



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCE
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2023

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' reports offer valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. They are written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and detail how candidates have performed.

This report offers an overall summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It goes on to look in detail at each question/section of each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.ⁱ

The information found in this report can provide invaluable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive annual programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 6 months after the examination.	www.wjecservices.co.uk or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the overall subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	www.wjecservices.co.uk
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	www.wjecservices.co.uk or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with invaluable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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Subject Officer's Executive Summary

All papers functioned as expected this summer with all questions being accessible to candidates. Assessment of the NEA remains problematic with approximately a third of centres having their marks adjusted as a result of the moderation process.

There were many excellent responses to the challenging texts of Unit 1. *Jane Eyre* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* remain the most popular texts. Weaving relevant contexts into responses was rarer this summer and timing remains a problem for too many candidates with the higher-tariff questions. As with the other papers in this qualification, colloquial language is becoming more of an issue. This is, perhaps, something to be targeted lower down the school so that candidates can adopt a formal, academic register by the time they reach their A/AS level studies. It is worth noting that nothing can replace a sound and thorough knowledge and understanding of the set text. The most successful candidates knew their texts well.

For Unit 2, the Principal Examiner noted that at their best, candidate responses were interesting, original and sophisticated. Rubric Infringements are still a hindrance to success for too many candidates in this paper and is an issue which still needs to be addressed by centres. As with Unit 1, candidates are most successful when they have a good understanding of the poems and of how to analyse poetry in general. Those who merely focused on poetic techniques could often miss the wood for the trees.

Unit 3 was sat by well-prepared candidates who were able to respond fully with an engagement and knowledge of the studied texts. It was emphasised that exam technique had improved in this exam series despite some weaknesses evident across the range of responses viewed. Timing could be an issue, especially where candidates had spent too much time on Section A part (i) at the expense of the higher tariff questions in part (ii) and in Section B. Some excellent, mature responses were seen in Section B. Connections were less successful where candidates had sought to compare through poetic techniques or the titles of the poems.

King Lear, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* were the most popular texts studied in Unit 4. The most successful responses tended to be focused and concise. With only two questions to answer in this paper, too many candidates use the time to write too much and their responses lacked focus and structure as a result. An ability to place the extract in its context concisely at the start of an essay in Section A was helpful and proved to be a better approach than writing long introductions to the extract-based question.

Some high-quality work was observed in many samples where centres had taken an exemplary approach to the NEA (Unit 5). Considering the age of the specification, not enough of this type of quality is seen in candidates' folders, however. Points raised in previous moderators' reports still ring true. Task-setting is still an issue and there are too many examples of literary analysis being sidelined with a reduced attention being given to AO2. As with Unit 1, there is no substitute to candidates knowing and understanding their chosen texts thoroughly.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
For Unit 1, candidates should remember that in Section B they are studying drama texts. They need to make full use of their knowledge of dramatic devices such as staging, stage directions, music, props and lighting.	Understanding Dramatic Texts	Blended learning resource.
Making and developing connections is essential in Unit 2 Section B essays.	Unit 2 Booklets	There is a booklet on each pair of poets for Unit 2 available on the WJEC Digital Resources site.
For Unit 3, candidates need a better grasp of poetic form and structure and the relationship between them.	Autumn 2019 CPD	The Professional Learning events in autumn 2019 focused on teaching poetry. The link takes you to the 'Training' tab on the WJEC English Literature site. Please click on 'Materials from previous events' in the menu to access the folder of resources.
In Unit 4, Section A, the Shakespeare extract, there were some excellent responses where candidates had focused on language and imagery and carefully selected quotations to enhance the depth of their analysis.	Shakespeare's Language	Blended learning resource.
The most important aspect of the Unit 5 Prose Study must be close reading and secure knowledge of the texts being studied.	Close Analysis of Prose Fiction	Although this link takes you to the Blended Learning resources for Unit 1, the same principles apply to studying prose texts for the NEA.

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UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

Overview of the Unit

There were many excellent responses to some quite challenging texts across both Section A and Section B. Indeed, many candidates engaged with the questions set and demonstrated a growing confidence when analysing the ways in which meaning is created as well as the significance of contextual factors. Some candidates confidently used alternative readings to illuminate their own interpretation of the texts which was pleasing to see. Once again, *Jane Eyre*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* were, by far, the most popular texts but it was lovely to see some centres studying *North and South* which is rich in context and allows the candidates to access AO3 with ease. It was, however, disappointing that in 2023 no centre chose to study *David Copperfield*. Although this is a lengthy text, it is a vibrant novel which allows candidates to explore the complexities of the mid-Victorian period and Dickensian London. There is also a plethora of academic critical material available which gives candidates the opportunity to explore alternative interpretations.

