

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/01 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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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. 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. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper J351/01 series overview

J351/01 is one of two examined components for the new GCSE (9-1) English Language examination which was first examined in 2017.

The main difference between the two components is that J351/01 assesses candidates' response to non-fiction texts whereas J351/02 assesses their response to literary texts. Each of the components follows a similar structure and tests the same assessment objectives. The exception is that in Question 2 of J351/01 candidates must synthesise information from two texts. This skill is not tested in the same way in J351/02.

To do well in this component candidates must be able to read unseen texts with confidence and understanding. They should also be able to select relevant details from the text and identify and explain features of language and structure. They must also be able to identify similarities and contrasts between the texts and evaluate the impact of each text on a reader.

This is the third session in which this component has been examined, following sessions in June and November 2017. Centres have clearly paid careful attention to examiners' reports from those sessions because most candidates are using more successful approaches to respond to each question. The candidates' responses show a clearer understanding of the demands of each question.

In previous sessions responses to some questions were not well planned enough and too long. To give clearer guidance to candidates about how much to write, the question paper was redesigned. Candidates were given two pages for the response to Question 3 and three pages for the response to Question 4. There is limited time to respond to these questions and candidates were able to write successful responses without using additional answer booklets.

Less successful candidates:

- write illegibly
- leave questions unanswered
- leave blank pages in responses to longer questions
- run out of time
- state their ideas without explanation
- provide no evidence to support their responses

More successful candidates:

- write legibly
- write something for every question
- write a full-length response for every question
- make effective use of time and plan their responses
- develop their responses by giving reasons for their answer
- support their responses with detailed evidence from the text.

Section A overview

The reading section contains two unseen texts which have a thematic link. The first text will always be a text written in the 19th century and the second will be a text written in either the 20th or 21st century. The unseen texts chosen for this session provided a successful stimulus for candidates.

As this is an un-tiered qualification, both texts were slightly edited to ensure accessibility for candidates as well as challenge. Lower ability candidates were able to access the more straightforward ideas in each text and higher ability candidates were challenged by the more complex ideas in each text.

The first text was a description of an experience of the natural world written by Henry David Thoreau in 1854. Candidates responded well to Thoreau's vivid description of a fight between three ants and most understood the effect it had on his emotions.

The second text was a biographical account of how the young Bert Hölldobler was inspired to become a scientist. Many candidates understood that it was not only an experience of the natural world but also the support of his parents that led Bert choose a scientific career.

Most candidates were able to make connections between the two texts and many could identify some differences. It was clear to candidates that both texts described a powerful experience but many candidates saw that the effect on Thoreau was less long-lasting than the effect on Bert.

There were some common misunderstandings. Some candidates thought that Thoreau was a young boy like Bert. Other candidates thought that the ants behaving frantically in the second text were fighting like the ants in the first text.



Centres should refer to the 'Reading Skills: Teacher Guide' on the OCR website. There is also a collection of exemplar responses based on the June 2017 examinations. This will be followed in the autumn term of 2018 with exemplars from the June 2018 examinations.

Key



OCR support An identifiable issue/misconception for which OCR have support available.

Question 1(a)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau.

Look again at lines 1–3.

1 (a) Where did Thoreau find the two ants?

..... [1]

Question 1(b)

(b) Explain **two** ways in which the two ants were different from each other.

.....
.....
.....
..... [2]

Question 1(c)

(c) Explain what the word 'incessantly' suggests about the way they fought.

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

Question 1 is designed to be a gentle start to the examination. It should enable all candidates, including lower ability candidates, to achieve some marks at the start of the examination. The question tests candidates' ability to select and interpret information. In this session both 1a and 1b could be answered simply by copying out relevant quotations from the text. The only candidates who did not achieve full marks for 1a and 1b were candidates who did not offer a response to the question.

Question 1c was more challenging because it asks candidates to interpret the word 'incessantly'. The command word 'explain' or the question word 'why' indicates that a quotation is not enough and that an explanation is required. Some candidates may have drawn on previous vocabulary knowledge. It was possible, however, to infer the meaning of the word 'incessantly' from the statement earlier in the same sentence that 'having once got hold' the ants 'never let go'.

Question 2

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau **and Text 2**, *Journey to the Ants* by Bert Holldobler and Edward O. Wilson.

