make thoughtful comparisons between the two texts and evaluate how they presented their ideas.

Some candidates, however, used very long quotations and it was not always clear which element of the quotation related to the comment that they were making. Others used ellipsis in the middle of a lengthy quotation, an approach which did not lend itself to close analysis of the question.

Examiners were impressed by the hard work that all candidates put into their response to the questions on this paper. The maturity of response to the reading section, and the effectiveness of much of the work in the writing section, all produced within the time constraints of an examination, were a credit to the candidates and to the centres who prepared them.

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 before answering • used paragraphs to organise responses • chose precise quotations • used terminology precisely • started paragraphs with topic sentences • wrote enough - but not too much. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misread the texts • did not organise responses clearly • did not select relevant evidence • used subject terminology inaccurately • did not use the correct form of writing • did not address the audience directly.

Section A overview

Each question in Section A tests different reading assessment objectives. The exception is AO2 which is assessed in both Question 2 and Question 4. Different aspects of AO1 are tested in Question 1 and 2: Question 1 assesses the skills of selection and interpretation whereas Question 2 assesses the skill of synthesis.

The questions are based on two texts from different centuries. In this session the first text was from the 19th century and the second text was from the 21st century. Candidates are not required to draw on knowledge from outside the texts but some candidates do use contextual clues from within the texts in their evaluation of the texts for Question 4.

Text 1 was written by a famous 19th century chef who wrote a recipe book to help people on lower incomes to cook their food more economically. He also thought that improved cooking skills would have other benefits: it would improve people's emotional well-being and moral behaviour and would also increase people's appreciation of what he called 'the culinary science'.

Text 2 was written by Gillian McKeith in the 21st century, who claimed to have medical expertise which she used to improve the diets of her patients. Like Soyer, she wanted to make people 'happier' but she was more concerned than him about improving their physical health and helping them to lose weight. Unlike Soyer, she referred to her own personal struggles with eating 'the right food'.

The texts were accessible and linked by themes which could be understood by students. All candidates understood that the writers wanted to improve people's diets, and most were able to explain the different emphases of each writer. Some were critical of McKeith's emphasis on a 'slimmer' you and preferred Soyer's concern for the more general wellbeing of people with lower incomes.

There were some misunderstandings. Some candidates used incorrect pronouns to describe each writer; assessors are instructed not to penalise such confusion when awarding marks. Many candidates confused Soyer's desire to improve people's 'morals' with a desire to improve their 'morale'; as this was so prevalent, it was decided that such confusion should not affect candidates' marks.

There was clear evidence that candidates had followed advice given in previous examiners' reports. They had read both texts and looked at all the questions before they began to answer. They were, therefore, able to draw on ideas from later reading questions and from the writing tasks to help them understand the key ideas addressed by the two texts.

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

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Shilling Cookery for the People* by Alexis Soyer.

1 Look at lines 1–6.

(a) Identify the word that describes the people Alexis Soyer visited.

..... [1]

(b) Give **two** ways in which philanthropic individuals have tried to help the poorest people.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

(c) Explain the help Alexis Soyer thinks that the poorest people still need.

.....

.....

..... [1]

1a. Almost all candidates identified the word 'poorest' as the word that describes the people that Soyer visited. Some, however, had not read the text carefully enough and quoted other words instead. Candidates would be well-advised not to write the whole phrase but just the word itself, and not to explain that they are about to quote the word.

1b. Almost all candidates were able to select 'improve their morals' and 'render their dwellings more comfortable' as the correct answers. Some, however, used incomplete quotations which suggested a lack of real understanding, e.g. some wrote 'render their dwellings' rather than the full quotation. A correct response here sets the scene for a better response to Question 4.

1c. This question is the differentiator as it requires interpretation. Although the correct answer is that Soyer wants to help the poorest people prepare their food more economically or more effectively, many thought that he simply wanted to provide them with more food. Many candidates gave several possible answers, but examiners are told to accept only the first answer even if the correct one is given later.

Exemplar 1

Both texts emphasise the powerful emotional satisfaction food can bring us. This can be seen in Text 1 as "nothing more disposes ~~to~~ the heart to amicable feelings" than well-prepared food. Similarly in Text 2, the writer feels "hope and inspiration" when learning about different foods.

Both texts also ~~may~~ highlight the complex and scientific nature of food. This can be observed in Text 1, where the writer mentions the importance of "culinary science". In the same way, the writer in Text 2 emphasises the importance of a "esoteric ~~microbiotic~~ diet".

