



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE A LEVEL

SUMMER 2019

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: POETRY AND PROSE

General Comments

Centres and candidates have clearly heeded advice given in 2017 and 2018. The selection of poems from the Anthology in Section A caused fewer concerns this year, although there were still some unsuitable choices. Section A requires candidates to choose two poems from the Poetry Pre-1914 Anthology to discuss and compare with one of two unprepared texts. While there was some impressive work both on studied poems and unprepared material, selecting suitable poems for comparisons is an essential skill which varied markedly between centres. Candidates must be dissuaded from including a favourite poem with little or no connection to the theme in the question. Careful reading of the unseen text is also essential for meaningful analysis (AO2) and connections (AO4).

In Section B part (i) candidates analyse an extract from the studied novel, followed in part (ii) by an essay on a question related to the extract. Clearly many centres had provided useful timed practice (20 minutes and 40 minutes) and there were only a few serious problems with time management of the extract and essay. Those who have been advised to answer Section B first are more likely to spend too long on the extract and need to be warned against this. There were also fewer disappointing marks caused by overlooking contextual factors for the double-weighted AO3 in Section B part (ii). Ensuring that the assessment objectives are thoroughly understood is always worthwhile.

Section B's 'open book' format is to facilitate the analysis of relevant textual evidence. Successful candidates had the thorough knowledge of the novel essential for brisk and effective selection. Others used a very narrow range of textual evidence, struggled with poorly chosen material or, in a few cases, used none at all. A significant minority still gave descriptive outlines of their chosen topic or told the story, without even attempting analysis.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A: POETRY

Question 1 on the presentation of childhood, featuring the poem 'Children's Song' by R.S. Thomas, was much more popular. Question 2 on the expression of protests and/or complaints was based on a review of Starbucks by A.A. Gill. Achievement was slightly higher on Question 2 where there were fewer very basic or limited responses.

Q.1 Anthology choices

Although there were fewer problems this year, the choice of poems was still one of the most serious issues. The most popular suitable choices were 'The Schoolboy' and 'To a Child Dancing in the Wind'. Less popular, but successful, were 'The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers' and the extract from 'The Prelude'.

The most common unsuitable choice was 'To Virgins, to Make Much of Time', which is addressed to those of marriageable age, not children. Some appeared well aware of this and referred to 'youth' throughout; others were unsure of what the poem was about.

While some broad connections on different ages were possible, achievement on AO2 and AO4 was adversely affected by this choice. 'To Virgins' appeared most often in centres where 'To a Child Dancing' did not. A similar pattern emerged last year when 'The Voice', a very productive choice for 'remembering the dead', was chosen often in some centres and not at all in others. Perhaps some are less confident on poems towards the end of the Anthology. Another problematic choice was 'The Author to Her Book' where the child is metaphorical. There was a small number of unaccountable selections including 'To Autumn' and 'Spellbound'.

'**Children's Song**' met with several observant and sensitive readings. There was, however, one quite common misreading: several wrote about how children 'probe and pry', curious to access the adult world. This was usually the result of feature-spotting before an accurate overview of meaning had been reached. Most used the pronouns 'we' and 'you' and the determiner 'our' to discuss the speaker's viewpoint but there was some misidentification. It is worth revising first, second and third person pronouns and determiners which are very likely to prove useful since even able candidates make errors here. The most successful accounts of the poem explored the impact of the metaphorical flower and eggs at the end, while others got stuck at the start and overlooked these altogether.

Q.2 Anthology choices

There were fewer problematic choices of poems where complaints or protests are expressed, one reason for higher achievement on this question. The most popular choices were 'England in 1819', 'London' and 'A Satirical Elegy'. There was also successful work on 'The Latest Decalogue' and 'God's Grandeur'. Less successful were Sonnet 130 and 'Leisure', where the elements of complaint are more obliquely expressed.

There were a few entirely unsuitable choices: these included 'The Kraken' and 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning'.

The *Starbucks* review was rarely misunderstood but in some responses there was very little analysis of its stylistic features. Stronger candidates made sound use of literary features, notably hyperbole, personification and allusions to science or culture, recognising the devices used to create humour.

Terminology and analysis (AO1; AO2)

Low achievement often results from narrow approaches or unproductive application, especially of linguistic and phonological terms. Some centres seem to have focussed exclusively on the recognition and identification of these i.e. feature-spotting to the detriment of reading and understanding skills. This produces scripts which may score well on AO1 but are basic or limited on AO2 and superficial on AO4. Analysis requires not only the identification of features but understanding key meanings and exploring how they have been created. One sound method here is to ask first *what* the writer is saying and *then how* they are conveying it.

Here are some of this year's concerns on evidence of integrated study, briefly:

- The over-interpretation of **phonological effects** is still a cause for concern.
- **Accurate word-classing** is a useful skill but often most productive when combined with other terminology e.g. the personifying adjective in 'malevolent epidermis'
- Knowledge of **poetic form** clearly has a place in this section but it is wise to avoid spending too long on this. Avoid unrealistic claims about the impact of form on meanings.
- Pointing out **declaratives** might sometimes be useful, preferably combined with other terms e.g. A.A. Gill's simple declarative 'It rejected them.' where the verb assists the personification of his loathsome cappuccino. As declarative is the most common sentence mood, it is unproductive to use the term repeatedly.

Common errors: expression and terminology

Here are some observations about usage. Several apply also to Section B.

- **Positive** and **negative** are still used too often, simplifying comments on attitudes.
- **Connotation** is widely misapplied along with the verb **connote**. 'Connotation' means an additional tone, idea or feeling which a word or phrase suggests, not just its literal meaning. The expressions 'negative connotations' and 'positive connotations' are too vague to be helpful.
- **Furthermore** and **moreover** should be used to continue an argument, not to introduce new material.
- Using '**similarly**' does not in itself create a connection.
- **Lexical sets** are connected by meaning (not word class) and their identification needs quotation relevant words from the same **semantic field** e.g. the lexical set of surveillance 'subterfuge', 'pry' and 'eavesdrop' in 'Children's Song'
- Different texts cannot '**juxtapose**', which refers to the close placing of two things *within* one text.
- **Vocative** means a term of address used directly to someone or something.