Overall, the quality of candidates' work is to be commended, especially as this is a closed-book exam across both sections. It was encouraging to see many centres engaging with advice from the previous Unit 1 Principal Examiner's Report, especially in regard to the Section A extract as fewer candidates wandered into discussing irrelevant contextual detail and critical opinion. It was enjoyable to read many of the responses written.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Prose (extract)

AO1

Once again, it should be remembered that AO3 and AO5 are not assessed for part (i) and responses that allude to irrelevant contextual information or alternative readings are self-penalising. Although it was pleasing that fewer candidates did this in the 2023 series, it is worth noting as there were still some examples of candidates bringing in irrelevant contextual and critical detail in Section A (i). Likewise, some candidates lacked focused, critical engagement with the extract and drifted into a narrative retelling of the plot.

The 'information for candidates' section on the Unit 1 paper's cover page recommends spending 20 minutes on Section A, part (i). A notable minority spent an excessive amount of time on this question, consequently compromising the quality of their part (ii) response and creating timing issues for Section B.

AO2

It is important that candidates clearly engage with specific textual detail and avoid simply embedding quotations with little or no analysis as this inevitably leads candidates into a drifting, narrative response. As in previous series, there were many interesting responses whereby candidates were aware of author techniques and commented on the effects of a writer's choice of language for effect.

Section A: Prose (Essay)

AO1

Many candidates took the opportunity to plan their responses beforehand which, more often than not, allowed them to produce more structured responses with a tighter sense of argument. Indeed, many candidates who took the time to *briefly* plan their essay were often awarded a higher band for AO1. However, as stated in previous Principal Examiners' Reports, it is important to note that examiners cannot award marks for planning, regardless of how detailed they may be. Moreover, there were occasions when examiners found that detailed planning meant that the essays were underdeveloped and candidates had, on occasion, resorted to bullet-pointing the end of the essay as they had simply run out of time. Timed essay writing in the classroom is recommended to support candidates with this issue.

As mentioned in previous reports and discussed at CPD training, centres should inform candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their wider essay writing. A significant number of candidates simply re-visited the extract with limited acknowledgement of the wider novel. This approach suggests a lack of confidence or understanding of the text as a whole and is self-penalising across the AOs.

The use of slang and informal phrasing was, unfortunately, common in many responses seen in the 2023 series. A significant number of candidates slipped into using colloquial expressions while also displaying an inaccuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In these instances, the candidates failed to achieve the higher bands for AO1 as they struggled to achieve an academic tone and displayed lapses in their fluency of expression.

AO2

There were many examples of candidates knowing and accurately quoting the text in detail which, as mentioned previously, is impressive in a closed-book exam. Once again, examiners noted that many successful responses carefully selected key quotations from focused parts of the novel rather than trying to cover the whole text.

As mentioned at CPD and in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, centres should advise candidates that, although this is a closed book exam, they are expected to integrate and evaluate relevant quotations from across the novel.

As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created, producing a narrative-driven response. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).

It is useful to emphasise that many candidates used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5. A close textual analysis is the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.

AO3

It is essential to remember that despite the heavy weighting for AO3, the most effective responses maintained a focus on the significance and influence of contexts, using relevant information to construct an analytical text discussion. A noticeable number of candidates strayed from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of unnecessary contextual information, appearing pre-rehearsed. Contextual references, including biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake.

Candidates are advised to use the 'task-text-context' formula to ensure that context informs, rather than dominates, their response. Unfortunately, context was not acknowledged at all by some candidates. Centres should take note of the mark allocation for this AO and ensure candidates understand the importance of alluding to *relevant* and, importantly, *specific* contextual details.

AO5

Candidates are expected to incorporate relevant alternative views to enhance their analytical discussion and build a personal response. Stronger responses incorporated relevant alternative views to foster a sense of debate.

Instances where candidates included lengthy, sweeping critical statements that were not integrated into their argument often failed to help them achieve the higher bands.

It is important to emphasise the importance of using academic sources for AO5. This year, examiners noted that there were more examples of candidates seeming to make up the critical quote/critic which did little to enhance their own sense of argument.

As stated previously, centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:

- *Engaging with* specific critical views i.e. literary criticism
- *Engaging with* critical perspectives i.e. Marxism/feminism
- Offering multiple readings of characters/events, etc.

