AQA
Realising potential

GCSE
ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

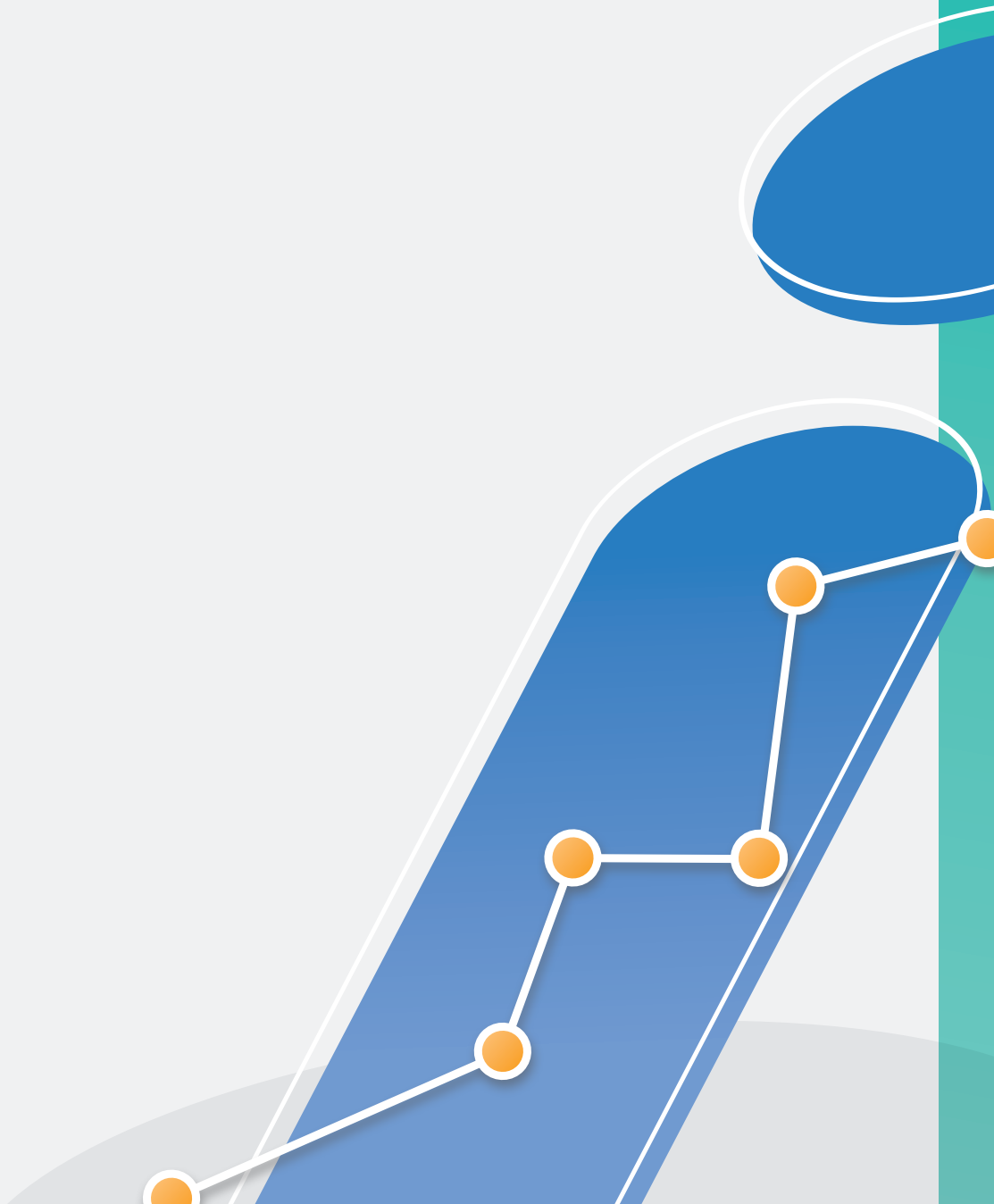## Insight report:
2019 results at a glance

September 2019

2019

aqa.org.uk

Insights

How to use this report

This report provides a snapshot of this summer's results. It contains information on grade boundaries and performance by paper. This report is part of our full results insight series. For extra information on results:

- Join your Head of Curriculum for a [video breakdown](#).
- Access our free Enhanced Results Analysis tool. We've created [two-minute tutorials](#) to show you how.
- Navigate to [e-AQA](#) to download the full report on the exam for a detailed breakdown.
- Book on to one of our [live lessons webinars](#). The Head of Curriculum for your subject will take you through this year's results and answer your questions.
- [Book on](#) to a Feedback event. See examples from real scripts from the summer to highlight common areas where students did well and where there's room for improvement.

