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Guidance

GCSE subject-level guidance for English language (2022)

Published 11 November 2021

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Introduction

About this document

This document is part of a suite of documents which outlines our guidance for awarding organisations offering GCSE Qualifications (graded 9 to 1) in 2022.

This document sets out guidance which applies to all GCSE Qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in English Language. It supports both:

- [GCSE Qualification Level Conditions and associated requirements](#)
- [GCSE Subject Level Conditions and associated requirements for English Language \(2022\)](#)

This document constitutes guidance for the purposes of section 153 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the ‘2009 Act’), Conditions GCSE 4.1, GCSE (English Language) 3, GCSE (English Language) 1.1(c) and GCSE (English Language) 5.1.

An awarding organisation has a legal obligation under the 2009 Act to have regard to this guidance, where relevant, in relation to each GCSE Qualification in English Language that it makes available or proposes to make available. Conditions GCSE 4.1, GCSE (English Language) 3, GCSE (English Language) 1.1(c) and GCSE (English Language) 5.1 impose the same obligation in respect of the guidance below which is issued under those Conditions.

An awarding organisation should use the guidance in this document to help it understand how to comply with the GCSE Qualification Level Conditions, as they apply to GCSE Qualifications in English Language (2022), and the Subject Level Conditions and associated requirements for such qualifications.

Guidance set out in this document

This document provides guidance on minimum assessment time, spoken language assessments and assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications (graded 9 to 1) in English Language for Learners completing the qualification in 2022, except where the General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework applies.

Guidance on minimum assessment time for GCSE Qualifications in English Language

Conditions GCSE 4.1 and GCSE (English Language) 3 state that all assessments for a GCSE Qualification in English Language shall be Assessments by

Examination - except for spoken language assessments (as defined in Condition GCSE (English Language) 3.4.

We expect that an awarding organisation will design and set the Assessments by Examination for a GCSE Qualification in English Language on the basis that the total amount of time spent by each Learner in taking those assessments should be no less than three-and-a-half hours.

Guidance on spoken language assessments

Condition GCSE (English Language) 3.3 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to spoken language assessments (as defined in Condition GCSE (English Language) 3.4 for GCSE English Language qualifications.

We set out our guidance for the purposes of Condition GCSE (English Language) 3.3 below.

Presentation formats

Under the requirements in relation to spoken language assessments contained in our GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for English Language and Certificate Requirements, an awarding organisation must ensure that each such assessment is designed and set in such a way as to -

- (a) allow each Learner to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the content outlined in the Content Document
- (b) allow each of the specified levels of attainment for the spoken language assessment to be reached by a Learner who has attained the required level of knowledge, skills and understanding
- (c) facilitate the comparability of such assessments

We note that the format of the presentation which each Learner is required to give has the potential to affect the degree of sophistication with which that Learner is able to demonstrate the knowledge and understanding of subject content and hence the specified levels of attainment which that Learner can reach.

The requirements outlined above are intended to ensure that the formats of presentations are such that the spoken language assessment is open to Learners across the full range of abilities.

We therefore expect an awarding organisation to allow each Centre which delivers the spoken language assessment a degree of flexibility in selecting presentation formats. Such formats may include -

- (a) a speech or talk by a Learner, followed by questions from the audience, or
- (b) a formal dialogue, such as an interview where the Learner is able to prepare extended responses to questions or prompts which have been shared in advance, followed by questions from the audience

We expect an awarding organisation to outline in its assessment strategy for a GCSE English Language qualification how it will ensure that spoken language assessments are comparable in view of any flexibility regarding presentation format.

Audience size and composition

Under the requirements in relation to spoken language assessments contained in our GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for English Language and Certificate Requirements, each Learner's presentation must take place before an audience.

The degree of sophistication which a Learner can demonstrate in responding to questions and feedback can be affected by the size and composition of an audience. This may in turn have an impact on the specified levels of attainment which that Learner can reach.

We expect an awarding organisation to provide guidance to Centres on the size and composition of the audience in a spoken language assessment. We expect such guidance to include the advice that an audience consisting of at least two people can be more likely to create the circumstances under which a Learner can demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to reach the higher specified levels of attainment in the spoken language assessment. We also expect such guidance to include the advice that an audience should be composed of individuals able to provide the Learner with opportunities to respond to appropriate questions and feedback.

The spoken language assessment may take place before a single teacher who can represent an 'audience'.

Guidance on assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications in English Language

The assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications (graded 9 to 1) in English Language are set out in the Department for Education's publication [GCSE English Language: subject content and assessment objectives](#) (the 'Content Document')

and reproduced below.

