

GCSE Subject Criteria for English Language

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This document replaces all previous versions of *GCSE Subject Criteria for English Language*, and comes into effect at 12.01am on 17 July 2015.

The criteria

Introduction

GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and learning outcomes

1. GCSE specifications in English Language should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study. They should prepare learners to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices, and to use language to participate effectively in society and employment.
2. GCSE specifications in English Language must enable learners to:
 - demonstrate skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing necessary to communicate with others confidently, effectively, precisely and appropriately;
 - express themselves creatively and imaginatively;
 - become critical readers of a range of texts, including multimodal texts;
 - use reading to develop their own skills as writers;
 - understand the patterns, structures and conventions of written and spoken English;
 - understand the impact of variations in spoken and written language and how they relate to identity and cultural diversity;
 - select and adapt speech and writing to different situations and audiences.

Subject content

3. The content of GCSE specifications in English Language must reflect the learning outcomes.

4. GCSE specifications in English Language must specify the content in ways that promote an integrated approach to speaking and listening, reading and writing.
5. GCSE specifications in English Language must be consistent with the national curriculum key stage 4 programmes of study for England.
6. GCSE specifications in English Language must allow learners to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of language and its use as specified below.

Studying language

7. GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - engage with and make fresh connections between ideas, texts, words and images;
 - analyse spoken and written language, exploring impact and how it is achieved;
 - understand how spoken language and written language evolve in response to changes in society and technology and how this process relates to identity and cultural diversity.
8. In studying written language, GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - understand how meaning is constructed through words, sentences and whole texts, including multimodal texts and at least one extended text, recognising the effects of language choices and patterns;
 - evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader;
 - explore language variation and how it varies according to audience and reader.
9. In the study of spoken language, GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - reflect and comment critically on their own and others' uses of language in different contexts and how they adapt language to different listeners and tasks, exploring these experiences in the contexts of wider language use and variation;

- understand the reason for, and effect of, choices in use of standard and non-standard forms of language and how these may vary over time and place;
- analyse the characteristics of, and influences on, spoken language.

Using language

10. GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of written language, including grammar, spelling and punctuation;
 - experiment with language to create effects to engage the audience;
 - express ideas and information clearly, precisely, accurately and appropriately in spoken and written communication;
 - form independent views and challenge what is heard or read on the grounds of reason, evidence or argument.
11. In writing, GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - write accurately and fluently, choosing content and adapting style and language to a wide range of forms, media, contexts, audiences and purposes.
12. In speaking and listening, GCSE specifications in English Language must require learners to:
 - present and listen to information and ideas;
 - respond appropriately to the questions and views of others;
 - make a range of effective contributions, using creative approaches to exploring questions, solving problems and developing ideas;
 - reflect and comment critically on their own and others' uses of language;
 - participate in a range of real-life contexts in and beyond the classroom, adapting talk appropriately to situation and audience;
 - select and use a range of dramatic techniques and creative approaches to explore ideas, texts and issues in scripted and improvised work.

Assessment objectives

13. All specifications in English Language must require learners to demonstrate their ability to meet the assessment objectives set out in the table below and must weight the marks for those objectives as set out in the table below:

Assessment objectives		Weighting toward final GCSE mark
AO1	<p>Speaking and listening Speak to communicate clearly and purposefully; structure and sustain talk, adapting it to different situations and audiences; use standard English and a variety of techniques as appropriate.</p> <p>Listen and respond to speakers' ideas and perspectives, and how they construct and express meanings.</p> <p>Interact with others, shaping meanings through suggestions, comments and questions and drawing ideas together.</p> <p>Create and sustain different roles.</p>	0% ¹
AO2	<p>Study of spoken language Understand variations in spoken language, explaining why language changes in relation to contexts.</p> <p>Evaluate the impact of spoken language choices in their own and others' use.</p>	From 10–15%
AO3	<p>Studying written language Read and understand texts, selecting material appropriate to purpose, collating from different sources and making comparisons and cross-references as appropriate.</p>	From 35–45%

¹ Stated as 0 per cent as, in GCSE English Language, results of assessment in speaking and listening are not allowed to form part of the weighting toward the final GCSE mark.

	<p>Develop and sustain interpretations of writers' ideas and perspectives.</p> <p>Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.</p>	
AO4	<p>Writing Write to communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, using and adapting forms and selecting vocabulary appropriate to task and purpose in ways that engage the reader.</p> <p>Organise information and ideas into structured and sequenced sentences, paragraphs and whole texts, using a variety of linguistic and structural features to support cohesion and overall coherence.</p> <p>Use a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</p>	<p>From 35–45%</p> <p><i>At least one third of available marks for AO4 should be allocated to the use of a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</i></p>

Scheme of assessment

14. The overall scheme of assessment in a specification in GCSE English Language must allocate a weighting of 60 per cent of the final GCSE mark to external assessment and a weighting of 40 per cent of the final GCSE mark to controlled assessment. However, as noted above, this does not include assessments in speaking and listening, which are not allowed to form part of the weighting toward the final GCSE mark.
15. Question papers in English Language must be targeted at either foundation or higher tier.
16. GCSE assessments in English Language must allocate a weighting of 45–55 per cent for the functional elements of English.