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Qualification summary

June 2019 marks the third major series of assessment of the new specification for GCSE English Language. The specification has attracted a number of new centres and as a result there has been a further increase in the entry this year, of more than 27,000 students compared to the June 2018 entry.

The cohort continues to represent the whole range of ability, with students entered from a wide variety of educational centres.

The data indicates that students' performance at subject level is very stable. The overall mean mark on Paper 1 is slightly higher than the overall mean mark for Paper 2, but these mean marks are more aligned this year compared to June 2018. Examiners noted increased confidence in students' responses, particularly on the reading questions on Paper 2. This is indicative of teachers' increased familiarity with the assessment at this point in the lifecycle of the specification and teachers should be credited for preparing their students well.

Before getting into the detail, it is worth noting that the best answers continue to be those which spring from a spontaneous and individual response to the stimulus material, rather than those which are the result of overly mechanistic, prescriptive or repetitive approaches.

This is an un-tiered exam and therefore the following comments will give feedback and suggestions that could inform progress at different levels of attainment.

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Enhanced results analysis

Conduct your own analysis using data relevant to you. Watch our [two-minute tutorials](#) on using Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) for school, subject, group or student performance; or log straight in through [aqa.org.uk/log-in](#)

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Grade boundaries

Subject or paper	Max mark	Summer 2019 grade boundaries (raw mark)								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
English Language 8700	160	16	36	56	76	86	97	108	117	127

How to interpret grade boundaries
Grade boundaries are set using a mix of statistics and expert judgement

Our research team uses a range of statistics to make predictions that suggest the most appropriate grade boundaries. The statistical evidence considers the prior attainment of the given cohort as well as the distribution of marks. Senior examiners then review a script sample to confirm the statistically recommended marks are sensible for the grade.

Boundary setting is overseen by Ofqual. To find more grade boundaries and learn how they are set, visit aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/results-days/grade-boundaries-and-ums

Or hear from Dale Bassett and Ben Jones in our meet the team video series.

2019 grade summary

Grade summary
This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.

Grade	Percentage
9	2.1%
8	4.3%
7	7.2%
6	13.7%
5	17.5%
4	17.3%

Total achieving (3-U = 37.9%).
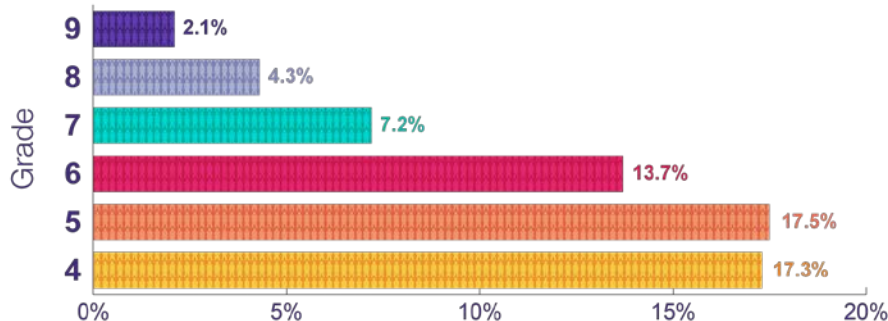
AQA GCSE English Language

Grade summary

This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.

Watch our two-minute team stories to find out more about how we set grade boundaries and ensure fairness. Visit aqa.org.uk/team-stories

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Paper 1 insights

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2019 series in our reports on the exam. Visit aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

Average performance by question/mean marks: Paper 1

AQA GCSE English Language
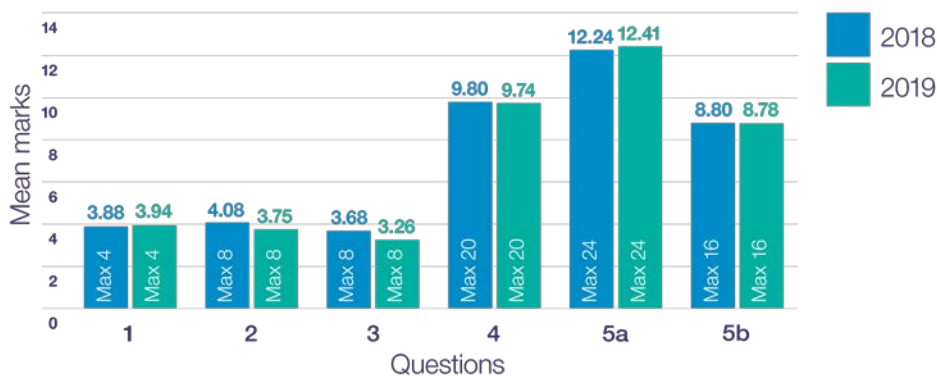
Mean marks by question on Paper 1.