There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps' or 'suggests'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

Once again, it was pleasing to see this novel being studied by more candidates than in the past and there were many interesting responses. A significant number of responses successfully used the extract as a springboard into the essay and confidently engaged with Austen's nuanced depiction of the significance of wealth in Regency society while alluding to relevant contextual detail. It was particularly enjoyable to read the responses which explored characters such as Lucy Steele and the Palmers as well as the more obvious characters such as the Dashwood sisters.

Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Predictably, *Jane Eyre* was the most popular Section A text in this unit and there were numerous examples of candidates confidently engaging with the critical view in the question to produce fluent, perceptive and academic responses. The question proved to be very accessible and it was pleasing to see a variety of approaches. Some candidates even explored the complexity of Brontë's depiction of the character of Jane herself, discussing the significance of her concealing her identity when fleeing to Moor House. Many confidently linked this to the novel's mid-Victorian context and the vulnerability of women at this time as well as the treatment of the socially outcast 'fallen women'. However, as noted in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, less successful responses only focused on the opening of the novel – particularly the 'red room' scene and Jane's time at Lowood, suggesting a lack of familiarity with the rest of the novel.

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

It was extremely pleasing to see a few responses to this text with candidates successfully exploring the relationship between Mr Thornton and his mother which was the focus of the extract. As mentioned before, this novel often allows candidates to connect their textual analysis to the wider Victorian context which led to some candidates achieving the higher bands for AO3.

Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

No responses seen.

Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The accessibility of the essay question was evident in the quality of responses seen as a significant number of candidates explored Hardy's nuanced depiction of marriage, connecting it to relevant contextual detail. A few responses analysed the significance of the author's own tumultuous relationship with Emma Hardy and the ways in which this may have shaped his fictional depiction of marriage in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It is, however, important to emphasise that if any biographical detail is included, that it is relevant and is clearly used to enhance textual analysis. Overall, candidates engaged well with the extract. Nevertheless, examiners did comment that a notable minority misinterpreted Henchard's words 'woman-hater' to suggest that he was a homosexual character with romantic feelings for Farfrae.

Section B: Drama**AO1**

As noted for Section A, it is important that candidates pay close attention to timings. It is advised that candidates spend *60 minutes* on Section B, so strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing underdeveloped responses for Section B.

As mentioned in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, it is important that candidates remain focused on the set question and do not begin writing a different essay to the one set. Some responses to *A Streetcar Named Desire* merged the two questions so it was unclear which they were answering.

AO2

Many responses demonstrated a confident understanding of writers' use of language and *dramatic features* for effect, quoting confidently from the text and exploring how meaning is created. It was also pleasing to see a significant number of candidates make full use of their knowledge of dramatic devices such as staging, stage directions, music, props and lighting. This is to be further encouraged.

AO3

As mentioned in Section A, centres are to advise candidates to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context *informs* rather than dominates the response. It is vital that centres encourage candidates to draw upon a range of specific contextual material and avoid generalised statements about the time periods. Some candidates were able to make thoughtful comments about the contexts of reception while others drifted into irrelevant biographical detail. While some biographical detail is important to understand a play's reception, it is important that candidates allude to the impact of biographical detail when analysing language or dramatic technique.

AO5

Once again, candidates must use other *relevant* opinion to *inform* their own discussion of the text and build a *personal response*. As with Section A, centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:

- *Engaging with* specific critical views i.e. literary criticism
- *Engaging with* critical perspectives i.e. Marxism/feminism
- Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.

There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps', 'suggests' or 'arguably'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.

Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

It was enjoyable to read many sophisticated and fluent responses which tackled the challenges of Marlowe's play with confidence. It is a popular text which allows pupils to access a wealth of contextual material to support their own interpretation of the play. Overall, candidates spent less time exploring irrelevant biographical detail; indeed, when biographical detail was discussed, it was often used to illuminate close textual analysis. This was reassuring to see.

Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

This text continues to grow in popularity with many interesting responses seen. The demand of the questions was appropriate and a range of responses were marked with a significant majority of candidates exploring the significance of props when analysing dramatic techniques. There were still examples, however, of pre-rehearsed opening paragraphs focusing on London Society and Oscar Wilde's life. Centres are reminded that this approach is not helpful for the candidate and is to be discouraged.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

A Streetcar Named Desire was the most popular choice of Section B text and Question 10 was, by far, the favoured choice for candidates this year. It was pleasing to see many responses analysing the effect of plastic theatre on the depiction of characters, especially Blanche. As mentioned in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, although the more confident candidates were able to discuss the nuances of the question, it is worth noting that the less confident candidates simply agreed/disagreed with the question's statement. Taking such a simple approach prevented them from accessing the higher marks for AO5.