Grade descriptions

17. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by learners awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.
18. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the learner has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of learners' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.
19. The final GCSE qualification grade and grades for any GCSE English Language assessments other than speaking and listening assessments must be determined in accordance with the grade descriptions in the table below.

Grade	Grade description
A	<p>Learners respond personally and persuasively to a variety of texts, developing interpretations and evaluating how details of language, grammar, structure and presentation engage and affect the reader. They identify and discuss writers' perspectives in narrative, argument, explanation or analysis. They choose apt quotations and make telling comparisons and cross-references that illuminate the purpose and meanings of texts.</p> <p>Learners' writing shows confident, assured control of a range of forms and styles appropriate to task and purpose. Texts engage and hold the reader's interest through logical argument, persuasive force or creative delight. Linguistic and structural features are used skilfully to sequence texts and achieve coherence. A wide range of accurate sentence structures ensures clarity; choices of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling are ambitious, imaginative and correct.</p> <p>Learners explain expertly, and evaluate persuasively, how they and others use and adapt spoken language for specific purposes².</p>

² This text has moved from grade description 5 in paragraph 20 below as a correction since this document was published on 26 June 2014.

<p>C</p>	<p>Learners understand and demonstrate how meaning and information are conveyed in a range of texts. They make personal and critical responses, referring to specific aspects of language, grammar, structure and presentational devices to justify their views. They successfully compare and cross-reference aspects of texts and explain convincingly how they may vary in purpose and how they achieve different effects.</p> <p>Learners' writing shows successful adaptation of form and style to different tasks and for various purposes. They use a range of sentence structures and varied vocabulary to create different effects and engage the reader's interest. Paragraphing is used effectively to make the sequence of events or development of ideas coherent and clear to the reader. Sentence structures are varied and sometimes bold; punctuation and spelling are accurate.</p> <p>Learners explain and evaluate how they and others use and adapt spoken language for specific purposes.³</p>
<p>F</p>	<p>Learners describe the main ideas, themes or argument in a range of texts, and refer to specific aspects or details when justifying their views. They make simple comparisons and cross-references that show some awareness of how texts achieve their effects through writers' use of linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational devices.</p> <p>Learners' writing shows some adaptation of form and style for different tasks and purposes. It communicates simply and clearly with the reader. Sentences sequence events or ideas logically; vocabulary is sometimes chosen for variety and interest.</p> <p>Paragraphing is straightforward but effective; the structure of sentences, including some that are complex, is usually correct. Spelling and basic punctuation are mostly accurate.</p> <p>Learners show some awareness of how they and others use and adapt spoken language for specific purposes.⁴</p>

³ This text has moved from grade description 3 in paragraph 20 below as a correction since this document was published on 26 June 2014.

⁴ This text has moved from grade description 1 in paragraph 20 below as a correction since this document was published on 26 June 2014.

20. The final grade for GCSE English Language speaking and listening assessments must be determined in accordance with the grade descriptions in the table below. These assessments are graded separately from the final GCSE qualification grade.

Grade	Grade description⁵
5	<p>Learners select suitable styles and registers of spoken English for a range of situations and contexts, showing assured use of standard English where appropriate. They confidently vary sentence structures and choose from a broad repertoire of vocabulary to express information, ideas and feelings in an engaging manner.</p> <p>They initiate conversations and demonstrate sensitive listening through contributions that sustain and develop discussion. They recognise and fulfil the demands of different roles, whether in formal settings or creative activities.</p>
3	<p>Learners adapt their talk to the demands of different situations and contexts. They recognise when standard English is required and use it confidently. They use different sentence structures and select vocabulary so that information, ideas and feelings are communicated clearly and the listener's interest is engaged. Through careful listening and by developing their own and others' ideas, they make significant contributions to discussion and participate effectively in creative activities.</p>
1	<p>Learners talk confidently in familiar situations, showing some awareness of purpose and of listeners' needs. They convey information, develop ideas and describe feelings clearly, using the main features of standard English as appropriate. They listen with concentration and make relevant responses to others' ideas and opinions. In formal and creative activities, they attempt to meet the demands of different roles.</p>

⁵ Text contains corrections since this document was published on 26 June 2014.

Grade boundaries for GCSE English Language speaking and listening assessments

21. The provisions of the appendices to the *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice* (May 2011) which refer to the setting of grade boundaries on an eight-grade scale from A* to G do not apply to GCSE English Language speaking and listening assessments. For these assessments, the three key grade boundaries must be dealt with in the following sequence:
- 3/2
 - 5/4
 - 1/ungraded
22. All other grade boundaries for these assessments must be determined arithmetically:
- the 4/3 grade boundary is obtained by dividing the mark interval between the 5/4 and 3/2 boundaries by two. Where there is a remainder of one, the extra mark is added to the grade 4 interval;
 - the 2/1 grade boundary is obtained by dividing the mark interval between the 3/2 and 1/ungraded boundaries by two. Where there is a remainder of one, the extra mark is added to the grade 2 interval.

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