

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Virtual communities

Commentaries

Published: Spring 2022



Commentaries on student responses

Student A commentary

This upper Level 2 response has a straightforward chronological structure, using a familiar genre (horror/thriller) in familiar urban and domestic settings. There is some narrative control with an attempt to build suspense using a number of recognisable conventions at text, sentence and word level. There is an emerging sense of atmosphere and some conscious vocabulary ('thundered') and some appropriate, if over-familiar and contrived devices ('a sigh of relief filled my body'; 'silence then filled the air'). However, the characterisation is undeveloped and one-dimensional, whilst a contrived ending prevents this from meeting the standard required for Level 3.

Student B commentary

This response displays many of the features of Level 2 descriptive writing. It switches attention from one object to another: baskets, spaces, back streets, without stopping for a moment and lingering to describe precise details. There is an emerging sense of atmosphere but it appears formulaic: for example, the second paragraph goes through the 'senses' gears of taste, smell and touch a little too mechanically. When Student B stops to add little stories to colour the description, they rely too much on simple assertions such as 'it was a painting' or 'the location was nice'.

Student C commentary

This Level 3 response lingers on details such as the description of the fish or the image of the lady in white weaving through the marketplace. It is a relatively short piece, but it covers a range of sensory details: the smell of the fish, the noise of the shoppers, or the feel of the soft breeze. There is an effective sequence of images, but each one is given a little more life by incorporating additional clauses ('peered up blindly'; 'from all over the country'; 'as if she was moving through a maze'). There is some precise vocabulary used, in particular the onomatopoeia employed to describe the cash register and the 'clink' of the knife. The sequence of images is shaped by the eye moving from one element to another before resting finally on the 'lady in white' which provides a sense of control at the end of the piece, a narrative device almost that takes the reader away from the market!

Student D commentary

This high Level 4 response begins with the idea that the market is like the beating heart of a community, with the people as its lifeblood, and this is returned to in the conclusion. In between, the body and its sensory response is referred to throughout: 'spindly' limbs of children squatting in the market place; bodies engaged in a metaphorical dance of bartering; hands, fingers, crow-like faces and dead carcasses are described to convey an image of both life and death.

The second key aspect of this piece is the **spatial movement** which is almost cinematic in its aspect. The first paragraph is akin to an establishing shot that stands back from the image-stimulus

to provide an overview of the scene: a bustling market replete with 'hordes of people', before 'cutting in' to various elements within the larger frame: stalls, street-urchins on the prowl for free food eyed suspiciously by wary street-traders. Then, the student moves in even closer to eavesdrop on conversations between buyers and sellers haggling over produce, before concluding with a final paragraph that encapsulates the big idea and the reader can almost imagine the camera pulling back to reveal the scene again as the opening credits roll!

The vocabulary in this response is rich and varied: the aforementioned lexical field of the body, the sensory excess of 'aromas'; the 'sizzle of the oil' and even the tactility evoked by the 'soft silk sheets'. There is clear evidence of crafting: the student's corrections – for example the replacement of 'crying' for 'crowing' and the contrast between the 'scorched earth' and the 'glowing rivers of honey and wine'. Sentences are characterised by their varied openings: the use of spatial concepts through the use of prepositional phrases ('amongst narrow streets', 'in the corner'), and multiple adjectival clauses all add to the liveliness of the writing.

Student E commentary

The student opens with an attempt to adopt a formal tone, which is slightly clumsy. This is followed by a spurious fact which stands out as being implausible. There is some focus on the task, however, and some more ambitious vocabulary. There are a couple of ideas introduced early on which are not developed as the student moves swiftly to a new paragraph.

The use of an expert opinion is typical of students working at Level 2 – it lacks credibility and sits uncomfortably alongside the increasingly informal, even chatty style. The personal anecdote confirms the uneven tone, again typical of students working at this level. Having said that, it is engaging in places, with a lively approach, but the ideas are fragmentary, poorly sequenced and rarely developed beyond a single sentence.

By this point, the central argument ought to be appearing, but there is little sign of any clarity beyond repeated attempts to encourage the reader directly to get out and go travelling. Little of the statement in the task is addressed, which leads to a limited range of ideas. The final couple of paragraphs offer even less, as the tone becomes colloquial, and the student ends on an even more arbitrary statistic.

The response is a sustained attempt to engage with the topic, but is inconsistent in terms of style and tone, with some conscious use of vocabulary and an attempt to use structural features.

Student F commentary

The Level 3 response opens with some well-chosen and precise vocabulary, and more sophisticated phrasing which establishes an engaging style. It is clearly focused on the task and addresses the reader directly in a more mature style.

The paragraph on birds is a nod towards big ideas, with a reference to nature and our place as humans within a natural world where migration and travel is. This sets up a logical sequence of ideas, which is followed through by reference to people holidaying and the stress relief provided by proximity to nature. However, this idea is not developed much further, and the student takes a detour to engage with more pragmatic issues such as cost, which detracts from the consistency of the argument.

The tone changes as the student moves through their argument, but the thrust remains well-focused on the importance of travel to well-being. The counterarguments are well-handled and dismissed without distracting from the central argument. Linguistic devices are used aptly and appropriately. They enhance the work rather than detracting from it. The piece ends in an appropriately cheery way.

Contact us

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