

Assessing the Assessment: From KS1 to GCSE

Implications of the New KS1 and KS2 for Secondary English Departments

In the second of his series, **Peter Thomas** explores the implications of the changes to curriculum and assessment at KS1 and KS2 for secondary English teachers, focusing particularly on grammar and writing. He argues that it is crucial for English teachers – and NATE – to scrutinise and challenge the ‘narrow measurabilities’ of current models and develop constructive alternatives.

Following a drastic change in the success rate reported from the first year of the intentionally more ‘rigorous’ KS1 and KS2 SATs, (53% ‘pass’ in 2016, 80% in 2015) and the widespread criticisms of the test papers, their level of difficulty and the poor advance preparation for them, the Government has announced a review of the testing. If the same drop in ‘passes’ in the new, intentionally more ‘rigorous’, GCSE happens in August 2017, employers, parents, teachers and students will be demanding more than a review.

Despite the evidence of results and despite the well-documented flaws in the tests, schools are still expected to prepare students for the next round of tests. It is not difficult to see why many headteachers

think that entering students for a flawed assessment is unacceptable. In no other area of life would patients, doctors, workers, traders, scientists, clients or any other stakeholders be told to carry on using a system found by professionals to be faulty. That’s a sad measure of how education figures in the societal vision of officialdom.

Whilst there is an admission that the tests require revision, there is no consideration that the curriculum also may be in need of some critical scrutiny. It seems that the new curriculum and some modified form of its testing apparatus will be with us for some time. This article considers some of the implications of this in terms of English as a specialist subject, and in terms of a wider pedagogy.

1. The new National Curriculum for English

Secondary English teachers are currently grappling with major changes in GCSE and A Level specifications, and may well feel there is enough to do to make these work in the classroom and in the 2017 results data. However, changes in primary English make it vital that they know what is going on in the six years before students arrive in their classrooms.

In September 2016, the new Year 7s arrived at their secondary schools with two years' experience of the reformed KS1/2 English curriculum and its assessments. Secondary colleagues need to know what these youngsters have done, and how it may impact on their understanding of 'English'. This is not just a matter of managing transition: it is a matter of reviewing the way that secondary English continues, develops or departs from the priorities established in primary English. As changes to GCSE thrust the point of final secondary assessment further away from Year 7, there is a greater need to review what happens in KS3 and KS4.

The curriculum

Primary colleagues have been intensely engaged with changes deriving from a radically different agenda for English at KS1/2. The new curriculum and its assessment regime have resulted in a nation-wide prioritising of the teaching of grammar by non-specialist primary teachers that would surprise most secondary English specialists whose degrees were in literature. What follows is a brief guide to changes in the primary English experience, with particular reference to the mode and values of an assessment-driven primary curriculum.

The KS1/KS2 curriculum defines the range of coverage and the skills in reading and writing in ways that secondary teachers would easily recognise. There is a very similar repertoire of fiction and non-fiction reading texts and writing tasks. What is different is the explicit content of listed grammatical features

and associated terminology. (See the 'non-statutory' glossary for the programme of study.) This requires that KS1 and KS2 teachers are familiar with a vocabulary for the description of grammar in language more extensive and more specific than currently familiar to most secondary English teachers. The explicit agenda for primary English involves some prescriptive certainties, such as that there are four kinds of sentence (Statement, Question, Command, Exclamation) and that an exclamatory sentence begins with 'What...' or 'How...', and requires an exclamation mark. Knowing this will help secondary colleagues to understand why so many Year 7s insert sentences such as 'What a fine day it is!' or 'How glad I was to receive the present!' in their writing. There are other ways in which students' previous learning will make itself known to secondary colleagues.

2. How students are assessed in the new curriculum

There are three levels of attainment defined by the match to a complete set of criteria:

