

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

J351/03/04 Summer 2018 series

Moderated component

Version 1

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Introduction

The Spoken Language endorsement is a compulsory component of GCSE English Language. The endorsement is reported as a separate grade (Pass, Merit, Distinction or Not Classified) and does not contribute to the result of the overall GCSE English Language qualification.

Candidates must undertake a prepared spoken presentation on a specific topic following which they must listen to and respond appropriately to questions and feedback. Presentations must be formal but may take a wide variety of forms.

The Spoken Language endorsement is assessed holistically as a grade, using competency-based marking criteria. Competency means that a candidate must meet all the criteria in a grade to achieve it. If they only meet some of the criteria, they cannot be credited that grade.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments. This should take place as far as possible before assessment begins where possible.

General overview

Comments about general good/poor practice that apply to the spoken language endorsement. Likely to include:

- planning of presentations and use of notes
- effective use of assessment criteria
- effective organisation and presentation of sample
- importance of internal standardisation

In this second session of the new GCSE English Language specification, the majority of centres had embraced the opportunities offered by the new Spoken Language component and monitors reported seeing some excellent work in centres of all sizes with the full range of ability able to access and pass the assessment.

Centres were required to submit recorded evidence of the assessments, sending up to 30 recordings to the monitor to allow the centre's grading to be monitored. Recordings of assessments on all three grades, distinction, merit and pass, were required where appropriate. Some centres chose to upload their recordings onto the OCR repository, other sent their recordings to the monitor on USB sticks or DVDs. Monitors reported that the vast majority of centres submitted their recordings by the deadline and the USB sticks/DVDs were clearly and helpfully labelled with candidate numbers, names and the grade credited. A small number of centres did not label them fully and had to be contacted to provide more details, usually the grade credited to individual candidates. Centres were also required to send the monitor a copy of the centre mark sheet, but the majority of centres did not fulfil this requirement and had to be contacted.

Key point call-out

Centres are reminded that a copy of the centre mark sheet should be sent to the monitor with the recorded samples for J351/04, or uploaded onto the repository for J351/03.

Monitors reported that the filming of the assessments was mostly very helpful and of sufficient visual and sound quality. However, some centres did not provide a recording of the whole assessment, including the questions. Centres are reminded that the whole assessment must be filmed with the candidate clearly in view. There is no need to film the person asking the questions or to scan the audience. Occasionally the sound quality on the recording was poor, sometimes due to extraneous noise in the background and sometimes due to the camera being positioned too far from the candidate where projection was poor and could not be picked up fully by the camera's microphone. It is crucial that monitors can hear every word of the presentation and the questions for effective monitoring to take place. It is also fairer to candidates if background noise and disturbances are kept to a minimum during these assessments. Monitors reported that some films were difficult to access where they were too large for monitors to upload or saved in an unusual format, although there was a discernible improvement in this area this year. Centres should check their submissions carefully to ensure that they can be accessed easily.

The topics chosen varied widely and it was clear in the majority of centres that candidates had made choices which were judiciously guided by the teacher allowing for personal engagement with the subject-matter as well as an appropriate level of complexity for the grade credited. In a few centres monitors

reported seeing topics which were too heavily based on literature texts, where candidates had clearly not had much choice in their subject-matter. The standard of these presentations was often lower as a result. For any candidates aiming for merit or distinction grades, the topics need to have a level of complexity and interpretation. Less complex topics, such as work experience or my favourite football club/sport/hobby should be reserved for candidates aiming for a pass grade.

Key point call-out

Centres are reminded that candidates should choose a topic where they can speak passionately to engage the audience and that they should have some control over their choice of subject-matter.

The questions asked should enable candidates to extend their talk rather than repeat information. Monitors reported seeing some excellent examples of pertinent questions which enabled candidates to achieve a higher grade in many cases; these questions tended to probe and challenge using precise language. Other questions were less helpful and sometimes far too long, sometimes leaving the candidates with little to add, or closed questions which invited very perfunctory responses. It is essential that the questions are teacher-led rather than allowing other candidates to freely ask questions, as often candidate-led questions were far less helpful to the candidates.

Some centres adopted a format where the teacher used questions to structure the candidate's talk for them. This is a supportive format, but it is one that should be reserved for candidates aiming to achieve a pass grade.

