Year 10 English Language mock – Examiner’s Report

December 2016

Firstly it’s clear that with 100% exam assessment, it’s a really good idea to get students used to the exam format in Year 10. While some struggled with the requirements, it strikes me that’s the point; there’s plenty of time to target the areas of weakness. I think it’s really important to state that all indications are that this will be a low scoring paper nationally. A quick look at the indicative standard material on the mark scheme shows why. I think it would be important to make sure students are aware of this so that they don’t become too demotivated. The indicative standard material in the mark scheme also provides some good models which might be helpful to use with students.

Marks out of 80 ranged from 3 to 65. Overall the vast majority of students performed much better in Section B than Section A. Some students who seemed to struggle with the more analytical questions really flourished in Section B, and even some students at the lower end of the ability spectrum produced really credible descriptive writing. This had clearly been taught very well. The focus for teaching therefore needs to be on Section A. Quite a few students seemed to have the idea that the more they wrote, the better. I think it would be worth emphasising to students that they are certainly not expected to fill all the space, and indeed many (though not all) of the top scoring answers tend to be shorter, well crafted and conceptualised. Conversely longer answers can tend to repeat material and are often rather diffuse. Certainly if a candidate is asking for more paper than is provided, alarm bells should be ringing!

Question 1

This is, of course, the most straightforward question and involves retrieval of information. Almost all candidates were able to make a good stab at this. The most common wrong answer was about how dark it was, which doesn’t directly relate to the weather. I also didn’t allow “granite sky” or “grey sky” as it wasn’t explicitly mentioned on the mark scheme, I think because it might not show enough understanding of weather. In practice I suspect they may allow this in the real thing.

Question 2

Most students were able to spot that this was an invitation to discuss linguistic techniques and their effects. The discriminating factor tended to be how well students could discuss the effects of personification (“the coach groaning”) and simile (“the drunken man”). Students should be advised to avoid meaningless phrases like “this draws the reader in” and “this makes the reader think.” A number of students were rather hindered by their belief that the passage was describing a school coach. A significant minority weren’t able to name these techniques and another significant minority didn’t quote to support their points.

Question 3

This question was poorly answered overall, with very few candidates achieving above Level 2. A very large number did not spot that this was a question focussing on structure, and instead they wrote often quite spuriously about language or characterisation. My understanding is that candidates can, indeed should, discuss the effects of language, but only in the context of structure e.g. by tracking changing references to rain throughout the passage. Candidates should follow the bullet points given in the question, make sure they still quote even though the question is about structure, and try to focus on narrative devices such as how the writer changes the focus as the text develops.

Question 4

This question was the most poorly answered on the paper, with very few achieving above Level 2. The first point to make is that 20 marks (out of 80 on the whole paper) are available just for this question, so candidates should allocate their time accordingly and aim to write more than twice as much for Question 4 as they did for Questions 2 or 3. On the other hand, vague writing paraphrasing everything we are told about the different characters is to be avoided. There is no need for introductions and conclusions as this is not an essay question; students should just get straight into answering the question.

Candidates should engage with the statement given in the question. In this case, those who disagreed with the student tended to find this a rather unfruitful path! One or two managed it, but far more floundered trying to argue why the writing did not make you feel like you were there.

Question 5

This was much better overall. Many candidates responded with creativity and sensitivity, with some doing a really impressive job. Some candidates got too tied up in telling a story, with the result that they rather forgot about including lots of description. Others just wrote too much, and would be better advised writing less but crafting it much more. A surprisingly large number used quotes from the Section A passage in their Section B response; they would be a lot better coming up with their own descriptions. Quite a few did not write in paragraphs, a sin AQA have always penalised particularly heavily.