

WACE English examination marking workshops

Background

The WACE English examination marking workshops were organised in response to a recommendation from the Assessment, Review and Moderation (ARM) panel. It was felt that teachers needed more support to assist them in preparing students for the new exam and in particular, how it would be marked.

The Curriculum Council engaged Hugh Rayner, who has been on the examination panel and has been the chief marker for the past few years, to run the workshops.

The sample scripts were responses from students completed in their Semester 1, 2007 examination. The aim was to ensure that, as much as possible, this workshop was an authentic experience for teachers.

As an equity issue, the workshops were monitored by Curriculum Council officers and all questions asked were recorded and summarised. A satellite video of the sessions was organised to ensure that teachers from more isolated areas could be involved in the process. A DVD of this session, as well as responses to the frequently asked questions, will be compiled and made available to all English teachers in the State. The samples used in the workshop and commentaries based on feedback from teachers participating in the workshops will be placed on the Curriculum Council website.

Introduction

The workshop was run to replicate the process to be used in the WACE examination marking sessions following the final examination.

This process is as follows:

- One hour after the exam commences, the chief marker is emailed the paper, along with comments on how the examiners expect students to respond to the questions on the paper
- The chief marker constructs a marking guide based on these comments
- Later in the day, the chief marker obtains a sample from Curriculum Council of 40 –100 scripts, which will demonstrate a full range of marks. These scripts are copied for use at the pre-marking meetings in the “trial marking” process for each section.
- The marking guide may then be modified according to what is seen in the scripts.
- Chief marker compiles a package of 10 trial marking scripts which display a range of marks or raise tricky issues for marking from each section.
- On the Saturday after the examination, there is a pre-marking meeting where the marking guide is discussed by the marking panel and modified as appropriate.

- Markers then rank the 10 scripts in the trial marking package and try to apply a number out of /30, using the full range of marks as appropriate.
- Trial marking groups of four are formed to discuss marks and refine marker's own judgements. This is not a consensus exercise; it is an opportunity for markers to justify their marks
- The entire panel reconvenes to collate marks and try to reach consensus
- Two bundles of scripts are marked by Monday for statistical purposes to allow pairing of markers to occur. Higher and lower markers are paired
- Markers finish marking first position by Wednesday and move to another position to be finished by the end of the week. By the end of Week 1 all Writing scripts have been marked by two markers
- The process is repeated in Week 2 with the Reading scripts and again in Week 3 with the Viewing scripts.
- At the end of 3 weeks, six different people have marked the complete paper. If the marks vary by 5 marks or less, the computer averages the marks. If the difference is greater than 5 marks, experienced markers will reconcile the marks. About 11% of scripts have needed to be reconciled in some way in past years. If the whole paper needs reconciling, the chief marker, together with experienced markers, carries out the reconciliation process.

General comments

In the exam marking process, it is important to remember that this is a ranking process. It is not about levels/grades/pass/fail. Markers need to use the full range from 0 -30 and attempt to avoid clumping. Ranking reflects the extent to which students answer the question on the paper.

Markers need to remember that:

- exam responses are the first draft
- most students are 17
- the students are doing their best in three hours
- they need to reward what is there, not penalise them for what is not – candidates need to answer the question, demonstrate understanding of genre, purpose and audience and have control of appropriate language conventions
- length is not necessarily an indicator of quality

Frequently asked questions

Specifically in response to this examination paper

WRITING SECTION

- 1. Is it acceptable to use colloquial language, slang and unseemly language?**
Yes, if appropriate to context, audience and purpose.
- 2. What constitutes “a range of texts”?**
Responses may include detailed discussion of one or two texts, together with brief references to others (which may be of different genres) or pertinent but brief references to a range of texts. Range refers to both number and/or diversity. It is the quality of the references, not the number as such or the length that matters. References to texts are used to support ideas – the question is not usually about texts.
- 3. Will students be able to write answers without having studied any substantial texts in detail?**
While it is not mandatory to refer to what has been studied in class, student responses which demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the concepts would be more likely to achieve a higher mark.
Limited study of texts would also affect students' ability to respond effectively in the Reading section.
- 4. How is it possible to compare creative writing with other forms of writing?**
When judging creative pieces it is important to focus on the tangibles – how well the student meets the requirements of the genre, succeeds in demonstrating control of language and answers the question. This allows objective comparison to be achieved.
- 5. Is it useful for students to provide a rationale prior to writing response?**
Although not a requirement, a clear rationale may benefit students by providing some context. The process may also clarify their thinking.
- 6. What if students annotate work, such as a poem they have written? Would this be of benefit?**
Meaningful annotations could assist markers in their response to students' work and give some understanding of the processes used in construction; however, the writing still needs to stand on its own merits.
- 7. Should planning (Processes and Strategies) be rewarded?**
Planning may be taken into account and incorporated in the overall decision if appropriate. If the plan has been crossed out, it should be disregarded. While Processes and Strategies may also be evident in internal editing, for many students Processes and Strategies are implicit in the quality of their responses. Again, the written response must stand on its own merits.

- 8. Is it important to format newspaper/feature articles?**
It is not necessary to demonstrate the format but it is necessary to adhere to the writing conventions such as short sentences and paragraphs, quotes etc. Audience, purpose and form are important.
- 9. Should students be encouraged to respond to certain questions?**
Selection of questions may be more significant in the new WACE examination and teachers should encourage students to choose response types carefully to suit their strengths and thus maximise their chances of success.
- 10. What happens if a student uses a visual text to support argument in the Writing Section?**
It will depend on how the question is worded. If the question asks the candidates to refer to any text in their answer, then reference can be made to a visual text. If the question limits students' responses to written texts, the candidates should not use a visual text as the major part of their answer.

VIEWING SECTION

- 1. How much of the response should refer to the images provided in the exam paper?**
As stated in the marking guide, there is no set percentage of the script that must relate to the images provided; however, the response must refer to one or more of these visual texts. There is no expectation of a 50/50 balance. Each reference must make a relevant contribution to the overall response.
- 2. Could a teacher teach still images in the classroom without covering aspects of other visual texts?**
Theoretically it is possible, but since the examination must cover aspects of the syllabus, students who have not been given the opportunity to study a range of text types may be disadvantaged. Also, as with written texts, the sophistication and texture of responses is likely to be significantly less from students whose study in school has been less comprehensive in breadth and depth.
- 3. Are students required to make intertextual links?**
Although students may not be required by the exam question to make them, students' intertextual links may be rewarded, depending on their quality and relevance to the argument in response to the question.
- 4. How important is writing in this section?**
Marking in this section does not foreground the Writing outcome. The ranking should be based on candidates' mastery of the demands of Viewing. The ability to be fluent, accurate and persuasive will impact on students' overall performance only to the extent that it influences how well they are able to address the question and demonstrate their understanding of viewing.