Organisation (AO1; AO4)

Yet again, empty introductions can gain no marks. Purposeful introductions show evidence of careful reading with a meaningful comment on each text and clear focus on the question set. Stronger candidates will often include key contextual factors in the introduction. Although the comparative element may be addressed here, some successful responses leave key connections for the body of the essay and the conclusion.

Having read and re-read their chosen unseen text carefully and used it to guide their choices, candidates need to re-read their studied poems thoroughly, thinking about the question.

This will help them to make connections between the three writers' treatment of the topic and choose links as an organising strategy. Structuring the essay around similarities and differences leads to an orderly response which does not narrow down or compartmentalise the approaches used. This method produced many of the most competent responses. For example, a Question 1 response on Thomas, Blake and Yeats might use this plan: viewpoints and addressees; the attitudes of the speakers; the relationship between childhood and the adult world; nature imagery. It is acceptable to compare two texts at a time, rather than all three throughout, as this is often more manageable. Problems are sometimes caused by making sweeping statements across the three texts which quite often prove to be inaccurate.

A shaped response requires a conclusion but it should be succinct. A meaningful sentence or two is preferable to a long paragraph repeating earlier points or offering vague generalisations.

Contextual factors (AO3)

Most of the contextual comment in Section A will refer to poems from the Anthology. Towards the top of the range there were also some comments on 'Children's Song' reflecting a more child-centred 20th century or on the purposes and audience of Gill's review. On the studied poems, contextual understanding of Blake was noticeably stronger than on Yeats. Shelley's 'England in 1819' was often strongly contextualised. Some, however, lacked key information such as the identity of Swift's 'Late Famous General'.

SECTION B: PROSE (open book)

The Color Purple was the most popular novel, followed by *Jane Eyre* and *Atonement*. A few centres had studied *Great Expectations* and a smaller number chose *The Remains of the Day*.

Part (i) EXTRACT ANALYSIS

This section requires clarity, purposeful application of literary and linguistic terms and relevant analysis. A brisk pace is also beneficial: some repetitive or leisurely approaches dealt only with the opening of the extract or laboured one or two points, at the expense of range. Candidates should practise scanning the extract to select the most interesting material, which will enable them to show understanding of a range of linguistic **and** literary techniques. For example, in Question 7(i) only a few explained the literary allusion to Malvolio at the end of the extract.

A general introduction is unnecessary but a sentence or two establishing the internal context of the extract acts as a shaping device. There were some problems with internal context this year: Question 4(i) featured *Jane Eyre* after the failed wedding and a few candidates appeared not to recognise this as the cause of her distress. Question 7(i) on *Atonement* concerned Robbie at the dinner table: there were misreadings from those who did not realise that he and Cecilia had already met in the library. As Section B is 'open book', it is easy to check on what has happened before the set extract. Most candidates knew the novel well enough to avoid such errors.

The questions on Section B were again very straightforward. Irrelevance was rare but on Question 12(i) a few wrote about the opening of the letter in which the extract about Sofia appeared, although this was not part of the extract set. Those studying *The Color Purple* should be aware that the extracts might be taken from the middle of a letter.

This year, very few extract responses drifted into context which is not rewarded on part i) but it is still important that candidates should be reminded of this.

Part (ii) ESSAY

Overview

Most candidates now understand that the 'open book' opportunity requires them to select textual evidence from relevant episodes. A thorough knowledge of the text enables brisk and effective selection which might not mean starting at the beginning of the novel. 40 minutes is not long so it is important to form a clear plan and the most successful responses offered a convincing argument. The skills required here are rather different from those required in Section A because there is much more material to choose from. Successful candidates knew exactly where to find key episodes; others adopted a chronological approach or struggled with poorly chosen material. A significant minority still gave descriptive outlines of their chosen topic, drifted away from the question or lapsed into story-telling.

In most centres, candidates have clearly been encouraged to use a variety of analytical approaches. Literary techniques have been thoroughly discussed and revised, so that the focus is kept on linguistic **and** literary approaches. In others, AO1 evidence of study was limited to some desultory word-classing or alliteration spotting.

AO3: Contextual understanding

There is a list of starting points for each specimen question in the AO3 section of the Specimen Assessment Materials and the Mark Schemes.

The quality and range of comments on contextual factors governed success in this task because of the double-weighted AO3. A range of relevant factors was essential for a respectable mark. Although context accounts for half of the marks it should not take up more space than textual analysis and needs to be firmly connected to the chosen topic. The key requirements are: range, relevance and clear integration into the response. The strongest essays had blended relevant contextual points into each section of analysis. It is wise, although not essential, to include some key context, such as genre and time period in the introduction. Fewer now start with a chunk of biography without a clear steer from the question.

The more successful candidates used an impressive range including history, biography and critical opinions. On the whole, discussions concerning the production of the text will centre on different factors influencing the writer when the novel was written as well as social and historical issues from when the novel is set (not necessarily the same as in the case of *The Color Purple*.) As for reception it is valid to discuss responses of readers today, in the light of current attitudes and events, as well as the opinions of earlier readers and critics. Candidates need to have a wide range of factors to select according to the question and the material they choose.

Q3/4 *Jane Eyre*

Both questions were popular. Jane's relationships with female characters were often linked with the Bildungsroman genre. There was interesting work on the literary relationship between Jane and Bertha. In some centres where an essay on women had been prepared, some drifted from the focus on relationships and discussed Jane and other women individually. The topic of suffering was most successfully handled with a non-chronological approach.

Those started at the beginning tended to spend too long in the Red Room; some got no further. Some concentrated on Jane but there was also sound work on Rochester, Bertha and St John. There were good examples of effective planning e.g. suffering as a result of societal failings or physical and psychological suffering.

Q5/6 *Great Expectations*

The question on settings was much more popular. Again, some problems were caused by spending too long on the marshes at the start of the novel; the setting appears elsewhere in a different light and this would be an interesting line to follow, but few did. There was sound work on Satis House, although few noticed that the novel ends on the site where it stood. Some wrote well on the less appealing descriptions of London, such as Smithfield or Newgate and a few discussed Wemmick's Castle. Knowledge of Dickens' life and concerns was generally well integrated.