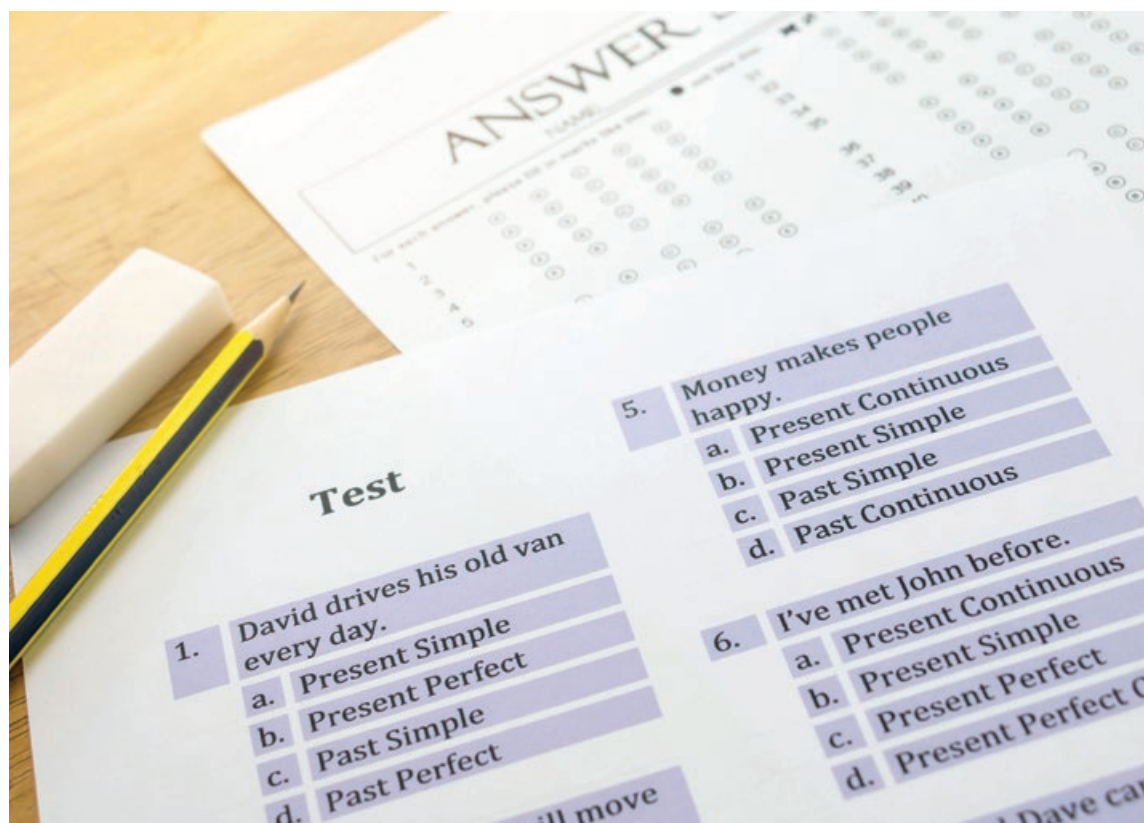
- Working towards the expected standard
- Working at the expected standard
- Working at greater depth within the expected standard.

Assessment of reading

Reading is assessed by means of externally set and externally marked papers. The 2016 KS3 reading paper required children to read three extracts from fictional and non-fictional sources, and to answer 40 questions on them – in one hour. Secondary teachers need to be familiar with the kind of preparation for these questions that will have developed children as readers in the primary years. They will – most of them – have a very clear idea of what they think is expected as a response to reading.

“This year, new Year 7s arrived with two years' experience of the reformed KS1/2 English curriculum and its assessments. Changes in primary English make it vital that secondary English teachers know what is going on in the six years before students arrive in their classrooms.”





“Secondary colleagues need to know how changes in Primary English may impact on their understanding of ‘English’ so that they can review the way that secondary English continues, develops or departs from the priorities established in primary English.”

Assessment of writing

Writing is teacher-assessed and subject to external moderating. Drafting is allowed in preparation of a portfolio of different text types for assessment. This would seem to allow some professional discretion and expertise, and some breadth of writing in the composition of a portfolio, as well as reflection and development of writing through the drafting process. However, the discretion and expertise are limited by the priorities of the assessment regime.

The assessment of writing is supported by exemplars of attainment matched to criteria. The annotated exemplars (Sam, Alex, Leigh and Morgan) of writing which meets the ‘expected standard’ make very clear the dependency of writing assessment upon the content features of the *grammar* curriculum.

These annotated exemplar scripts are essential reading for secondary teachers as they are very different from the standardising exemplars used in GCSE. GCSE exemplar scripts are presented with commentaries based on criteria in the three categories of Communication, Organisation and Accuracy, with a substantial weighting of the first two against the third. That is a major difference (in the current jargon, a ‘disconnect’) between KS1/2 and KS 3/4.

Assessment of grammar

KS1/KS2 assessment includes timed, externally-assessed grammar, punctuation and spelling tests which ensure that children have been taught the explicit content. This summer’s KS2 test contained 50 questions on aspects of grammar, as well as a separate spelling paper. The framework for test developers provides a very clear summary of the content domain covered by the national curriculum tests of vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

The seven domains are specified as:

- grammatical terms/word classes
- functions of sentences
- word, phrase & clause combination
- verb forms, tenses and consistency
- punctuation
- vocabulary
- Standard English and formality

There is little in this list that is new, and some of what appears new is actually re-badged old content, with some terminological changes: for example, what used to be a conjunction, then became a connective, is now definitively a *conjunction*; definite/indefinite articles have been replaced by a wider category of *determiner*, and an adverb starter is now a *fronted adverbial*.

It is the curriculum and assessment status given to some of these features that is important. Tight linkage between the curriculum content and its assessment provides a consistent, objective and easily-marked performance for external attainment. Separating grammar from the rest of English enhances its importance – which may be a good thing; but the paper separation is less significant than its duplicating integration.

3. Assessment issues in the KS1/2 tests

Whilst the prescribed content of the KS1/KS2 curriculum could be seen as a familiar Knowledge about Language audit, there is some additional context which signals an interesting, clear and helpful pedagogy wrapped around the content. Test developers are required ‘to make the thinking skills and intellectual processes required ... for the test explicit’, with a ‘classification of cognitive demand identifiable in any question.’



