

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

(9280) Paper 9280/W

Report on the examination

November 2021

REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE 9280W NOVEMBER 2021

The November 2021 paper inspired many students to produce high standard of responses. Incomplete papers were a rarity and the majority of students appear to have a clear grasp of what the tasks (and the specification as a whole) require of them. Some students produced outstanding responses and deserve much credit for their preparation and dedication.

It is worth restating that the underlying principle of 9280W is one which privileges both technical accuracy and content: the production of engaging responses that are technically accurate is seen as the gold standard. The mark scheme therefore rewards both technical accuracy and content, but it is vital that students understand how the balance between these twin poles shifts towards the end of the exam paper. For instance, the first task allots 6 marks for content and 3 marks for accuracy, but in the final task the balance shifts to 8 and 15 marks respectively. The final task is therefore as a platform for students to show their command of sentence variety, accurate sentence demarcation, accurate spelling and variety of vocabulary. The majority of students understand this and have clearly been well-prepared by their teachers.

In terms of the tasks set in this and every other series, task focus and relevancy are essential. Examiners expect to see that the specific focus of each question is addressed. To this end, students are reminded that the bullet points in questions 2 and 3 are compulsory. Where students miss one or more of the compulsory bullets, examiners are unable to award high marks. Although the bullet points in question 4 are optional, it is often the case that most students follow them and this seems a sensible approach. In most cases, students used the bullet points wisely, yet some bullets were less thoroughly covered. Where a bullet invites a justification (e.g., 'why they should go with you') then it is wise for students to spend time elaborating on this.

Pre-learnt phrases and long-winded introductions to tasks tended to get in the way of some answers. It was often the case that social phrases like 'I hope you're in the pink of health' or lengthy statements giving accounts of family activities felt bolted-on and used without much regard for the task or audience. Given that the word counts are constrained, it's far better when students get down to the task fairly promptly.

Centres often ask about the stated words counts. While there is no penalty at all for exceeding suggested word counts, it is worth students adhering to them as it can be the case that writing excessively runs the risk of making more errors. For the most part, students did stay within suggested limits.

QUESTION 01

The image used in this task was slightly fantastical and led to some brilliant responses, ones that dwelt on the visual content and/or the imagined atmosphere. It is worth reminding students that they are not obliged to cover all elements in the image; selecting on one or two aspects and developing them in clear detail is the best approach.

In terms of technical assessment, only spelling and punctuation are assessed. It is far better for students to write clear descriptions using full stops accurately rather than using e.g., semicolons or overly ambitious vocabulary in this first task. Full marks are achieved through clarity.

QUESTION 02

This task required students to write a letter to a friend inviting them to visit a city. As stated above, examiners are in part assessing how well the bullets have been addressed. Clearly, the first two bullets in this task can be addressed quickly, but the final bullet ('why they should go with you') usually determined the quality of the response. These 'justification' bullets are worth dwelling on for students. The best answers combined some details about the city's attractions and often a more personal reason for visiting. Less thorough responses shortchanged this bullet and gave simple justifications, e.g., 'There's lots to do there'.

Focusing on 'why' bullets is doubly effective as these bullets can lead students to demonstrate sentence variety when they spend time justifying their thoughts via complex sentences. Doing so naturally enables students to access the higher reaches of the language part of the mark scheme where marks for variety (as well as spelling and punctuation) are available.

QUESTION 03

This task invited students to write a blog about someone who has inspired them. This was usually very successful and was interesting to read for examiners. Some students wrote touching accounts of friends and family members, and some wrote about public figures. Either approach was fine and, as ever, judgements were solely made on the clarity, detail, accuracy and variety of what was written. Once again, the quality of the response in relation to the later bullets ('what you like about them' and 'how they have inspired you') helped examiners to judge the depth of ideas.

As noted above, elaborating on justification-style bullet points enables students to write in more varied grammatical structures. Employing complex sentences accompanied by subordinating conjunctions and dependent clauses is often the hallmark of better responses.

QUESTION 04

The final task resulted in some fascinating responses. Students clearly had some passionately held views and very often wrote laudatory accounts of their teachers and schools which were heart-warming to read. Question 4 provides students with some latitude to show their skills and a greater amount of words to play with. Longer responses require careful sequencing which aids the overall coherence of the

argument. Many students structured their response in a logical fashion whereby a sense of a building argument was evident. Less effective responses tended to be un-sequenced and occasionally scattershot. It is always worth students spending some time planning their response to help aid coherence.

The balance of marks between content and language alters in the final task. Here, variety is important and so demonstrating control over grammatical structures and vocabulary is worth focusing upon. Previous reports have commented on the avoidance of overly ambitious vocabulary: overloading an answer with complex words used inaccurately is to be avoided. Pleasingly, most students seem to have avoided this trap in the November 2021 series.

Examiners continue to be impressed by the abilities and communication skills of students writing in a second language. Once again, the assessment of this paper revealed the quality and talent of many students and therefore, the dedication and skill of their teachers.

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In line with OxfordAQA's Fair Assessment promise, the assessment design, marking and awarding of this examination focused on performance in the subject, rather than English language ability.



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