Q7/8 *Atonement*

Both questions were popular. On problems facing Robbie and Cecilia's relationship, there were some very basic responses which followed the relationship without exploring the problems. Successful candidates had a clear plan e.g. social class; the war; Briony. There was some competent work on power and authority. One candidate chose to contrast Robbie and Paul Marshall; this included a convincing section on WW2, featuring Robbie's ambiguous status as an educated Private and the commercial success of Paul, who did not serve. There was interesting comment on government handling of the war and on Briony's authorial control.

Q9/10 *The Remains of the Day*

There were few responses on this novel. The question on the English class system was more popular. Although the question had plentiful opportunities for including context, in some responses it remained implicit (only discussed within the events of the novel) rather than explicit (linked to the novel, but with a broader historical or social focus). Others were able to use the question as the starting point for an essay that showed their detailed wider contextual knowledge.

Q11/12 *The Color Purple*

Both questions were popular. Although sisterhood was widely seen as female solidarity, a few concentrated entirely on Celie and Nettie which narrowed the response. Elsewhere, there was successful focus on other women who encouraged and supported Celie. Some noted shrewdly that jealousy was the factor most likely to impede female relationships. There was also sound work on Olivia and Tashi in Africa. One contextual note: in some centres, many expected the term 'womanism' to speak for itself, without explaining what Walker meant by it. When writing on the question about racial conflict, a few confused race with gender and veered off the topic.

Although some wrote well about the exploitation of the Olinka, in some centres there was inadequate understanding of colonialism, with some blaming white Americans.

Summary of key points

Summary of advice on Section A:

- Read the unseen texts carefully when choosing the question and poems.
- Ensure that the chosen Anthology poems deal directly with the theme in the question
- Know your AOs.
- Choose from a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology, not just word classes or phonology.
- Contextual factors need to be learned and revised.
- Revise poetic form but avoid over-interpretation of its impact.

Summary of advice for Section B:

- Make sure that candidates are thoroughly conversant with the AO weightings. and know contextual factors must appear but only in part (ii) questions.
- Timed practice is strongly recommended, using a 20+40-minute structure.
- Practise literary approaches and readings, where appropriate, on part (i) questions.
- Advise candidates to select at least two key episodes for closer analysis in part (ii) questions.
- Practise integrating different contextual factors with the analysis of key episodes in the novel.

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COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

General Comments

This year's Component 2 examination produced many impressive responses, and a wide range of valid and interesting approaches to the questions set. Although language analysis still tends to be dominated by word class identification, there was an encouraging increase in the number of responses discussing conversation analysis and pragmatics – both very apt for dramatic texts. Compared with last year, increasing numbers of candidates also demonstrated awareness of the texts as stage plays performed in real time, particularly in the extract question of Section A. There was a clear improvement over previous years in the discussion of context: far fewer responses offered 'bolt-on' context paragraphs unrelated to the question, and increasing numbers demonstrated relevant and well-integrated knowledge of a wide range of different aspects of context and reception, including some confident and perceptive accounts of recent Shakespeare productions.

Generally, candidates are using appropriate academic expression, although there is some evidence of contractions such as 'would've' and 'could've' finding their way in to even fluent and confident work at times. Many are offering clear introductions to essays, and organising their arguments well, although as always this is an area where some need improvement.

Clearly the majority of candidates responded well to the challenge of the closed-book paper and demonstrated some detailed and precise knowledge of the texts, offering material for close linguistic analysis even in the 48-mark questions.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Shakespeare extracts

These were, as usual, an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their close analysis skills, focusing on both linguistic and literary features. As mentioned above, dramatic effects were discussed better than in previous years, although there were still very few responses dealing effectively with the poetic or phonological features of Shakespeare's verse, in extracts where that is appropriate (for example alliteration, assonance, consonance, pararhyme, metrical disruptions, etc.) a potentially very rich area for analysis.

Antony and Cleopatra

The extract for *Antony and Cleopatra* was accessible to most candidates, the majority discussing Antony's conflicts sensibly, and many picking up the contrast with the previous scene. Some accurate and insightful analyses were seen, but only the better responses dealt with Enobarbus' speeches appropriately, however, and even those tended to miss the sexual innuendo. As with the other extract questions, technical literary analysis was rare.

King Lear

The most popular text after *Othello* was *King Lear*, where many candidates gave a good account of Lear's complex emotional state as reflected in his language in this central and well-known scene. However, this was an example of Shakespeare's richest dramatic language offering a great deal for close analysis, little of which was seen. The best responses also commented on Lear's lack of response to the Fool, and the contrast between their different types of language creating additional meaning for the character of Lear.

Much Ado About Nothing

The *Much Ado About Nothing* extract was particularly well seen for its dramatic effects (particularly since the question specified focus on "dramatic effects", perhaps), and some very impressive answers were given here, combining analysis of Dogberry's malapropisms and the comic but tense mood.

Othello

Most centres chose *Othello*, as in previous years, and this extract from the centre of the play was widely accessible and generally answered well, with most candidates seeing the emotional struggles and painful dramatic irony as expressed in the language. Language analysis centred mostly on Iago's "green-eyed monster" warning, but there were some insightful accounts of the conversation analysis here.

The Tempest

Only a few centres chose to study *The Tempest*, but this extract was another opportunity for close analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic language – his so-called 'high style', as in the *King Lear* extract — which some candidates attempted, with some offering an appropriate discussion of the power relationships in the scene and how they are reflected in the language.

Shakespeare essays

Antony and Cleopatra

Q1(b) on the needs of the individual and the needs of the state was the popular choice, with most candidates engaging well with the question, particularly with regard to Antony. The best answers dealt with Roman context in detail, but elsewhere surprisingly little AO3 could be credited, given the double weighting in this question. Where context was offered it often consisted of rather general and assertive remarks about attitudes 'in Roman times', rather than Jacobean England, Shakespeare or modern interpretations or attitudes. As elsewhere across the component, many responses attempted to answer by offering a few sound-bites to analyse, rather than detailed knowledge of the play as a whole.