2 Both texts describe experiences of the natural world.

What are the **similarities** between these experiences of the natural world?

Draw on evidence from **both** texts to support your answer.

.....

.....

.....

[6]

Question 2 is more challenging than Question 1 but should be approached in a straightforward way. It is designed to help candidates see the connections between what the texts are describing. Candidates do not have to analyse language and structure.

Both texts should be read carefully and thoroughly before candidates attempt this question. The question asks candidates to identify similarities between the texts and give evidence for the similarities by referring in detail to each text. The similarities, however, must be relevant to the question.

The best candidates explained three similarities between the texts. They gave evidence from each text to support each similarity. More often than not the best evidence was a short, relevant quotation but detailed references were accepted.

Other candidates varied between two extremes. Some identified just one good similarity and gave relevant evidence but did not try to identify any further similarities. Other candidates listed more than three similarities but did not give enough evidence to support the similarities.

Some claimed similarities were not accepted. It is true, for example, that both texts refer to a war but the reference in the second text is not directly relevant to the writer's experience of the natural world. It is, therefore, not relevant to the question.

Other candidates identified a relevant similarity but produced no relevant evidence to support their point. They either gave no evidence at all or provided evidence that did not support the similarity they had described.

The expected similarities are listed in the mark scheme but it is not exhaustive. Examiners were instructed to be open-minded and many other valid similarities were identified by candidates – and rewarded by examiners – during the marking of this question.

Exemplar 1

Finally, both experiences result in fascination 'on the outsider's behalf'. Text 1's author writes that he was 'excited even as if they had been men', showing how excited and fascinated he was. Text 2's story states that the experience of the world of ants 'invited young Bert', meaning what he was fascinated by it.

This extract from a candidate's response shows how to write a clear, concise paragraph. It begins with a short summary of the similarity – the 'fascination' evoked by the ants. Then the candidate uses an embedded quotation from each text to support the similarity that has been identified. Three short, clear paragraphs like this would be sufficient to achieve full marks for this question.

Exemplar 2

in text 1 it shows how Henry watched the ants when it says "I watched a couple of ants that were locked in each others embraces, prepared now at noonday to fight till the sun went down or life went out." This suggests that the ants were preparing for their big fight and that they only fight in the night this makes the reader think that the ants are ready to fight.

in text 2 it shows how Bert kept ants when it says "He gathered live colonies and studied them in artificial nests, learning the local species, drawing their distinctive anatomical traits and observing their behavior." This suggests that he liked to keep track on the ants to see how they are developing.

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Turn over

This whole candidate's response is less successful. It identifies one relevant similarity – that both Thoreau and Bert observed ants. However, the candidate uses overlong quotations and explains them in an unnecessarily verbose way. This leaves the candidate no time to identify any other similarities so the candidate is unable to achieve any more than two marks.

Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *Journey to the Ants* by Bert Holldobler and Edward O. Wilson.

3 Look again at lines 13–29.

Explore how Wilson uses language and structure to show Bert's growing fascination with the natural world.

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

[12]

It is important to note that this question asks candidates to discuss a specified number of lines. This reflects the fact that candidates have limited time to respond to the question. It was pleasing to see that far fewer candidates drew on material outside the specified lines in this session.

Question 3 begins to increase the demand for candidates but the analysis of language and the use of subject terminology should be familiar territory for most centres. In the new specification, however, candidates are expected to send an equal amount of their response analysing structure.

Lower ability candidates tended to explain in their own words what happened in the text. Better candidates were able to use subject terminology to identify features of language. Many candidates, however, found it hard to explain the effects of language precisely enough for the highest marks.

In this session the question was designed to point candidates towards a discussion of structure. The reference to Bert's 'growing' fascination invited candidates to consider how the writer shows Bert's response to his encounter with the ants develops into his final decision to enter a career in biology.

The responses to this task in this session were better than the responses to a similar question in June 2017. Candidates seemed to have been better prepared to identify features of structure at both text and sentence level.

For the purposes of this qualification structure includes any feature of a text beyond word level. Therefore, features such as alliteration, repetition and listing are regarded as structure at sentence level in the same way that contrast and build-up are regarded as structure at text level.

