



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report
Intermediate English
Main Session 2021

Examiners' Report (2021): IM English

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A. Statistics

The total number of candidates who registered to sit for the Intermediate English June 2021 session was 1579. Table 1 shows the distribution of grades for the session.

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	ABS	Total
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	26	136	469	227	168	339	214	1579
% OF TOTAL	1.65	8.61	29.70	14.39	10.63	21.46	13.55	100

Table 1: Candidates' distribution of grades

B. General Remarks

General Remarks on the Written Examination

Reports by all markers indicate there is enough evidence to acknowledge the effort invested in candidates' preparation for Intermediate English. Well-written language essays adhering to the conventions included in the syllabus, precise answers to questions in Section B, good summary writing skills and valid responses in Section C cannot but be the result of commitment and hard work. It is this evidence that then makes it disappointing to find too many efforts by candidates that seem to undermine this level of preparation with language essays that still do not reflect an understanding of the importance of proper organisation at essay and paragraph level, answers to questions in Section B that are at a tangent to the intended focus, summary paragraphs that ignore the specific rubric and literature responses that display knowledge of the short stories but an inability to use that knowledge selectively to answer the set tasks. As noted in one of the comments below, shortcomings that one may consider not immediately concerning candidates' competence in English are very important factors that may and do weaken performance. The better performing candidates tend to manage a consistency of control in each section and task. In contrast, other candidates lack this sustained control and perform to different degrees of arbitrariness.

As in previous years, markers highlighted a number of language specific issues. The main concerns underscored by markers included limited expression and poor or incorrect syntax, range and choice of vocabulary and use of a conversational/informal style. In some cases, the shortcomings were such that they only dulled what could otherwise have been better performances. Unfortunately, in some instances, these language issues were more serious compromising candidate effort particularly when (and this was often the case) shortcomings such as those mentioned in the paragraph above further compounded the problem.

C. Comments on Individual Sections

Section A

General Comments

As noted in previous reports, it is encouraging to see that the time invested in preparing for Section A translates into many essays evidencing an effort to adhere to appropriate format with essay and paragraph structures reflecting the conventions described in the syllabus. Given there is clear evidence this preparation is happening, it is a pity a number of candidates insist in writing essays disregarding these conventions. Another positive comment by markers was that most essays reflected a clear understanding of the rubric and a sustained effort to remain within the parameters determined by the rubric. In contrast, there were

too many essays manifesting a blatant disregard of key words/phrases in the rubric leading to efforts that did not really achieve the set task.

At paragraph and sentence level, the following were the most noticeable issues.

- Lack of cohesion and coherence at sentence and paragraph level
- Writing of overloaded run-on sentences
- Subject-verb agreement and tenses
- Limited range of vocabulary and/or wrong word choice
- Use of a conversational style of writing

Title 1: Descriptive

One of the favourite titles among candidates. The better essays evidenced a proper understanding of the title with the narrative parts clearly 'subservient' to the descriptive and a sustained effort to focus on what could be seen and experienced during the visit. Unfortunately, the weaker essays failed to achieve an acceptable balance between the narrative and the descriptive and/or what the description focused on. Some essays included too much concern in narrating the couple's past or the actual build-up before getting to the couple's residence. Other essays were also limited to just describing the couple without reference to anything else. In several responses, there was a lack of consistency in tense choice throughout the essay (randomly alternating between present and past tenses - "I started feeling like I am drowning").

Title 2: Narrative

Rather disappointingly, in most essays, the task was not really achieved. Again, a fundamental problem seemed to be ignoring the parameters determined by the title and the absence of a plan to work within or towards those parameters. Three key phrases in the title were 'mysterious creature', 'final hour' and 'fantasy story'. Too many essays were problematic because they lacked a touch of the mysterious, magical or supernatural; were not mainly concerned with the creature or ignored the focus on the last hour.

