Technical accuracy in writing in GCSE English: research findings

QCA

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Publications related to this report

This is a report of findings of a QCA research project. This report is available on the QCA website (www.qca.org.uk) or through the English team at QCA.

This was followed up by a group of teachers who considered the implications of the work for their classroom teaching. Practical guidance on planning and teaching arising from this work can be found in another booklet called *Improving Writing at Key Stages 3 and 4*, which is available through our publications order line (01787 884444).

If you are interested in using the methodology of this project to analyse pupils' work, or would like further information on the methodology, there is a booklet which contains the coding frames and explains their use. Copies of this can be obtained from the English team at QCA.

Acknowledgements

Content

Introduction

The project specification

In 1995 the SCAA/Ofsted report on *Standards in Public Examinations 1975 to 1995*, found some concerns about GCSE examinations in English and levels of literacy among 16 years-old:

> *SCAA should initiate an enquiry into the standards of technical accuracy typically associated with key grades. Among other outcomes, this enquiry should identify the range of attainment in technical accuracy shown by candidates awarded each of these grades.*

Following this report, work was undertaken to develop ways of analysing accuracy in pupils' writing and the application of such methods to GCSE English scripts. Over 3 years the analyses were trialled and refined. This report presents the findings of the analysis of 1998 English GCSE scripts. The project investigated the accuracy and usage of six aspects of written work: spelling, punctuation, sentences/clauses and different word classes, paragraphing, textual organisation, and non-standard English. The scripts used were representative of performance at borderline grades A, C and F.

Writing in GCSE English

The Criteria for GCSE English, and the syllabuses of all the examination Boards, now specify clearly which tasks assess reading and which assess writing.

In 1998 all English examinations were required to provide candidates with a specified range of writing tasks, described in relation to writing purposes, in four broad categories:

- argue, persuade, instruct
- analyse, review, comment
- inform, explain, describe
- explore, imagine, entertain

These imply different styles, registers, forms, choices of vocabulary and linguistic devices. Given this specification it is possible to compare candidates' performance in different tasks which are comparable to some degree in that they are likely to involve choices of related language and forms.

Coding of tasks: narrative and non-narrative

All tasks were coded as either narrative or non-narrative. 144 tasks were coded as narrative and 144 as non-narrative, one narrative and one non-narrative from each candidate. Narrative included all tasks which implied recount, whether from real or imagined experience. At the heart of this distinction is the notion of chronology. Most narratives describe or relate to a series of events, characters or settings located in time, even if the events themselves are not presented chronologically. All tasks implying recount were coded as narrative; all tasks implying discussion, persuasion, report or explanation were coded as non-narrative.

Such coding can cut across form and genre. In relation to form, for example, a letter task inviting candidates to write about what happened during an activity was coded as narrative; a letter which invited candidates to write to a specified audience to encourage or persuade was categorised as non-narrative. Some tasks allowed candidates to respond in narrative or non-narrative. For example, a title (eg *Living in the Past*) could prompt time-located narrative or discursive speculation. Even when the purpose was clear (eg *Describe one of the following in such a way that it can be easily imagined by your reader: a city a night...*) some candidates may have opted for a chronological structure on which to base the description, while others might have chosen a different organisational framework.

The purpose of the narrative/non-narrative coding was to allow consideration of relationships between types of text and technical accuracy. For example, through this coding it was possible to consider whether particular grammatical features were more prevalent in narrative than discursive writing, or whether punctuation usage varied according to the type of writing.

The project also included analysis of 64 coursework tasks. The *explore, imagine, entertain* category of purposes (typically a fictional narrative) was often solely in coursework. This meant that most of the 32 coursework narratives were stories or accounts, sometimes based on personal experience (eg *A Life in the Day of*; *Work Experience*). Nearly all 32 non-narrative coursework scripts were examples of *analyse, review and comment*, most in response to literary texts, with about one third in response to media texts, typically newspapers.

The significance of the analyses

Some aspects of the analysis, particularly those related to paragraphing and textual organisation, reflect this sample of writing but may be more variable with other samples. The patterns in other aspects, spelling, word classes and sentence construction, have remained stable over different samples. The figures and percentages given in this report relate to the analysis of 1998 scripts. Many of the differences did not reach statistical significance, but the trends identified were similar to those in the previous two years.

This suggests that patterns in the data do relate to recurrent features of pupils' performance which merit attention. While the sample size is sufficient to enable detailed statistical analysis, at the level of subsamples the numbers are inevitably small, for example, scripts by girls at grade F. In order that the data are fully available the numerical tables of results are included in this report. The commentary reports the analyses in full, indicating where the subsamples are small. The summaries at the beginning of each section of the findings indicate the most significant patterns.

This information about pupil performance has implications for the planning and teaching of English. *Improving Writing at Key Stages 3 and 4*, published by QCA, identifies the most significant implications. It then offers practical suggestions for how planning and teaching may take account of them. This includes overall, long term planning in order to integrate the insights from this study into the English curriculum, and also the necessary adjustments to existing units of work to incorporate teaching points.

Summary

Characteristics of writing at borderline grades A, C and F in GCSE English

Grade	A	C	F
Spelling	98.7% mean accuracy. errors in: • separating compound words; • doubling consonants; • unstressed vowels.	97% mean accuracy. errors in: • separating compound words; • omission; • homophones; • unstressed vowels.	93.9% mean accuracy. • many errors difficult to categorise; • letters and phonemes omitted; • word division still significant, but less so than for A and C.
Punctuation	• accurate; • includes variety of devices; • commas used to support meaning; • commas used parenthetically; • omissive apostrophe correct.	• generally accurate; • comma splicing evident; • commas used to demarcate some clauses and in lists, but rarely parenthetically; • omissive apostrophe correct; • greater use of contractions; • errors in possessive apostrophe.	• generally accurate use of capital letters; • widespread omission of punctuation, especially full stops; • sparse use of commas; • errors in both omissive and possessive apostrophes.
Sentence/clause structure	• variety in sentences: simple and multiple; • sentences expanded by adverbial/non-finite clauses; • considerably more subordination than co-ordination and effective use of both; • use of variety of subordinating/co-ordinating conjunctions.	• less variety in sentence structure; • more long sentences, fewer simple sentences; • more subordination than co-ordination; • some weaknesses in handling clause structure, especially co-ordination; • less varied conjunctions used.	• less variety in structure; some repetitive structures; • long sentences; • almost equal use of co-ordination and subordination; • strings of clauses linked by 'and'; • weaknesses in handling clauses.
Word class usage	• greater use of abstract nouns; • greater lexical density; • lower number of finite verbs.	• higher number of finite verbs; • some use of abstract nouns; • more reliance on adjectives and adverbs for detail.	• little use of abstract nouns; • lower lexical density; • highest number of finite verbs; • more reliance on adverbs, low use of adjectives.
Paragraphing	• paragraphing nearly always present and used accurately; • in narrative and non-narrative, a greater variety of paragraph linkage using conjuncts to contrast and place adverbials.	• paragraphing usually present and handed appropriately in 50% of cases where used; • in narrative and non-narrative, less variety of linkage than at A; conjuncts to order and time adverbials.	• paragraphing as likely to be omitted as used; • limited number of paragraphs means limited range of paragraph links, particularly in non-narrative.
Textual organisation	• establishes good relationship with reader; • successful openings; • less successful closure and cohesion/coherence.	• generally successful relationship with reader and openings (though less strong than A grade); • less successful closure; • less successful cohesion/coherence.	• some success in openings and closure, but very little success establishing relationship with reader; • lack of cohesion.

Implications for teaching

This summarises a more extended account of the implications for teaching which can be found in *Improving Writing at Key Stages 3 and 4*.

The interrelationship of features of technical accuracy

In considering the teaching implications arising from this study, teachers should be aware of the inter-relationships between the six areas of writing in this study and explore how one aspect of technical accuracy impinges on another. For example, pupils' difficulties with accurate sentence demarcation, a feature of punctuation, may best be approached through teaching sentence and clause structure; the use of the parenthetic comma and the omissive apostrophe could be taught in the context of their effect on the reader-writer relationship; and the non-standard use of prepositions in place of a verb (eg *should of; could of*) may be approached through the teaching of the omissive apostrophe.

Teaching decisions made in the light of this study will also focus on whether an aspect identified by the research requires a single, focused input, or needs to be looked at in more detail over a period. It seems likely that areas such as the use of abstract nouns to carry meaning rather than verbs and adverbs, the use of a variety of conjuncts to lead into paragraphs, and the non-standard use of a preposition in place of a verb may well be best dealt with by direct, focused teaching. However, sentence and text structures and the punctuation features such as commas, which relate closely to them, are likely to demand more systematic and regular attention over a period of time. Therefore, the findings from this study suggest that appropriate planning is needed to ensure both coverage of the issues and opportunities for recapping, extension and consolidation of pupils' understanding of these features.

The findings of this study suggest a number of areas which merit more attention in the classroom, which are summarised here. In addition, the coding frames for this study are potentially a rich source of diagnostic information about pupils' writing. Teachers could consider using these frames, or adaptations of them, to analyse their own pupils' writing. (Details of the coding frames and how to use them are available from the English team at QCA.)

For the purposes of this report, features arising from this study which have implications for teaching are described according to the categories covered by the six coding frames.

Spelling

Pupils need to be taught about:

- unstressed vowels, homophones and errors which are phonetically plausible;
- other semantic and syntactic cues;
- phoneme and letter omission;
- word division, particularly for higher achieving pupils;
- consonant doubling.

Punctuation

Pupils need to be taught about:

- the accurate use of commas and full stops rather thatn comma splicing, especially in narrative;
- different functions of comma usage, including the less commonly used parenthetic comma;
- use of the possessive apostrophe;
- use of a wider range of punctuation devices, including the colon and semi-colon;
- specific aspects of punctuation which characterise weakness at certain grades, such as use of the omissive apostrophe at grade F.

Sentence/clause Structure and word class usage

Pupils need to be taught about:

- sentence length: the use of short sentences for effect; the avoidance of over-long, rambling sentences; variety in sentence length;
- sentence structure: the appropriate use of both co-ordination and subordination; avoiding repetition of similar structures, for example, Subject-Verb-Object sentences;
- effective handling of clauses in non-narrative writing;
- co-ordinate clauses: the use of effective co-ordination; the avoidance of excessive co-ordination with clause strings linked by 'and'; the use of alternative co-ordinators to 'and' or 'but';
- subordinate clauses: the use of subordinate clause structures; handling complex ideas through subordination; recognising tangled or confusing subordinate clauses; the use of a wide range of subordinators; the use of subordination in non-narrative texts, especially to express arguments;
- word class: the use of abstract nouns as an alternative to adjectives and adverbs, especially in narrative.

Paragraphing

Pupils need to be taught about:

- the use of paragraphs in general and paragraphing of dialogue in particular (especially lower achieving pupils);
- the use of adverbials to link narrative paragraphs, with particular emphasis on adverbials which link according to place;
- the range of conjuncts and other appropriate phrases used to link paragraphs in non-narrative;
- the use of layout devices other than paragraphs.

Textual organisation

Pupils need to be taught about:

- openings in non-narrative writing;
- endings in narrative and non-narrative;
- establishing and maintaining a relationship with the reader;
- the establishing of cohesion/coherence, particularly the use of pronouns.

Non-standard English

Pupils need to be taught about:

- the use of the irregular past tense form, and the difference between the past tense and the past participle (eg *I wrote to you* and *he has written to you*);
- the non-standard use of prepositions;
- the use of the preposition 'of' instead of 'have' following a modal verb (*could've/could of*; *should've/should of*).

Spelling

Summary of findings

- Spelling accuracy closely matched the grades awarded: A grade 98.7%, C grade 97%, F grade 93.9%
- Spelling accuracy was not related to task
- The most prominent category of error was word division
- Many pupils rely heavily on phonological cues
- Approximately one in five errors at all grades was omission of a letter or letters
- For A grade candidates errors of word division, consonant doubling and the unstressed vowel were particularly prominent
- For F grade candidates nearly one third of the errors suggested implausible guesses; the broad category of omission accounted for one in four errors
- At A and C grades patterns of errors for boys and girls were similar; more boys were judged to use more sophisticated vocabulary

Accuracy in the whole sample

The mean score of correct spellings per 100 words in the whole sample was 96.6. The total number of errors made by the 144 candidates was 990. The degree of accuracy ranged from a mean of 93.9 for F grade candidates to 98.7 for A grade candidates. Typically, therefore, in a 300 word examination answer, A grade candidates would make 4 errors and F grade candidates 18. The error figures describe the number of errors made rather than the number of different words spelled incorrectly, so if the same word was spelled incorrectly three times in a 100-word sample, it was counted as 3 errors.