Reading (Weighting: 50%)

Assessment objective	Description
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AO1	Read and understand a range of texts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas• select and synthesise evidence from different texts
AO2	Read and understand a range of texts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
AO3	Read and understand a range of texts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts
AO4	Read and understand a range of texts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references

Writing (Weighting: 50%)

Assessment objective	Description
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AO5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences• organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts
AO6	Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.

Spoken language (Unweighted)

Assessment objective	Description
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AO7	Demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting.
AO8	Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and

Condition GCSE (English Language) 1.1(c) requires awarding organisations to interpret the Content Document having regard to any guidance published by Ofqual.

We set out below our guidance for the purposes of Condition GCSE (English Language) 1.1 (c). This guidance explains how we expect awarding organisations to interpret these assessment objectives in terms of:

- the different 'strands' within each of the assessment objectives
- the further discrete 'elements' within each assessment objective and its strands, which questions and tasks could target and/or seek to credit - our expectation is that each and every question and task should target or seek to credit at least one of these elements, and may target or seek to credit multiple elements across one or more assessment objectives
- the coverage expectations, such as in relation to the different strands and elements within each assessment objective and how those strands and elements should be sampled over time
- the key areas of emphasis in each assessment objective and the particular meaning for the subject of any key terms and phrases used – defined terms are shown in bold text, followed by their definition

In line with the obligations set out in Condition GCSE (English Language) 1.1(c), we expect awarding organisations to be able to demonstrate how they have had regard to this guidance. For example, an awarding organisation could map how it has regard to the guidance as it:

- develops its sample assessment materials
- delivers the qualification
- develops and applies its approach to sampling the elements into which the assessment objectives are divided
- monitors the qualification to make sure it addresses all elements appropriately

AO1: identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas; select and synthesise evidence from different texts (Weighting: 50% overall for reading)

There are 2 strands within this assessment objective.

Strand 1: Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
1a Identify explicit information	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 10 to 20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO1. (This would mean 5 to 10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.) • Identify suggests retrieving data or facts; interpret has a wider range of possibilities, which would include working with more complex material and a more sophisticated level of engagement with material.
1b Identify explicit ideas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although AO1 details the foundational skills of reading – which would be relevant to any reading task and shown in any reading response – those skills would not necessarily be targeted in the sense of there being an intention to credit them in a particular question or task; they would not always be the intended emphasis.
1c Interpret implicit information		
1d Interpret implicit ideas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which Learners with different levels of ability can demonstrate AO1 will depend on the task set, but also on the text(s) with which they are required to engage.

Strand 2: Select and synthesise evidence from different texts

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
2a Select evidence from different texts	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 10 to 20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO1. (This would mean 5 to 10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.) • Select suggests appropriating material; synthesise, as defined in the requirements above, means bringing material together from more than one text to create new material.
2b Synthesise evidence from different texts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although AO1 details the foundational skills of reading – which would be relevant to any reading task and shown in any reading response – those skills would not necessarily be targeted in the sense of there being an intention to credit them in a particular question or task; they would not always be the intended emphasis. • The extent to which Learners with different levels of ability can demonstrate AO1 will depend on the task set, but also on the text(s) with which they are required to engage.

AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views (Weighting: 50% overall for reading)

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
1a Comment on, explain and analyse how writers use language,	Full coverage in each set of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 20 to 40% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO2. (This would mean 10

<p>using relevant subject terminology to support their views.</p> <p>1b Comment on, explain and analyse how writers use structure, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.</p> <p>1c Comment on, explain and analyse how writers achieve effects, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.</p> <p>1d Comment on, explain and analyse how writers influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views</p>	<p>assessments (but not in every assessment)</p>	<p>to 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a notional hierarchy within each element, with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - comment on the lowest level, suggesting simple descriptive statements - explain the middle level, suggesting descriptions elaborated upon by some reference to how they work and - analyse the highest level, suggesting linkages between writing and its results that are complex and detailed. • There are no intrinsic differences in the Levels of Demand between the four elements, though they are different in the nature of what they involve. • There is considerable overlap between language and structure, and it will not normally be possible to draw absolute distinctions between them. • The extent to which Learners with different levels of ability can demonstrate AO2 will depend on the task set, but also on the text(s) with which they are required to engage.
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AO3: Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts (Weighting: 50% overall for reading)

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
<p>1a Compare writers' ideas across two or more texts.</p>	<p>Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 10 to 20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO3. (This would mean 5 to 10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)
<p>1b Compare writers' perspectives across two or more texts.</p>	<p>Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The emphasis in AO3 is on comparison, and this distinguishes it from AO2. For example, a comparison of how writers' ideas and perspectives are conveyed should have AO3 (and not AO2) as its principal assessment focus.
<p>1c Compare writers' ideas, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.</p>	<p>Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements 1a and 1b suggest lower levels, whereas elements 1c and 1d suggest higher levels potentially, but also permit the credit of lower levels.
<p>1d Compare writers' perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed,</p>	<p>Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At higher levels, AO3 might involve comparison that is sustained, detailed, evaluative and interwoven; at lower levels, there might be more straightforward description and

across two or more texts.

identification of main similarities and differences.