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

This play is growing in popularity which is good to see. Indeed, a significant number of candidates followed the 'task-text-context' formula and used historical and literary contextual information to inform and illuminate their understanding of the play. The questions were accessible with a balance of candidates choosing to respond to each question, discussing the impact of dramatic techniques such as the overlapping dialogue.

Brian Friel: *Translations*

Too few responses were seen on this text to make adequate comment.

Summary of key points

- For Section A, part (i) questions, avoid AO3 and AO5. Only AO1 and AO2 are assessed here.
- Timed essay writing in the classroom is essential in preparing candidates for the exam. A number of candidates struggled with timing in this exam.

- Candidates need to have a thorough knowledge of the *whole* text.
- Context should always be *relevant* and *integrated* into the analysis of the text. Candidates should use the ‘task-text-context’ structure to ensure that AO3 informs rather than dominates the response.
- Remain focused on the set question. Avoid pre-learnt essays or regurgitating essays on similar questions to what has been asked.
- Candidates should remember that in Section B they are studying drama texts. They need to make full use of their knowledge of dramatic devices such as staging, stage directions, music, props and lighting.
- Candidates must use other *relevant* opinion to *inform* their own discussion of the text and build a *personal response* (AO5).

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UNIT 2: POETRY POST-1900

Overview of the Unit

Examiners were generally happy to note that most candidates had successfully prepared for and addressed the requirements of the examination. Some candidates responded to the texts with perception and sophistication, but it was disappointing to see a continued proliferation in Rubric Infringements in Section B, which had a detrimental effect on many candidates' attainment. Examples of specific Rubric Infringements and how to avoid them in future are detailed in the relevant sections. Yet again, some candidates had answered Section B before A; however, some candidates dedicated too much time to Section B leaving their Section A answers very brief or even incomplete. In some cases, this affected their marks for the section, and we would like to emphasise again for centres to provide more timed practice to avoid rushed and incomplete responses. Handwriting was problematic for a higher number of candidates this year and it was noticeable that legibility decreased as responses developed. Again, timed practice could help with this issue.

Duffy and Larkin were clearly the most popular pairing with a significant number of centres also choosing to study Sheers and Heaney. The pairing of Hughes and Plath wasn't far behind in popularity but only a minority of centres chose to study Thomas and Lewis. Although there was a slight increase in candidates, it was disappointing to see so few centres choosing the new pairing of Yeats and Abse.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Critical Analysis

Many perceptive responses were seen with some detailed and lengthy writing in the time permitted. However, many Section A answers this year were overly concise barely reaching two sides of the answer booklets with some only a page. These responses tended to be limited, lacked close analysis of the texts and did not always answer the questions set in enough detail. As we recommend candidates to spend approximately 45 minutes on this section, it is expected that candidates write in some detail. A very small minority of candidates answered both questions in Section A, a rubric infringement. Although examiners marked both responses and awarded the highest mark, the responses were invariably too brief and frequently infringed into time which should have been used for Section B.

More candidates than previously included many detailed references to context and critical views which in some cases dominated their responses. AO3 and AO5 are not assessed in Section A and their inclusion is self-penalising to the candidate.

AO1

Misreading texts was seen more often this year where the candidates responded inaccurately to the meaning and content of the poem. This, quite obviously, had an effect on AO1 marks. Worryingly, many candidates responded as if the text were an 'unseen poem' and as if they had never read the poems before. This was especially disappointing as centres and candidates had been provided with a reduced list of texts this year.

Structurally, many candidates looked at the theme in the poem through the use of techniques (a paragraph for each technique), e.g. Betrayal in 'Havisham' through the use of similes, metaphors, caesura etc. This approach is limiting and lacks cohesiveness when discussing the theme across the entire poem. Stronger responses tracked the examples of the theme through the poem.

Many candidates wrote general analyses on the named poems without focussing on the theme noted. Although aspects of the responses touched upon the themes, many of the essays lacked application to the wording of the question itself. AO1 marks were obviously affected in these cases.

As accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation is one of the foci of AO1, some candidates' marks were negatively affected by careless errors in expression, which led to a lack of clarity. Informality in register and tone was also still a problem for many candidates. Referring to the poets by their first names and voicing their opinion on the poets' lifestyles does not equate to an academic register.

Some candidates still made use of linguistic terminology usually seen in English Language A level. Some terms, of course, overlap but some essays were hampered by excessive (and not always correct) use of linguistic terminology. Merely recognising or labelling such features cannot be rewarded without being developed into analysis of the poem in the light of the question. More candidates seemed to be labelling basic parts of speech and although some use of this can be productive, many had either incorrectly named phrases or words and some responses were dominated by this approach.