Title 3: Opinion

A good number of essays showed that candidates feel young people do not receive adequate training in the skills they require to lead an independent life. The better essays had good arguments (focusing on how parents, the education system and the nation in general are not doing their utmost to prepare young people to live independently), included support/evidence to underscore those arguments and, in a number of essays, some of the consequences resulting from this failure. Generally, the essays (particularly those with the better ideas) were correctly structured at the macro and micro level. The weaker efforts included weaker argumentation, overgeneralisations/sweeping statements and a less disciplined organisation of text.

Title 4: Argumentative

This was the favourite title among candidates. Most tackled it as a problem-solution essay focusing on linking current lifestyle with environmental problems and offering possible solutions. As expected, given the topicality of the issue, content was generally valid, however, text organisation tended to be more problematic than that observed in the average/better essays for Title 3. Introductions were 'relevant' but

lacked the clear focus leading into the essay body and body paragraphs tended to be organised in a less (when compared to Title 3 efforts) disciplined manner.

Title 5: Report

One of the strengths in report writing has always been adherence to format (To, From, Subject, Date, and Subheadings). The better efforts followed this convention of report writing, organised ideas (well thought and plausible) under proper subheadings, kept a sense of balance between subheadings and clearly produced a text focused on requesting funds. All markers; however, noted that while in previous years there was a consistent improvement in report writing, this year, a number of efforts were written as a letter or an email in total disregard of the report format.

Section B

General Comments

Responses in this section indicate that, most of the candidates understood both the passage and the questions. It was also evident that understanding the passage was not limited to surface/literal comprehension. As noted in the particular comments below, there were, however, a number of recurring shortcomings. These included:

- Not paying careful attention to the question – ‘In separate complete sentences...’ (Question 4), ‘What do the adjectives ... reveal about the writer’s attitude ...?’ (Question 5a)
- Answering questions by lifting from the passage
- Expressing ideas correctly and coherently
- Giving wayward answers – such as the picture suggesting tail docking is wrong

It seems that some candidates still need to understand that their effort in this section greatly depends on focus, discipline and attention that is, to a certain extent, separate from their competence in English.

Question 1

Very few candidates got the four answers correct.

- a) Most candidates got this question correct giving a valid explanation for their answer.
- b) Many candidates got this question correct. Many answers were imprecise because they included only part of the Subject.
- c) Few candidates answered this question correctly.
- d) Few candidates answered this question correctly.

Question 2

Most of the answers to this question were correct or mostly correct. Often, issues were the result of some arbitrary decision taken by candidates such as, ignoring the ideas in the text and answering the question

according to their opinion, not answering in a full sentence and simply listing single words and/or directly lifting from the source text.

Question 3

- a) Most responses showed understanding of the writer's argument in paragraph 3 and linked selective breeding to health issues, disease and complications.
- b) The better answers focused on paragraph 4 explaining how it functions as an exemplification of the argument made earlier by the author. Again, issues in these answers generally stemmed from lack of preparation for this section as some candidates ignored the rubric (writing about the author's pets mentioned in paragraph 1 and/or including reference to items bought for pets) and/or lifted from the source text.

Question 4

A good number of candidates answered this question correctly evidencing a clear understanding that the picture is not an actual image of one of the pet dogs mentioned in the source text, that answer/s had to be in separate and complete sentences and that each sentence needed to show a link between something in the picture and a point made in the source text. The weaker/poor answers missed one or more of these expectations, evidenced language shortcomings or included ideas/assumptions that could not be accepted (such as the picture suggesting that tail docking is wrong or that one should not take pets out in the rain).

Question 5

- a) A good number of candidates answered this question correctly explaining that the writer feels that the available products for pets are over-the-top. Some extended their argument to suggest a sense of ridicule. Unfortunately, too many candidates gave a separate definition of each of the quoted words without linking it to author attitude.
- b) In answering this question almost all responses showed understanding of the literal meaning of the verb "to mask" as hiding or covering the animal's smell. However, very few commented on the dual function referred to the owners' intention to disguise their pets' natural traits and behaviours.