Patterns of error

The largest category in this report is **impausible, illegible** (19) which accounted for 22% of all errors; a significant proportion of these errors are accounted for by F grade candidates. This category includes mainly those errors which coders found difficult to identify. Typically in this category, a single word would contain more than one type of error; or poor handwriting combined with error would make the word difficult to identify or categorise.

category	Omission				Ending				Sound							Doubling			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**
whole	2.1	4.1	8.3	6.0	1.7	1.2	1.2	0.3	8.6	2.0	5.7	5.8	2.8	14.3	3.0	2.3	4.3	4.1	22.0
narrative	2.9	4.2	6.3	7.2	1.9	1.3	1.1	0.4	6.3	2.9	6.1	5.5	2.9	14.9	2.5	2.7	4.2	4.6	21.9
non- narrative	1.4	4.1	10.1	4.9	1.6	1.2	1.4	0.2	10.7	1.2	5.3	6.0	2.7	13.6	3.5	1.9	4.5	3.7	22.2

Table 1: patterns of errors as percentages - in the whole sample and according to task.

Categories

1 Omission - d, ed, ing	**8** Ending - other suffix	**15** Inversion
2 Omission - s	**9** Sound - homophone	**16** Doubling inflection
3 Omission - phoneme	**10** Sound - long e	**17** Doubling other
4 Omission - single letter	**11** Sound - unstressed vowel	**18** Common words
5 Ending - y	**12** Sound - phon. plausible	**19** Implausible, illegible
6 Ending - verbs - e	**13** Sound - consonant confusion	
7 Ending - adverb	**14** Word division	

20.5% of errors were categorised as errors of **omission** (1-4 in table 1). Errors of omission divided themselves naturally into two types. Firstly, 6.2% involved the failure to add 'd', 'ed' or 'ing' on the end of verbs and 's' on present tense verbs and nouns. In one sense this is less a spelling error and more a failure to use the appropriate word, since the word written was usually a correct spelling but not the version of the word intended. This category was strongly related to grade and will be discussed later. The other categories, omission of phonemes and of single letters, accounted for 14.3% of errors. Examples of phoneme omission included *happ(en)ing, amou(n)t, th(r)ough, diff(er)ent, sta(n)d, me(n)tally, physi(ca)lly, ex(er)cise, fie(l)d, b(r)oken, exam(p)les, clean(in)g, mill(i)ons. ster(e)o,* and *terro(ri)st.* Single letter omissions included incorrect formation of past tense (*glistend, happend*), omissions where the letter was part of a digraph *(ment, jepordises, shoud, mecanism, caos)* and other particular omissions of 'e' (*snak, ther, slid*).

Ending errors (5-8) related to words ending in 'y', inflections forming participles on verbs which end in 'e', adverb formation and suffixes accounted for only 4.4% of the total. However, to contrast omission errors with ending errors is clearly not comparing like with like: every word contained the potential for omission but few words offered opportunity for errors in forming a participle from a verb ending in 'e'. The data simply describe those errors which occurred most frequently.

24.9% were errors in the very broad **sound** category (9-13). Of the errors categorised in some way as sound, the largest number were homophone errors. This category was used to include confusion between common errors such as *to* and *too*, *know* and *no*, *knew* and *new, their* and *there, your* and *you're,* many of which occurred repeatedly. Other homophone errors included *heard/herd, fore/four, seams/seems, sites/sights*, *maid/made*, *braking/breaking*, and *course/coarse*. The unstressed vowel errors will be discussed later in relation to A and C grade errors. Phonetically plausible errors were, as one would expect, wide-ranging and often inventive; they included *broused, shaire, howe, highe, pritty, terned, thow (though), chirch, ghoast, orfanages, cort, shorely, oister, colledge, domb (dome), faulter, thare, moaring, amoungst, attact, and sourcers*. 'Phonetically plausible' was only used when coders felt that other categories were not more appropriate for a given word. Since a large number of other errors are also phonetically plausible it seems likely that these GCSE candidates, in general, had little difficulty in bringing phonological knowledge to bear. What they sometimes seemed to lack was a range of other strategies against which to check such knowledge.

Of the remaining categories (14-18) the most prominent was clearly category 14, **word division**. This category, accounted for 14.3% of all errors. These errors included predictable examples of elision*: alot, abit, aswell, infact, incase*. Very occasionally, hyphens were inappropriately used (*foot-baller, stylish-kid, shot-gun* and *re-act*). But often, single words were written as two words, with a failure to join or hyphenate compound words: *house work, grand father, flat mate, back up, boy friend, base ball, brake shoes, down stream, over spill, eye witness, nation wide*. Several of these, of course, can be appropriately separated depending on the context within the syntax of the sentence. The complexity of this issue is illustrated by dictionary entries of *girlfriend* as one word, when applied to a sweetheart, but two when meaning a girl's young female friend. Context within the sentence was also significant in the decision of coders to include as errors, *rubbish filled, profit making,* and *short term*. Familiar words, involving an adjective followed by a noun or pronoun were often divided up, including *every thing, any thing, some thing, some body, some times, any way, every one, no body*. Variations on this theme included *when ever, where ever, where by, with out, our selves, him self, mean while, all ready, all too gether* and *all together.* Less predictable were *was nt* and *inter val.* In the vast majority of these words, individual units (words or syllables) were usually spelled correctly.

Inversions (15) accounted for only 3% of the total errors and will be briefly exemplified later in the discussion of F grade errors.

Consonant **doubling** (16-17) accounted for 6.6% of the total number of errors and will be considered separately when errors in relation to grade are discussed.

The most prominent error patterns (77.3% of the total) within the whole sample are described in the table below.

Implausible/multiple errors within one word	22.0%
Omission of phoneme/single letter	14.3%
Word division	14.3%
Homophones	8.6%
Consonant doubling	6.6%
Phonetically plausible	5.8%
Unstressed vowel	5.7%

Table 2: percentage of spelling errors most frequently occurring in the whole sample.
Categories are combined where this is helpful to the understanding of error patterns.

Accuracy and patterns of error according to task type

Accuracy in narrative and non-narrative proved remarkably similar (96.4% non-narrative and 96.7% narrative). Coder judgements about sophistication in relation to task were also similar. Given these similarities, one would not expect significant differences in patterns of error in relation to task, and this was the case.

Accuracy and patterns of error according to gender

	Omission				Ending				Sound							Doubling			
category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
girls	0.9	1.4	4.2	6.5	2.3	1.4	2.8	0.5	6.5	2.8	11.1	5.1	3.2	25.5	2.8	2.3	6.0	4.2	10.6
boys	2.0	1.0	5.0	5.9	2.0	1.0	3.0	0.5	9.9	4.5	8.4	8.4	5.4	15.8	0.5	3.0	8.4	2.0	13.4

Table 3: patterns of errors as percentages for girls and for boys.
This represents performance at A and C grade only. At A grade there were six more female scripts than male.

Categories

1 Omission - d, ed, ing   8 Ending - other suffix   15 Inversion
2 Omission - s   9 Sound - homophone   16 Doubling inflection
3 Omission - phoneme   10 Sound - long e   17 Doubling other
4 Omission - single letter   11 Sound - unstressed vowel   18 Common words
5 Ending - y   12 Sound - phon. plausible   19 Implausible, illegible
6 Ending - verbs - e   13 Sound - consonant confusion
7 Ending - adverb   14 Word division

In order to consider performance in relation to spelling and gender, the table above does not include F grade candidates, where boys are heavily represented. In relation to performance according to gender at A and C, the mean number of words spelled correctly was 97.8% both for boys and girls. Indeed the pattern of errors made by boys and girls was also remarkably similar, with only word division showing a trend towards greater significance for girls.

Coder judgements on the sophistication of vocabulary suggest that boys were spelling their words correctly in the context of slightly more sophisticated vocabulary. That is, 35% of girls were coded 3 (most sophisticated) compared to 47% of boys.

Accuracy of spelling and sophistication of vocabulary according to grade awarded

Accuracy		Degree of sophistication		
Grade	Mean score	1	2	3
A	98.7	0%	39.8%	60.2%
C	97.0	16.7%	62.5%	20.8%
F	93.9	61.7%	35.1%	3.2%

Table 4: mean accuracy and sophistication of vocabulary according to grade.
Accuracy figures are expressed as means, and represent the number of words correct in a 100-word sample.
Sophistication figures represent the percentage of scripts coded 1, 2, or 3 at that grade.
1 represents least sophisticated vocabulary and 3 most sophisticated.

Differences in spelling accuracy strongly reflected the grades awarded. A grade candidates spelled 98.7 words correct in every hundred, C grade 97 and F grade 93.9. In total, A grade candidates made 132 errors, C grade candidates over twice this number, with 286 errors, and F grade candidates 572, accounting for more than half the total number (990) of errors made. Ability in spelling is not simply a matter of numbers of errors, since the nature of the words spelt must also be taken into account. The 'sophistication rating' is admittedly crude, but it does give a reasonable guide to the lexical context in which errors were made. So, A grade candidates scored the highest rating (3) in 60.2 % of their scripts, compared to only 20.8% for C grade. Equally apparent is the gap between those rated 1, the lowest for sophistication, at C (16.7%) and at F (61.7%). To illustrate the point further, all of the five F candidates who scored 100 for accuracy were graded only 1 for sophistication of vocabulary. Conversely, the three F grade candidates coded 3 for sophistication of vocabulary made, between them, 12 errors, which included *aparaently, increaseing, hopeing, ghoast, shrapnell, tommorrow, evactuation, bycycles, polloution,* and *addvantage.*

Patterns of error according to grade awarded

	Omission				Ending				Sound							Doubling			
category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
A	1.5	0.8	3.0	5.3	2.3	2.3	3.0	0.8	3.8	5.3	11.3	6.8	5.3	21.8	0.8	3.0	10.5	1.5	11.3
C	1.4	1.4	5.3	6.7	2.1	0.7	2.8	0.4	10.2	2.8	9.1	6.7	3.9	20.4	2.1	2.5	5.6	3.9	12.3
F	2.6	6.3	11.0	5.8	1.4	1.2	0.0	0.2	8.9	0.9	2.6	5.1	1.8	9.5	4.0	2.1	2.3	4.9	29.4

Table 5: patterns of error as percentages - according to grade.

Categories (as table 3)

These percentages according to grade must be treated with caution because they are percentages of different totals. For example, since A grade candidates made few errors in any case (132 in total), reference to 10% of errors is a reference to about 13 errors. 10% of F grade errors, however, represents about 57 errors.

For F grade candidates, one very large category relates to implausible errors which could not safely be placed in any other category. This category accounts for 29.4% of all F grade errors. Exemplifying many of these errors in detail would be fruitless, but they include *oppion, manufactors, though* (for *throw), vacanances, sucsefally, fallind, puninant, leasening* and *poasivel*, typifying a range from those

where one can see what the word was meant to be to those where it is necessary to rely heavily on context to guess.

Another way to characterise F grade errors is by the large number which involved omission (25.7% of F grade errors). Within this broad figure there are some other features. For example, the tendency to omit 's' or 'd' from the end of a word was found in 8.9% of F grade errors. In relation to omission of phoneme/single letter, where A grade candidates omitted a letter from a word, the omission tended to leave the sound of the word largely unaffected (*apprentiships, goverment, shoud, suvive, casulty*). Amongst F grade errors, however, there are many examples of the omission which have a significant effect on the way in which the word is heard - *happ(en)ing, amou(n)t, diff(er)ent, sta(n)d, physi(ca)lly, abou(t), finis(h)ed, clean(in)g, mill(i)ons* are just a few examples. Inversion accounted for 4.0% of F grade errors, including *beign, dosen't, strenght, agianst, nevre, frielndy, requires, figther, desing, hoilday* and *filed (field).*

For A grade candidates, much more significant was the category related to word division, accounting for 21.8% of A grade errors. These A grade errors (sometimes related to syntactical context) included *taste buds, stick like, land mines, can not, over heard, some what, fox hunt, over spilling, pitter pattering, un-balanced, alot* and *infact.* These errors may seem less significant than errors in which letters are omitted, wrongly included or wrongly arranged. Some categorised errors may be thought contentious. Different readers might argue, stylistically, for the inclusion or omission of a hyphen, and different dictionaries might disagree on some words. This could be an issue meriting exploration, particularly at A grade.

The unstressed vowel accounted for 11.3% of A grade errors. These included *indefinately, definate, appatising, dependant, desparate, persistant, correspondant, detinated, mollastation, marvallous* and *domented.*

One other significant area for A grade candidates appears to be the error related to consonant doubling. In total, this accounted for 13.5% of A grade errors (10.5% of those related to errors within the word rather than errors related to inflection). A grade errors included *accross, ballance, herron, dissapointed, succesfully, untill, adress, embarassment, milennium* and *millenium.*

For most of the categories, the percentages of C grade errors were between A and F grades. In general, C grade spelling patterns of error were not very different from A. The most notable exception is in the use of homophones where it represents 10.2% of C grade errors compared to 3.8% of A and 8.9% of F.