The classification is very clear, and very clearly rooted in skills:

- *Synthesis and evaluation (alternatives, comparisons and judgements)*
- *Application and analysis (applying and categorizing)*
- *Knowledge and comprehension (remembering and identifying)*

Mark tariffs

This model of an explicit hierarchy of cognitive demand provides a secure basis for a mark tariff signalling greater reward for higher level cognitive/responsive/performative functions. A mark tariff should reflect the different levels of cognitive activity required for an answer – and declare the value of different questions at the point of reading. Devising questions whose answers can be fairly deemed worthy of one mark, two marks, or three or more marks helps differentiation of skills as well as differentiation of attainment. The tariff should distinguish between the reward for a show of *knowledge* and the reward for a show of *knowledge which has been applied, developed, supported, sustained or supplemented*. It should distinguish between responses based on simple *selection and retrieval* from given material, and responses which show *inference and transformation* of material. It should distinguish between responses limited to what is directly prompted and responses which show independence and extrapolation.

An explicit hierarchy of cognitive demand and performance is a welcome and necessary foundation, not only for assessment, but for teaching and learning, because it emphasises skills rather than content. Any assessment in English as a whole has to resist the temptation to simplify the curriculum to a contents list in the interests of secure, consistent and cheap assessment. It should not over-value knowledge over *applied knowledge* or the *management and evaluation of different kinds of knowledge in different contexts*. It is always a danger when assessing English that questions privilege mere recall or identification (e.g., ‘the writer

uses alliteration/metaphor/enjambment’) without showing understanding or appreciation of the way in which the identified feature works, or is particularly inventive, provocative or apt. An assessment tariff based on a secure pedagogy should declare itself in the mark weighting, awarding one or two marks for simple knowledge and recall, but a significantly greater reward (e.g., 4 or 6 marks) for applying, modifying or evaluating the knowledge in context.

Methodology in practice: the reading paper

The reading paper demonstrates how cognitive demand is matched to a marking tariff in a general pattern of one-mark award for ‘retrieve and record’ questions (‘Find’, ‘select’, ‘which’, etc.) and two-mark awards for questions requiring inference (‘explain’). Questions requiring predictions from stated and implied details are awarded 3 marks. Thus there is a coherent implementation of the underlying pedagogy, though there are questions which award 2 marks for retrieval and recording because two items are required, and there are questions where inference is awarded only one mark (e.g., Q19).

In a world where children need to be prepared for the way in which they will be assessed, they need to be familiar with the test rubric and know which questions are worth most marks. Preparation therefore involves a measure of strategic negotiation with the assessment mechanism. This is helped by assurance of a constant mark tariff and weighting. In the 2016 paper, the first reading extract was worth 16 marks, of which 7 were for inference. The second reading extract was worth 22 marks, of which 12 were for inference, and the third reading extract was worth 12 marks, of which 6 were for glossing vocabulary. Hence the second passage was the most difficult and worth most marks. According to the framework for test developers, questions should be sequenced by increasing difficulty. This appears not to be the case with the reading paper, as the last few questions are low-tariff ones (one mark).

“Assessment in English must resist the temptation to simplify the curriculum to a contents list in the interests of secure, consistent and cheap assessment. It should not over-value knowledge over applied knowledge.”

Given children's variability of focus, concentration and motivation, this test paper is not only asking a lot of children's stamina in the extensive reading of texts and questions in an hour, but it presents some challenge in understanding where to place most effort. This test requires not only understanding of the curriculum content but also understanding of the priorities and protocols of the assessment apparatus.

Methodology in practice: the grammar paper

The grammar test paper consists of a 45-minute test paper with 50 questions, each worth one mark. Some are two-part questions for which both parts need to be correct to be creditworthy. This is irrespective of the nature of the task, which is sometimes multiple choice, sometimes linear linkage and usually circling/underlining the appropriate example from a list. The majority of questions (66–84%) prompt a 'selected response' strategy with a smaller proportion (16–34%) prompting a more extended 'constructed response' strategy. This reflects the different cognitive demand of a question which asks for one example to be selected from a given list or source and one which asks for a more open response. The difference between the 'selected' and 'constructed' responses is made clear in the question stems: for example, selected responses begin with a direction to 'identify', 'match' or 'circle all the pronouns in the sentence below'. A constructed response question will begin with a direction to 'complete', 'write', 'explain', or even 'why?'

There is some methodological coherence here, but despite this helpful distinction, the questions on the grammar paper are all valued at one mark. The 'one-mark-for-all' tariff is not well-matched to the processes required for answering the questions. There is clearly a different cognitive demand in a question requiring writing out the contracted form of 'does not' and one requiring classification of 'where my father works' as a) a preposition phrase, b) a relative clause, c) a main clause or d) a noun phrase, as all four options have to be tested for plausible match to the criterion. This question, a correct answer to which is the 'expected standard' of a ten year old, is the one Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, was unable to answer on 'The World at One'.

It is clear that for children to be judged to be working 'at the expected standard' they will be able to (among many other things):

- Demonstrate familiarity with the terminology of word classes – nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunction, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions and determiners.
- Distinguish between co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions
- Identify and use expanded noun phrases and fronted adverbial phrases
- Identify and use progressive and perfect verb forms, and active and passive verb forms

Much follows from this. The ability to 'identify' to the expected level is evidenced by correct answers to specific one-mark questions in the *grammar* test – e.g., 'Tick the sentence (out of a choice of four) below which is a command.' The ability to 'use' this knowledge to the expected level is evidenced in the teacher-assessed writing portfolio. The exemplar scripts illustrating 'expected level' make clear that success in *writing* is signalled by the same high-value tokens of successful *grammar* learning.

