



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LITERATURE
AS**

SUMMER 2018

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE AS

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 1: PROSE

General Comments

There were some excellent responses to a variety of challenging and often lengthy texts. It was pleasing to read that most candidates demonstrated a confident understanding of their chosen texts, discussing how meaning is shaped with growing sophistication while taking into account the influence of relevant contexts and different interpretations. However, there were some candidates who did not address the AOs effectively and some who seemed determined to write a pre-rehearsed answer.

Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

Points for Consideration: Extract

(i) A01

- It is possible for candidates to 'build' their ideas using context/elsewhere in the novel – (for example, for this year's question on *Jane Eyre* the candidates could have argued that the light that Jane sees on the moor could represent the safe haven she finds at Moor House), however the answers should not then develop into lengthy discussions of context/elsewhere in the play.
- Although it may be useful to put the extract in to context (i.e. discuss whereabouts it takes place in the novel) candidates should be clear to link this to the question. A description of events before the extract without saying how these events have affected the presentation of setting/character/relationship in question serves only to waste valuable time analysing the extract.
- Some candidates lost focus on the question and drifted away from, for example, the **relationship** between two characters to talk generally about characterisation or plot.

(i) A02

- It was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writers' techniques, in addition to the use of language, when exploring how meaning is created. However, in some cases, candidates simply embedded quotations in order to produce a narrative re-telling of the extract with very limited analysis. It can be useful to think why a writer has used a specific word or technique and to discuss the connotations explored.
- Feature spotting should be avoided – as well as naming of grammatical functions (i.e. 'Austen uses the fronted adverbial...') The candidates should be discussing **how** meaning is created by the writers' choices.

Points for Consideration: Essay

(ii) A01

- Effective planning is essential in order for candidates to produce a concise and clearly structured essay. There was some evidence of planning where candidates had taken time to think about their approach to answering the question. There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches.

- In a minority of cases candidates relied too heavily on re-writing what were clearly pre rehearsed answers. Centres should encourage candidates to take an independent and individual approach to the **specific** question.
- Centres should advise candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay response: candidates should not spend too long re-visiting the extract and should be discouraged from using textual references from the given section.
- Candidates should be conscious of embedding their contextual references (AO3), critical views (AO5) and their supporting comments from the text (AO2) with subtlety, clearly linking to the topic in question. Some candidates lacked both sophistication and relevance when attempting to integrate critical views and contextual information.

(ii) AO2

- As with the extract responses, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- Centres should advise candidates that although this is a closed book exam, there is an expectation that they will integrate and analyse textual support. It is not the case that a candidate must use a lot of quotations, but those they do use should be relevant and should support the argument they are making.
- An understanding of the characters as constructs through which the writer explores ideas is important.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as a springboard for AO3 and AO5 and that the most successful answers were when these three AOs were co-dependent and used to answer the question directly.

(ii) AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Centres should advise candidates that the closer the link between the contextual point and the text, the more successful the answer is likely to be. For example, the strongest responses linked specific contextual ideas to specific exchanges/textual support from the prose.

(ii) AO5

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinions to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to pick up marks for AO5:
 - i. Offering **and engaging with** critical views (literary criticism)
 - ii. Using critical perspectives (ie feminism/Marxism) to offer alternative readings of characters/events etc). However, it should be noted that sometimes this can be quite a reductive approach as it often leads to sweeping statements about perspectives.
 - iii. Offering multiple readings/interpretations of events/characters etc. This includes using tentative language to explore alternative interpretations of the text.
 - iv. Engaging with the critical comment in the question.
- It was pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

Notes on Texts

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

Although there were a limited number of responses on this text there were some interesting ideas explored and a number of candidates used the title as a springboard into relevant discussion.

Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Again, *Jane Eyre* was the most popular choice in Section A of this component and there was some perceptive discussion of setting – especially Brontë's depiction of The Red Room. Some candidates spent a lot of time exploring Brontë's use of the gothic genre. This was purposeful in some responses, however in the majority of candidates' answers this discussion felt 'tagged' on. It was also noted that a number of candidates clearly felt that they had to argue against the statement, which in a number of responses led to discussion being less focused. It should be made clear that there is no requirement for candidates to argue against the statement should they not wish to.

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

Candidates wrote effectively about 'change' in *North and South*, with some using the viewpoint in the question to structure their response.

Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

No responses seen.

Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

No responses seen.

Section B: Prose Fiction Post-1900

Points for Consideration

A01

- As with Section A, planning is essential for candidates to construct a perceptive and coherent discussion of the text. As stated in the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Component 1 exam paper, it is advised that candidates spend **45 minutes** on Section B. Strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing brief and underdeveloped responses for Section B.
- The questions are designed so that they offer candidates a contextual focus and a critical comment with which to engage. Centres should advise candidates that to score highly for ideas and concepts they should engage with the critical comment rather than just explore the theme that may also be included in the question.
- It was noticeable that with some candidates who had studied texts with a narrative link, (i.e. *Jane Eyre*/*Wide Sargasso Sea*) there was sometimes the tendency to conflate the two narratives. Whilst it is possible to use the other text as a contextual source, candidates should remain focused on the core, set text for that section.
- The strongest answers kept focus on the question throughout the essay, using the beginning and end of each paragraph to develop a perceptive argument.