Punctuation

Summary of findings

- Capital letters to begin sentences were used more accurately than full stops to end sentences
- The comma splice was a significant characteristic of incorrect sentence demarcation, particularly at C and F grades; it was marginally more frequent in narrative
- The omission of commas was a more significant feature than incorrect placing of them. Omission occurred most frequently in the use of commas to demarcate clauses or to act as a discourse marker; omission of the parenthetic commas was also significant
- F grade writers made little use of the comma in their writing. They sometimes punctuated inaccurately but, more significantly, they omitted internal sentence punctuation
- Use of the parenthetic comma increased substantially at grade A
- Boys made more accurate and more frequent use of commas than girls
- The correct use of the possessive apostrophe caused more difficulty than the omissive apostrophe: the problem was pervasive, with A grade writers making errors in their use of the possessive apostrophe in 50% of occurrences
- C grade writers made more liberal use of apostrophes than either A or F grade writers. The use of the omissive apostrophe was more frequent at C and F grade, suggesting that these writers made more use of contractions than did A grade writers
- Girls used more dialogue than boys and were more accurate in their use of speech marks
- C grade writing was largely accurate in the use of speech marks; F grade writing was largely inaccurate in punctuating speech

Use of punctuation in the whole sample

Sentence demarcation

	Full Stop			Capital Letter		Comma Splice
	Correct (C)	Incorrect (I)	Omitted (O)	Correct (C)	Omitted (O)	
Mean	4.0	0.4	1.2	4.9	0.4	0.5
%	72			92		

Table 6: outcomes of the analysis of sentence demarcation in the sample.

The data show that 72% of all full stops and 92% of all capital letters to begin sentences were used correctly. Given that most initial capital letters were deployed correctly, it is evident that sentence closure with a full stop proved more difficult than the opening convention of a capital letter. Omission was a more significant problem than the incorrect use of full stops.

The use of commas

The data in table 7 show that commas to demarcate clauses were more frequently used than other comma types. This partially reflects the nature of writing: many sentences have more than one clause and may require a comma as a clause demarcator or as a discourse marker, but the need for commas to separate items in a list or a list of clauses, or to indicate a parenthesis, is naturally less. In terms of

accuracy, it is clear that incorrect usage of commas was rare in all categories, though the 19% incorrect use of parenthetic commas suggests that this type of comma is an area of insecurity. Pupils were least accurate in their use of parenthetic commas, and most accurate in their use of commas in a list.

	To separate list			Parenthetic			To demarcate clauses		
	C	I	O	C	I	O	C	I	O
% accuracy	66%	6%	28%	26%	19%	55%	33%	4%	67%
total number of commas used	113			58			346		
% of scripts with no commas	68%			70%			11%		

Table 7: outcomes of the analysis of comma usage in the sample.

The principal finding regarding comma usage from this data is its sparsity. Despite being used more frequently than other commas, omission of commas to demarcate clauses was a significant feature, largely accounting for the low accuracy rate in using this comma, and omission of parenthetic commas was also substantial. There were approximately three times as many full stops used across the sample than commas: given that the clause analysis data suggest many sentences were multiple sentences, one would expect a higher frequency of commas. The picture presented by this data is not so much one of difficulty in correct placing of commas, but of a general lack of commas in text.

The use of other punctuation devices

	it's/its		Omissive apostrophe			Possessive apostrophe			Speech marks		
	C	I	C	I	O	C	I	O	C	I	O
% accuracy	68%	32%	78%	6%	22%	36%	40%	24%	58%	7%	35%
total number of occurrences	65		272			99			48		
% of scripts with no occurrences	83%		49%			81%			86%		

Table 8: outcomes of analysis of other punctuation features in the sample.

The data indicate that while the omissive apostrophe and the use of the apostrophe or otherwise on *its/it's* were fairly accurate, the possessive apostrophe is less accurately deployed. The principal difficulty with the possessive apostrophe appears to be incorrect positioning, rather than omission, and the examples provided by the scripts suggest this is often due to the use of apostrophes on verbs (*walk's*) and to confusion over whether the apostrophe should precede or follow a plural 's' inflection.

The examination tasks set for 1998 did not naturally invite the use of other punctuation devices which often accompany layout features, such as bullet points in information leaflets. There were few examples of colons, semi-colons, parentheses or dashes being used across the sample and the occurrences are too few to draw conclusions about accuracy in usage. Parentheses and dashes were used more frequently than colons and semi-colons. There was evidence nonetheless of creative use of alternative punctuation devices for deliberate effect - one writer used the dash to create the effect of surprise that the protagonist felt in the story:

…the rocks disappeared from my line of sight to show me - paradise.

Comparisons of the use of punctuation according to task type

Sentence demarcation

Both capitalisation and the use of the full stop were marginally more accurate in non-narrative writing than in narrative, though commas were used more frequently in narrative. Comma splicing was common to both writing types, though it occurred slightly more frequently in narrative. This may be because, if there are shorter sentences in narrative, there are more possibilities per 100 words for comma splicing. Analysis of several scripts where comma splicing was evident suggests that writers with a tendency to comma splice in narrative showed the same tendency in non-narrative. The following extracts from the same candidate exemplify this:

> *Most people affected by homelessness are young people between the age of 16-25, some of the reasons are because their parents throw them out of home because they were too much for their parents to handle, they ran away from home because they couldn't live for another day under the same roof …*

> *I went out on Wednesday night, just for a drink with the girls up the Bull's Head, there was only Ang, Lizzy, Amy and me but we had a good laugh. They had a Karaoke up the pub which was a laugh, we all went up on the stage and sang 'All Saints, Never Ever'…*

The use of commas

The broad pattern of comma usage found in the whole sample was replicated in each task type, with parenthetic commas being used both least frequently and least accurately. There was little difference between narrative and non-narrative in terms of the number of commas used, though some curious patterns emerged concerning accuracy. Commas for listing were more accurate in non-narrative (71% accuracy, 62% in narrative) while the remaining comma usages were more accurate in narrative.

The use of other punctuation devices

There were few noteworthy differences in the use of other punctuation devices according to task type. Possessive apostrophes were over twice as frequent in narrative as in non-narrative but similar accuracy rates were achieved on both tasks (36% and 37% accuracy). The use of *its/it's* occurred more frequently in non-narrative and was also more accurately used than in narrative (72% accuracy, 60% in narrative).

Use of punctuation according to gender

Sentence demarcation

The overall data show girls to have been slightly more accurate than boys in terms of sentence demarcation. However, when the data for gender is compared using grades A and C data only (thus excluding the bias at grade F towards boys) the pattern is reversed. Boys were marginally more accurate in both the use of the full stop and the capital letter, and they were less likely to comma splice than were the girls.

The use of commas

		To separate list			Parenthetic			To demarcate clauses		
		C	I	O	C	I	O	C	I	O
% accuracy	BOYS	66%	7%	27%	28%	20%	52%	32%	5%	63%
	GIRLS	66%	5%	29%	23%	16%	60%	34%	2%	64%
total no. of	BOYS	71 (63%)			41 (71%)			202 (58%)		
commas used	GIRLS	42 (37%)			17 (29%)			144 (42%)		

Table 9: outcomes of the analysis of comma usage by gender.

The data reveal some indications of contrasts in the way boys and girls used internal sentence punctuation. Given that F grade writers (mostly boys in this sample) made little use of commas and were often inaccurate, the data apparently shows boys less accurate than girls and less likely to use commas. The overall sample over-represents boys, with 58% of the sample boys and 42% girls: nevertheless the statistics suggest that boys made more use of commas than girls and that they were equally accurate in their deployment. Despite the 58:42 split of the sample, the proportion of commas used by boys tended to exceed this ratio, most noticeably their use of the parenthetic comma.

		To separate list			Parenthetic			To demarcate clauses		
		C	I	O	C	I	O	C	I	O
% accuracy	BOYS	83%	5%	12%	37%	26%	37%	51%	7%	42%
	GIRLS	73%	4%	23%	29%	20%	51%	39%	3%	58%
total no. of	BOYS	51			40			168		
commas used	GIRLS	40			17			137		

Table 10: outcomes of the analysis of comma usage at grades A and C by gender.

When the gender results at grades A and C are analysed (see table 10), the pattern of superior performance by boys was more marked. They were considerably more accurate and more prolific in their use of all three categories of comma, though the difference is most marked in the use of the parenthetic comma. Although boys put more commas in the right place than girls, they also placed more commas incorrectly, suggesting they made more attempts to use commas than girls. By contrast, girls' use of commas was characterised more by omission, particularly in the deployment of commas to demarcate clauses or in a parenthetic position.

The use of other punctuation devices

There were no significant gender differences either in accuracy or frequency of usage of other punctuation devices, other than the use of speech marks. Girls were considerably more accurate than boys in this area (80% accuracy set against 30% for boys). Moreover, girls used dialogue more frequently than boys. This pattern of greater accuracy and usage of dialogue by girls was replicated in the data for grades A and C. However, it should be noted that these data are drawn from the small sample of pupils who used dialogue.

Comparisons of the use of punctuation according to grade awarded

Sentence demarcation

		Full Stop			Capital Letter		Comma
		Correct	Incorrect	Omitted	Correct	Omitted	Splice
A	Mean	4.4	0.2	0.2	5.4	0.1	0.3
	%	92			98		
C	Mean	4.5	0.5	0.8	5.6	0.1	0.5
	%	79			98		
F	Mean	3.1	0.5	2.6	3.6	1.1	0.5
	%	49			77		

Table 11: outcomes of the analysis of sentence demarcation according to grade awarded.

The data show a clear picture of declining accuracy in sentence demarcation with declining grade. Both A and C grade writers were very accurate in their use of capitalisation, and clearly F grade writers had more mastery over this aspect of punctuation than over the use of the full stop. Omission of full stops was a significant feature of F grade writing.

The use of commas

The expected pattern of accuracy and frequency in comma usage declining with grade is demonstrated in these data, and is most marked at grade F. The data suggest that for C grade writers the omission of commas to demarcate clauses was a typical feature of their writing, while at F grade a greater percentage of all comma types were omitted than used. Moreover, F grade writers used fewer commas of any kind than C or A grade writers. The tables below illustrate this pattern.

		To separate list			Parenthetic			To demarcate clauses		
		C	I	O	C	I	O	C	I	O
	A	82	0	18	41	24	35	57	6	37
% accuracy	C	73	10	17	20	26	54	31	5	64
	F	37	11	52	3	0	97	11	2	87

Table 12: outcomes of the analysis of comma usage by grade (% accuracy).

		To separate lists	Parenthesis	To demarcate Clauses
total number	A	50	41	200
of commas	C	41	16	105
used	F	22	1	41

Table 13: outcomes of the analysis of comma usage by grade (totals).

The use of other punctuation devices

The pattern, found elsewhere, of accuracy in punctuation decreasing with declining grade is repeated but the frequency data are less predictable. C grade pupils appear to have made more use of apostrophes than either A or F grade writers. Both C and F grade writers made similar use of the omissive apostrophe, and notably more so than did A grade writers. This suggests that the use of contractions was more characteristic of C and F grade writing than A grade writing. A grade writers were least likely to use an apostrophe of any kind and it is possible that this reflects a higher degree of formality. A comparison of an A grade writer and a C grade writer responding to the same task illustrates that the absence of contractions contributes to the formality of the A grade piece. The task was to write to a headteacher complaining about the decision to discontinue school dinners:

- A grade*: So it is your responsibility to provide for them the one meal a day that can give them some much needed nourishment. If I allow my children money to buy their dinner then I have no doubt that they too will be misled by fatty burgers and chips. I am not saying we should deprive children of this but they should at least have a choice.*

- C grade*: That's who I feel sorry for because it isn't cheap doing packed lunches. I strongly believe that you should re-think this through because I think you haven't thought about this at all. I personelly think it's a disgrace and I will be taking action against this.*

In similar vein, both C and F grade writers made slightly more use of dialogue than did A grade writers. However, whereas C grade writers were largely accurate (80%) in their demarcation of dialogue with speech marks, F grade writers were considerably less successful with an accuracy rate of only 17%.

The possessive apostrophe appears to cause universal difficulty - even at grade A only 50% of possessive apostrophes were used correctly.

The data

It was difficult to achieve absolute consistency in the analysis of punctuation because there are so many aspects of punctuation which are a matter of personal choice. The use or position of a punctuation device is often dependent on the meaning the writer is trying to convey or the meaning the coder attributes to a given sentence. This applied most strongly to sentence demarcation, when coders frequently had to decide whether a comma was demarcating clauses within a sentence or was in fact a comma splice, representing a failure to mark the sentence end correctly. The same subjectivity was also true of the use of commas to demarcate clauses and commas in parenthesis. In practice, an omission was registered only if it was essential that a comma should be used: the discretionary placing of commas was not considered.

A further difficulty was presented by the handwriting on the scripts and the ambiguities caused by photocopying: there were cases where it was difficult to determine whether the mark on the page represented a comma or a full stop. Occasionally, the collapse of sentence structure in F grade scripts made it very difficult to determine where sentences should begin and end, and consequently made decisions concerning use of punctuation more tentative.

Sentence/clause structure and word class usage

Summary of findings

- Sentences were longer in non-narrative writing than in narrative and contained fewer finite verbs
- The number of finite verbs increased with declining grade, while sentence length decreased. This reflects the greater degree of elaboration and expansion within the sentence found in A grade writing, particularly the use of adverbials, non-finite clauses and parenthetic comments. C and, especially, F grade writers were more dependent on the verb to move the writing forward and provided less additional detail
- Boys tended to write longer sentences than girls. Boys seemed also to be more effective in their handling of clauses than girls
- Co-ordination was less effectively handled than subordination, regardless of task type, gender or grade. A repeated cause of poor handling of co-ordinate clauses was excessive co-ordination, where a writer used 'and' or 'but' to string together long sequences of clauses. Ineffective handling of co-ordination may have indicated that co-ordination was used where subordination might have been more effective
- Handling clauses, regardless of type, was less secure in non-narrative than in narrative writing
- A grade writers used fewer subordinate and co-ordinate clauses than either C or F grade writers, indicating greater variety in sentence type and structure at grade A. C grade writers made more use of subordination than did F grade writers
- Abstract nouns were more frequent in non-narrative writing and at A grade
- Lexical density was highest at grade A and decreased with declining grades
- Adjectives were used least frequently at grade F, though F grade writers made more use of adverbs than at A or C grade. This frequency is partly due to the use of adverbs with little lexical meaning such as 'really' and 'just'

Sentence/clause structure

Sentence/clause structure in the whole sample

The mean number of sentences per 100 words was 5.9, and the mean number of finite verbs used was 12.6. As the number of finite verbs is more than double the number of sentences, this indicates that many of the sentences contained more than one clause. The average sentence length was approximately 17 words.

Significantly greater use was made of subordinate clauses, rather than co-ordinate clauses, with a mean of 4.4 subordinate clauses per 100 words set against a mean of 3.2 for co-ordinate clauses. Judgements made by coders suggested that subordinate clauses were used more effectively than co-ordinate clauses with 59% of all subordinate clauses in the sample rated positively for effectiveness, compared with 50% of all co-ordinate clauses. This difference may in part be attributed to the very common pattern of excessive co-ordination, where a series of clauses is linked by *and* or *but*; writers who exhibited signs

of such excessive co-ordination tended to do so repeatedly, whereas even weaker writers controlled some aspects of subordination effectively. This pattern is typified in the following extract:

> *After that Sarah never spoke to me for ages we were all upset about it but Sarah was*
> *getting really bad and in the end Sarah had another horse but she's called it paddy and*
> *he is lovely and we still have all mystery's picture and when I look at them it makes me*
> *think I wish I never said that about Sarah's horse because mystery could have been here*
> *right this minute…*

Here the writer, who uses no sentence punctuation at all, strings together a long sequence of clauses using *and* or *but*. Although there should clearly be a full stop after the word *ages* where the first sentence reaches its grammatical end, the remaining section of the extract is all one sentence. This sentence is 64 words long with six co-ordinating conjunctions. Not only does this writer over-use co-ordinating conjunctions in one sentence, but she uses the conjunctions where the notion of connection between the ideas expressed is weak. For example, in the two clauses *he is lovely and we still have all mystery's picture* the conjunction links two separate ideas about two different horses. By contrast, the subordinate clauses are handled without difficulty and introduce a welcome moment of reflection into the rather breathless narrative.

Sentence/clause structure according to task type

	Number of sentences	Number of Finite verbs	Co-ordinated clauses	Subordinate clauses
narrative	6.3	13.1	3.5	3.9
non-narrative	5.5	12.1	2.9	4.9

Table 14: characteristics of sentence/clause structure by task type.

There were some differences in patterns of sentence and clause structure between the narrative and non-narrative writing. There was a higher mean number of sentences in narrative writing (6.3) than in non-narrative (5.5) indicating a tendency towards longer sentences in non-narrative. Finite verbs were more frequent in narrative than in non-narrative, suggesting that narrative writing was more dependent on verbs than non-narrative. An extract from a narrative piece, where verbs drive the narrative forward with very little supporting detail or comment, is included below:

> *They must have been gone for about three hours so I decided to stay in and wait till they*
> *came home so I did. They came back and I asked where they had been but they wouldn't*
> *tell me. Later on my brother did. He said "Don't tell me, we got chased by the police."*
> *I swear I wouldn't tell anybody but I wanted to. I didn't like having secrets from my mum*
> *because if she found out she would go mad.*

The occurrence of subordinate and co-ordinate clauses differed between the two writing types. Although in both cases there were more subordinate clauses used, in narrative the balance between co-ordination and subordination was almost even, whereas in non-narrative substantially more subordinate clauses were used. This variance may simply reflect the differing linguistic demands of the two task types. However, in terms of writers' confidence in handling clause structure, differences between the two types of writing were evident. Accomplishment in handling clauses effectively was less secure in non-narrative writing, regardless of the clause type.

	Narrative	Non-narrative
co-ordinate clauses	55%	46%
subordinate clauses	63%	57%

Table 15: percentage of clauses given a positive rating for effectiveness.

This tendency towards less assurance in handling clauses in non-narrative can be seen when extracts from the same candidate are studied. Below are two pieces from an A grade candidate:

- Narrative: *Intelligence had told them the man was armed. Normally that didn't make any difference though. The guy would be too busy trying to avoid getting shot at to think about confrontations. And if they did confront Peters and his squad, all he'd do is threaten to shoot them, crack up and start crying on the floor, before being taken in. Thank goodness for the human soul, Peters thought. Thinks it's so cocky and then loses its bottle, like someone who's so hungry they say they'd eat anything, but offer them anything on brown bread and they say they'll wait.*

- Non-narrative: *The money that the Millenium Dome is costing could be used to keep all museums all over the country open for a while, and so everybody could get the same amount of knowledge as they would from going to the Millenium Dome, if not more.*
  I believe that the government should spend its money like a family does, and that is to buy what it needs and what is useful to it.

The narrative piece is well-controlled, showing confidence in using co-ordination and subordination in a variety of structures. The final sentence is a sophisticated construction: a complex sentence, with three co-ordinating conjunctions and a series of relative clauses; this contrasts with the direct simplicity of the preceding sentence. The non-narrative piece, however, demonstrates more mixed success in handling clauses. The first sentence is rather awkward and clumsy, partly due to the use of the co-ordinating *and so* where a more decisive subordinator is needed to make the argument clear. By contrast, the final sentence is an articulate statement of an argument, demonstrating a well-executed use of both subordination and co-ordination.

The pattern of co-ordination handled less effectively overall than subordination, was repeated in both task types. Difficulties in handling co-ordination did not appear to be task-related.

In narrative writing, secure control of clauses frequently meant that co-ordination and subordination were used to complement each other. In the best narratives co-ordination was used to achieve pace and to move the narrative action forward, while subordination provided reflective comment or additional detail - as the following extract demonstrates:

> *He rang up Alder Hay Children's Hospital and ordered a bed to be vacant. While that was happening, I began to feel upset.*

> *Later that day, I went to Alder Hay Hospital where they gave me a temporary bed. They carried out blood tests to see what was wrong. They said they were going to be a few minutes and as they left, my parents were talking anxiously and I was terrified of what might happen next.*

In weak narratives, writers relied far more heavily on co-ordination, resulting in too much pace at the expense of detail or reflection:

> *I was very excited when my mum had a baby and then we found out my sister was pregnant and she's had the baby now and it was a boy and it's weight was 9.9 and he is lovely.*

In non-narrative, confidence in handling clauses meant that writers were able to use subordination to express and justify their ideas or opinions clearly, and co-ordination was often used to assert or to emphasise. In the following extract the writer makes deft use of the *I think that...so that* subordinate constructions, articulating a proposition and a justification, and uses the balance of co-ordination (*they will...and we will*…) to underline the viewpoint expressed:

> *I think that many people would want the money spent on repairing collapsing school buildings, building community centres and reducing the NHS waiting lists, so that Britain can enter the new millennium with an education system and an NHS we can be proud of again.*

> *In a few years time the Dome and many other silly schemes will be gone. They will have used millions of pounds and we will have nothing to show for them.*

Sentence/clause structure according to gender

	Number of sentences	Number of Finite verbs	Co-ordinated clauses	Subordinate clauses
girls	6.2	12.7	3.0	4.6
boys	5.7	12.5	3.4	4.2

Table 16: characteristics of sentence/clause structure by gender.

Because the sample for this project contained more boys than girls and the imbalance was principally at F grade, the data need particularly careful scrutiny. Although the table above suggests that girls made more use of subordination than boys and correspondingly less use of co-ordination, the data for F grade writers indicate that the weakest writers also used less subordination. Consequently, the gender pattern implied by the data may have been distorted by the over-representation in the sample of boys at F grade. However, the finding that boys' sentences tended to be longer than girls' seems significant as this contradicts the pattern found at F grade (F grade sentences were shorter than those at A grade).

When the data for grades A and C only are considered (thus excluding the bias at F) boys wrote longer sentences and used fewer finite verbs than girls, and although the mean number of co-ordinate clauses was the same they used fewer subordinate clauses. Overall, the pattern of clause structure employed by the boys at grades A and C mirrors the pattern of A grade clause structure more closely than does the pattern employed by girls.

The whole sample data concerning the effectiveness of the clause structure indicate superior handling of clauses by girls; but the pattern is different when the data for grades A and C only are considered: boys appeared to be more assured in their handling of clauses.

	Girls		Boys	
	Whole sample	A and C only	Whole sample	A and C only
co-ordinate clauses	55%	64%	47%	70%
subordinate clauses	62%	71%	58%	82%

Table 17: percentage of/clauses given a positive rating for effectiveness.

Sentence/clause structure according to grade awarded

	Number of sentences	Number of Finite verbs	Co-ordinated clauses	Subordinate clauses
A	5.2	11.0	2.5	4.1
C	6.2	13.1	3.1	4.7
F	6.4	13.7	4.0	4.3

Table 18: characteristics of sentence/clause structure according to grade awarded.

A grade writers presented different patterns of sentence length and frequency of usage of finite verbs from those of C and F grade writers. A grade writers made more sparing use of finite verbs and had fewer sentences per 100 words. C and F grade writers had similar means for number of sentences per 100 words, but F grade writers used more finite verbs. The writing showed that A grade writers elaborated and expanded on the finite verb, often through the use of adverbials or parenthetic comments. Both C and F grade writers made more use of the verb to drive the writing forward, though at C grade there were more attempts to expand and include additional detail. The following three extracts exemplify these patterns:

- A grade: *Who knows what might lurk around the next corner? The high rise buildings threaten the dark alleys and streets. All is dark and silent.*
As I watch over the city I see the moonlight catching an office window making it look almost golden. The smells from the rubbish dumped by people shopping and the overloaded bins rises up. The stench is unbelievable like dead bodies left to rot in a cold, damp cellar.

- C grade: *We both had to be home at 9:00. As we aproached the bolted gates we both glanced at each other in anxiety. "You go first" I said to Jayne, but wouldn't go, Jayne by this time was very wary of what we were about to do.*
"Let's just forget it now and head back" said Jayne, but I disagreed and begged her to come. We decided to climb the gates together, ensuring there was no body else present. We climed the gates, which were very tall and extreamly pointy.

- F grade: *When I came out she said she was going to run away and never come back. I just said "yes" and carried on to work. At 6.00 when I come home from work I went in her bedroom and some of her clothes had gone. So as I looked in her room I looked she had gone. I sat down and phoned the police and they came over and I gave them a statement and a picture of what she looked like and…*

The A grade piece uses very few finite verbs, and adds narrative detail through the use of adverbials (*around the next corner, over the city*), through premodification (*dark, overloaded, cold, damp*), and through non-finite participial clauses (*catching an office window, dumped by…, left to…*). Both the C and the F grade writers make more use of finite verbs, but the C grade piece provides more descriptive detail, principally through the use of adjectives (*wary, tall and extreamly pointy*) and through adverbials (*in anxiety, by this time*). The F grade piece lacks adjectival or adverbial colour and is almost entirely driven by its verbs. Coders also commented on the restricted range of verbs used in F grade pieces, and these examples support this. Both the A and C grade pieces make use of lexical verbs which themselves add colour to the writing (*lurk, threaten, approached, glanced, disagreed*) whereas the F grade piece makes use of a very limited range of verbs and is repetitive (*looked, came, sat, gave*).