The implications of this are considerable. If the same grammar criteria for expected performance are applied to writing, the result is a substantially enhanced weighting of technical knowledge and usage as part of the whole English assessment. This is a significant penalty on children who have much to write about, but lack the required presentational wrapping of their expressed ideas, attitudes and feelings. What is being valued in the writing criteria – and therefore what will be prioritised by teachers – is the *use* of devices rather than the *skill* of using devices selectively, aptly and judiciously. This seems a better model of content-based assessment than of skills-based assessment.

4. Assessment issues in the teacher assessment of writing

This is perhaps the area of greatest impact upon secondary colleagues. The teacher guidance materials provide portfolios of annotated children's work to support the assessment of writing. The annotation of the scripts is meticulously consistent in identifying the key aspects of performance that constitute 'expected standard'. They define the high-value tokens of success in writing which current and future Year 7s will be keen to display in their new schools:

- expanded noun phrase
- past progressive/present progressive
- fronted adverbial
- co-ordinating conjunction
- relative clause
- preposition phrase

Children assessed as meeting the 'expected standard' have to fulfil all of the criteria for the KS2 standard – which means fulfilling all the criteria for the KS1 standard also.

“What the writing criteria value – and therefore what will be prioritised by teachers – is the use of devices rather than the skill of using devices selectively, aptly and judiciously.”

'Expected Standard' in KS1 Writing: Sam

Sam's narrative writing is annotated to show secure management of tenses, ('they fell down and zoomed'), co-ordination and subordination ('but', 'and' and 'while'), noun phrases ('strange looking button remote') and appropriate punctuation in the form of exclamation marks, list commas, apostrophes of omission and possession. There is a strong sense of presentational accuracy in Sam's piece, and there is no doubt that he uses those features that he has been taught to identify in the grammar paper. His sentence 'What a nightmare it was!' shows he can use one of the four kinds of sentence, as he does in other pieces, such as 'How shiney she looks!' and 'How funny they look!' Ken Dodd could never have guessed that his catchphrase 'How tickled I am!' would become a token of national expected written standard.

It is possible to agree with assessment of *what* the writing shows about learning, but a more refined assessment concerns *how* the demonstrated learning is exploited. There is a difference between *usage* and *appropriate and effective usage*. For example, there is some inappropriateness in his use of ‘and’ and ‘but’ as co-ordinators. In ‘*Devin pressed the button but then we heard a lot of angry and furious animals.*’ The ‘but’ would be better replaced with ‘and’. In ‘*We tried to kill them with weapons and that didn’t work.*’, the ‘and’ would be better replaced with ‘but’.

This issue is clear also in the use of exclamation marks. In the exemplar letter, Sam uses 12 exclamation marks. This shows clear awareness of the expressive effect of punctuation. The annotation records that there is ‘*some overuse of exclamation marks*’. The overuse would seem to be rather more than ‘some’. Only 3 of the 12 uses can be justified as apt or effective. In the example of narrative there is more restraint but, again, only two of the four uses of an exclamation mark can be seen as necessary or appropriate. A success rate of less than 50% is not a strong indication of competent usage. What is going on here will be familiar to all teachers who have taught the apostrophe: a subsequent wild profusion of the taught device in relation to any final ‘s’. The effect of making any particular feature a high-status token is that children will naturally want to show that they have learned and used what they have been taught. This is fine – but it involves the risk that assiduous usage draws attention more to the deficiency of the learning rather than the efficiency of the learning. Sam has been led by the assessment priorities to expose a weakness that would not have been otherwise evident.

It is clear that this exemplar of expected standard at KS1 is successful in most aspects of accurate spelling, punctuation and tense control. The annotation records Sam’s diligent deployment of the features he has been taught. Much has been achieved here in presentational management for public reading. Whether the quality of his writing owes all or much to the replication of grammar features is a matter of some debate. He is certainly a very successful learner, but perhaps a rather less successful writer. Successful writing sometimes works in a way outside or beyond the repertoire defining the expected standard – for example, a strong sense of communicated vitality in the art of story.

A comparative KS1 exemplar

Consider the following example of KS1 narrative writing:

The Little girl who fel in the well

Ons a ponatim so I cay bicos you cod say on day a little gerl to chudron livd in a red hows with a red roof and sam red windose and a red door the to chiljron sied to there muthear can we go for a worc yes dya she sied BUT don’t spyc to ctranjas NO WE WONT okay I blyv you off you go they sgip in the fyold CODONLY thy caym to a well oooh my BE GEEEEEEFALL BUT IT WOS TO LAT she had fallen down help im sdud Itod you you shodof been cefoll but I was no you wernt it was very very very very very DARC in the well help plys get me owt pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeees so he did thy ran all the way hom did you have a lovly tim NO sertonly NOT and thy tod her obowt wot hapend and thy had there tea and there poding and then thy went to bed for the next day

By AMY age 6

By the terms of the KS1 writing assessment, and matched to the exemplar of Sam’s ‘expected standard’, this is a long way short of the standard, or even of working towards it. It does sustain appropriate tenses for narrative and dialogue, but without accurate spelling of familiar verbs and without punctuation of dialogue or of sentences. There are no commas or other forms of punctuation. It is possible to find an expanded noun phrase (*the red house* etc). There is a co-ordinator (*but*) and a fronted adverbial (*Codonly*) but without the necessary punctuation or spelling to make their use match expected standard. Verb forms are consistent but simple, restricted to the past perfect with the exception of the more complex ‘*had fallen*’. There are no relative clauses or complex sentences with any subordinate clauses.