Both texts also underline the various physical benefits provided by ~~got~~ good food. This can be seen in Text 1, where good food is shown to bring people "much ~~&~~ comfort". Similarly, in Text 2, the writer says good food will give you the best chance of being slim and happy and healthy.

This candidate's response shows how to organise a clear, concise response to Question 2. There is a clear statement of a similarity supported by relevant evidence drawn from each text.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *You Are What You Eat* by Gillian McKeith.

3 Look at lines 12–25.

Explore how Gillian McKeith uses language and structure to persuade the reader to trust her advice.

Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

This task asks candidates to focus on one section of the text and explore how the writer has used language and structure. The question clearly directs candidates to lines 12 to 25. Some candidates, however, referred to material from earlier in the passage which assessors were not able to reward, no matter how insightful. Centres should make sure that candidates are aware that this question will always focus on a section of the text rather than the whole text.

Candidates made use of an impressive range of subject terminology. Less successful candidates tended to use lengthier quotations with a general reference to a feature of language and structure but without a clear explanation of the effect. More successful candidates analysed features of language and structure in detail and gave more thorough explanations of the impact on the reader.

In the specified lines there were a wide range of linguistic and structural features to discuss. Candidates in this session were especially successful at identifying straightforward features of structure such as alliteration, repetition, and three-part lists. There was much less discussion of linguistic features such as metaphor which would enable candidates to access the higher levels in the mark scheme.

There is, for example, the metaphor of a 'journey' which is first mentioned on line 12 and the returned to on line 21 when McKeith refers to the 'first step on the road to a slimmer, healthier you'. She also uses the metaphor of a journey in the phrase 'you have taken the first step on the road back' and later compares bad diets to drugs and good diets to prescriptions.

Only a few candidates demonstrated the perceptive appreciation of language and structure required for the highest levels. Discussion of the language associated with medicine in the specified lines and the differing connotations of McKeith's references to the 'patients' at her 'clinic' and her use of the correct 'prescription' were useful in demonstrating a more sophisticated understanding of the text.

Pronouns are a significant feature of the text and were a popular choice for discussion. Many candidates were able to discuss how the writer used pronouns to create a relationship with the reader. Higher level responses were able to track how the use of pronouns shifted as the text developed with a clear shift of focus towards the patient using 'you' towards the end of the extract.

Tracking the development of the text in this way is a more useful approach than selecting more random features from different parts of the text. It is useful to start with the first of the specified lines and trace how the writer develops ideas as the extract progresses, looking for patterns of language such as the shift in the use of pronouns to 'you' on line 18.

However, generalised comments about how the topics of each paragraph change are less helpful. It shows some general awareness of how the extract develops but lacks precision. It is better to locate more precisely the words or phrases which mark these changes of focus in the text.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Shilling Cookery for the People* by Alexis Soyer and **Text 2**, *You Are What You Eat* by Gillian McKeith.

4 'Both texts are just about the benefits to individual people of changing what they eat.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss what we learn about people changing what they eat
- explain how far you agree that both texts are mainly about individual people changing what they eat
- compare the ways the texts present the benefits of people changing what they eat.

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

[18]

Examiners were pleased to see how much progress candidates had made in their approaches to this task. Centres have clearly taken on board advice given in previous examiners' reports about how to organise responses to this task. Almost all candidates now attempt to address the statement and frame their response as an interwoven comparison.

The focus of the statement was about whether the benefits of changing what they eat was beneficial just to individuals or to whole groups of people. Most candidates were able to see that Text 1 did refer to the benefits that individuals would receive but was more concerned than Text 2 about the benefits to a whole group of people – 'the poorest people'.

More successful candidates considered the contexts of each text. They noted that Soyer was also concerned about the benefits to professional chefs like himself of a greater appreciation of their skills. In a similar way, McKeith was seeking benefits for herself by encouraging people to buy her book and follow her dietary recommendations.

There were very few successful introductions to candidates' responses to this task. It would be useful for centres to help candidates plan their responses carefully and frame their argument in a concise opening paragraph. It would be useful in the introduction, for example, to identify the extent to which the statement is applicable to each text.

The best responses began by exploring the ways in which the statement did apply to each text. They provided supporting evidence based both on what each text described and how they presented their ideas. Critical consideration of how the writers present their ideas is essential for achieving marks in the two highest levels of the mark scheme.