A grade writers not only used fewer sentences and fewer finite verbs per 100 words, but they also used fewer subordinate and co-ordinate clauses than C or F grade writers. This would suggest that there were more simple sentences, of one clause only, or verbless sentences in A grade writing. In the extracts quoted above, the A grade writer uses several simple sentences, including one short simple

sentence (*All is dark and silent);* the C grade writer uses one (excluding the simple sentence in dialogue); and the F grade writer uses none. The greater use of simple sentences in A grade writing may also indicate more variety in sentence length. Coders noted further examples of effective writers using one word sentences or very short sentences for effect or emphasis - in writing which also made confident use of longer, more elaborate sentence structures:

> *I feel the dome being built containing all of the 20th century inventions as clearly mapped out in 'The Times' is the push Britain needs to leap into the 21st century. I for one have booked my ticket.*

> *The knife? What knife? …The handle was gold with a carved eagle on it, such a strong symbol, like me, strong.*

> *Have you read about some of the things that go on out there? It's chaos.*

> *As many more mines are detinated, people are still looking for help, and people are still dying. Unknown, innocence is dying.*

At all grades subordination was used more frequently than co-ordination, though A grade pupils made significantly greater use of subordination relative to their use of co-ordination, and at F grade there was almost an even balance in the frequency of co-ordination and subordination. Predictably, successful handling of clauses declined with the declining grades: while C and A grade writers presented competent or very effective handling of clauses, F grade writers appear to have struggled with this aspect of composition. The pattern of co-ordination being handled less effectively than subordination, already noted, was replicated across all grades.

	A	C	F
co-ordinate clauses	86%	50%	16%
subordinate clauses	90%	61%	25%

Table 19: percentage of clauses given a positive rating for effectiveness.

Analysis of qualitative comments by coders provided further information about the way in which writers at each grade handled clauses. A feature of the assurance of A grade writers was their sparing use of co-ordination and their ability to use a range of subordinating conjunctions or pronouns in a variety of positions. The following extract indicates the way one A grade writer uses subordination to contribute detail to the narrative. The use of *whilst* in the final sentence is an example of a confident writer using a subordinator where a less confident writer might have been inclined to use 'and':

> *To my right, as I continue along the meandering ridge, a herron stands still in the waters by the bullrushes, it's eyes alert for any slight movement, as it awaits the passing of a tasty morsel by its stick like legs. In the long grass, frogs croak in general conversation, whilst minute lizards scuttle from hiding place to hiding place.*

Another A grade writer effectively manages both subordination and co-ordination in one sentence to create a cumulative sense of movement and anticipation of the scene, the clause structure mimicking the physical experience:

> *The first day we got there, I ran down the steps, all the time trying to get a glimpse of what it was like, until finally the gradient slackened, and the rocks disappeared from my line of sight to show me - paradise.*

At C grade, writers exhibited general competence in handling clauses, though coders sometimes described the clause structure as 'over-ambitious', 'unadventurous' or 'rambling'. The apparent

contradiction inherent in these descriptions is not surprising as C grade writers sometimes attempted structures executed with accomplishment at A grade, and they sometimes displayed weaknesses more typical of F grade writers. The tendency to ramble was often caused by poor control of co-ordination: although C grade writers did not use co-ordination excessively, nor link unconnected ideas by 'and' or 'but', weaknesses such as the following were typical:

> *A rich person could spend a lot of money on a ticket, and only do it for the fun of it, and won't even notice the money has gone.*

Some C grade writers attempted to employ complex structures, often to express an argument, opinion or idea, and were not quite successful in managing the grammatical constructions. In some cases, the degree of abstraction or generalisation in the content appeared to disrupt the effective handling of clauses. The following two cases illustrate this:

> *I think if needs be that next time we should do something about it and it's not that I am a violent person it's just if other countries think if they can get away with it so can we.*

> *For instance, the dangers would go down because there would be less cars used and also if helmets were worn, if an accident did happen then it is likely to be less serious.*

As the effectiveness ratings indicate, F grade writers had some difficulty with handling clauses, a difficulty which was sometimes compounded by weaknesses in sentence punctuation. The tendency towards excessive co-ordination, previously mentioned, was particularly characteristic of F grade writers: the extract below shows a writer over-using co-ordination through too many *buts* within sentences and inappropriate use of *and* to begin sentences. However, despite inaccuracies in verb concord and use of plurals, the subordination is nevertheless reasonably controlled and contributes towards the beginnings of an argument:

> *This food sound very interesting but if you think about the ingredients it sounds is fatning because cheese's is fatning. And also patato. But the calorie is only 258 calories. And this maight sound interesting for the people who's on a diet. And it's healthy too because it's got a fish in it which is haddock. And the food is for people who can't be boverd to cook because if you want you can cook diet food at home…*

Coder comments also noted a tendency at F grade (which was also occasionally true at C grade) of writers to use the same structures repeatedly. In narrative, this was often Subject-Verb-Object repetition, whereas in non-narrative patterns such as main clause plus relative clause; repeated use of a modal; or Subject-Verb-Complement structures were repeated:

> *I think it matches some of the claims in the advertisement…I think it is a bit too dear for what it is…But I think the back up batteries…I think one of the best things…*

> *but then it is very slim… there are the scratch cards… which are a good idea…*

> *There could be… Shops could… people could…homeless could…*

Word class usage

Analysis of word class usage in whole sample

The distribution of word class in the whole sample indicated that just under half (49%) of all words used were non-lexical items (pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and auxiliaries). Finite

verbs (12.6%) and concrete nouns (14.0%) accounted for a further quarter of all words used, while adjectives accounted for 7.9% and adverbs for 5.1%. The principal purpose of analysing word class usage was to examine the way in which usage might vary according to task, gender or grade and this is explored below.

Word class usage according to task type

	Abstract nouns	Other nouns	Adjectives	Adverbs	Non-lexical words
narrative	0.8	14.2	7.9	5.6	48.3
non-narrative	1.6	13.8	8.0	4.7	49.8

Table 20: word class usage expressed as a mean per 100 words.

Two main differences in word class usage by task were firstly, that non-narrative writing made more use of abstract nouns than narrative, and secondly, that adverbs were more frequently used in narrative. The presence of more abstract nouns in non-narrative may reflect the nature of non-narrative tasks which invite discussion of ideas, arguments or opinions and require a degree of abstraction, unlike the more immediate, concrete demands of narrative action. The non-narrative task asking pupils to write a letter of complaint regarding the abolition of school dinners invited both a formal register and the need to convey a sense of why school meals were necessary - this led to the use of many abstract nouns including *responsibility, nutrition, nourishment, health, progression, education, opinion, argument,* and *opportunity.* However, the higher ratio of adverbs and adjectives in narrative relative to abstract nouns may suggest that, in narrative, fewer writers exploited the possibility of using abstract nouns to convey feelings or emotions. The following two narrative extracts exemplify this, the first relying heavily on verbs and concrete nouns to describe the events, and the second using adjectives particularly to create the sense of horror:

> *His mother was cooking dinner inside when she heard the blast. She thought of Tom playing outside and ran outside in her apron, to find the firemen struggling in vain to rescue her son, who's fragile arm protruded from the rubble.*

> *The worst suffering can be seen in the few, crowded hospitals. There are children with bloody stumps where their legs used to be and endless crying from underfed or starving babies.*

Word class usage according to gender

	Abstract nouns	Other nouns	Adjectives	Adverbs	Non-lexical
girls	1	13.8	8.0	5.0	47.2
boys	1	14.2	7.9	5.3	50.3

Table 21: word class usage by gender expressed as a mean per 100 words.

There are no significant differences in the way word classes were used according to gender.

Word class usage according to grade awarded

	Abstract nouns	Other nouns	Adjectives	Adverbs	Non-lexical words
A	1.9	15.1	8.8	4.4	47.5
C	1.1	13.8	8.7	5.0	48.9

| F | 0.7 | 13.2 | 6.2 | 6.1 | 50.8 |

Table 22: word class usage by grade expressed as a mean per 100 words.

The pattern of word class usage by grade revealed notable differences between the grades. The frequency of usage of abstract nouns declined steadily with declining grade, suggesting that the use of abstract nouns is a mark of increasing sophistication in writing. Conversely, the proportion of non-lexical items in writing increased with declining grade - able writers achieved a higher lexical density, selecting words to convey meaning with greater economy than weaker writers. These general patterns can be observed in the following two pieces, where the A grade writing is lexically dense, achieved partly through the use of present tense lexical verbs, and uses several abstract nouns; while the F grade extract has a considerably lower lexical density and only one commonly-used abstract noun *(trouble)*:

- A grade: *Nobody minds the noise. It is all part of the atmosphere. A shaft of light momentarily fills the room as the doors open to let a newcomer enter. Some turn around to see the source of the disturbance while others just blink in the unnatural light.*
Legs lie sprawled over seats or cramped between the aisles. The tawdry music invades the stillness and I feel somehow violated of my peace.

- F grade: *They only set homework how much the teacher now if her or his class could do. If you are being arashed [harassed?] you go to a teacher and tell them what is the matter they will sort things out for you. You will survive of being beaten up or being in trouble. If in case a fire does start just break the fire alarm and you could survive and help other people…*

A further difference in word class usage according to grade lay in the use of adjectives and adverbs. While A and C grade writers made similar use of adjectives, their frequency declined at grade F, signalling the lack of additional detail in weaker writing. The F grade writers' greater use of finite verbs was discussed in an example of F grade writing which made no use of adjectives (see page 25). The data for word class would appear to confirm this pattern. The trend of increasing use of adverbs with declining grade is less easy to explain. It may be that A grade writers used more adverbial phrases or clauses, rather than single word adverbs, or that they used abstract nouns instead of adverbs. The higher frequency at F grade was sometimes commented on by coders, who noted that adverbs such as 'really' and 'just' with little lexical meaning were used repeatedly (for example, *you are just getting board of what you are doing…just carry on…just get out…)*. Further investigation of the quality, appropriacy and effectiveness of adverb usage is needed to illuminate this finding further.

Paragraphing

Summary of findings

- Four out of five scripts contained paragraphs. Those scripts which omitted paragraphs were likely to be those of F grade candidates
- F grade candidates were marginally more likely to omit paragraphs than to use them
- Paragraphing in narrative was somewhat more effective than in non-narrative. Greater success in structural patterning tended to occur in narrative
- The tendency to paragraph dialogue appropriately was strongly associated with grade. Higher achieving boys were, however, less likely than higher achieving girls to use dialogue, and less likely than girls to paragraph dialogue appropriately
- In narrative, A grade candidates were more likely than C grade candidates to use adverbials of place. C grade candidates were more likely to link narrative paragraphs via time adverbials. Few candidates began a paragraph with a place adverbial
- The repertoire of conjuncts and other linking phrases between paragraphs in non-narrative was generally limited, particularly at C and F grades
- There was little use of alternative layout devices (eg sub-headings or bullet points); it is likely that this was strongly related to opportunity and task

The analyses in this section are inevitably more subjective that in others, since coders made judgements on quality as well as quantity. Therefore the findings reported below should be seen as tentative and indicating trends rather than conclusive evidence of details.

Use of paragraphing in the whole sample and according to task type

	Appropriate	Partially Appropriate	Absent	Strong evidence of structural patterning	Some evidence of structural patterning	Little evidence of structural patterning
whole sample	44%	33%	22%	55%	33%	13%
narrative	47%	31%	22%	58%	29%	13%
non-narrative	42%	35%	22%	51%	36%	12%

Table 23: use of paragraphs and evidence of structural patterning, according to the whole sample and by task; figures shown for 'appropriate' use represent percentages of total number of scripts. Figures shown for 'structural patterning' represent percentages of total number of scripts which contained paragraphs.

The most notable figure is the absence of paragraphing in one in five scripts, the major part of which is accounted for by F grade candidates. Paragraphing was judged to be used appropriately in 44% of the 288 scripts. Although, the number of candidates who omitted paragraphs was identical in each (32), paragraphing in narrative was somewhat more effective than in non-narrative.

Structural patterning describes the degree to which candidates managed to impose a semantic structure on their paragraphing, for instance, whether there was an organising principle beyond the breaking up of the text into manageable chunks. There was a trend towards more successful structural patterning in narrative.

Use of paragraphing in narrative in relation to use of dialogue

Paragraphing of dialogue			
Appropriate	Partially appropriate	Absent	Number of scripts using dialogue
20 scripts	8 scripts	18 scripts	46 out of 144

Table 24: use of paragraphing in relation to management of dialogue in narrative.

The number of candidates who used dialogue is too small to allow significant conclusions to be drawn. However, it is worth noting that, out of the 46 candidates who used dialogue, those who were judged to paragraph dialogue effectively and those who omitted the necessary paragraphing entirely, were similar in number.

Illustration of structural patterning and linguistic patterning

Narrative

At F grade, in relation to structural patterning, coder comments suggested that chronology was likely to be the main organising principle. Chronology was seen to be almost as important at C grade, though more subtle organising features began to emerge, related to setting and character. Coder comments included:

- 'poetic rhythmic style picks up the feel of the tide and storm';
- 'structured on three different sets of relationships'.