Question 6

This question proved to be one of the most problematic as a significant number of candidates failed to link the writer's brief mention of the two dogs she had as a child/teenager and with her position in the text. Many answers mentioned that she was part of a growing pet keeping tradition but stopped at that and did not take the argument further.

Question 7

Most candidates presented a summary in one paragraph and within the given word limit. It was common for candidates to identify just one salient point and present examples related to that particular point from the text. Very few candidates identified most salient points. Some focused on the entire text rather than our wrong perception of pets. In some efforts, lifting from the source text was evident.

Question 8

For the most part, candidates were unable to answer this question correctly and very few candidates gained full marks. Some answers were completely irrelevant. Many referred to pets' dependence on owners leaving them vulnerable to whichever treatment owners deem necessary but many of the answers were vague.

Section C

General Comments

As has been repeatedly noted in the examiners' report for this section, overall, candidates demonstrate a good understanding of the stories and the possibility of finding responses that include wrong facts and/or details is essentially insignificant. However, what was made apparent from a significant number of scripts was that, even though candidates might have studied plot development, characters and key literary features of the narratives, there are issues when it comes to focusing on addressing the set question and adapting the studied material to this purpose. Indeed, as specified in the syllabus' objectives, candidates must 'Identify the key terms' (LO 1) and 'Interpret which aspect of a text (or texts) they are expected to discuss' (LO 2).

Question 1

An immediate observation on most of the responses has to be the lack of clarity in the introduction to establish/mention the single effect the essay will focus on and the various elements that contribute towards that effect. Introductions were generally problematic and the elements and their effect tended to eventually emerge only piecemeal in the essays, which more often than not, were driven by narrative and sometimes provided chunks of episodes without locating their relevance or importance to the question. In many cases, unfortunately, the elements and/or their effect/s were either included as an afterthought or were actually missing and one could only assume the point being made through inference. A good number of candidates did not focus on one story.

However, a good number of essays did target the discussion adequately and with the correct focus. Arguments were well organised and properly developed indicating not just a mature understanding of the story, but also good writing skills.

Question 2a

A good number of candidates who opted for this question managed this first part of the task quite well. Such candidates engaged with the rubric, addressing both the requirement to discuss language and contrasts. It seems that candidates are now more familiar with the objectives for this type of question.

A number of candidates commented on and foregrounded techniques such as figurative language and direct speech to convey contrasts, like the contrast between the social classes and the atmosphere/mood at different points in the passage. Such attempts generally resulted in satisfactory essays, though some struggled to maintain the right balance between discussing both contrasts and language.

Some candidates discussed contrasts and language but only referred to the first half of the passage, specifically the first two paragraphs, without discussing the rest of the given extract or were rather vague

when analysing the effect – 'to put the readers in the picture', 'to create an atmosphere', 'to describe the setting and surroundings'.

There were also some candidates whose efforts were mainly a paraphrase of the given passage with very limited focus or no reference to either language or contrast.

Question 2b

It may be that candidates who opt for the gobbet question invest more time and effort in the first part of the question, and less on the second. Even though question (b) carried more marks, some responses were not long enough or there was a discrepancy in the level of work between the two questions.

In most answers, there was evidence of theme discussion, but many responses were mainly concerned with the story and the theme was only mentioned towards the end. In too many essays, the focus was largely on Adrian's pursuit of happiness with other characters being either minimally discussed or omitted.

A discussion of the theme was very often framed within Adrian's dalliance with Betsy D'Amido; the initial lack of depth was somehow compensated by reference to how that brief fling reinfused him with youth, and some referencing was attempted here. The reference to Eva (when included) was mostly focused on her attempts to even out the balance, seeking refuge in Butterworth's attention and alcohol. However, Eva was never discussed with the same level of detail as Adrian.

During the discussion of guidelines for markers, it was made very clear that not including reference to the era of the story (1920s/1930s – the Jazz Age) should not be considered as a shortcoming in candidates' efforts, but one cannot not observe that the absence of such a link or even a mention in the greater majority of the essays was rather disappointing.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2021