Key point call-out

There were a few centres this year where candidates appeared to have been given the questions in advance and read aloud from pre-prepared answers. This is not permitted practice in this assessment: candidates should not be told the questions in advance and their responses to them should not be planned or scripted.

The majority of centres used the competency-based mark scheme accurately and put candidates in the correct grade band. As the marking criteria for the Spoken Language component is competency-based, candidates must fulfil all the criteria in the appropriate grade descriptor to achieve that grade. There was some evidence in a few centres that a 'best-fit' approach was being taken and candidates were credited a higher grade based on fulfilling one of the descriptors in the grade above. Centres are reminded that this is not appropriate in this assessment and that internal moderation must take place within the centre to ensure that the marking criteria is applied consistently and fairly. Where candidates had been over-marked, it was usually for one of the following reasons:

- the topic lacked the complexity necessary for the grade credited
- the presentation was too short and undeveloped
- the candidate read aloud a pre-prepared essay with no attempt to engage the audience
- the candidate did not use the range of strategies required for a distinction grade.

Additional comments

These should describe how centres met the assessment criteria and effective use of evidence.

Other suitable content includes:

- common misconceptions
- how candidates can access higher mark bands
- if bad practice is occurring, a description of this, why it is bad practice (which should clearly relate to the assessment criteria) and how centres can avoid this in future (especially when this might be treated as malpractice)
- signposting onto further resources (produced by OCR, or others) where this will support centres further

Monitors reported seeing a great deal of good practice, where candidates had planned their presentation carefully and used a wide variety of presentational skills and rhetorical devices to engage their audience, judiciously using a PowerPoint or short notes to assist them.

Unfortunately, there was far too much reliance on whole scripts in many centres where candidates were simply reading a pre-prepared script, sometimes with very little emphasis and often far too quickly. This led to ineffective talks with no communication established between the presenter and the audience. Often these candidates had been given higher grades that seemed to be based on the content of the script rather than how effectively the content was delivered. These higher grades could not be justified, as the requirement to engage the audience had not been met. Other candidates used PowerPoint slides which contained far too much information and were read aloud by the candidate.

Key point call-out

Reading aloud (from a script or a PowerPoint) is not a skill that can be assessed as a spoken language presentation as it does not meet the needs of the audience. Centres are reminded that candidates should not have full scripts in front of them when doing these assessments; short notes or concise PowerPoint slides lead to a much higher standard of work and develop the skills being assessed in this component much more effectively.

The presentations and questions should last 8 – 10 minutes. Monitors reported seeing a number of presentations that were very short – between 1 and 2 minutes at times. Some of these presentations had been credited distinctions and merits. Although at times the questions allowed candidates to expand their talk through extended answers enabling a higher grade, this was not always the case. Centres are reminded that candidates aiming for higher grades should present an extended talk on their topic, allowing them to fulfil all the criteria for these grades. Conversely, some presentations were far too long, and some monitors reported seeing individual presentations and questions lasting up to 30 minutes. This is not helpful for either the candidate or the monitoring process and centres are reminded that 10 minutes is the maximum time recommended. Teachers should work closely with candidates to ensure that their presentations are an appropriate length.

Where centres had enthusiastically embraced the demands and challenges of this new Spoken Language component, candidates had produced some outstanding work. Monitors reported seeing a great deal of excellent presentations where the candidates were enthusiastic about their subject and fully engaged the audience. It is hoped that as centres get more used to the requirements of this component, all candidates will be given opportunities across the course to develop a range of oracy skills in preparation for this final assessment.

Key point call-out

Working on oracy skills throughout the course, to enable candidates to develop effective strategies for this final assessment, is essential, as it was clear that many candidates were not aware of the need to engage with their audience using gesture, eye-contact and body language. For some candidates, the presentation seemed to be the first time that they had presented a formal talk. Oracy skills can be developed through group and paired presentations when studying literature texts or developing ideas for non-fictional writing tasks. They should be built into the scheme of work to develop the candidates' skills and confidence gradually.

OCR's guide to the Spoken Language endorsement is available on the OCR website and offers a complete scheme of work to prepare candidates for their final assessed presentation.

Supporting you

For further details of this qualification please visit the subject webpage.

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