At A grade, there was a wider range of organising structures related to setting and character, including effective use of dialogue. Coders commented:

- 'narrative hinges on journey home';
- 'moves from calm sea to storm and back again';
- 'organised by a combination of dialogue and a movement through the days';
- 'good use of dialogue between reporter and news desk to hold narrative';
- 'moves from scene setting to shattering to reflection';
- 'shifts effectively between imaginary world of island and [real] world of examinations'.

In the case of one A grade candidate, the organising principle was almost cinematic:

- 'moves from overall picture to close-up'.

Evidence of linguistic patterning at F grade was scarce. At C grade, coders tended to note repetition:

- '*I* begins 6 paragraphs';
- 'repetition of title *in my secret world*'.

At A grade, some coders noted deliberate, poetic refrains, including repetition of:

- *cool gust of wind; sea gently laps; surreal city; your world - our world.*

Non-narrative

At F grade, there was little evidence of any structural patterning (although coder comments on coursework noted some simple two-part structures). At C and A grade there were far more references to logical development, with several coders noting the tendency of A grade candidates to locate a clear and identifiable topic in each paragraph.

At F and C, the most likely linguistic pattern was the repetition of 'I', as in *I think*, or *I feel*, or *I believe*. At C grade there were examples of more subtle, rhetorical repetition such as:

> *Remember... remember;*
> *Disabled people... disabled people;*
> *We need more... we need more;*
> *People say... people say.*

A grade candidates shared the C and F grade tendency to repeat the first person pronoun, but with significant variations:

> *I know; I wish; I hope;*
> *I believe that; I am opposed to;*
> *I believe that; I do believe that;*
> *I am aware; I can remember; I am sure.*

Use of paragraphs according to gender

	Appropriate	Partially Appropriate	Absent	Strong evidence of structural patterning	Some evidence of structural patterning	Little evidence of structural patterning
girls	63	33	4	60	33	8
boys	63	28	10	70	26	5

Table 25: use of paragraphs and evidence of structural patterning according to gender - as a percentage of total no. of A and C scripts.
Figures shown for 'structural patterning' represent percentages of total number of scripts which contained paragraphs.

Because F grade is so heavily represented by boys, this particular comparison between gender performance relates to A and C grade candidates only. In terms of 'appropriate use', the main feature of the data is the similarity between boys and girls. Slightly more boys' scripts omitted paragraphs, but those boys who used paragraphs showed evidence of strong structural patterning.

In narrative writing, there was one feature which appeared to vary according to gender. That is, girls were more inclined to use dialogue than boys (25 out of 50 girls' scripts contained dialogue, compared to nine out of 47 boys' scripts). From this limited evidence, girls appeared to be more successful in paragraphing dialogue. Of those nine boys' scripts, four omitted the necessary paragraphing. Of the 25 girls' scripts only three omitted the necessary paragraphing.

Use of paragraphs according to grade awarded

F grade candidates were marginally more likely to omit paragraphs than they were to use them. Also, while there was comparatively little difference between A and C candidates in their tendency to omit paragraphs, 82% of A candidates were judged to use paragraphing appropriately, compared to only 44% at C. The figures for structural patterning broadly reflect those for appropriate use. The F grade figures, of course, represent a comparatively small number of scripts, since 51 out of the 94 F grade scripts did not use paragraphs and were therefore not coded for structural patterning. There is little evidence of F grade candidates' ability to clarify their ideas through paragraphing.

	Appropriate	Partially Appropriate	Absent	Strong evidence of structural patterning	Some evidence of structural patterning	Little evidence of structural patterning
A	82%	16%	2%	84%	16%	1%
C	44%	45%	12%	42%	46%	13%
F	6%	40%	54%	12%	49%	39%

Table 26: use of paragraphs and evidence of structural patterning, according to grade for the whole sample; figures shown represent percentages of total number of scripts. Figures shown for 'structural patterning' represent percentages of total number of scripts which contained paragraphs.

Use of conjuncts according to grade awarded and to task

	Narrative Adverbials Time	Narrative Adverbials Place	Non-narrative Conjuncts Ordering	Non-narrative Conjuncts Contrasting
A	30%	29%	9%	14%
C	34%	20%	9%	6%
narrative	32%	24%		
non-narrative			10%	10%

Table 27: frequency of use of conjuncts or equivalent phrases to link paragraphs; figures shown represent percentages of the total number of paragraphs for each grade and for task.

F grade candidates used so few paragraphs that no conclusion can be drawn from the data which relate to them: thus they are excluded from the table above.

32% of paragraphs in narratives contained a first sentence which linked with the previous paragraph via a time adverbial, and 24% by a place adverbial. In narrative, many paragraphs were dialogue-based, offering less opportunity to provide this sort of link. Also, as with non-narrative, links in the opening paragraph were obviously not possible. A general impression, therefore, is that a substantial number of paragraphs in narrative were helpfully linked by time and/or place reference.

More interesting is the general difference between A grade and C grade in comparing use of time links with place links. In linking paragraphs, A grade candidates used more place adverbials than C grade candidates.

In relation to links between non-narrative paragraphs, the issue is related to the quality of the links rather than the quantity. However, even allowing for the fact that opening paragraphs distort the percentage figures somewhat, the general impression remains that in non-narrative the larger elements of the text were not often explicitly linked via the opening sentence of each paragraph. (10% of paragraphs for each of the two categories of 'ordering' and 'contrasting'). In the table above, the trend is towards A grade candidates linking paragraphs by contrasting or refocusing and C grade candidates by ordering or sequencing ideas.

Use of adverbials to link paragraphs in narrative

For the majority of candidates, time-related narrative links in the first sentence of a paragraph tended to come at the start of the sentence, with some variations between grade. Not surprisingly, F grade time links were often limited to single adverbs (*today, then, still, now*). Variations, sometimes found within the sentence rather than at the start, included *at night, at dawn, about 4 years ago*. C grade time links included some use of the more direct, main clause (*it was 12.30, it was seven fourteen pm, it was a Saturday, it was time for, it was now*). More subtle variations on this way of foregrounding time came from A grade candidates (*the night lives, the time had come*). A grade examples also included arguably more subtle adverbs such as *eventually* and *currently*.

Use of common groups of adverbials offered some variety, for example, the variations on' day':

* *today; yesterday; the next day; the following day; on Tuesday; the first day; then one day; the other day;*

the use of 'at' to locate the narrative in a particular moment in time:

* *at about half-past ten; at dawn;*

the use of 'after'*,* to summarise an idea before moving on:

* *after my painful telling; after half an hour; after she got home; after more mines exploded;*

the use of 'as' to suggest a continuous past:

* *as the day progressed; as I travelled; as Jane walked past.*

A feature of the use of time adverbials was their positioning within the first sentence of a paragraph. It was rare to find a sentence beginning with a place adverbial; if found it was likely to be in the writing of an A grade candidate, and the effect on the reader was potentially stronger because of its foregrounding:

* *between the sand and...; towards the left; in a slightly quieter corner; around the town.*

Not surprisingly, the most commonly occurring adverbials began with 'in' or 'to':

* *in France; in a minefield; in Bosnia; in court; in the gym; in the hall; in the town*

* *to America; to the rock; to the floor; to Wales; to the address of.*

These compare with the visual and active impact created by 'into'*:*

* *into the supermarket; into the deeper sea; into a clearing; into the distance.*

Use of conjuncts and other linking devices in non-narrative

In non-narrative writing, the issue was the quality of the links between paragraphs rather than the quantity. At all grades there was a limited variety of either contrasting or ordering linking devices. Coders noted any phrases which seemed to provide a link with previous paragraphs. These included disjuncts like 'admittedly' and 'indeed', the conjuction 'but' and rethorical expressions such as 'other people say'.

The most commonly occurring ordering link was 'also', sometimes used at the start of the opening sentence of the paragraph, sometimes within the sentence. Also, there were variations on 'first', 'second' and 'third':

- F grade: *the second thing; the third thing; the last thing*;
- C grade: *the first point; the third point*;
- A grade: *firstly; finally*.

Perhaps the greatest difference between grade was in relation to non-narrative links used to contrast. F grade candidates were more or less limited to 'at least', 'anyway', and 'but'. C grade offered slightly more variation, but only A grade candidates used 'however', 'yet', 'admittedly', 'indeed' and 'even so'.

Use of topic sentences in non-narrative tasks, according to grade awarded

Paragraph introduced by topic or statement			
	Mostly	**Sometimes**	**Never**
A (49 scripts)	41	4	2
C (48 scripts)	24	18	1
F (47 scripts)	11	9	2

Table 28: use of topic statements in non-narrative. Figures show actual number of scripts for each judgement at each grade.

The above table applies to non-narrative and only to those scripts where paragraphs were used. In general, they support the other evidence that effective management of paragraphs was strongly related to grade. However, half of those 22 F grade candidates who used paragraphs seemed to have a clear notion of paragraphing, and most of the rest were able to give their paragraphs a focus at least some of the time. This suggests that, although F grade candidates tended to omit paragraphs, when they did use them the paragraphs contributed to the cohesion and coherence of their text.

Use of layout devices in non-narrative tasks according to grade awarded

The table below provides no information to judge the effectiveness of layout devices used, but simply identifies the percentage of non-narrative scripts in which these devices appeared. The overall picture is that, more or less, these devices were simply not used. There are a number of factors to explain this. Firstly, the writing purpose to *analyse, review and comment* was placed, by most Boards, within coursework, making the use of quotation unlikely in the examination but more likely in coursework. Secondly, the sample offered few opportunities to present information in the form of leaflets, therefore there were few opportunities to use sub-headings and bullet points. In summary, in 1998, most writing in the examination sample took the form of continuous prose with little use of layout devices.

	Sub-headings	**Bullet Points**	**Quotations**
A	0%	6%	0%
C	2%	6%	6%
F	0%	6%	0%
all non-narrative	1%	6%	2%

Table 29: use of layout devices. Percentages represent proportion of scripts where the devices were used.

Use of paragraphing in narrative in relation to use of dialogue

	Appropriate	**Partially appropriate**	**Absent**	**No. scripts using dialogue**
A, C, and F	20	8	18	46 (out of 144)
A	14	1	2	17
C	6	6	5	17

F	0	1	11	12

Table 30: use of paragraphing in relation to management of dialogue in narrative. Figures represent actual numbers of scripts in each category.

In most GCSE English syllabuses, the traditional narrative (the short story) has been placed within coursework. Many tasks in this sample encouraged personal accounts or description of setting. However, the evidence in the table above suggests that opportunities to use dialogue in narrative remained. The appropriateness with which it was used, even allowing for small numbers overall, is strongly related to grade. No F grade candidate in the examination (or in the coursework) was judged to paragraph dialogue appropriately.

Textual organisation

Summary of findings

- Openings and the establishment of a reader-writer relationship were the most successful elements of textual organisation overall
- Textual cohesion/coherence was a comparatively unsuccessful category for all candidates, regardless of task or grade
- Narrative openings was the strongest single feature of textual organisation
- Non-narrative endings was the weakest feature of textual organisation
- Struggling writers had least success in their management of cohesion/coherence and in establishing a reader-writer relationship, regardless of the task
- A grade candidates were generally successful in establishing a relationship with the reader. In narrative, the ability to establish a relationship with the reader was an effective discriminator between grades
- Narrative was generally stronger than non-narrative in most aspects of textual organisation; in particular, narrative openings were stronger than non-narrative openings
- At A and C grades, boys tended to score more highly in all four categories

In relation to textual organisation, writing was coded on a scale for effectiveness (1 least, 4 most effective). In the tables below, comparison of categories 3 and 4 together, and 1 and 2 together are used to describe broad areas of success or lack of success. Achievement rated 4 was mainly, but not exclusively related to A grade candidates as achievement rated 1 mainly, but not exclusively, related to F grade candidates.

Textual organisation in the whole sample

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion/coherence			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
whole	17.7	34.0	27.0	21.2	19.5	37.0	27.5	16.1	23.6	27.6	28	20.8	23.6	33.6	25.7	17.1
narrative	15.3	32.6	31.9	20.1	14.7	38.5	32.9	14.0	23.9	25.4	28.2	22.5	22.7	34.0	24.8	18.4
non-narrative	20.1	35.4	22.2	22.2	24.3	35.4	22.2	18.1	23.4	29.8	27.7	19.1	24.5	33.1	26.6	15.8

Table 31.1: effectiveness of elements of textual organisation in the whole sample and according to task; figures represent percentages of candidates who were coded 1, 2, 3, or 4; 1 represents least effective, 4 most effective.

The same data are shown in the table below, this time combining the less successful categories (1 and 2) and the more successful categories (3 and 4).

