
GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Insight report: 2018 results at a glance

Published: October 2018



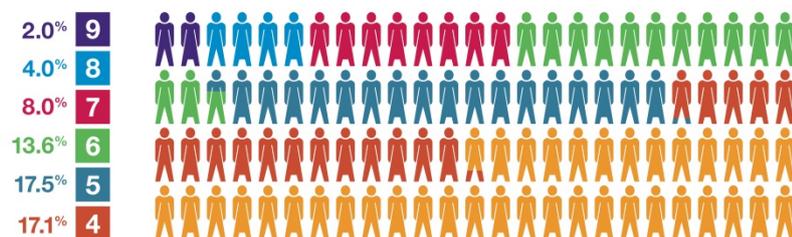
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Series analysis

Conduct your own analysis using data relevant to you. Watch short [tutorials](#) on using Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) for school, subject, group or student performance; or log straight in through aqa.org.uk/log-in

Grade summary

This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.



AQA GCSE English Language

Grade summary

This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.

Average performance by question



AQA GCSE English Language

Average performance by question

Note that the maximum mark for Q3 and Q4 is different for the two papers.

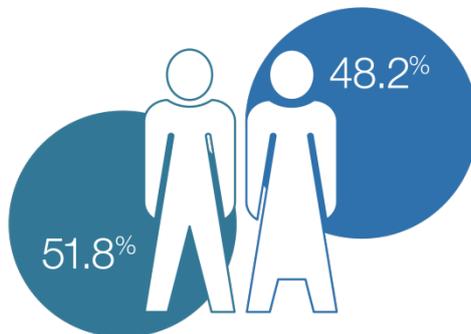
[Watch tutorials](#) on using ERA for results analysis, or log straight in via [e-AQA](#).

Series analysis cont.

Conduct your own analysis using data relevant to you. Watch short [tutorials](#) on using Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) for school, subject, group or student performance; or log straight in through aqa.org.uk/log-in

Entry profile
514,207 entries

20%
of students
are studying
post-16



Entry profile

266,507 boys
247,700 girls

20% of students are studying
post-16.

AQA GCSE English Language

Watch tutorials on using ERA for results analysis, or log straight in via e-AQA.

Grade boundaries

Subject or paper	Max mark	Summer 2018 grade boundaries (raw mark)								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
English Language 8700	160	16	36	56	76	86	97	108	118	128

How to interpret grade boundaries

Grade boundaries are set using a mix of statistics and expert judgement

Our Centre for Education Research and Practice (CERP) uses a range of statistics to make predictions that suggest the most appropriate grade boundaries. The statistical evidence considers the prior attainment of the given cohort as well as the distribution of marks. Senior examiners then review a script sample to confirm the statistically recommended marks are sensible for the grade.

Boundary setting is overseen by Ofqual. To find more grade boundaries and learn how they are set, visit aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/results-days/grade-boundaries-and-ums

Qualification summary

June 2018 saw the second major series of assessment of the new specification for GCSE English Language. There was an increase of more than 50,000 students from the June 2017 entry.

This entry represents the whole range of ability, with students entered from a wide variety of educational centres. The increase in entry is largely due to the inclusion of a significant cohort of post-16 students. In June 2017 there was a final series of the outgoing specification, and those schools and colleges who entered their students for that series are now entering this specification.

The inclusion of this higher proportion of post-16 students meant the overall national data for this 8700 specification looked different to June 2017, whereas for most schools the performance of their students was in line with last year.

Feedback on the exam courses use student responses to explore what happened in each exam series. Visit aqa.org.uk/language-cpd

Paper 1

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2018 series in our reports on the exam. Visit aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

“What worked well”	“Even better if”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The national data for Question 3 showed a marked improvement in performance than in June 2017.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The national data shows a balanced performance across most questions, however there are still opportunities for most students to improve further on Question 5.

Highlights from summer 2018

The national data showed an increase in performance for Question 3 in comparison to the June 2017 series.

The key skill here is the analysis of structure and, as noted previously, in its simplest terms, students are required to examine **what** happens **where** and **why**, usefully asking themselves the question, ‘How does reading about this **at this point** add to my understanding of the source as a whole?’ There was a significant improvement in the quality of student performance this series, with over 30% achieving at least Level 3 in the mark scheme. Students did not over-complicate the question and there was far less over-reliance on subject terminology or high level literary/narrative theory.

The most successful students understood that the story was a construct. They offered an overview of the structure of the whole source before breaking it down into its constituent parts and analysing the shifts in perspective and focus in a way that clearly explored their significance. They looked for patterns and were able to make links and connections between different parts of the source, and they explored contrasts and juxtaposition of both ideas and tone.

Students who did not do so well on this question narrated too much of the story or did not focus sufficiently on the effects of the writer’s choices.

On the whole though, responses to Question 3 this series have been encouraging. In order to help students further, see [How structure is assessed in Paper 1 Question 3](#), produced as part of the

Reports on the exam are written by senior examiners who see more responses than anyone else. Access full reports via aqa.org.uk/log-in

Further Insight series and published on the AQA website. It gives details of what a student needs to do for this question, explains the 'Indicative Standard' in the mark scheme, offers some ideas on structural features for students to analyse and includes example responses with commentaries.

There were no questions which stood out as not being successful. However, it is felt that for some students the responses for the writing section on this Paper (Question 5), could be even better if they had planned their responses.

The importance of planning for Question 5 was emphasised through the feedback in the June 2017 series. Find more in our [hub school network resources from Spring 2018](#).

Many students heeded this advice. Having to analyse structure in someone else's creative writing in Question 3 is increasingly encouraging students to consider the shape of their own writing in Question 5. Planning was especially important in the narrative as students needed to know from the start what the unexpected thing was going to be so that everything in their plot led up to that point, and it was also useful in the description when, for example, the old man had a flashback to his younger years. Some students adopted a circular structure or an extended metaphor that ran throughout their response, often with convincing and compelling results.

An increase in planning seemed to lead to more concise responses, and there were fewer unnecessarily lengthy narratives and descriptions, although there were still some cases where the more students wrote, the greater the deterioration in ideas, structure and accuracy. There was increasing evidence of crafting, with students looking back over their work to make improvements, which is encouraging.

However, there are still areas for improvement. Some students continue to produce formulaic responses with a contrived use of senses: I can see/I can hear/I can smell. Others continue to include over-ambitious vocabulary that is misused and obscures meaning. Writing skills obviously need to be taught, but there is also an argument for not over-preparing students with formulaic methods, especially for creative writing. There is much to be said for an honest response where the student's voice can be heard, rather than an artificial, contrived construction.

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Paper 2

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2018 series in our reports on the exam. Visit aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

“What worked well”	“Even better if”
Question 3 seemed to be one of the more successful questions for students.	Question 4 is one of the questions where, nationally, there was a trend for it to be less successful for students.

Highlights from summer 2018

Question 3 assesses the student’s ability to comment on the writer’s use of language and to explore the effect of the language choices made. That the given lines were from the 19th century text did not appear in any way to detract from the students’ ability to showcase their skills, and in many cases the text provided students with the opportunity to offer highly sophisticated responses.

Overall, the responses to Question 3 were extremely pleasing and demonstrated a huge step forward in language analysis, with 80% of students able to make at least an attempt to comment on the effect of language.

There was sufficient richness in the language choices on offer for students to explore, according to their ability. Those working at Levels 1 and 2 were able to select words such as ‘majestically’ and, even without knowing its exact meaning, were able to use contextual clues to comment on how this word made the surfers seem impressive or magical. At Level 3, students would typically comment on the use of similes and metaphor, as well as the use of individual words and phrases, often exploring how the simile of the heads ‘bobbing about like corks’ showed the relatively small size of the surfers in comparison to the immensity of the sea.

It was also rewarding to see students exploring the writer’s choice of extended sentences, which echoed the journey time of the surfers from the moment they caught the wave, through their battle with the sea, up to the point where they made it safely to shore.

There were some less successful responses, where students were drawn into an inferential reading of the text, opting to comment on the meaning or content rather than the language choices made by the writer. Another trend, and potentially therefore a further area for centres to address, is

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where students tended to comment on what effect the language had on ‘the reader’ in a contrived and generalised way. The implication is that all language must have an emotive impact on the reader, creating fear, tension, intrigue or excitement, for example. This type of comment is too generic to be judged ‘clear’ and rewarded in Level 3.

Question 4 presents a demanding and multi-dimensional challenge for students. The task requires a response which includes not just a demonstration of the student’s understanding of the ideas and perspectives in both texts, but also a comparison of these ideas and the writers’ different perspectives. This should be supported by relevant textual detail and an explanation of how both writers have used a range of methods to convey their points of view.

Where students were less successful on this question, they tended to fall into the same traps as last year: focusing on ideas at the expense of perspectives; dealing with the texts separately without making meaningful connections; and identifying methods used without exploring their effect or how they contributed to presenting the writer’s point of view. Centres would be advised to continue to target these areas in their teaching to ensure students are sufficiently prepared to attempt to access the full range of marks available for this question.

On a very positive note, there were far more students commenting on the methods used by the writers than in both previous series. Many students appeared much more confident in engaging with methods, and this suggests that the majority had been really well-prepared for this task.

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Vivienne Neale, Teacher

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Nick Taylor, Assistant Headteacher

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