A02

- As with Section A, a significant number of candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These essays tended, therefore, to slip into narrative which undermined critical engagement.

- Centres should advise candidates that although this is a closed-book exam, there is an expectation that they will integrate and analyse textual support. It is not the case that a candidate must use a lot of quotations, but those they do use should be relevant and should support the argument they are making.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as a springboard for AO3 and AO5 and that the most successful answers were when these three AOs were co-dependent and used to answer the question directly.

A03

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- As with the Section A Part ii responses, some candidates tended to drift in to long discussions of historical/social context which ultimately affected the direction and accuracy of their argument.

A05

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to pick up marks for AO5:
 - i. Offering **and engaging with** critical views (literary criticism)
 - ii. Using critical perspectives (ie feminism/Marxism) to offer alternative readings of characters/events etc)
 - iii. Offering multiple readings/interpretations of events/characters etc. This includes using tentative language to explore alternative interpretations of the text.
 - iv. Engaging with the critical comment in the question.
- It was, however, pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

Notes on Texts

Joseph Conrad: *The Secret Agent*

No responses seen.

E M Forster: *A Room with a View*

Both questions were popular, with perhaps number 8 the most popular. There were some good answers, particularly those which engaged with extended motifs across the text – i.e. Medieval vs Renaissance. However, a number of answers were bogged down by context – with a lot of discussion of the Edwardian/Victorian era without any link to the text itself.

Emyr Humphreys: *A Toy Epic*

No responses seen.

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Candidates did very well with the question on difference, with some excellent analysis of the role different cultures play in the text.

Kazuo Ishiguro: *The Remains of the Day*

Again this text remained popular with centres. The weaker area here is still context – with candidates sometimes scoring Band 4 or above for AO1, AO2 and AO5 but struggling to integrate relevant context in a meaningful way.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE AS

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 2: POETRY AND DRAMA

General Comments

There were fewer candidates for AS this year, but a good range of texts were chosen by centres. On the whole, candidates were well prepared for the demands of this paper, however, there are still some candidates who are not addressing the questions effectively and instead writing about what they wish to cover with the occasional reference towards the question focus.

Section A: Poetry (open book)

Points for Consideration:

A01

- Both questions on this section name a poem and require candidates to select another poem/poems themselves. A significant number of candidates chose to use 3 or 4 poems, which can sometimes lead to a dilution of AO4. This was especially the case where candidates were comparing poems they had chosen themselves, as the rubric clearly states that comparison must always link back to the named poem.
- Across the texts, it was pleasing to see that candidates were thoughtful and individual in their choice of second poem/poems.

A02

- As was the case last year, a significant number relied heavily upon looking at structural features of poems and produced extensive analysis of these features. Much of this was very assertive and candidates should guard against making lengthy claims about what the number of lines in a stanza, or the line length, might signify.
- Similarly, many assertive claims were made about the impact of enjambment.
- Centres should encourage candidates to limit their use of terms taken from English Language study, as these often distract from literary analysis.

A04

- In this section the mark scheme is weighted towards AO4 and making connections between poems. The best responses had clearly been planned and therefore the candidates were able to build their responses around points of comparison. In weaker responses, candidates tend to demonstrate the ability to set up comparisons but then move on to deal with the poems separately.
- As noted above, it is worth reminding candidates that the question requires that comparison should always be between the named poem and another. Some candidates utilised several poems and were often engaging in extended comparison that did not involve the named poem.

Notes on Texts

Thomas Hardy: *Poems Selected By Tom Paulin*

- Q1** A small number of candidates responded to this question. The choice of poems was varied and effective and most of the links created were thematic. The most successful candidates were those who focused on key techniques such as pathetic fallacy and symbolism.
- Q2** A similar number of candidates chose this question. Responses were sensitive, with some very pertinent AO2 analysis relating to the voice of the poem.

Ted Hughes: *Poems selected by Simon Armitage*

- Q3** Responses to this question were very enjoyable to read, as candidates clearly connected with Hughes' portrayal of the calf. There were very strong links made with other animal poems and the concepts of 'hope' and 'despair' produced thoughtful responses.
- Q4** This was a popular question and candidates found much to say about imagery and metaphor in the poem. Again, there was a good range of poems chosen for comparison and it was pleasing to see that candidates were making connections in terms of poetic techniques (through AO2). As was the case last year, in responses to both Hughes questions, there was some reliance upon comparison of structural features, such as line length and enjambment. Candidates had obviously been taught to do this and it tended to be quite assertive and limit their time on other types of more productive comparison.