However, there are merits here in the art of storytelling. There is some relish in the playing of a writer’s trick with alternative genre conventions such as story openings (choice of ‘Once upon a time’ or ‘Two children...’), and some evident familiarity with conventions of tales in the repetitions of red. There is some evidence of lexical choice to convey mood and manner in the use of ‘*sgipt*’ rather than ‘went’ or ‘ran’. There is further lexical selectivity in the embedded dramatic dialogue with the characterisation of the mother with an attitude of affectionate concern for welfare (*Yes dya*), and the eager display of assurance that they will abide by her warning (*NO WE WONT*, where capitalisation stands for speech marks and replication of tone). There is continued use of speech to animate the story with a typical friction between friends or siblings in the interchange after the fall in the well (*You shoudof... – I did – You didn’t*) and there is further realistic rendering of the mother’s greeting and their returned assertion that things had not been good. Overall, the piece shows secure and confident grasp of narrative structure in the initial setting amid calm and comfort, the excursion into peril and the return to calm and comfort, with an implicit moral purpose in the message to heed a parent’s warning.

“Sam is certainly a very successful learner, but perhaps a rather less successful writer.”

Comparison of the two KS1 examples suggests a missing dimension in the KS1/2 assessment framework, and a more important missing dimension in the making of children as writers. There are virtues of writing a story that are to do with communicated ideas, feelings and situations, irrespective of the degree of presentational accuracy. There are aspects of story that are part of the traditions of the genre, and part of the reader’s pleasure in reading – and the writer’s pleasure in writing. A major part of these is the evidence of insight into human relationships and human motivation. There is some danger in the intense focus on those features contributing to ‘expected standard’ that children may lose the confidence, pleasure and motivation to communicate these things in writing, and may lose the relish of invention in the art of story. An assessment framework that recognised the subtle interplay between communication, organisation and accuracy, as with GCSE, would reduce the risk that writing for assessment dominated writing for the pleasure of self and others.

'Expected standard' in KS2 Writing: Leigh and Morgan

Leigh: The annotation of Leigh's work, supporting her meeting of the expected standard, makes repeated reference to her expanded noun phrases (e.g., '*Some winter clothing in a suitcase and two tatty-looking passports in her bag*'), co-ordination (e.g., '*Lauren was stuck between a fierce snow-leopard and a powerful blizzard*') and her fronted subordinate clauses (e.g., '*Determined to escape, she flung...*'). Leigh is able to show in her writing those features she has been taught to identify in her grammar study. For example, her use of fronted adverbials is linked to her structural borrowing of the five-point story scaffold for paragraphing: '*Eventually, they arrived...*', '*Quickly, a light gust of wind...*', '*Menacingly...*' and '*Fortunately...*'. Elsewhere in her portfolio, she demonstrates use of preposition phrases, fronted adverbials, modal and passive verb forms and expanded noun phrases. What she has learned has been deployed across a range of writing modes, and is easily assessable.

Morgan: The annotation of Morgan's work, assessing it as 'expected standard', makes repeated reference to her expanded noun phrases (e.g., '*the cream wooden door*', '*The man had brown hair and ocean blue eyes.*'), fronted subordinate clauses (e.g., '*Before she knew it*', '*there were millions of injured and bloodied soldiers*') preposition with abstract noun use (e.g., '*with bewilderment*', '*with sadness*') and her use of modals and passives (e.g., '*She couldn't run*', '*she was planted in squelching mud*').

Morgan shows that she can use in her writing those features she has been taught to identify in her grammar study: she uses fronted subordinate clauses and preposition phrases in the Viking piece, and modals and passives in the *Macbeth* piece. What she has learned has been deployed across a range of writing modes, and it is easily assessable.

Morgan has also understood that using semi-colons is a good thing. In her narrative she uses 6, of which 1 or 2 are apt, 2 unnecessary and 3 inappropriate. Her accuracy of effective and appropriate use of semi-colons is, therefore, about 25%. Her use of a colon is also inappropriate. In demonstrating understanding of the importance of exclamation marks, she uses 18, a very high incidence and a potential distraction. Her accurate and appropriate use of them is about 50%, and there are places where they are needed but not used.

The net effect of this descriptor-driven writing is an ample display of *usage*, but less of *successful* usage. The emphasis on high-status tokens has helped Morgan to be a better *writer for assessment*, but that is not necessarily the same as helping her to be a *better writer*. She would benefit from an emphasis on other aspects of communicated ideas and textual organisation if she is to become independently accomplished. She needs to make appropriate and discriminating use of the scaffolding in her independent writing. As it is, the scaffolding tends to be intrusive, and the result may appear a triumph of assessment over performance.

It is clear that these three have been successfully familiarised with the repertoire of high-status tokens of writing performance, and that this is what justifies their status as exemplars of 'Expected' standards. Any external assessor can easily judge how far they exemplify the taught curriculum. The teacher assessment of writing, exemplified in the work of Leigh, Morgan and Alex puts a premium on 'Accuracy', with the criteria for 'Organisation'

and 'Communication' being drawn from the same linguistic device bank as assessed in the grammar test.