The best responses then considered ways in which the statement did not apply to each text by breaking the statement down to its component parts. Candidates considered whether each text was just about changing what people eat, just about the benefits, or just about individuals. The word 'just' was picked up and clearly examined.

Less successful candidates often paraphrased the text or included lengthy quotations. Future candidates may find it beneficial to practise selecting quotations more judiciously and use them in support of their response to the statement. Often, candidates were commenting on quotations without linking their comments back to the statement.

Section B overview

There were successful responses to both tasks but Question 5 was the more popular choice. Candidates had a more secure grasp of the how to write a talk than how to write a magazine article. Both tasks elicited responses that were enjoyable to read, and candidates of all abilities were able to make responses which reflected their level of attainment.

There are several criteria for a successful response: the response must be cohesive and organised into coherent and effective paragraphs; sentences should be controlled and effective with accurate punctuation used for clarity and effect; the vocabulary should be precise and convincing and spelling should be accurate.

Most responses have a clear overall structure with only a few coming to an abrupt or unsatisfactory ending. Candidates make good use of discourse markers in the text to support cohesion between sentences and paragraphs, however, many candidates do not use paragraphs which are coherent or effective.

The content and style of the response must also be adapted to suit the form, audience, and purpose of the task. Candidates were more successful in doing this in their response to Question 5 than in their response to Question 6. Centres may like to consider making this a focus in their preparation for future assessments.

Candidates' use of vocabulary is usually appropriate and often effective, and spelling is generally accurate. A wide range of sentence structures is used by many candidates, and some show an exceptional control of sentences used for effect. Punctuation within the sentence, however, is sometimes inconsistent, and candidates would benefit from further work on how to use commas.

Question 5*

5* Write a talk for parents advising them how to help their children eat healthier food.

You should:

- describe some difficulties children have with eating healthily
- explain the benefits of eating healthier food
- describe how to convince children to eat healthier food.

[40]

It was pleasing to see that centres had taken note of advice in previous reports and used simple deictic features such as here/now/today to locate the talk clearly. More successful candidates also made clear what persona they had adopted as the speaker, for example, health worker, parent, or dietary expert, and often referred to imagined personal experience. Anecdotes can be helpful but should not be lengthy as they can distort the structure of a text which is not intended to be a narrative.

Most candidates were able to give clear, detailed advice, and were able to use quite precise vocabulary to explain their ideas. There was a clear sense of the purpose of the task and a clear sense of who the audience was and how to address them effectively. The most successful candidates made use of an impressive range of rhetorical features and persuasive language.

Question 6*

6* A magazine for young people publishes a regular column with the title 'That was when my journey began.'

Write an article for the magazine to describe a moment when you changed your ideas about life.

You should:

- explain what you used to think about life before that moment
- describe the moment that changed your ideas
- explain how your life has changed since that moment.

[40]

Although fewer candidates chose this task, some of the most impressive and enjoyable pieces were written in response to it. Candidates had a clear sense of the purpose of the task and were able to identify, and describe in often effective detail, the moment their journey began. There were a range of journeys described, including the discovery of an unexpected talent, a personal tragedy, or a realisation that it was time to start preparing for final exams.

Responses tended to take a narrative form, however, and very few candidates attempted to make use of the magazine article format or address the specified audience. Lively sub-editorial material such as a headline, a stand-first, and one or two sub-headings would easily address this deficit. Candidates could also more clearly identify their audience by making use of simple techniques like pronouns to establish an effective reader-writer relationship.

Exemplar 2

~~Why am I~~ Why am I telling you all this?
 It's not like I'm a Hollywood screenwriter,
 I'm a student, just like you. ~~well~~
 Well, it's exactly that: ~~you~~ You could
 be in the same spot as I was, still
 believing in the magic of the arts. Don't
 get me wrong, the arts ~~or~~ can be
 magical, but they're still made by people.
 People who went to school, who ~~took~~
~~the bus~~ got bored in class, who did
 their homework. People who thought, ~~the~~
 'I could do that', and did. Still just people.
 People like me. &

People like you. John J. Doe, student

Exemplar 2 describes the moment their journey to becoming a successful screenwriter began. In this concluding section, the candidate deliberately positions the audience of young people by using pronouns and by referring to concrete examples of their experience. The vocabulary is straightforward but appropriate for the audience with an effective use of pronouns, punctuation, and sentence structure.

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