Seamus Heaney: *Field Work*

- Q5** A very small number attempted this question. Some candidates who chose this question analysed several poems and might have been better off focusing on two poems and developing deeper comparisons.
- Q6** No candidates chose this question.

Gillian Clarke: *Making Beds for the Dead*

No centres chose to study this text.

Carol Ann Duffy: *Mean Time*

- Q9** As has been the case in previous years, 'Mean Time' was the most popular of the poetry texts. Many candidates approached this question by looking at disappointment in love and produced some excellent responses. Those who contrasted 'Crush' and 'Havisham' found much to say about differing imagery and poetic voices in these texts.

A smaller number of candidates looked at different types of disappointment, such as general disappointment with life. For this approach, 'The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team' proved a fruitful source of comparison.

- Q10** Again, this was a popular choice of text and question. Candidates thoughtfully handled a range of different types of loss, such as loss of a loved one, loss of memory and loss of hope. 'Never Go Back' was used successfully and candidates had engaging points to make about how place and settings are used to amplify the sense of loss. 'Beachcomber' was another popular choice of comparative poem, as was 'Disgrace'.

As has been noted in the general comments, some candidates seem to be spending a considerable amount of time making assertions about structure and what the number of lines or verses or rhyme patterns might symbolise.

Section B: Drama

Points for Consideration: Extract

A01

- Candidates had generally been well prepared for this task. Stronger candidates used quotations to support AO1 as well as their AO2 points.
- As was noted last year, it is important that candidates maintain focus on the extract. Whilst it is likely that some candidates will allude to the wider play, in order to inform their AO1 analysis, there is no requirement for contextualising the extract within the wider play.

A02

- Many candidates were adept at choosing quotations which allowed them to engage in deep analysis of language and techniques. Less successful responses were the ones where candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created.
- Candidates should be reminded that it is often more productive to use short quotations to dig below the surface meaning, rather than quoting several lines of dialogue without specific focus.

Points for Consideration: Essay

A01

- There were many excellent whole play essays, which were well-structured and fully engaged with the question. Most candidates were able to range around the plays and draw upon material from several scenes in order to build their argument.

A02

- Yet again, use of quotations was very impressive, given that this is a closed book question. Not all candidates write about the text as drama, whilst others make full use of their knowledge of props and staging and frequently refer to the audience.

A03

- This AO is very heavily weighted and the candidates who score highly on this AO are able to draw upon a range of contextual material so that they are not reliant upon generalised statements about the time periods. (This continues to be an issue from last year.) Some candidates were able to make thoughtful comments about the contexts of reception.
- More successful candidates will weave contextual references throughout their essay, often briefly, rather than having a 'block' of context at one or two points.
- It is worth repeating the point from last year's report that candidates should guard against extensive use of biographical material as context. Whilst this can be informative, it needs to be handled carefully and clearly linked to wider contextual issues.

Notes on Texts

Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

In the extract question, candidates adopted a range of approaches to the relationship between Faustus and Mephistophilis - most of them valid. Some candidates struggled to engage with the language and structure of the extract, tending to pull out quotations without any analysis.

There were some impressive essay responses to this text, which were written in a very academic style and drew upon a variety of contexts to answer the question.

Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

A small number of centres chose to study this play. In the extract question, some candidates struggled to focus on language and structure, perhaps because they were not prepared for a single speech. There were also a number of candidates who included a considerable amount of contextual reference in their analysis of the extract.

In part ii, there was evidence of a wide range of contextual links and candidates engaged with different aspects of Victorian morality and prejudice.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

As was the case last year, this was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of drama text. The extract provided candidates with much to say about the presentation of Blanche and there were pleasing references to the structure of the dialogue and the part played by Williams' use of punctuation.

In part ii, a significant number chose to ignore the reference to 'changing attitudes and values' in the question and simply wrote about a range of points related to 1940s America. Reading the question carefully is essential, as irrelevance can detract from all AOs.

Candidates need to be reminded that biographical context must be used carefully as over-reliance on this can be quite limiting. However, there was also some sophisticated use of an impressive range of contexts.

David Hare: *Murmuring Judges*

A very tiny number of candidates studied this text, possibly those who were re-sitting. Responses to the extract were good, with careful attention paid to the detail in the stage directions.

Part ii responses showed good knowledge and understanding of Irina's character and drew upon a range of evidence from the play.

Joe Orton: *Loot*

Responses to this text were lively and engaged and it was pleasing to see that candidates had responded well to the humour and farcical elements of the play.

In the extract question, there was clear appreciation of the structure and absurdity of the dialogue. In part ii, candidates discussed various kinds of rebellion and different forms of authority in the play. A range of contexts were confidently handled.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk