

GUIDANCE

# GCSE Subject Level Guidance for English Language (2021)

November 2020

**ofqual**

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>About this document</i> .....	3
<i>Guidance set out in this document</i> .....	3
<b>Guidance on minimum assessment time for GCSE Qualifications in English Language</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Guidance on spoken language assessments</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<i>Presentation formats</i> .....	5
<i>Audience size and composition</i> .....	5
<b>Guidance on assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications in English Language</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<i>Reading (weighting 50%) – Read and understand a range of texts to:</i> .....	7
<i>Writing (weighting 50%)</i> .....	7
<i>Spoken language (unweighted)</i> .....	8
<i>AO1: identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas; select and synthesise evidence from different texts (weighting: 50% overall for reading)</i> .....	9
<i>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)</i> .....	11
<i>AO3: Compare writers’ ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts (weighting: 50% overall for reading)</i> .....	12
<i>AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references (weighting: 50% overall for reading)</i> .....	13
<i>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: 30% [writing: 50%])</i> .....	14
<i>AO6: Learners must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation (weighting: 20% [writing: 50%])</i> .....	16

# 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 2021.

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

- the [GCSE Qualification Level Conditions and associated requirements](#); and
- the [GCSE Subject Level Conditions and associated requirements for English Language \(2021\)](#).

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 (2021), 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 (2021).

## Guidance on minimum assessment time for GCSE Qualifications in English Language

Conditions GCSE4.1 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, and
- (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<sup>1</sup> (the 'Content Document') and reproduced below.

### Reading (weighting 50%) – Read and understand a range of texts to:

Ref	Assessment objective
A01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.</li> <li>Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.</li> </ul>
A02	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.
A03	Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.
A04	Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.

### Writing (weighting 50%)

Ref	Assessment objective
A05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.</li> <li>Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.</li> </ul>
A06	Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. <b>(This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</b>

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education (November 2013) [GCSE English language: subject content and assessment objectives](#), DFE-00232-2013

## Spoken language (unweighted)

Ref	Assessment objective
<b>A07</b>	Demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting.
<b>A08</b>	Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations.
<b>A09</b>	Use spoken Standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.

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/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; and
- 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; and
- 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"> <li>■ Approximately 10–20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO1. (This would mean 5–10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</li> <li>■ <b>Identify</b> suggests retrieving data or facts; <b>interpret</b> has a wider range of possibilities, which would include working with more complex material and a more sophisticated level of engagement with material.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>
1b	Identify explicit ideas		
1c	Interpret implicit information		
1d	Interpret implicit ideas		

**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"> <li>■ Approximately 10–20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO1. (This would mean 5–10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</li> <li>■ <b>Select</b> suggests appropriating material; <b>synthesise</b>, as defined in the requirements above, means bringing material together from more than one text to create new material.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>
2b	Synthesise evidence from different texts		

**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, using relevant subject terminology to support their views	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Approximately 20–40% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO2. (This would mean 10–20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</li> <li>■ There is a notional hierarchy within each element, with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <b>comment on</b> the lowest level, suggesting simple descriptive statements</li> <li>□ <b>explain</b> the middle level, suggesting descriptions elaborated upon by some reference to how they work and</li> <li>□ <b>analyse</b> the highest level, suggesting linkages between writing and its results that are complex and detailed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ 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.</li> <li>■ There is considerable overlap between language and structure, and it will not normally be possible to draw absolute distinctions between them.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>
1b	Comment on, explain and analyse how writers use structure, using relevant subject terminology to support their views		
1c	Comment on, explain and analyse how writers achieve effects, using relevant subject terminology to support their views		
1d	Comment on, explain and analyse how writers influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views		

## 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
1a	Compare writers' ideas across two or more texts	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Approximately 10–20% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO3. (This would mean 5–10% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</li> <li>■ 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.</li> <li>■ Elements 1a and 1b suggest lower levels, whereas elements 1c and 1d suggest higher levels potentially, but also permit the credit of lower levels.</li> <li>■ At higher levels, AO3 might involve comparison that is sustained, detailed, evaluative and interwoven; at lower levels, there might be more straightforward description and identification of main similarities and differences.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>
1b	Compare writers' perspectives across two or more texts		
1c	Compare writers' ideas, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts		
1d	Compare writers' perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts		

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

Elements	Coverage	Agreements and definitions
This AO is a single element	Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Approximately 20–40% of the reading marks should be allocated to AO4. (This would mean 10–20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)</li> <li>■ The conjunction in AO4 ('<b>and support this with</b>') should be understood to mean 'supported by' – that is, the clauses either side of it represent a single process, which is evaluative in nature.</li> <li>■ 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.</li> <li>■ 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).</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>

**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/for different forms, purposes and audiences	Full coverage in every writing task/question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ Marking reliability across writing tasks should be promoted by having fewer separate judgements per response.</li> </ul>
1b	Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively		
1c	Select and adapt tone, style and register		

**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/question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ Marking reliability across writing tasks should be promoted by having fewer separate judgements per response.</li> </ul>
2b	Use structural and grammatical features		
2c	Write to support coherence and cohesion of texts		

**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 AO is a single element	Full coverage in every writing task/question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.)</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>





© Crown Copyright 2020

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/)

or write to

Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU

Published by:

**ofqual**

Earlsdon Park  
53-55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344  
[public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk)  
[www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual)