

Summary of changes

Introduction

We are making light but meaningful changes to GCSE English Language (8700), for exams from June 2026 onwards. The changes will increase the clarity of our exam papers by simplifying language and offering clearer prompts. We are also updating the mark schemes to add extra clarity for teachers and examiners.

What's new	What's gone	What's the same	What's changed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 1, Question 1 is changing to a multiple-choice question. Paper 1, Question 3 now focuses on a single effect, for example, 'How has the writer structured the text to create suspense?' Paper 2, Question 2 has been reworded to improve clarity. Paper 1, Question 5 prompt reminds students they can use their imaginations and do not have to describe the exact picture. Paper 1, Question 5, narrative option now offers students the option to write an 'opening', rather than a whole narrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 1, Question 4 has had the reference to a 'student' making the statement removed, making the focus on the statement clearer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The set structure of both papers, available marks for each question and assessment objectives for each question are remaining the same. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 1, Question 4 has a change to the wording of the bullet point referring to 'evaluating' methods Paper 2, Question 4 has a change to the wording of the bullet point referring to 'comparing' methods. Mark schemes for both papers have added a table of 'typical features' to help with assessing students in the reading sections. Question 5 mark schemes have additional columns added for 'typical features' at each level.

Paper 1

Question	More details
Paper 1, Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question 1 is being changed to a multiple-choice question, offering the students a low demand question to help settle them into the exam. The mark allocation for the question remains as 4 marks and will still be focused on the opening of the given extract.
Paper 1, Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question 3 is being reworded slightly to focus the question on a single effect to help students focus their answers and support them in writing succinct, relevant responses. Students will also be provided with extra guidance in the bullet points by giving generic structural features that they could comment on.
Paper 1, Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have removed the reference to a 'student' making the statement in Question 4. This is to help focus students on the statement itself, ensuring that their response offers a critical judgement of the writer and the text, rather than what the imaginary speaker (the student) is saying. We have changed the second bullet from 'evaluate' to 'comment on' methods to clarify that the focus of this AO is evaluation of the text in relation to the statement. This should be supported by analysis of the different methods used by the writer.
Paper 1, Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have added a prompt to the descriptive question stating that students can use 'their imagination', with the image providing further 'ideas', to remind them that they don't have to describe the exact picture they have been given. In the narrative question, students can 'write an opening of a story', rather than having to construct a full narrative. The mark scheme has had the addition of 'typical features' columns for both narrative and descriptive writing at each level. This will offer extra clarity for teachers and examiners when assessing student responses.

Paper 2

Question	More details
Paper 2, Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Question 2 has had meaningful changes made to the wording of the question to make it clearer to students what they need to do to gain marks. We believe this is fairer and allows all students to demonstrate their ability to select, infer meaning and synthesise information, as required by the assessment objective.
Paper 2, Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have changed the second bullet from 'compare' to 'comment on' to clarify the focus of this AO is the comparison between the authors' ideas and perspectives. This should be supported by analysis of the different methods used by the two authors, but not necessarily by a direct comparison between the methods.• This has also been reflected in the skills descriptors in the mark scheme.
Paper 2, Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The addition of typical features at each level in the mark scheme will support teachers and examiners in awarding a mark in the correct level.