King Lear

Most candidates chose **Q2(b)**, the presentation of power and authority, and a wide range of different approaches was seen, although the majority focused on Lear's misuse of his power in the first scene of the play. Some better responses used the suggestion in the question quotation, and considered the behaviour of both fathers and rulers, with some nice work on the parallel plots of Lear's and Gloucester's families.

Some of the most successful context work concerned King James's attitudes to government, although discussion of gender stereotypes also proved popular, and was successful when part of a wider-ranging account of the use and misuse of power in the play.

Much Ado About Nothing

The two essay questions were chosen in fairly equal numbers, and both produced some strong responses, suggesting that candidates found them both accessible. However, **Q3(c)** (Shakespeare's use of Hero and Claudio to explore social attitudes) was addressed more thoroughly by the majority who tackled it, as candidates seemed familiar with the relevant context here, such as the different types of honour (male and female), social hierarchy and gender stereotypes, to name a few.

The combination of genres in the play **Q3(b)** seems also to have been a familiar idea to many candidates, although the tendency was just to list examples of comic scenes and tragic scenes, often with rather simple notions of the genres. The best gave fuller definitions of comedy (not just humour) and tragedy (not just sad or challenging moments) and explored accordingly.

Q3(a) on nature seems to have been less accessible on the whole, although when candidates did choose it they often responded well as there is abundant material on this topic in the play.

Othello

Most candidates chose **Q4(b)**, the significance of outsiders in the play, and there were some excellent accounts of this topic. The majority focused centrally on Othello himself, with better responses finding a range of examples of 'others'. Some struggled to find outsiders elsewhere and strained to include characters such as Roderigo and Desdemona, although there were convincing accounts made even of those at times. Given the double weighting of context in this question, there was a good opportunity here to discuss the Turks, the main cultural outsiders in the play, who are referred to significantly on many occasions, yet only a very few responses mentioned them.

Fewer candidates tackled **Q4(a)** the question on settings, but a few particularly successful responses were seen. The best made impressive correlations between Cyprus and Othello himself, both threatened and on the edge of Christendom, addressing the context focus of the question in the process.

The Tempest

The Caliban question, **Q5(b)**, proved the more popular, with most candidates demonstrating good knowledge of the colonial context, and better answers considering audience responses based on several scenes where Caliban is on stage, rather than just asserting the post-colonial analysis and deducing that we would support him against Prospero. The best used the opportunities for language analysis offered by Caliban himself (his dialogue with Prospero in 1 ii, his soliloquies) and the attitudes to him expressed by a range of characters, including Prospero, Trinculo and Stephano. However, there were a number of successful accounts of the presentation of magic in the play, often informed by detailed knowledge of early 17th century attitudes to alchemy and witchcraft, and discussing the way that magic is used both as an engine of the plot, and in order to generate spectacle.

Section B

Modern drama

Q6/7 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

Most candidates who studied this text chose to answer on the American Dream, and it proved accessible and fruitful, on the whole. Those who gave a clear account of the nature of the dream in their introductions, or early on in the essay, generally went on to offer sensible readings, and some very insightful responses were seen. Analyses here, as elsewhere, still tended, on the whole, to be structured around (sometimes rather random) quotations with word classes identified, but many better answers discussed the characterisation structure of the two couples and their distinctive linguistic and dramatic moments, relating to the American Dream.

Q8/9 *The History Boys*

The majority of responses on this text opted for **Question 9**, on the struggle for identity. Many were able to demonstrate wide and detailed knowledge of the text and its contexts, often evaluating effectively and arguing that some characters are secure in their identity. Posner was the most frequently discussed character, and sexuality the favourite topic, and better answers avoided loss of question focus by sticking to 'struggle for identity' as opposed to the more general oppression of minorities. The Irwin question (**Q8**), although chosen by fewer candidates, produced some very successful accounts at times, particularly where candidates discussed the proleptic scenes of Irwin's post-teaching life. Some less successful responses were clearly based on the film, where those scenes are omitted.

Q10/11 *Translations*

Few responses were seen on this text.

Q12/13 *Kindertransport*

Most candidates who studied *Kindertransport* chose **Question 12**, another identity question, and as with *The History Boys* it proved an accessible and fruitful topic, with the majority demonstrating some detailed knowledge of the play and its contexts, although there were some successful accounts of the character Faith for **Question 13**. The best responses also analysed the dramatic effects (particularly strong in this play), discussing the juxtaposition of time frames and settings brought about by the staging, particularly for Question 12.

Q14/15 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Many centres chose to study this popular text, and both questions generated some very strong answers. **Question 14** clearly invited a context discussion on gender, which the majority were able to produce, whereas **Question 15** (on the restrictions of 1950s American society) required a bit more thought in that respect, although ultimately offering a wider scope. As in Question 9 (*The History Boys*), a number of candidates challenged the question premise and argued that some of the characters are unable or unwilling to "break out", some very successfully.

Summary of key points

- Good progress has been made with context work in essays, with largely relevant and integrated discussions being offered.
- Shakespeare context could be improved, with relevant details of 16th and 17th century history and society, and deeper understanding of the genres of Shakespeare's plays.
- Candidates should aim to analyse more than just word classes, which are not always relevant to the creation of meaning. Literary language (phonology, metre, figurative language for example) is just as relevant to integrated study. The key is to choose the appropriate and relevant analytical tools for the point.
- There is a need to focus on the dramatic effects of the play (dramatic syntax, irony, visual effects, for example) rather than writing about the texts as if they are novels.
- Candidates should keep to an academic register in all exam responses, and keep working on organisation of essays (planning, introductions, paragraphing).
- Language study of literary texts should always be about the meaning of the texts. Many responses are seen each year that simply select sound-bites and identify the features in them, without discussing the events, characters or meaning of the plays.

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COMPONENT 3:

General Comments

In Section A of this component, candidates are required to analyse three spoken texts of different purposes and genres but with a thematic link. It was encouraging to see that many candidates were able to analyse the texts with some perception, focusing on how each text conveys precise meanings, and comparing and contrasting the attitudes to London expressed by the speakers. This year, the phrasing of the task, which included explicit reference to ‘the presentation of different attitudes’ in the source material, appeared to be helpful to many candidates as it steered them away from the more descriptive type of response. However, many candidates are still resorting to lengthy descriptions of the generic differences between transcribed and non-transcribed spoken texts.