It was encouraging to see that centres had prepared candidates to discuss sentence length more effectively in this session. The better candidates were able to explain, with specific examples, how writers used different length sentences to control the reader's response to a text.

Some candidates were content to state that the list of animals kept by Bert showed his fascination with the natural world. Better candidates looked closely at how the list developed from everyday domestic animals such as 'dogs' to climax with an exotic creature like the 'axolotl'.

Overall candidates understood what this task required and went some way towards meeting its demands. Centres would be well advised, however, to give candidates practice in explaining how and why a particular quotation has a particular effect.

Exemplar 3

In addition the pets Bert has after they show his love for animals and nature, ~~captured~~ shown in the phrase 'dogs, mice... called an axolotl'. The asyndeton in this list ~~shows~~ ^{forms} a crescendo from the more ordinary pets Bert has owned to the more ~~unusual~~ ^{unusual} ones, emphasising how much he is fascinated by all kinds of animals and nature showing his ~~love~~ ^{true} love for it.

Wilson uses ⁵ ~~By using~~ a series of verbs to describe what Bert did to the arts, which are 'gathered... studied... learning... drawing... observing'. These active verbs show just how dedicated and interested ^{Bert is by arts.} ~~and interested~~ ~~and interested~~.

Finally Wilson describes Bert as 'obsessed with the diversity of life', which is an extreme emotion showing his complete devotion and fascination for nature and as it is near the end of the passage it implies that this is the ⁵ ~~climax~~ climax of Bert's feelings for nature.

In this exemplar the candidate explains clearly how the quotation supports the point. Many candidates quoted this list to show Bert's fascination, but this candidate was one of the few to explain successfully how. There is detailed consideration of how the list itself has a significant internal structure which builds from everyday creatures to more exotic ones. It is also worth noting how subject terminology – asyndeton, crescendo – is integrated into the response as a springboard for the explanation rather than as its main point.

Exemplar 4

for the reader. Another way the author
 has shown Bert's reaction to the
 ants is by talking about "after
 the war Bert's home was filled
 with pets, including, at various times, dogs
 mice, fish, guinea pigs, a fox, a heron,
 a Jackdaw and a large salamander
 called an ~~ante~~ axolotl." This shows
 Bert's love for animals and the natural
 world.

This candidate's response is an example of a more basic approach. The candidate has identified a relevant quotation and copies it out in full. There is no use of subject terminology, however, such as the simple term 'list' and the comment simply states that the quotation 'shows his love' but does not explain how.

Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau and **Text 2**, *Journey to the Ants* by Bert Holldobler and Edward O. Wilson.

4 'Both texts powerfully describe how people can be affected by the natural world.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the impact of the natural world in each text
- explain how far the natural world can change people's lives
- compare how the writers present the effects of the natural world.

Support your response with quotations from **both** texts.

[18]

All the questions candidates have responded to so far lead up to this question. This question is what makes the reformed GCSE qualifications more challenging because it requires candidates to make independent judgements about two unseen texts.

Although some centres prepared their candidates well for this question in June 2017, candidates' responses were generally much better this year. Centres have clearly made good use of the support offered by OCR to ensure they understand the demands of this question.

Most candidates kept their response focused on the key words in the question – 'how far do you agree?' – and used them to frame their response. Many started by identifying which text agrees more fully with the statement than the other and end by repeating the same point.

The best candidates planned their response carefully. In their introduction these candidates identified specific reasons why they believed one text agreed with the statement more fully. They used the rest of their response to explain the specific reasons in more detail.

There were some impressive discussions of which text was more powerful. Some candidates argued that the vivid description and extended comparison with human society made text 1 more powerful. Others argued that the effects on Thoreau were less powerful than the effects on Bert in text 2 because they were so short-lived.

There are 18 marks available for this response. The marks are divided, however, between two assessment objectives with 12 marks available for critical evaluation and 6 marks available for comparison.

This question builds on the similarities candidates have already identified for Question 2. In this question, however, the candidates take the similarities further by considering the impact on the reader. Candidates also go on to consider the differences between the texts which is not addressed in Question 2.

In this session many candidates found sustained comparison challenging. Less successful responses made some general references to connections between the texts in their opening paragraph and then wrote about each text in turn with little further reference to comparison.

Better responses alternated between the two texts. They wrote one paragraph about the first text and then used a linking sentence to move to a paragraph explaining a comparison or contrast with the other text. They were rewarded for clear comparison but not developed comparison.

Candidates were better at evaluation. Many candidates could discuss 'negative' features such as the violence in Text 1, and 'positive' features, such as the pleasure Bert gained from his collections. Better candidates, however, were able to deploy more precise vocabulary to explain the effects of the natural world.

Most candidates could gain more marks by developing their explanations. Many simply asserted the effects they believed their quotations had. A simple explanation of how or why the quotation had the effects they claim would move them to the next level.

Exemplar 5

Both texts also differ in the length of time the impact lasts. ~~While~~ Text 1, ~~for example~~ lasts over a span of around half-an-hour, and mainly describes the ants' conflict and the author's emotions and thought at the time. ~~So far~~ The text starts with 'one day', implying that this text is a random occurrence and so that the events in the text ~~are~~ last within a short frame of time, and the phrase near the end 'for the rest of the day' indicates that, though the impact of the ~~be~~ natural world is strong, it is short-lived ~~and~~ and confined to a single day, represented by the beginning ('one day') and the end ('for the rest of the day').

Text 2, however, has the impact last over a ~~much~~ much longer period of time. In the beginning of the ~~sentence~~ text, the words 'childhood pleasures' implies that the impact started at a very young age, and the ~~in~~ phrase 'entered the study of insects' indicates that their impact will last throughout their life. Later on in the text, the time qualifier 'after the war' indicates ~~as~~ time passing and the impact still remaining, demonstrating the long lasting nature of the impact, and the phrase 'the die was cast' gives the reader a sense that

Bert is fated to take a career in ~~biology~~ biology due to the strength of the impact of the natural world on him.

This is a strong response because it has an overview of the text. The candidate's point about how long the effects of the experience last is straightforward but it is skilfully exemplified from the text. The use of quotations from across each text shows how each writer develops his ideas and there is some judicious use of terminology such as 'time qualifier'.

Section B overview

In this component there is a choice of writing tasks can both broadly be described as non-fiction. Each task specifies a form, audience and purpose and candidates are expected to adapt their style of writing to suit the form, audience and purpose of their chosen task. Audience is especially important: the most successful candidates in this session had a clear focus on who they are addressing when they were writing.

Candidates wrote successful responses to the two tasks set in the writing section set for this session. Both tasks seemed equally popular and both tasks were undertaken by candidates across the range of ability.

Centres have clearly paid attention to advice given in previous examiners' reports as responses to the writing tasks were much shorter this year. A shorter piece of writing allows candidates to spend more time planning and crafting the quality of their writing. Longer pieces of writing tend to lose focus and rarely achieve the highest marks.

The redesign of the examination paper has given candidates seven pages on which to write their response. Centres should advise their candidates, however, that three pages is enough to demonstrate their writing skills. Keeping pieces short also allows candidates to consider how to use structure for effect.

The range of responses assessed for this examination reflected the full range of ability. There was no dramatic change in the quality of written responses other than reduced length. The grid below outlines the main areas of strength and weakness in the current session.

<i>Areas of strength include:</i>	<i>Areas for improvement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of rhetorical devices • beginnings and endings • complex sentences • adventurous vocabulary • spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of metaphor • paragraphs – connectives and use for effect • using sentence structure for effect • punctuation between and within sentences

Question 5

EITHER

- 5 Write a post for an online forum for young people about 'A moment that changed my life'.

In your post you should:

- describe the moment in detail
- explain your thoughts and feelings about that moment
- comment on what made that moment so important for you.

[40]*

Many candidates used this as an opportunity to write an account – possibly fictional – of a dramatic moment in their life. Some referred to bereavement, depression, pregnancy and other life-changing moments while others referred to more mundane events such as GCSE results day and bad haircuts.

The best responses to this task had a clear sense of purpose and audience. Many simply framed the response with an address to their online audience, urging them to learn from the mistakes that they had made. More successful responses interacted with their imagined audience throughout the response.

Others wrote effective accounts which made no reference to the context or audience. Assessors were instructed to give candidates the benefit of the doubt as the conventions for an online forum remain relatively fluid.

Many candidates were able to adopt a suitable style. Some tended to be a little too conversational which limited their achievement. The best mixed elements of formality with some colloquial vocabulary which demonstrated good control of register.