Here is a problem. Their attainment, and the assessment of their attainment, does not sit well with the assessment of writing at GCSE. The assessment model for writing at GCSE reflects the different merits of 'Communication, Organisation and Accuracy', and ensures an appropriate, and very different, weighting. It would make sense to ensure continuity and coherence for progression through all key stages with this model of assessment.

Issues in the application of assessment methodology

The elevation of selected grammatical features to high-status tokens of success provides teachers and learners with very specific targets. The result is that their *learning* becomes very easily and measurably successful. However, it is less clear that their *writing* becomes as easily and measurably successful. Annotation can record the use of the requisite list of grammatical features, but this may not necessarily be a strong indication of a writer's grasp of language and consciously controlled choices. Consider this relatively unsophisticated sentence:

I have been a supporter of Man U from the age of four when my dad took me to their famous Old Trafford home in my new Man U strip and I am hoping to see them come top of the UK premier division next year.

At GCSE, this would be fairly described as straightforward expression of simple ideas with some undeveloped linkage between past and present, and some undeveloped potential; for personal reflection, contextualising and authenticating detail. Applying the KS1/2 writing assessment model, it could be presented more flatteringly in its language competence:

I have been (*1) a (*2) supporter of Man U from the age of four (*3) when (*4) my Dad took me to their (*5) famous Old Trafford home (*6) in my new Man U strip (*7) and (*8) I am hoping to see (*9) them come top of the UK premier division (*10) next year (*11)

*1	Choice of Statement sentence form
*1	past progressive use
*2	use of an appropriate determiner
*3	preposition phrase
*4	relative clause
*5	appropriate use of pronoun
*6	expanded noun phrase
*7	expanded noun phrase
*8	co-ordinating conjunction
*9	present progressive
*10	expanded noun phrase
*11	balanced contrast between past and future.

“The net effect of this descriptor-driven writing is an ample display of usage, but less of successful usage. The emphasis on high-status tokens has helped Morgan to be a better writer for assessment, but that is not necessarily the same as helping her to be a better writer.”

This flattering of performance springs from an exalted repertoire of linguistic terminology. Expressions such as 'He threw his dummy out of the pram' and 'I was a bit under the weather' are not in themselves indicators of high performance writing – rather, written examples of common spoken usage. However, by identifying in each the 'preposition phrase', the writing matches a key descriptor. The 'expanded noun phrase', as in simple noun+adjective use ('tall dark man') or noun+relative clause ('man who was tall and dark') may appear, annotationally, to be rather more expectably competent than it is.

“Analysis is a vital skill to develop as part of youngsters’ cognitive growth, but, in writing and in reading, competence comes both cognitively and chronologically before analysis.”

5. Some inherent limitations in the KS1/2 writing assessment model

a) The same assessment model is not best suited to the grammar test and the writing assessment because the writing involves a far wider communicative repertoire concerned with genre, audience and purpose. The testing of the KS2 curriculum places a high value on the ability to name the parts and a high value on reconstructing the parts as evidence of good writing.

b) There needs to be a subtler distinction between *using* high-status tokens of expected performance and *using them with discretion and effectiveness* – between a display of learned features and a crafted and judicious display of them in a purposefully controlled context.

c) The notion of an ambitious 'expected standard' may be worthy, but may also be more aspirational than realistic. The relationship between language and intelligence is a subtle one, and intelligence is not an evenly distributed asset, or one universally teachable. Some grammatical structures depend upon a suppleness and purposefulness of cognitive processes that may not be within the intellectual repertoire or range of many children.

d) As with all forms of assessment, learners who 'fail' to meet the expected standard may respond with inhibited enthusiasm and self-esteem. Enthusiasm and self-esteem are as necessary for personal growth and social harmony as literacy. It is a unique feature of the English agenda that it provides, in reading, in writing and in speaking and listening, scope for self-realisation, social interaction and communication for all, irrespective of academic attainment or fulfilment of expectable standards of literacy.

e) The need to build study of grammatical structures into English is, I think, accepted by all English teachers, and addressed through various contexts of reading and writing, and of spoken English. This was clear in the way teachers embraced GCSE work on Spoken Language Study (unfortunately abandoned in the new more 'rigorous' GCSE), which gave greater status to language variation in relation to audience and purpose, in relation to intended and unintended aspects of language use, and in relation to social attitudes to language use.

f) It seems fundamental that explicit knowledge about language may not be the greatest strength of effective language use. Hence there should be some difference in the merits of a test of knowledge and a test of communication in writing. There are aspects of writing – narrative, descriptive writing that go beyond grammatical knowledge and use – for example, structure, characterisation, appeal to readers, narrative viewpoints, embedded reflection, irony, or attitudinal manipulation. Applying the same assessment criteria to both grammar (knowledge) tests and (communicative) writing tests has the effect of over-valuing the prescribed content of the curriculum against the uniquely individualised thought and feeling in the child's writing for self and others.

6. Implications for Assessment and Teaching & Learning in Secondary English

One of the most remarkable changes in English teaching over the last thirty years has been the increasing influence of assessment on learning. At its best, this has been beneficial as assessment *for* learning, but high-stakes examination results have turned it into something more like learning for assessment. That is now true of KS1/2 as well as KS4. Where there is a high degree of specificity in curriculum content, there will be a strong valuing of knowledge in relation to language. This will be most easily, quickly and cheaply assessed by questions requiring explicit knowledge – in its simplest and most easily-assessed form, the naming of parts. Teachers in fear of results that will declare their school to be not delivering what Ofsted assesses will inevitably accord high priority in *learning* to what is high priority in *assessment*. There is a likelihood of extracting the described features as high-value tokens of attainment and teaching them in order to meet assessment criteria – e.g., semi-colons, passives, exclamatory sentences.