In Section B, candidates analyse an extract from the non-literary prose text that they have studied and then produce an essay response with a thematic link. The best responses track through the extract carefully, using an extensive range of technical terminology to make precise points about how meanings are created. They also relate these points closely to the requirements of the question. Less successful responses tend to use a restricted range of technical terms (or apply them incorrectly), leave out relevant sections of the extract and do not develop their points about meaning in sufficient depth. High-quality essay responses select a few key episodes from the text and analyse them thoroughly, also embedding relevant contextual points with confidence. On the other hand, many candidates are hindered by their lack of sufficient knowledge of the text and their inclusion of more general contextual points that are not relevant to the question.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

This year, the linking topic was attitudes to London, and candidates were expected to compare and contrast the presentation of this topic in the three unseen spoken texts. In this year’s examination, two of these texts were transcripts, allowing candidates opportunities to compare and contrast the impact of features such as intonation and micropauses on the meanings conveyed by the speakers.

The strongest candidates again covered a very wide range of features in their answers. Another characteristic feature of strong answers was that candidates consistently focused on similarities and differences in attitudes towards London, as directed by the question. However, some candidates are still producing introductory paragraphs which simply repeat the descriptor paragraphs which are printed on the examination paper before the three texts – sometimes copying them word-for-word – although this approach did seem a little less prevalent this year. Many are still writing very long and often repetitive and loosely organised introductions which make very general points about the text and include no quotations for analysis.

It is also worth pointing out that 'signposting' terms such as 'on the other hand' or 'similarly' will not in themselves score any AO4 marks: the term has to be followed up with precise and meaningful analysis of how similarities and differences are demonstrated in the texts. The repetitive use of the vague terms 'positive' and 'negative' to describe attitudes only counts as 'basic' analysis of the texts.

Text A, an extract from Sadiq Khan's victory speech on being elected Mayor of London, allowed candidates to analyse the use of rhetoric, and many recognised features such as anaphora and antithesis although surprisingly few candidates took the opportunity to evaluate Khan's use of ethos and pathos appeals. Nearly all pointed out his appeal to unity and his lauding of London as 'the greatest city in the world'. Some candidates described Sadiq Khan as the 'Prime Minister', the 'President' or the 'Major' of London and several labelled his praising of London as 'patriotic'. Some also appeared to think that Khan had been Mayor for some time and was highlighting his achievements rather than outlining his ambitions.

Text B, an extract from a vlog, gave candidates opportunities to explore attitudes to London which demonstrated both similarities and differences to those in evidence in Text A. For example, many candidates pinpointed the speaker's revulsion at the 'incredibly dirty' streets and made some productive links with Khan's pledges about 'cleaner air and a healthier city – although many labelled 'incredibly' as an adjective. The most successful candidates were those who recognised a mixture of attitudes within the text, with the speaker enthusing about the many opportunities available in London despite the less appealing points that she makes in the first half of the extract. As last year, many still referred to 'sentences' rather than 'utterances' when analysing transcripts, and some described the speakers of the texts as 'writers'. Using such terms usually indicates a lack of sufficient awareness of the spoken and performance aspects of the texts.

Text C tended to be the least effectively analysed of the three extracts, with many candidates writing about it in far less detail than the other two. Most, however, picked up on the reference in the descriptor paragraphs to the primarily American audience for the podcast, and were able to make some convincing points about how the speaker uses American references to explain the key sights of London to the listeners and to guide them around. However, a number of candidates asserted that the main purpose of the text was 'persuasive' (i.e. to persuade potential tourists to visit London), which was a misunderstanding of its purpose and genre: as a podcast, it was designed for visitors who are already present in London so its primary purpose is informative (although there may be some persuasive elements in the sense that the speaker is trying to persuade the listener of London's greatness). Several candidates wasted time by exhaustively listing the features that were not present in this non-transcribed text, such as micropauses and fillers. Such comments scored no marks as they were self-evident (by definition, a non-transcribed text will not include these prosodic features) and also did not address the question of how the speaker conveyed attitudes to London.

Section B

In Cold Blood was again the most popular choice of text, with *Once in a House on Fire* being studied by a fair number of candidates and a smaller number of answers on *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, *Homage to Catalonia*, and, for the first time, *Skating to Antarctica*.

The more successful candidates paid close attention to the writer's use of linguistic and literary techniques to convey theme, character and setting, tracking carefully through the extract and showing a sensitive awareness of how specific meanings were created.

Others often produced poorly structured answers, sometimes making only a limited range of points and ignoring sections of the extract.

The key to a good-quality extract response is systematic close reading, meaning that candidates should home in on short quotations, give sharp and precise analysis of how meanings are created, and then quickly move on to the next point.

Many candidates found the essay section much more challenging. In some cases, this appeared to be a result of issues with timing, with candidates simply not leaving themselves sufficient time to produce an essay response in any depth. Others showed a lack of familiarity with the text, producing very generalised answers with little close analysis of key episodes. Context also remained a problem for many, with some candidates including very little and others going to the other extreme by writing context-led essays that included very detailed biographical, social and historical contextual information at the expense of close textual analysis. The most successful approach is to use relevant contextual points to illuminate analysis of the text, embedding these points in every paragraph – only a minority of candidates showed an ability to do this successfully. The ‘learnt essay’ still appeared this year, in which candidates have learnt a standardised response and then try to adapt it to the wording of the question. This approach is restrictive and often inhibits candidates from accessing higher marks. Furthermore, some candidates included references to the extract in the essay response – no credit can be given for this as the essay question clearly states that they need to cite evidence from ‘elsewhere’ in the text.