Overall the task elicited engaged and enjoyable responses which examiners enjoyed reading. However, the tendency of candidates to write about very graphic and disturbing incidents – hopefully fictional - concerned some examiners.

Exemplar 6

It all began in that messy, dull, dusty room that I was residing in for a short time. The wall's gray paint was cracked and slowly falling off, there were cobwebs every where, and the endless amounts of dust ~~every~~ in every inch of the ~~room~~ room. It was clearly unsuitable for a living area but my distain was in vain and so I immediately began cleaning. Until something peculiar I saw hanging from the ~~old~~ ceiling lead smack in front of ~~the~~ the window. ~~I panicked as~~ It was an egg of some kind, I panicked in an instant believing it to be a spider's egg, but soon noticed it was too weirdly shaped to be one, so I immediately ~~so~~ ever so closely gathering all the courage I could muster to inspect it. While it ~~startled~~ startled me by its surprise hatching. I was blabberghasted to discover that it was actually a butterfly hatching from its safe & cozy bed. In that moment, I cared for nothing else in the world, I was too entranced by this spectacle. It was

This exemplar illustrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of candidates in this session. The candidate uses an ambitious and effective vocabulary to describe a life-changing moment. Most complex words are spelled correctly but there is a simple homophone error.

This candidate varies sentence lengths effectively but could improve their mark by organising their ideas into paragraphs. The candidate should also check punctuation between sentences carefully to correct comma splices.

Question 6

OR

- 6 You are giving a talk at a parents' information evening about why all children should study science at school. Explain your views.

In your talk you should:

- explain why some people think that all children should study science at school
- consider why other people might think that not all children should study science at school
- express your own opinion about all children studying science at school.

[40]*

Not all candidates who take this examination attend a school but almost everyone can draw on some experience – whether as a parent or a candidate - of information evenings at school or college. Almost all candidates had a clear sense of the audience and context for this task and adapted the style of their response accordingly.

In the same way candidates were able to draw on their own experience of studying Science at school, no matter how distant a memory, and work out good reasons for children to study it. Reasons included the fun that children could have in Science lessons and the possibility that they might grow up to develop some life-enhancing technology.

Some candidates found it harder to include a counter-argument in their response. Arguments against the study of Science that were commonly made included the difficulty of some topics in Science and its perceived clash with a religious world-view. Most concluded with an enthusiastic endorsement of Science as a subject that all should study.

Most candidates demonstrated confident control of the talk format. Many used a range of rhetorical devices to make their talk more persuasive and adopted a careful mix of formal and informal language. The best responses used sentence structure for effect and employed sophisticated scientific language to express their ideas.

Exemplar 7

Science has become very important in our lives. From something as simple as the water we drink, which ~~isn't~~ can be rendered ~~safe~~ to drink ~~the~~ potable thanks to science, to the smart phones in our pockets, ~~treated and~~ by which science created by hundred of innovations in the ~~past~~ and discoveries in the past centuries, science's effects ~~have~~ can be seen all around us. ~~This is important~~ The importance of science means that it should be taught to our children, yet still some object to this, thinking it is a waste of time. This talk shall hopefully convince those who disagree that science ~~is~~ very important ~~for~~ needs to be taught to all students at school.

Firstly, it ~~encourages~~ allows children to appreciate the wonders of the natural and ~~world and also the~~ artificial ~~and~~ world. By showing our children how, say, leaves ~~turn~~ use sunlight to turn the ~~air~~ ~~we~~ ~~break in~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~wa~~ carbon dioxide we exhale and the water we drink into ~~food~~ glucose in plants and fruits, we can implant the seeds of fascination and ~~am~~ amazement in our children. We can broaden and narrow their perspective to see the world in more ways, from the microscopic world of atoms and molecules to the ~~universal~~ macroscopic world of planets and ~~st~~ galaxies! Surely this would intrigue them? To see the world as never

This is a top-level exemplar. There is a clear sense of context in both the style and content of the talk. Paragraphs are used (but not, perhaps, as effectively as they could be). The candidate takes time to set the scene using a wide range of vocabulary and a variety of sentence structure to make the argument. Vocabulary is carefully and effectively chosen to persuade the audience of the case being made.

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