English teachers have no objection to developing an interest in the workings of language, and no objection to encouraging analysis of how language works. Rather, they see these as matters of great interest. Analysis (and not just of language) is a vital skill to develop as part of youngsters' cognitive growth, but realism suggests, as UKLA has declared, that in writing and in reading, competence comes both cognitively and chronologically before analysis. However, the current assessment-driven curriculum assumes analysis is an adequate measure of competence and reduces the influence of pedagogy on learning and what happens in the classroom.

Assessment and the growth of 'insertability' at GCSE

Students prompted by teachers to show that they have been taught what is specified in the domain coverage of the National Curriculum will insert any high-value tokens of performance with varying degrees of enthusiasm, diligence and appropriateness. Where there is a profusion of ellipses, or semi-colons, there is indeed, evidence of use of these tokens. The questions arising are a) how far the use is appropriate, b) how far it supports and enhances meaning, and c) how far the writing as a whole is greater than the display of insertable tokens. An excess of these features can distract the reader's attention from meaning, and a liberal use of them in which there is as much inappropriate or unnecessary use becomes more important than the fact of usage itself.

GCSE English examiners and moderators have observed a remarkable conformity in the mass of scripts from Penzance to Penrith, from Newquay to Newcastle, suggesting an industrial production of formulaic response. This testifies to the impact of various waves of curriculum re-prioritisation over the years, particularly since the Literacy Strategy. First there was a profusion of ‘I know this because...’, following an emphasis on exposing evidence for opinion, then a particularly assertive PEE formula as a result of trying to prompt focus and structure in those having neither, but needing to access KS3 Level 5, and subsequently limiting candidates to a ceiling of Grade GCSE C. At about the same time, discourse markers made a forceful appearance, with a profusion of ‘nevertheless’ and ‘however’, and accompanying furthermorefulness ‘moreover’ism. Then came the waves of invasive acronymic hordes on the shores of English – AFOREST primarily, as the basis for comment in Reading and display in Writing.

Understandably, given the stakes involved (from league tables to performance assessment) teachers adopt various acronymic strategies to set targets by key high-status mark-scheme descriptors. Equally understandably, students diligently use the tokens of approved currency. However, the issue arising is whether they use them well, use them appropriately and use them to enhance communication and organisation, rather than to distract from them.

Descriptor-driven writing at KS4

It is not difficult to snapshot current GCSE practice where descriptor-driven writing has become a nationwide formula, and the art and craft of writing have been condensed into 12 insertable features. Insertability means adding to a draft rather than re-working (or re-thinking) a draft. GCSE scripts have increasingly taken on the appearance of writing taught as a specific genre called ‘Writing For Assessment’, in which the imperatives are derived from meeting key mark scheme descriptors, as commonly emblazoned on classroom walls. Examples are shown in the table below.

The sort of descriptor-driven writing with which examiners and moderators are now familiar at GCSE is indicated below:

The sand massaged my feet from the moment they first sunk into the boundless beach. I could hear the waves whispering quietly as they swooped gently into the bay. While the gentle tropical breeze stroked my arm, I could feel the fiery sand toasting my feet. The sky was as bright as a light bulb. Cheerful sun shone in my face as the clouds danced across the sky. The sun was a ball of light, beaming in all directions. Shining down, it created an array of stunning colours reflected on the cool water: red, orange, blue, green and yellow. As it rushed against the shore, I could smell the salt coming from the water. All I could see around me was a beautiful island full of sun, sand and sea. I could taste the crisp fresh air. Although I was stranded on the island, I was very content. I walked lazily along the amazing pure white beach, beside the beautiful tall trees with ripe milk-filled coconuts hanging.

7. Some considerations for KS3/4 English teachers and progression

The purpose of this scrutiny is to prompt colleagues’ thinking about the way that secondary English continues, develops or departs from the priorities established in primary English. There are various options for year seven and beyond.

The Government has abandoned its ill-judged plan to continue testing those ‘failing’ students in Year 7 until they can meet the expected standard. Therefore the Year 7 programme and beyond could integrate the key features of what students have previously done into an expanded reading repertoire with a rationale based on increasing maturity. This would involve a planned stimulus to linked cognitive and language development – e.g., abstract nouns replacing concrete nouns, functional dedication of subordinate clauses to support purpose and audience and paragraph structure to differentiate focus and appeal.