Q.2 *Once in a House on Fire*

In the extract responses, nearly all candidates showed awareness of a range of attitudes to education, including Ashworth’s anxiety and the incredulous reactions of her peers. Most also saw the connections between these attitudes and social class, giving them a useful starting-point for the essay question. They recognised, for example, the significance of Tamsyn’s ‘Marks and Spencer clothes’ as a signifier of her middle-class background and there was some interesting speculation on the possible meaning of the simile ‘like a mermaid’, which Ashworth uses to refer to her own appearance. Some also saw the deep irony in their peers’ evaluation of their desire to continue their education as ‘stupidity.’

Taking their cue from the ideas presented in the extract, many candidates recognised the strong connection between education and social mobility in Ashworth’s memoir, focusing on how she presents educational achievement as a means of escape from her circumstances. Stronger answers traced the development of this theme throughout the text, for example examining episodes in which both of Ashworth’s stepfathers show their contempt for her reading and learning, such as Peter’s deliberate destruction of Andrea’s book of fairy tales in Chapter 1, the symbolic significance of which was highlighted by many. The quotation ‘In our house...homework makes you a rebel’ was also cited by many as evidence of Ashworth’s rebellion against the repressive authority of her stepfathers. Some candidates referred to an impressively detailed range of context – for example, legislation relating to the establishment of comprehensive schools – but often made this the main focus of the essay without linking it to close linguistic and literary analysis of the text.

Q.3 *Skating to Antarctica*

A small number of candidates answered on this text. In the extract response, stronger responses linked Diski’s observations of the behaviour of her fellow passengers with her own reflections on the nature of memory. They recognised that Diski was disparaging her travelling companions by suggesting that their obsession with creating memories has dehumanised them (for example, in the reference to ‘a Cyclops with video camera replacing the missing eye’).

In the essay response, many candidates referred to a range of examples from the rest of the text, especially Diski's reflections on the provisional nature of memory when she recalls her childhood experiences.

Q.4 A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius

A small number of candidates answered on this text. Most were accurately able to gauge Eggers's feelings in the extract, explaining, for example, the sense of unreality implied by 'not solid' and 'I am on a set.' Some also commented productively on the writer's use of the present tense to create a sense of immediacy and enhance empathy.

There were several valid episodes for candidates to draw upon in their essay responses to the wider text, and more successful candidates dealt not only with the presentation of the illnesses and subsequent deaths of Eggers's parents, but also with examples such as Eggers's own medical emergency (the kidney stone), Shalini's injury and its effects, and the presentation of attitudes to mental illness.

Q.5 In Cold Blood

In their extract responses, most candidates showed a clear grasp of how Capote was presenting the Clutter family as the embodiment of the 'American Dream'. Most of them sensibly discussed the symbolism of the 'plain gold band' as a metaphor for the Clutters' marriage and Mr Clutter's 'mangled' finger as a symbol of his commitment to physical work. Some went further, interpreting the mention of Bonnie having 'given him four children' as evidence of Mr Clutter's patriarchal dominance, and also pointed out the euphemistic use of the phrase 'little spells'.

The best essay responses included further analysis of the presentation of the Clutter family but then developed interesting and illuminating links with the presentation of other families and family backgrounds in the text – usually referencing the upbringings of Perry and Dick. Some candidates successfully incorporated contextual links with Capote's own family background but others wrote lengthy introductions describing the author's research techniques but without a specific focus on the actual task. Making links to the concept of the American Dream also proved to be productive for many candidates, as long as this was related back to the presentation of 'family life' as specified in the question. Some candidates quoted from the film adaptation of *In Cold Blood* rather than the written text.

Q.6 Homage to Catalonia

A relatively small number of candidates answered on this text. Most candidates made sensible comments on Orwell's presentation of the militiaman based on his outward appearance and behaviour, and many were able to see that he symbolises Orwell's anti-heroic views of the war in general ('he typifies for me the special atmosphere of that time').

Many candidates were able to cite a range of valid examples in their essay responses, often recognising that Orwell's presentation of his comrades differed according to the circumstances. While some restricted themselves to the generalised evaluations of 'positive' and 'negative', others saw the subtleties of Orwell's approach – for example, the way he describes his men as an 'untrained mob' and a 'complete rabble' yet simultaneously build the reader's sympathy for them.

Summary of key points

Section A:

AO1, AO2 and AO4 are all assessed in Section A, with AO4 having double weighting. The following points outline features of successful answers and areas for improvement for each Assessment Objective.

AO1

Characteristics of successful responses:

- A wide range of technical terminology applied accurately.
- When analysing a speech, the use of technical terms specific to rhetoric, e.g. anaphora, ethos/pathos/logos etc.
- Fluent and controlled written expression.
- Use of a formal academic register.
- Evidence of an integrated linguistic/literary approach
- A clearly structured response with a coherent line of argument.
- Made a clear distinction between written texts designed to be spoken by using the term 'sentences', and spoken transcripts by using the term 'utterances'. Referred to 'speaker' and 'audience' rather than 'writer' and 'reader'.

Areas for improvement:

- Word classes continue to be a source of confusion for most candidates, who need to keep working on getting the basic definitions right. This includes being able to distinguish between concrete and abstract nouns, and between adjectives and adverbs.
- Several used the term 'declarative' to label a phrase or even a single word.
- Basic spelling errors this year included: 'diffrent', 'ajective' (or 'agective'), 'speach', 'greatful' and 'manor' or 'mannon' (for 'manner').
- Some responses were again poorly structured, with much repetition and without a clear line of argument.

AO2

Characteristics of successful responses:

- Consistent analysis of specific attitudes to London (beyond simply 'positive' and 'negative') as revealed in the three texts.
- Relating these differing attitudes to the identity of the speakers, and the audiences, purposes and genres of the texts.
- Using a range of precise and detailed comments on how meanings are created.
- Recognising that different attitudes to London could be displayed in the same text: specifically, the vlogger's differing attitudes in Text B.

Areas for improvement:

- Candidates need to move beyond the repetitive use of the terms 'positive' and 'negative' to describe attitudes: this only counts as 'basic' analysis, which is a Band 2 descriptor.
- 'Oxymoron' continues to be a popular term – but if candidates use it, they need to be clear that an oxymoron is not the same as an opposite, juxtaposition or contrast.
- On the whole, candidates need to be clearer that spoken texts are delivered by a speaker, not a writer, and are received by an audience or a listener, not a reader.