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion/coherence			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
whole	51.7		48.2		56.5		43.6		51.2		48.8		57.2		42.8	
narrative	47.9		52.0		53.2		46.9		49.3		50.7		56.7		43.2	
non-narrative	55.6		44.4		59.7		40.3		53.2		46.8		57.6		42.4	

Table 31.2: effecitiveness of textual organisation in the whole sample and according to task - combined categories

Considering narrative and non-narrative tasks together (288 scripts) the data (in table 31.2) show that openings and establishment of a reader-writer relationship were most successful, with 48.2% and 48.8% respectively coded 3 or 4. Endings and cohesion/coherence were comparatively less successful, 43.6% and 42.8% coded 3 or 4 respectively. The general picture, therefore, is of engaging writing which begins well, but loses some cohesion and ends less successfully than it begins.

Textual organisation according to task type

All four features of textual organisation were coded higher in narrative than in non-narrative. Candidates, in short, did better in narrative. The variation was greatest in openings, (52% of narrative openings were judged to be successful, coded 3 or 4, compared to 44.4% of non-narrative openings). The difference was almost non-existent in cohesion/coherence. Of the 4 different elements of textual organisation, the most successful was narrative openings, (52% coded 3 or 4) and the least successful was non-narrative endings (40.3% coded 3 or 4).

Within narrative, an interesting contrast is between endings and reader-writer relationship. Table 31.1 shows that 14.7 % scored 1 for ending and 14.0% scored 4 for ending. By contrast, 23.9% scored 1 for reader-writer relationship, and 22.5% scored 4 for reader-writer relationship. This implies that the reader-writer relationship category proved to be an effective discriminator between the most successful and the least successful writer. The bunching at 2 and 3 in narrative endings suggests that this category was a less effective discriminator.

Textual organisation according to gender

Because of the imbalance of boys at F grade, the data below compare performance in relation to gender, at A and C grade only. Taking the combined score of 3 and 4 to represent comparative success in textual organisation, it is worth noting a trend towards boys' superiority in all four elements, the gap being smallest in relation to reader-writer relationship (7.3%) and largest in relation to endings (14.1% - about 10 scripts).

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion and coherence			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
girls	3	34	37	26	7	37	32	24	1	30.8	36.2	32	2.1	39.2	36.1	22.7
boys	4.3	19.2	39.4	37.2	7.6	22.6	46.5	23.6	5.4	19.2	45.7	29.8	2.2	30.5	39.2	28.3
	1 and 2		**3 and 4**		**1 and 2**		**3 and 4**		**1 and 2**		**3 and 4**		**1 and 2**		**3 and 4**	
girls	37		63		44		56		31.8		68.2		41.3		58.8	
boys	23.5		76.6		30.2		70.1		24.6		75.5		32.7		67.5	

Table 32: effectiveness of elements of textual organisation according to gender; figures represent percentages of candidates at A and C combined who were coded 1, 2, 3, or 4; 1 represents least effective, 4 most effective.

These data may disguise some variations within narrative and non-narrative. Boys' apparent superiority may have been established in non-narrative writing. For example, while in narrative there was a slight trend towards girls being more successful in establishing a relationship with the reader, in non-narrative, 79% of boys (total 47) were coded 3 or 4, compared to 59% of girls (total 50).

Analysis of textual organisation according to grade awarded

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion and coherence			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
A	1.0	7.2	38.7	53.1	3.1	16.4	39.3	41.2	0.0	7.2	42.8	50.0	1.1	15.6	38.5	44.8
C	6.3	46.8	37.5	9.4	11.4	43.8	38.5	6.3	6.5	44	38.7	10.7	3.2	54.8	36.6	5.3
F	46.8	48.9	4.3	0.0	44.6	51.1	4.3	0.0	66.3	32.6	1.1	0.0	68.1	30.7	1.1	0.0

Table 33: effectiveness of elements of textual organisation according to grade; figures represent percentages of candidates who were coded 1, 2, 3, or 4; 1 represents least effective, 4 most effective.

The results broadly reflect the grade patterns. In particular, no F grade writing in any textual organisation element was coded 4, and only a very small number coded 3. Perhaps surprisingly, however, 15.6% of A grade scripts were coded 2 for cohesion/coherence and 16.4% coded 2 for endings.

Taking the combination of 3 and 4 as a single measure, A grade candidates were most successful when establishing a relationship with the reader (92.8%) and in establishing an opening (91.8%). They were least successful in maintaining cohesion and coherence (83.3%) and in effective closure (80.5%). The C grade pattern mirrors the A grade pattern but there was less difference between strengths and weaknesses. F grade candidates were not successful in any area of textual organisation. However, they were less unsuccessful in openings and endings (only 46.8% and 44.6% respectively coded 1) and more unsuccessful in cohesion/coherence and reader-writer relationship (66.3% and 68.1% respectively).

Openings and endings

In order to illuminate the data, this section considers briefly the comments that coders made when arriving at their judgements.

Successful narrative openings were characterised by clear establishing of context, influenced by the emphasis in the tasks on contextual description. Coders comments included:

- 'concise evocation of darkness'; 'worlds of light and shadow effectively introduced'; 'establishes secret world'.

But the less successful openings left the reader in the dark:

- 'no clues to... setting'; 'little detail re character or context'; 'setting and time-frame weak'.

F grade openings had some merits:

- 'setting clearer than time'; 'signals a letter'; 'unsophisticated but clear'.

Comments on C grade writing often referred to writers' confidence in establishing theme, but comparative lack of assurance in establishing genre:

- 'indicates theme, but weak in genre'; 'signals theme effectively'; 'opts for letter form but genre is eye-witness report'; 'eye-witness genre not well signalled'.

Although most comments on A grade narrative endings were positive, there were some comments noting a lack of clear or appropriate closure. Coder comments reflected the comparative lack of success at A grade in narrative endings:

- 'not so much a resolution as a new development'; 'simply an echo of the start - hasn't gone anywhere'; 'misses the opportunity to round off the report'.

Comments on F grade narrative endings occasionally referred to attempts to establish a coda. Some coders noted how the use of the letter form to carry the narrative (a personal, factual account) ensured, at some level, a sense of closure for F grade and C grade candidates:

- 'fits with letter genre at a low level'; 'ending provided by signing off in a letter'; 'letter closure, but not really a resolution'; 'more to do with how to end a letter'.

One coder felt strongly that this same letter form, while offering a reminder of closure to F grade writers, proved limiting for A grade writers commenting that:

- 'genre of letter does not encourage skill in conclusion'.

Comments on A grade non-narrative openings tended to emphasise the writer's engagement with the reader:

- 'good rhetorical start'; 'lively and emphatic'; 'good use of modality'.

At C grade, candidates were likely to signal the topic clearly, but some seemed less assured about tone:

- 'very aggressive opening'; 'ham-fisted'; 'opens with challenging/badgering questions'.

F grade candidates sometimes struggled with genre and form, and often failed to establish an appropriate tone:

- 'writing to a friend, begins *Dear Sir*'; 'misses intended personal tone'; 'too direct in approach'.

While at A and C, coders often commented on how non-narrative endings successfully reflected the opening and/or theme, at all grades a common criticism emerged:

- A grade: 'no weighing up of pros and cons'; 'does not round up argument';
- C grade: 'no summary or overt conclusion'; 'no attempt to provide a conclusion';
- F grade: 'no summary - some attempt at goodbye'; 'no summary'; 'no ending, just finishes'.

Reader-writer relationship

Coder comments under this category in relation to narrative were very different at the ends of the grade scale. At A grade, coders noted the attempts at engagement, demonstrating a real sense of an audience:

- 'strives to pluck the heart strings'; 'works hard at creating a sense of tragedy'; 'story told with sensitivity'.

At F grade, however, comments more often referred to the lack of help that the reader received at a basic level (*very little detail*). It is arguable that at A grade and C grade, the reader-writer relationship means rather different things than it does at grade F.

In relation to reader-writer relationships in non-narrative, the contrasting comments for A and C grades were instructive. A grade candidates were not always successful in getting the relationship right

('strives for the right tone, but doesn't come off'; 'jokey tone isn't altogether successful'), but mainly hit an appropriate note ('vitality of piece wins reader over'; 'skilfully incorporates reader's presumed viewpoint').

C grade candidates, though generally successful, sometimes hit the wrong tone:

- 'too conversational and confrontational'; 'tone of challenge to reader crude'; 'becomes quite vehement in places'; 'sticks doggedly to point of view rather than arguing'.

Cohesion/coherence

In narrative and non-narrative scripts there were many comments related to the successful management of this textual element. However, at all three grades in narrative, when cohesion was less effective, there were comments on the use of names and pronouns or the sustaining of character or perspective:

- A grade: 'the central *I* character is rather fragmented'; 'needs to use names more';
- C grade: 'moves between *you* and *I* haphazardly'; '*you* becomes confusing';
- F grade: 'weak use of pronouns'; 'who took him down?'; 'shift to *we* not explained'.

This issue was also referred to, probably to a greater degree, in coder comments on non-narrative. Typically, where cohesion was lost in an argumentative piece, the writer was unclear in the use of pronouns to indicate ownership of a particular viewpoint.

- A grade: 'some confusion over *we* and *our*'; 'some confusion over *our* and *they*';

- C grade: 'use of pronouns in an uncontrolled way'; 'pronoun *you* sometimes confusing';

- F grade: '*they* used in first sentence without previous reference'; '*you* used without indication or audience'; 'pronouns not well used'.

At F grade, absence of cohesion was largely attributable to the tendency to omit paragraphs, problems with consistency of tense, and other technical errors.

Non-standard English

Summary of findings

- The incidence of non-standard usage was low
- The most commonly occurring non-standard features were:
  - ∗ non-standard use of prepositions
  - ∗ non-standard use of the definite/indefinite article
  - ∗ non-standard use of verb forms
- There was no significant difference in non-standard usage according to task type gender
- F grade writers made significantly more use of non-standard forms than A or C grade writers, often registering a higher frequency than A and C put together
- F grade writers had particular difficulty with verb agreement, and with past tense and past participle formations

Non-standard usage in the whole sample

The most significant outcome of the investigation into non-standard English usage was that the incidence across the sample was low, with 67% of the scripts (193 scripts) presenting no examples of non-standard features. The low incidence means that the data for this aspect of the technical accuracy project was collected as raw cumulative data, as both means and percentages would be unreliable when dealing with such low figures. For the majority of features scrutinised, the actual incidence was between 2 and 9 occurrences in the whole sample. However, two non-standard features occurred more often than others:

Feature	Incidence
non-standard use of prepositions	29
non-standard use of the definite/indefinite article	16

A further cluster of non-standard features registered a marginally higher frequency. These were features which centre on the correct use of the verb, either in terms of irregular past tense or past participle formation, or agreement between subject and verb.

Feature	Incidence
non-standard use of irregular past tense forms	12
non-standard use of irregular past participle forms	13
plural subject with singular verb	12
singular subject with plural verb	12

Before discussing these findings in a little more detail, it is worth noting that across all the categories of non-standard usage there were examples which are likely to be a consequence of transcription error, rather than poor control of standard English. Examples include *reports have show that; mess about if lessons; to try a more a varied variety;* and *a fighter shoot down my mate.* However, it is not possible to be certain and thus all uses have been counted for this study.

Non-standard use of prepositions

This category was significantly more common than any other feature, although it should nevertheless be remembered that there were only 29 incidences in the whole sample, and that there were 261 scripts which presented no problems with this feature. One sub-category of non-standard use of prepositions was accounted for by the use of phrasal verbs, some of which might be considered sufficiently common to be acceptable as standard English (such as *to tie up)*. In general, these phrasal verbs reflect an informality of register in writing, sometimes using the characteristics of spoken standard English. The examples of such phrasal verbs taken from the sample are:

> *I was up a party;*
> *the ropes which he had tighed me up in;*
> *decided to go down the park;*
> *going straight down middlesbrough.*

A more significant category was the choice of an inappropriate preposition in a phrase, resulting in a register which read awkwardly or dissonantly. This often occurred when a writer was seeking to express an idea, but did not have complete control of the appropriate idiom. Sometimes this reflected non-standard forms that are commonly used (eg *to pay for the bills; just getting board of where you are living)*. Other examples included:

> *we are all in favour for the scrapping of school meals;*
> *to book certain days in which they can…;*
> *who got into trouble by the police;*
> *to sacrifice considerable amounts on what I feel;*
> *can be a true symbol for how far people have come;*
> *how would you feel with not only having to cope with…;*
> *on a recent experiment.*

Non-standard use of the definite/indefinite article

Analysis of the examples of non-standard usage in this category suggests that there was no single problem in use of the definite or indefinite article which was causing the number of incidences. There was one error due to failure to use *an* in front of a word beginning with a vowel (*he lost a arm*)*.* The remaining errors were variously due to omission of an article where one was needed and inclusion of an unnecessary article.

As referred to above, some usages in relation to the definite/indefinite article may, in fact, consist of transcription errors, rather than failure to understand standard conventions related to the use of articles. It is also possible that some of these errors are made by pupils with English as an additional language, as they are the kind of error frequently associated with second language learners. Examples taken from the study include:

how bad these can be for you in both short term and long term
gone in flash
like a old people
I think it was a Tuesday 4th April
confidence in their ability of the pilots.
because you have place to stay
Non-standard use of verb forms

The cluster of errors in these categories strongly reflect either non-standard speech patterns, or constructions found in dialects. Some writers formed irregular past tenses incorrectly, often using forms heard in speech, such as *I then done it,* while other writers maintained the present tense form when a past tense was required (*when the police come*; *when I come home*). With both the past tense and past participle formations, some writers regularised irregular forms by adding inappropriately adding 'ed' (*costed, broadcasted, ringed*). Elsewhere, the nature of the error indicated that pupils had difficulty recognising the distinction between the past tense form and the past participle (*I have fell out with a friend; this country has fell into; I should of [k]new*).

Apart from a single incidence of a singular noun being followed by a plural verb because of the plural value associated with the noun (*my family are*), the incidence of poor subject-verb agreement took the form of predominantly straightforward errors in agreement. They included the following:

PLURAL SUBJECT/SINGULAR VERB:	SINGULAR SUBJECT/PLURAL VERB:
because they was	*how this gas effect people*
the charities …is…	*One house were on fire*
things that goes out	*my husband play*
I want to know what is your plans	*Have the lottery made it worse*
sweet foods you eat now effects you	*only one in ten thousand get in*
your parents wants you to	*the car have to go*
main reasons was	*the cat's eye shine*

Non-standard usage in other categories

The remaining categories of non-standard English usage investigated for this study registered very low incidences, and tended to follow very similar patterns within the category. For example, almost all the examples of a preposition used in place of a verb were the modal verb followed by *of*, and all the non-standard uses of *is/was* after *there* were the use of a singular verb when the noun complement was plural. Examples of usage in these categories are included below for reference:

is/was* after *there	*there is swimming pool, gym, basket ball etc*
	There is advantages
	is there nice boys around
	there was only two
adjective as adverb	*the majority did it quick*
	she said quick
	they have been playing amazing
	don't take this personal
***more* with comparative adjective**	*more easier*
preposition in place of a verb	*should have been allowed to of had our say*
	you could of
	I should of
***me* with subject noun**	*me and Neil*
	me and my boyfriend
no plural marker	*thirty pound*
	five pound
	three week
	about 2 hour
	another 5 mile

Non-standard usage according to task type

There were no significant differences in the frequency or pattern of non-standard usage in the two task types.

Non-standard usage according to gender

The raw data suggest that boys were more likely to use non-standard constructions than girls. However, bearing in mind the sample bias towards boys at grade F, this is not surprising. To look more closely at gender differences a further data set was created, including all pupils at A and C, where gender was more balanced, and excluding the F grade data. These data show that there was no significant difference in frequency of non-standard usage according to gender, with boys making a total of 28 non-standard usages, and girls making a total of 27.

There was little difference in the pattern of errors made, with both boys and girls making most errors in the use of a preposition in a non-standard form or in the use of the definite/indefinite article. The single exception to this pattern is that in the A and C data set girls made relatively greater use of non-standard prepositions (11:5), though the number of incidences was too low to draw definitive conclusions.

Non-standard usage according to grade awarded

Throughout the sample the highest incidence of non-standard usage was at F grade, often registering more incidences than C or A grade writers put together. There were 72 non-standard incidences at F grade, compared with 38 at grade C, and 17 at grade A.

Category		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	A	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	7	1	0	3
Grade	C	0	4	4	4	3	3	2	3	9	1	0	5
	F	13	7	7	4	2	7	0	5	13	0	6	8

Table 34: differences in pattern and frequency of non-standard usage by grade.

Categories

1 Non-SE Irregular past tense	**5** Adjective as adverb	**9** Non-SE use of prepositions
2 Plural subject, singular verb	**6** Non-SE irregular past participle	**10** *Me* with subject noun.
3 Singular subject, plural verb	**7** *More* with comparative adjective	**11** No plural markers
4 *Is/was* after *there*	**8** Preposition in place of a verb.	**12** Non-SE use of articles

It is evident that difficulties in mastering appropriate use of written standard English were largely confined to F grade writers. Although the whole sample pattern of non-standard prepositions being prominent is repeated at each grade, it does appear that F grade writers had some difficulty with standard use of the verb. Over 50% of F grade errors were in the categories of verb agreement or formation of past tense or past participles (compared with 8% at grade A and 36% at grade C). Of these, a problem with irregular past tense construction was the most significant, occurring exclusively at F grade. The absence of plural markers on nouns of quantity or measurement also featured exclusively at F grade.

Analysis of coursework

The investigation

In order to investigate and compare the patterns of technical accuracy found in coursework and examination scripts, a sub-sample of coursework was drawn from the main study sample. 64 coursework scripts across the grade, gender and task type categories were analysed in the same way as the examination scripts. Because the analysis of examination scripts had indicated very low incidence of non-standard English, this aspect was excluded from the coursework study. The other outcomes are described below.

Summary of findings

- There was little significant difference between coursework and examination, though there was a tendency towards greater accuracy and effectiveness in coursework
- F grade pupils exhibited the most marked differences, with more successful performance in coursework

Spelling

	Whole sample	A	C	F	Boys	Girls
Examination	96.6	98.7	97.0	93.9	96.0	97.4
Coursework	97.9	99.4	98.8	95.6	97.9	97.9

Table 35: mean scores for the whole exercise, for grades A, C, F and for boys and girls in comparison between test and coursework.

The mean accuracy for the whole sample was 97.9, an increase of 1.3 words per hundred over examination script scores. All grades improved their accuracy. A grade candidates improved on their score by 0.7, C grade by 1.8 and F grade by 1.6. The sample of 64 scripts is not large enough to speculate with any accuracy on the impact of the use of a spell-checker, but, of the 64 scripts, 18 were written on a word processor. Of these, no piece contained more than one error. However, 16 of those pieces were by A or C grade candidates, and only 2 by F. In this small sample, therefore, the 20 out of 22 F scripts were handwritten and did not benefit from the use of a spell checker.

Punctuation

Overall, there was no significant difference in the accuracy of sentence demarcation. By contrast, accuracy levels for the use of commas were higher for coursework. One notable difference between coursework and examination scripts was in the use of apostrophes. The coursework scripts made more accurate use of all apostrophes, but especially possessive apostrophes.

	Its/it's	Omissive apostrophe	Possessive apostrophe
Examination	68%	78%	36%
Coursework	87%	86%	71%

Table 36: accuracy in apostrophe usage expressed as a percentage.

This greater accuracy in the possessive apostrophe was combined with a higher frequency in coursework, arguably increasing the potential for inaccuracy.

The pattern of accuracy in punctuation use according to the grade awarded was broadly similar for both coursework and examination for A and C grade scripts. However, F grade scripts were more accurate in all aspects of punctuation in coursework.

Sentence/clause structure and word class usage

Overall, the principal patterns of clause and sentence structure found in examination scripts were replicated in coursework. In general, however, where accuracy or effectiveness were measured the coursework scripts scored more highly: they also scored more favourably where factors which may indicate quality (such as restricted use of finite verbs) were concerned. The coursework scripts had more sentences per 100 words, fewer finite verbs, and fewer co-ordinate and subordinate clauses than examination scripts, suggesting that in coursework there were both simple, short sentences and longer sentences elaborated around the finite verb. The F grade scripts were markedly more effective in handling clauses in coursework than in examination writing, though the differences for A and C grade writers were less significant. There were no marked differences in word class usage in coursework compared with examination scripts, other than that the use of abstract nouns was higher in coursework. The increased usage was almost exclusively attributable to greater deployment of abstract nouns in A grade scripts in coursework.

Paragraphing

	Appropriate	Partially Appropriate	Absent
Examination	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%
Coursework	54%	38%	8%

Table 37: comparing the use of paragraphs between coursework and examination script.
Figures represent percentages of total numbers of scripts.

The whole sample

The clearest difference in performance between examination script and coursework is in relation to omission of paragraphs: paragraphs were omitted in 22.2% of examination scripts and in 8.0% of coursework scripts. 44% were coded 'appropriate' in their use of paragraphs in the examination and 54% in coursework. In the examination scripts, slightly over half of F candidates omitted paragraphs entirely; in the coursework, only 4 F scripts out of 22 (18.2%) were not paragraphed.

Non-narrative

Though the numbers of scripts representing the coursework at narrative and non-narrative separately (32) are not enough for further comparisons of any significance, one point is worth noting. In non-narrative, only 2% of scripts contained the use of quotations, while 41% of coursework non-narrative scripts did so. This, as suggested earlier, is strongly related to the assessment of *analyse, review and comment* in coursework rather than examinations.

Textual organisation

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion and coherence			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Examination	17.7	34	27	21.2	19.5	37	27.5	16.1	23.6	27.6	28	20.8	23.6	33.6	25.7	17.1
Coursework	7.8	39.1	32.8	20.3	11	36	31.2	21.9	9.3	34.3	31.3	25	11	31.3	34.4	23.4

Table 38: scores for test and for coursework in textual organisation.

The general pattern is of better performance in all elements of textual organisation in coursework. The gap is smallest in relation to openings (48.2% coded 3 or 4 for the test compared to 53.1% for coursework) and greatest in relation to cohesion/coherence (42.8% coded 3 or 4 for test and 57.8% for coursework). It appears that, despite the considerable length of some pieces of coursework, cohesion and coherence were more successfully maintained than in the examination answers.

In those areas of textual organisation that the general data showed as problematic for low-achievers (cohesion/coherence and reader-writer relationship), the difference in those achieving the lowest score, 1 between examination and coursework is marked. In each category, approximately twice the percentage of candidates was coded 1 in the examination compared to the coursework. This can be interpreted as suggesting that, in respect of textual organisation, writing within a coursework context particularly favoured lower achieving candidates.

The performance of C grade writers in the foundation and higher tiers

The sample

Within the C grade sample for the project, there was an even number of scripts taken from candidates entered for the foundation tier and candidates entered for the higher tier. When comparisons in performance are drawn between the two tiers it must be remembered that the sample size is small, and that where incidence of features is low the comparisons are not reliable. With small samples it is also possible that the effect of different examination tasks on the statistics may be more significant than in the larger samples.

However, the most significant outcome of the analysis of C grade writing at the two tiers is that they were more similar than they were different. The differences suggest that sometimes foundation tier writing was more accurate or effective than higher tier and vice versa: it seems likely that these alternating differences balance each other out.

Spelling

Accuracy		Degree of sophistication		
Grade	Mean score	1	2	3
C foundation	97.5	12.5	58.3	29.2
C higher	96.6	20.8	66.7	12.5

Table 39: mean accuracy and sophistication of vocabulary according to whether the candidate was foundation C or higher C. Accuracy figures are expressed as means, and represent the number of words correct in a 100-word sample. Sophistication figures represent the percentage of scripts coded 1, 2, or 3 at that grade. 1 represents least sophisticated vocabulary and 3 most sophisticated.

There was no significant difference in accuracy of spelling on the two tiers.

Punctuation

There were few significant differences between in punctuation between the tiers. Foundation tier writing made more accurate use of the full stop (84% set against 73%). Foundation tier writing was generally more accurate in the use of commas; although the frequency of usage was very similar, higher tiers writers had more difficulties with omission of commas to demarcate clauses.

Sentence/clause structure

Although there was very little difference in the number of sentences and finite verbs used and the pattern of subordinate and co-ordinate clause use, there was some variation in the effectiveness of clause handling. More higher tier scripts received the top rating for clause effectiveness in both categories, but taking the top two ratings together the foundation tier writing scored more favourably.

Paragraphing

There was no significant difference between the use of paragraphs by C grade candidates on the higher tier compared to C grade candidates on the foundation tier.

Textual organisation

	Opening				Ending				Reader relationship				Cohesion and coherence			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
foundation	8.4	39.6	43.7	8.3	14.6	29.1	45.8	10.4	6.5	32.6	47.8	13	4.3	41.3	45.6	8.6
higher	4.1	54.2	31.3	10.5	8.3	58.3	31.2	2.1	6.5	55.1	29.9	8.6	2.1	68.1	27.7	2.1

Table 40: effectiveness of elements of textual organisation according to tier; figures represent percentages of candidates who were coded 1, 2, 3, or 4; 1 represents least effective, 4 most effective.

In relation to 3 and 4 coding of openings, endings, reader-writer relationship and cohesion coherence, the foundation tier outscored the higher tier. This represents approximately 10 more scripts in 3 out of categories being given coded 3 or 4 in foundation tier than higher tier. These data suggest that foundation tier textual organisation may have been more successful than higher tier textual organisation.