- The extent to which Learners with different levels of ability can demonstrate AO3 will depend on the task set, but also on the texts with which they are required to engage.

AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references (Weighting: 50% overall for reading)

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
This assessment objective is a single element	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 20 to 40% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO4. (This would mean 10 to 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)• The conjunction in AO4 ('and support this with') should be understood to mean 'supported by' – that is, the clauses either side of it represent a single process, which is evaluative in nature.• The emphasis in AO4 is on critical evaluation. This requires a personal judgement, which is informed and evidenced through references to the text, as well as involving a degree of summation and detachment. At higher levels, this intends a challenging requirement: it suggests both engagement and involvement, but also taking an overview from a critical distance, as well as textual examples that are apt, convincing and persuasive. At lower levels, it would be more likely to involve limited interaction and straightforward examples, but should not, even at this level, comprise personal opinions that are unconsidered and unsupported and that do not therefore represent judgements.• The extent to which Learners with different levels of ability can demonstrate the skills required in AO4 will depend on the task set, but also on the text(s) with which they are required to engage. This may include the specific type of text, the broad form of text (such as non-fiction, literary fiction and literary non-fiction) and the purpose of the text (such as persuasive, argumentative, affective, descriptive, explanatory and informative).• In terms of the assessment objectives, AO4 incorporates the greatest degree of change from the previous requirements. Awarding organisations will need to take particular care to explain their approach to this assessment objective in their assessment strategies for this subject.

AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences; organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts (Weighting for this

objective: 30%. Overall weighting for writing: 50%)

There are 2 strands within this assessment objective.

Strand 1: communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
1a Write in or for different forms, purposes and audiences.	Full coverage in every writing task and question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is not possible to ascribe individual weightings to the six elements of AO5 – they contribute together to the 30% of the overall marks for each specification allocated here. (Since AO5 must account for 30% of each specification as a whole, it must account for 60% of the overall writing marks.)
1b Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any writing task would enable Learners to show – and would therefore seek to credit – all six elements from strands 1 and 2. (However, they would not be 'targeted' in the sense of this being explicit.)• Learners would demonstrate the different elements according to their level of ability and the approach to assessing them would therefore be compensatory. (The tasks set for writing at this level are very open-ended and differentiation is very much by outcome.)
1c Select and adapt tone, style and register.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marking reliability across writing tasks should be promoted by having fewer separate judgements per response.

Strand 2: Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
2a Organise information and ideas.	Full coverage in every writing task and question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is not possible to ascribe individual weightings to the six elements of AO5 – they contribute together to the 30% of the overall marks for each specification allocated here. (Since AO5 must account for 30% of each specification as a whole, it must account for 60% of the overall writing marks.)
2b Use structural and grammatical features.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any writing task would enable Learners to show – and would therefore seek to credit – all six elements from strands 1 and 2. (However, they would not be 'targeted' in the sense of this being explicit.)• Learners would demonstrate the different elements according to their level of ability and the approach to assessing them would therefore be compensatory. (The tasks set for writing at this level are very open-ended and differentiation is very much by outcome.)
2c Write to support coherence and cohesion of texts		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marking reliability across writing tasks should be promoted by having fewer separate judgements per response.

AO6: Learners must use a range of vocabulary and

sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation

Weighting for this objective: 30%. Overall weighting for writing: 50%

Elements Coverage Agreements and definitions

This assessment objective is a single element	Full coverage in every writing task and question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 20% of the overall marks for each specification allocated to AO6 should be weighted equally across the writing tasks. (Since AO6 must account for 20% of each specification as a whole, it must account for 40% of the overall writing marks.)• The emphasis in AO6 should be on accuracy: the range is not a primary consideration, being mainly about how far creativity and risk-taking should be penalised where these have led to errors. (The extremes of performance here are fairly clear: the issue is likely to be the relative status of less accurate but more ambitious responses as opposed to more accurate but less ambitious responses.)• The creation of a common mark scheme across the awarding organisations for AO6 is likely to be problematic. Awarding organisations should therefore focus on developing a common set of broad marking expectations and emphases.
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