AO4

Characteristics of successful responses:

- Devoting a substantial amount of the answer to making connections between texts: this is important as AO4 accounts for half of the marks on Section A.
- Exploring specific similarities and differences between the attitudes of the different speakers.
- Examining how different genres, audiences and purposes could account for these differences in attitude.
- Including a good balance of similarities and differences.
- Clearly signposting when links are being made (Similarly, Equally, However, In contrast etc.) but then ensuring that this followed up with a specific and meaningful link.

Areas for improvement:

- As last year, many candidates devoted a considerable amount of time to describing obvious generic differences between spoken and written texts without referring to meanings or to attitudes to London: such comments are irrelevant as they do not address the question, and will not score marks.
- Several candidates were still not including many links, and this will be heavily self-penalising. Answers which essentially consisted of three mini-essays on each individual text, followed by some brief comments at the end about links, were unlikely to score highly for AO4. However, such responses did seem less common this year, which is an encouraging sign.
- Some candidates used signposting without supporting this with really specific and meaningful links between texts. Examiners will not award AO4 marks simply for including terms such as 'Similarly' or 'In contrast'.

Section B:

(b) (i)

Characteristics of successful responses:

- A good range of technical terminology used accurately and purposefully (AO1).
- A good balance of literary and linguistic terms, to show 'integrated study' (AO1).
- Attaches a technical term to every quotation (AO1).
- Showing clear awareness of the writer's reasons for employing devices such as metaphor, making sensible comments on how specific meanings are created (AO2).
- A thorough approach, including points from throughout the extract (AO2).
- All points about meaning are linked back to the question (AO2).

Areas for improvement:

- As with Section A, there was still often confusion about the definitions of basic features such as pronouns, sentence moods and word classes (AO1).
- Some candidates wrote at length (and often repetitively) about very specific parts of the extract and omitted many other potentially valuable points (AO1/AO2).
- Candidates who did not track through the extract in sequence experienced difficulties when trying to track changes and developments in the presentation of characters, themes and attitudes (AO1/AO2).
- Similarly to Section A, many over-used the terms 'positive' and 'negative' at the expense of more precise analysis (AO2).

(b) (ii)

Characteristics of successful responses:

- Beginning with a short and sharp introduction, including a clearly defined line of argument (AO2/AO3)
- Including some reasonably detailed reference to two or three key episodes from different parts of the text to exemplify/illustrate the line of argument: given the time constraints of this task, this should be realistic for candidates (AO2)
- Referring to specific contextual factors which are relevant to the specific wording of the task, including social/historical and, if appropriate, relevant information about the production of the text (AO3)
- The best responses skilfully interwove specific and relevant contextual information with analysis of meanings, showing a clear grasp of how these contextual factors influenced the production of the text (AO2/AO3)
- Finishing with a meaningful conclusion that sums up the argument and does not simply repeat points already made (AO2/AO3).

Areas for improvement:

- Some candidates ignored the wording of the question and wrote answers that were barely relevant, possibly reflecting a lack of sound knowledge of the text, or suggesting that they had memorised a set response.
- Candidates who attempted to adapt such a learnt response were rarely successful: such answers tended to be irrelevant or to have only tenuous links with the question.
- As half the marks for this question are awarded for context, candidates self-penalised if they included no, little or irrelevant contextual material.
- On the other hand, some candidates wrote essays that were context-led, with less detailed textual analysis.
- Again this year, several answers were extremely brief, suggesting that some candidates have issues with timing: it is recommended that they should spend twenty-five minutes on the essay question. A few candidates did not attempt the essay question at all.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 4:

General Comments

This component is internally assessed and externally moderated. It gives opportunities for learners to independently select an aspect of prose study that interests them and to study one text (chosen from a list in Appendix A) provided by WJEC Eduqas within that genre. In addition, learners are given the opportunity to select wider reading to inform their studies in this component and to reflect on the learning that has taken place. In reflecting on their studies, learners will then be required to produce original writing related to their chosen genre.

There was much to be praised in the work seen this year. On the whole, candidates effectively engaged with their chosen texts and produced engaging pieces of writing. Assessment was generally secure but there was an increase in generosity seen this year, particularly in Section A in Bands 4 and 5.

Administration

Administration on this Unit was greatly aided by centres' use of the non-examination assessment checklist. Where centres did not supply the checklist, administrative errors such as the omission of a sample list, incorrectly totalled marks, missing signatures etc. tended to occur. Annotation on the cover sheets was generally very good with the majority of centres providing a very useful overview of how final marks were arrived at. In a minority of cases annotation on the cover sheet and on the work itself was minimal or absent. As indicated on the non-examination assessment checklist, centres are required to provide sufficient annotation on the quality of the work being assessed.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Genre study

Centres had taken a range of valid approaches to this part of the non-examination assessment folder. The majority of centres had given candidates access to one or two main texts with more flexibility being given in the choice of wider reading texts. Some centres had given candidates complete free choice of both genre and texts leading to an entirely independent approach to the component. A minority of centres had prescribed genres and texts offering their candidates limited independence in their study.

Dystopia and Gothic remain the most popular genres but there was an increase in work in the identity/outsider and war and conflict genres. Work was also seen on all other genres from the list in the specification. Certain texts proved popular this year including *The Road*, *Never Let Me Go* and *1984* in the dystopian genre, *Frankenstein*, *Woman in Black* and *The Bloody Chamber* in the Gothic genre and *Trainspotting* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in the identity/outsider genre. Candidates had used a range of appropriate wider reading texts. The strongest pairings allowed candidates to explore genre change or different social or historical perspectives on their chosen topics. Bibliographies included with the work were very useful and demonstrated the care and attention that candidates had given to researching their chosen genre.

Many had read texts other than those analysed in their genre study and had undertaken critical reading which they engaged with effectively in their responses.

