**Prose Study Task Setting Guidance**

**The most successful tasks:**

* Have a **clearly defined focus** which is manageable and not too wide-ranging.

e.g. ‘*presentation of nature as a destructive force*’ rather than solely ‘*nature*’;

* encourage a **literary response** with a clear emphasis on critical analysis of the writers’ technique

e.g. using ‘the writers’ *presentation* of…’ or ‘the ways in which the writers *make us of…*’;

* ensure that **context does not drive the response** butis used to **inform a literary response**, rather than the texts being used as evidence of broad generalisations about social or literary trends;
* remind candidates of the need to give **both texts equal attention** and to develop **relevant, illuminating connections** between them;
* include some steer to help candidates **develop a line of argument**, such as using an accessible critical viewpoint as a starting point.

While the specification recommends that teachers read and give feedback on only one full draft of the candidate’s response, there are no restrictions on the guidance given in relation to task setting in the initial stages. Ideally, the candidate will identify topics which genuinely interests him or her which will lead to a dialogue with the teacher about how best to word the actual task.

**Careful, considered task setting will save time and work later in the writing process.**

**Example of task setting dialogue between teacher and candidate**

**Step 1: Candidate A’s proposed title**

**An exploration of the way social expectations influence women in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Mothering Sunday* by Graham Swift.**

* The topic is too **broad** – *all* women? ‘*An exploration’* is very **vague** here and doesn’t help the candidate shape his/her material. Could the focus be narrowed to give more opportunities for depth of analysis?
* The term ‘*women*’ could invite candidate to treat characters as **real people**, especially as there is no explicit steer towards AO2. A more solid focus on the writers’ technique can be prompted by using a term such as “**presentation”**.
* Focusing on ‘*social expectations’* could be very risky, inviting the candidate to take a **context-led approach** so that characters are effectively used to illustrate sweeping generalisations about social conditions for women at the time of writing or of the novels’ settings. This is very likely to take the candidate away from a literary response and affect performance in all AOs.
* There is no sense of any **literary debate** here, making it more difficult for the candidate to structure a clear line of argument and address AOs 1 and 5 directly. Including an accessible, relevant critical view would be helpful, especially to candidates aiming at Bands 4 and 5.
* There is no reminder to explore **connections between the texts** for AO4.

**Following discussion with the teacher, Candidate A rewords the task.**

**Candidate A’s reworded title:**

***‘Antoinette has her creator’s sympathy but she is nevertheless a victim, powerless in a man’s world.’***

**How far do you agree? Consider how both writers present their heroines in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Mothering Sunday.***

* The **focus has been narrowed** to make it more manageable and the **critical view** will help candidate organise material into an argument for AO1 and AO5.
* There is a **clearer emphasis on a literary approach** in the reference to the writers’ presentation and the use of the term ‘heroines’, underlining their status as literary constructs rather than real people.
* Omitting the reference to ‘women in society’ will make it easier for candidate to strike the **appropriate balance between AO2 and AO3**, introducing contextual material when relevant to **inform a literary response**. **(TASK – TEXT – CONTEXT)**
* There could be a **more direct steer towards AO4** so that the candidate is exploring similarities and differences in the ways the writers present their heroines, how one text **informs** the other.
* The use of the view relating to *Wide Sargasso Sea* only could create an **imbalance** in favour of one text.

**Following further discussion with the teacher, Candidate A is encouraged to tweak the task a little further**

**Candidate A’s task:**

***‘Despite both writers’ obvious sympathies for their heroines, the female characters remain essentially constrained and defeated by an unjust world.’***

**With this view in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which both writers present the theme of entrapment in Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Mothering Sunday* by Graham Swift.**

* The critical view has been tweaked to encourage a **more equal balance** between the texts, rather than favouring one, as well as giving a **clear standpoint** with which candidate can engage in structuring an argument.
* Consideration of the ‘*theme of entrapment’* will allow a more confident candidate to explore **more conceptual readings** and move beyond presentation of character.
* There is a clearer invitation to make ‘***illuminating’* connections**.
* There is also an appropriate steer towards AO3 and a ***discussion*** of the significance of context in the reference to the ‘*unjust world’*, inviting consideration of a range of contextual influences as well as gender issues, such as race, class, etc.
* The term ‘*an unjust world’* can also be considered in reference to other **literary concepts,** such as fate versus self-determination, virtue versus evil, the importance of setting, etc.

**Discuss the “tweaks” made to the wording of this task following dialogue between Candidate B and the teacher.**

**Candidate B’s original wording of task**

***“After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished?”***

**Consider how the writers presentthe historical past in *The* *Remains of the Day* and *Atonement*.**

**Amended task**

***“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”***

**With this statement in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which both authors present the relationship between past and present in *Atonement* and *The* *Remains of the Day*.**

**Would you suggest any further “tweaks” or changes?**