This chart compares the performance on Paper 1 in 2019 with that of 2018.

Highlights from Paper 1

The overall picture of performance on Paper 1 is very stable. Students are showing increased confidence, particularly in responding to the writing task. However, there is a marginal decrease in the mean marks for questions 2 and 3 compared to June 2018.

Aspects where students did best	Aspects where students did less well
Question 1: • Students have engaged quickly and successfully with the source. • Examiners reported seeing many more succinct, precise answers. Simply selecting relevant quotations continues to be an effective method of answering the question. Question 4: • Again, students' performance on Question 4	Question 2: • While examiners were impressed with students, of all abilities, engaging with the metaphorical aspects of the passage, (eg 'moulded in clay') some students continue to be distracted by using technical terms rather than focusing on the effects of specific words/phrases chosen by the writer. • Focusing on individual words/phrases is an effective approach for all students, as it

is very stable. Examiners noted that students of all abilities genuinely engaged with the focus of the question, showing both sympathy for Alice and criticism of her father, Hartop.

- While many students discussed both strands of the statement, schools are reminded that it is not imperative for students to cover all parts of the statement, or to present a counter-argument, in order to attain highly.
- Generally, students' responses were improved by adopting a 'methods-based' approach, beginning with phrases such as 'The writer used the phrase/word/method...to show how hard Hartop is…'.

Question 5:

- Both options in Paper 1 prompted equally engaging, imaginative pieces of writing.
- For the descriptive writing task, the most successful approaches used the image as a springboard into their imaginations, and balanced this with focusing on the finer, subtle details in the image.
- Students interpreted the title of the narrative writing task in a myriad of different ways. Examiners noted that those who opted for more poignant subject matters did so with considerable sensitivity and maturity.
- Across both options, students are writing fewer (three to four pages) but more controlled 'consciously crafted' pieces of writing.

encourages them to explain effects in more detail.

- Students should contextualise the individual words/phrases they select in relation to the passage, to avoid misinterpretation.

Question 3:

- Students continue to show confidence in engaging with the structure of the text. Many observed shifts in perspective from outside to inside the van, exploring the link between the weather and the tension between the family members. However, a significant number of students continue to make over-generalised comments ('interests the reader', 'makes the reader want to read on') which do not show any understanding of the effect(s) of a particular structural feature and cannot be credited at Level 1.
- A more successful approach would be to note a structural feature, at a specific point in the text and then comment on how it has developed from earlier/contrasts with the start or the end.
- The key to answering this question is to concentrate on why the detail selected is effective at that specific point in the text.

Question 5:

- Examiners reported some excessive planning: it's an important and effective skill but students should practise allowing themselves sufficient time to write the piece.
- While students' technical accuracy has improved in the range of sentence types and punctuation used, it's more effective to use apostrophes, semi-colons and colons sparingly – and accurately – rather than indiscriminately and incorrectly.
- The same principle applies to complex vocabulary which only adds to the quality of the writing if chosen aptly.
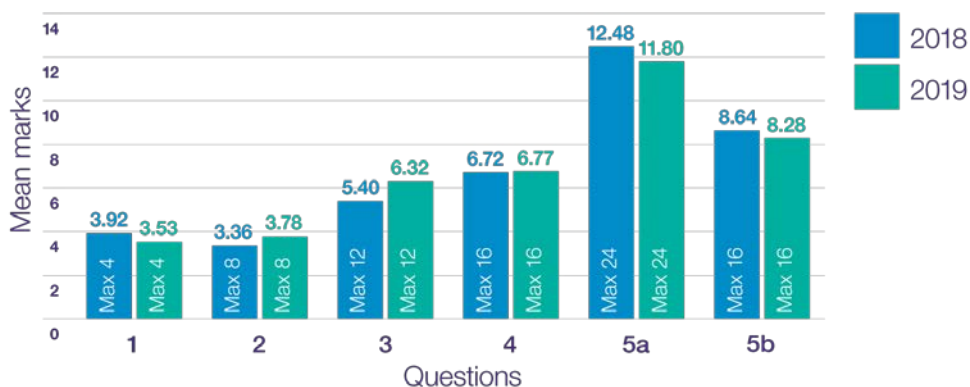
Paper 2 insights

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2019 series in our reports on the exam. Visit aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

Average performance by question/mean marks: Paper 2

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Mean marks by question on Paper 2.

This chart compares the performance on Paper 2 in 2019, with that of 2018.

Highlights from Paper 2

Similarly, the data shows students' performance on Paper 2 is very stable. There is an increase in the mean marks on the reading questions, most notably on question 3. However, this year, there were some areas where students' responses to the writing task could be improved.

Aspects where students did best	Aspects where students did less well
Question 2: • Students have demonstrated increased confidence in addressing the demands of this task which assesses, in equal measure, skills in both interpreting the implied meanings of texts and in synthesising ideas and evidence. • Students of all abilities were able to engage with the concrete focus of the task (different boats). • While all students recognised the difference in ages of the vessels, those who achieved	Question 1: • Students should use time at the start of the exam to read the text – and the statements – slowly and carefully. • Remind students that the statements are ordered chronologically to match the text. • Examiners also reported too many cases of students selecting more than four statements as true, which is a counter-productive approach.

marks in Level 3 and beyond observed the irony in the older of the two boats being the one that better survived the storm.

- The most successful responses offer detailed explanations of a small number of inferences (rather than making a larger number of less precise inferences).

Question 3:

- Examiners were impressed by students making wiser selections of language examples from the text. Many selected the imagery of the towering wave, the avaricious belly and the washing machine as the basis of their response, and these were all excellent examples to choose.
- The best responses, reaching into Level 4, often included perceptive comments that took a conceptualised approach to the language chosen by the writer and discussed those choices within the framework of the 'big ideas' in the text. For example, students demonstrated an understanding of the writer being sucked into the belly of the wave in terms of the endless battle between man and nature, concluding that man is only ever at a disadvantage because of the imbalance of power.

Question 4:

- Students are referring to writers' methods in an increasingly integrated way. The best students seamlessly move between perspectives and methods in their wide ranging analysis of the texts.
- Students frequently commented on the changes in the perspectives and feelings of the two writers and those who explored these shifts in depth, enhanced the quality of their response.
- Examiners reported more evidence this year of students comparing 'like with like' in the two texts. For example comparing how both writers responded with terror to the power of the sea. All students would benefit from developing the skill in identifying 'like with like', as it's the key to success in Question

Question 3:

- One note of caution however: too many students continue to offer generalised comment on the symbolic effect of colour. The waves in the source were white, but not because they were innocent, pure, angelic or fragile. A more successful approach is to ensure comments are specific and contextualised.

Question 4

- The task is designed for students to build on their inferential understanding and synthesis of ideas required by Q2 (the 'what'), and the exploration of language methods required by Q3 (the 'how'). The challenge is in addressing these two strands simultaneously. Consistent with last year's exam, some students did not address the 'how' in this question, and their marks are reduced as a result.

Question 5:

There remain some areas where students' responses to the writing task could be improved:

- A potential focus for further teaching could be structuring arguments. Students who carefully consider the use of paragraph links and discourse markers are likely to improve the clarity of their writing and improve the overall quality of the argument. This is a key discriminator for examiners and determines the level to be awarded, before then fine-tuning their judgement by assessing individual skills.
- A huge number of students are still writing too much (over 3 sides) which can be detrimental because it becomes far harder to sustain both the clarity of their argument and technical accuracy.
- Students are using a greater variety of sentence forms and a wider range of punctuation marks, but semi colons and colons are still more frequently misused.

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4, but critical to the synthesis required in Question 2.

Question 5:

- Students responded to the theme of the writing task (fame/celebrity) with much enthusiasm and confidence.
- The stimulus generated a dizzying array of different approaches to the task – very few students struggled to take a view on this topic. Many showed they could adopt a lively and individual voice, evident in the engagingly bold tone: using humour, irony and hyperbole to good effect.
- This year, students used a broader range of linguistic devices with fewer devices being over used.
- The best responses are characterised by students engaging with the 'big ideas' (politics, economics, gender, aesthetics, class, morality, psychology, philosophy) and framed their own perspectives in this larger context, which enhanced the overall quality of their argument.

- Students are using more complex and sophisticated vocabulary, but when students use such words imprecisely it obfuscates the meaning and detracts the overall clarity of the piece.
- A useful mantra that all students would do well by is: write less and control what you write more carefully.

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- Enhanced Results Analysis
- Reports on the exam
- Live lessons webinars
- Feedback events
- Visit Exampro for past papers, related mark schemes and examiner comments.

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