Moderators saw a wide range of tasks this year with the majority of centres offering candidates the flexibility to choose a topic which was of individual interest. This is undoubtedly best practice as a common task tended to result in genre studies with very similar content and a more limited overview of the genre being studied. Moderators saw some excellent work on social control in dystopian texts, flawed heroes in the Gothic genre and human faults and failings in the war and conflict genre. Candidates who chose a narrow focus such as this tended to craft focused and perceptive responses. Some centres provided a critical quotation in the task which candidates were required to engage with when constructing their argument. This approach worked well and allowed candidates to make some perceptive observations. Candidates who responded to tasks which signposted the relevant Assessment Objectives tended to have more structured arguments.

AO1 assesses integrated approaches as well as academic register and organisation. Arguments were generally well structured with the strongest responses including a focused introduction, clear topic sentences on paragraphs and a conclusion which effectively summarised points. In a minority of cases, introductions and conclusions were generalised and unconnected to the argument being explored.

Introductions are not the place to offer a biography of the author or an overview of the genre's history. Effective introductions should, instead, be comparative and offer an overview of the argument which will be explored in the genre study. Use of terminology was varied across the work seen. In stronger responses, candidates applied a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology with confidence and precision.

Where marks were awarded in Band 5, moderators expected to see candidates engage with language on both a word and sentence level. In a minority of centres, the range of terminology across the sample of work submitted was too narrow and in rare cases, was entirely absent. This heavily impacted candidates' access to both AO1 and AO2 marks as the identification of terminology should always be linked to meaning. Imprecise application of terminology or incorrect identification of terminology was evident across a minority of the work seen this year.

As candidates have the opportunity to edit and draft this work, errors should be avoided and terminology should be applied with precision. Candidates should also avoid generalised terminology such as 'lexis', 'lexical choice' etc. Stronger responses adhered closely to the Statement/Evidence/Analysis approach and applied terminology to all quotations.

AO2 remains a strength of Section A. On the whole, candidates engaged well with meaning and supported points with appropriate evidence from the texts. The strongest responses integrated AO2 with AO1 and AO3 to construct a purposeful argument. Weaker responses tended to lapse into description of key moments within the texts.

Candidates are required to engage with a range of contextual points. It is imperative that these points are relevant to the task and that they are embedded into the argument. The use of contextual detail was also varied across the work seen. The strongest responses dealt with the conventions of their chosen genre, and the typicality of their texts within it, in some detail. This was a very effective approach and allowed candidates to demonstrate the knowledge they had gained from critical and literary research. Some candidates made very little reference to the genre of their texts. As this is a genre study, candidates should explore their chosen theme or issue and its significance within the chosen genre, not just within the texts themselves. Many candidates were also able to make useful references to biographical, historical and cultural factors surrounding their texts.

In less successful responses, candidates included whole paragraphs of descriptive contextual points which did not connect to their argument and were, therefore, irrelevant to the demands of this Section. There was a tendency toward generosity in the assessment of AO3 where candidates did not embed contextual detail or did not include sufficient reference for the number of marks available.

AO4 requires that candidates offer comparisons between their core and wider reading texts. In the most successful responses these links were made from the outset and interwoven through the entire genre study. Less successful responses dealt with the texts separately and made only brief reference to the wider reading which had been undertaken. These responses also tended to be characterised with general linking statements such as 'This text also uses setting to establish isolation.' with no further development of the link offered. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their genre studies comparatively in order to ensure that the wider reading illuminates the study of the core text.

Section B: Related creative writing

Candidates are required to submit one literary and one non-literary piece of writing in this section. Short stories and novel openings were by far the most popular literary pieces, although moderators also saw novel endings, monologues and poetry collections. In general, the literary pieces were much stronger than the non-literary work with candidates showing clear awareness of characterisation and structure. Some of the strongest responses made interesting choices with narrative voice or form which made the writing very engaging. Use of dialogue was variable with the strongest responses producing convincing dialogue which progressed the narrative and aided characterisation. In weaker responses, dialogue was inaccurately written and unconvincing demonstrating the need for the use of quality writing as a model when preparing this work. Literary work which is a continuation of an existing text or features existing literary characters should be avoided as it limits the originality and flair candidates need for this Section.

There was a range of non-literary work again this year including articles, reviews, travel writing and speeches. Candidates wrote on a range of diverse topics from the World Cup to Brexit and there were so many interesting perspectives to read! There were very few issues with task setting this year, although moderators continue to see a minority of candidates using fictional content for non-literary pieces. Technical accuracy and the quality of written expression was generally good. In some cases, technical errors marred the quality of the work. Thorough proof reading and editing during the drafting process would allow candidates to craft more polished writing pieces.

Summary of key points

Section A

Candidates should:

- adopt a suitably academic register, avoiding use of the first person e.g. 'I will be exploring...' (AO1)
- apply a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology (AO1)
- ensure that terminology is applied with precision and accuracy (AO1)
- select terminology from all aspects of the framework, making comments on word, sentence and phonological levels (AO1)
- establish clear links between terminology and meaning - HOW do the identified literary and linguistic features create meaning/effect (AO2)
- support all points with the relevant evidence from the selected texts (AO2)

- integrate contextual details (AO3)
- make specific reference to the conventions of the chosen genre and how the selected texts fit into that genre (AO3)
- include a range of contextual detail e.g. literary, historical, social, political etc. (AO3)
- ensure all contextual points are relevant to the task being addressed (AO3)
- adopt a comparative approach from the outset (AO4)
- select texts of an appropriate level of challenge for comparison (AO4)
- avoid superficial comparative comments or links which do not address the task (AO4).

Section B

Candidates should:

- have clear links to the knowledge gained from the genre study
- show clear awareness of genre by either conforming to or subverting conventions
- use a style which is appropriate for audience, form, genre and purpose
- produce original and engaging writing
- use language choices which reveal detailed knowledge of literary and linguistic features and their impact
- proof read work carefully to ensure a strong degree of technical accuracy, particularly in terms of punctuation of speech
- use wide ranging vocabulary
- select the best genre for their writing. For example, in some cases first person narratives would have been better as monologues
- have a clear sense of audience and purpose.

Conclusion

Moderators saw a great deal of very strong work again this year. The best folders were characterised by comparative, analytical essays demonstrating clear contextual awareness coupled with engaging writing pieces with a clear sense of audience and purpose. Centres are to be commended for the high quality of their preparation for this component.



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