Punctuation band descriptors	Sentence construction band descriptors	Engagement of reader band descriptors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of punctuation used appropriately, accurately and effectively (6) Commas used accurately & effectively, increasingly competent use of sophisticated punctuation (5) Sentence demarcation secure, increasing accuracy in using commas, punctuation to clarify meaning (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and controlled manipulation of sentence structures for effect (6) Uses a wide range of sentence structures effectively (5) Sentence structures are varied, generally grammatically secure and, at times, effective (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convincing/compelling communication, sustained personal voice & delightful/mature vocabulary choices (6) Effective communication, developed ideas, sophisticated vocabulary, begins to manipulate reader response (5) Clear communication, conscious selection of detail & vocabulary for effect, discourse markers facilitating organization (4)
... translates into: Semi-colons and colons, ellipsis & exclamation marks	... translates into: Short/1-word sentences	... translates into: Direct address, rhetorical questions, similes, rule of three, alliteration, repetition, emotive language, adjectives, 5 senses, ‘furthermore’fulness and ‘moreover’ism

“Students prompted by teachers to show that they have been taught what is specified in the domain coverage of the National Curriculum will insert any high-value tokens of performance with varying degrees of enthusiasm, diligence and appropriateness.”

This is a crucial time to re-think the secondary curriculum with a radical, humane re-appraisal of English as a totality larger than the current KS1/2 curriculum and assessment model. This would require some re-thinking of the role of grammar within reading and writing, and some re-thinking of what English can be, and what English can do. The primary experience needs to be wrapped into something more ambitiously directed towards human expression, communication and interactivity, in which creativity is more than a tarnished boo-word or a weak allowance of indiscipline. What seems very clear is that the new KS1/2 English curriculum and assessment model is inadequate for the next stage of KS3/4 reform. A promising beginning has already been made on this by the work of the UKLA in its document *Curriculum and Assessment in English 3 to 19: A Better Plan* by John Richmond.

“This is a crucial time to re-think the secondary curriculum with a radical, humane re-appraisal of English as a totality larger than the current KS1/2 curriculum and assessment model.”

In the process of negotiating this difficult territory, several considerations will be of daily and long-term importance to secondary English teachers this year:

- the impact on transition policy, (no doubt to be a feature of OFSTED inspection) establishing a secondary English agenda that develops and supplements the priorities established in primary English. This could value students' prior learning but with distinctive ways in which that learning may be integrated into a wider vision of engagement, response and analysis in reading and writing.
- the impact on students' perception and expectations of English, a subject that has traditionally been the most democratic in its appeal across ability boundaries because of the breadth of its coverage of feelings, attitudes, ideas, relationships and situations, in reading and in writing – a vision beyond mechanics and devices of written language.
- the impact on teaching, learning and preparation for GCSE for students, like Morgan, who have reached the 'expected' standard at KS2, and therefore match many of the criteria for a GCSE O Level or a current grade C at GCSE.

8. Curriculum-driven learning or assessment-driven learning?

A curriculum without an assessment framework amounts to no more than a worthy wishfulness loosely flapped in front learners. Assessment is what allows teachers and learners to know how they are progressing through the curriculum and what, where and how to aim their next efforts. The job of curriculum is to establish what is worth doing and learning. The job of assessment is to establish how far the doing and learning has been successful. Assessment is a diagnostic and quality control instrument, not the purpose of the learning.

There are two ways in which the relationship between curriculum and assessment can become educationally distorted and unproductive. The first is that the assessment framework determines what is learned, and the second is that the need for standardised objectivity

in assessment privileges those aspects of learning that are most easily assessable. Some things are more easily assessed than others. It is easier to assess accuracy of the spelling of a word as right or wrong than it is to assess the causes of its wrongness, which may be a matter of morphological or phonetic plausibility achieved by application of a general pattern evident in similar words (e.g., 'I singed' or 'stashun'), confusion traceable to the 44 sounds represented by 26 alphabet items, or unawareness of a phoneme/grapheme irregularity traceable to a source language other than English e.g., 'pyjamas'. In most cases, mis-spelling is caused by the variability of patterns in words deriving from different sources – not from the language's user's ignorance of 'rules'. This is what makes spelling more than a matter of the 'basics' confidently asserted by those who have little understanding of language.

If education is to be more than training or instruction, the curriculum must have priority over assessment, and assessment must be a service to those for whom the curriculum is principally designed – teachers and learners. In a more public sense, there is a wider audience of parents and employers who also need to understand what learning has been successful, but their needs tend to be simpler than what teachers need: assessment for teaching and learning has to profile learners' attainments, their potential and their modes of learning.

9. Curriculum, assessment and the state of English

English teachers need to be confident and skilled in what they do, why they do it and how they do it – and these are not within the means or gift of government directives. It is, perhaps, a last chance for English teachers to be professionally, academically and publicly assertive about the subject's unique and humane principles and practice. English teachers need to develop a constructive alternative to the narrow measurabilities which undermine the integrity and scope of English in education. That requires a common commitment to articulate, promote and practise a vision of English that goes beyond the political short-termism and journalistic clichés that are a poor substitute for experience, understanding and intelligence. Evolution and development in the assessment of English are a necessary and valuable part of the evolution and development of the subject. They are best achieved when practitioners put assessment models to professional critical scrutiny based on understanding of English, and of teaching, teachers, learning and learners. Assessment needs to be assessed.

10. And finally: NATE – a professional community for vocational specialists

NATE has a crucial role to play here: NATE is the voice, mind and heart of English in theory and in practice. If it is to be the muscle, too, it needs to build a coherent critique of politically-driven innovation: it needs to draw the politics out of education and the education out of politics. If you are already a NATE member, please try to get colleagues to join too, so that they can contribute to the debate and feel part of a professional community that defends and develops English, education and students of all abilities.

Peter Thomas

is Vice-Chair of NATE and Chair of NATE's Learning & Assessment Committee