AO2

Examiners saw some detailed and confident analysis of the poems chosen, many with a sophisticated balance between close examination of techniques used and the writer's intended meaning. Some candidates only dealt with a stream of implicit readings, however. While these have their place, some literary analysis based on techniques and effect would improve the overall quality of these responses.

Conversely, some responses depended on technique spotting without any detailed comments. This approach limits the marks awarded and would be improved considerably with an examination of the effect of the techniques on the reader.

Examiners noted that the strongest responses used a well-chosen selection of quotations and did not attempt to analyse every line of the whole poem within the time given.

Edward Thomas

Most candidates successfully analysed Thomas' use of language, particularly his use of first person. However, some candidates included AO3 (not assessed) writing about war or speculating about Thomas' state of mind or his struggles with depression. Some candidates struggled to address the question focus of the 'effects of nature' and presented a general analysis of the poem.

Alun Lewis

A less popular option than Question 1 and an option which produced less confident responses as some candidates struggled to comment on the change witnessed in the final stanza. However, there were some excellent responses which explored Lewis' use of dark imagery and the symbolism of the lake.

W B Yeats

This was the less popular option of the two Section A questions for Yeats/Abse, with a range of approaches to sorrow: some candidates focused on Yeats' relationship with Maud Gonne (which, in some cases, examined AO3 in too much detail) while others took a broader approach and discussed the effect of ageing. While there was a generally clear analysis in the responses with many candidates writing in detail on Yeats' techniques, some did not comment on the melancholic or regretful tone of the text.

Dannie Abse

This was a slightly more popular choice and responses were generally more successful. Most candidates discussed the cinema's atmosphere effectively, though some did not comment on the contrast between the reality of the valleys and the films shown in the cinema. More successful candidates explored Abse's use of religious imagery and the use of humour in the poem.

Ted Hughes

Examiners commented on some confident responses which dealt with Hughes' language and imagery very well, discussing the brutality of his language very well. Despite this, a small number of candidates struggled with the poem's imagery and did not analyse in depth. Unfortunately, there were some misread responses claiming that the pig may not have been dead. It was pleasing to see candidates avoiding references to AO3 in the majority of responses to this question.

Sylvia Plath

An equally popular choice as 'View of a Pig', producing some fairly strong responses to the poem dealing with Plath's use of imagery and poetic voice well. Some more successful candidates discussed Plath's use of the sense of self and imagery well. Contextual details on Plath's mental health were discussed in many responses, which couldn't be rewarded as AO3 is not assessed here. Most candidates, however, kept their focus firmly on AO1 and AO2.

Philip Larkin

A popular choice but many candidates struggled to engage with Larkin's tone and overall ideas. The most successful candidates grasped Larkin's wry comments on advertising and his use of symbolism. However, a high number of candidates misread the poem, mistakenly commenting that Larkin was a feminist writer or that 'the girl' was a living person.

Carol Ann Duffy

One of the most popular choices of the paper, where many candidates responded successfully and in some detail. Many candidates dealt with Duffy's dramatic monologue well, but some responses misread some aspects of the poem claiming that the persona was already married and that her partner was unfaithful. More successful candidates commented on the use of animalistic imagery and the significance of the poem's structure (especially when reflecting Havisham's fractured mind).

Seamus Heaney

A far less popular choice than Sheers' poem, examiners commented on many successful responses which discussed Heaney's use of symbolism. The most successful candidates explored Heaney's use of imagery and discussed the sensual imagery of the poem. A minority of candidates did not make the link between the otter and Heaney's wife while other weaknesses included detailed inclusion of AO3.

Owen Sheers

This proved to be a very popular choice with some interesting and original observations made on Sheers' depiction of the swans. Many would have benefited from a closer focus on mood and atmosphere. Some responses did not refer to the change in the final shortened stanza leading to a narrower approach, which did not always answer the question fully.

Section B: Poetry comparison

Examiners noted that far fewer plans were seen this year. Planning remains a key element in this section as balancing all five AOs needs clear structuring. Stronger responses in this section usually showed clear evidence of planning. It is recommended that candidates spend 10 to 15 minutes of their 1¼ hour planning their essays as structuring and developing their argument is crucial.

Rubric Infringements were extremely commonplace this year, mainly with candidates focusing on fewer than the four poems required. In some cases, up to 50% of candidates in a centre committed an infringement with the most frequent problem being candidates only responding to two poems despite managing to complete their essay. We would like to remind centres to emphasise the need to use *four* poems (two from each poet) to their candidates.

It was pleasing to see that far fewer candidates used poems named in Section A. This also constitutes a Rubric Infringement. Likewise, although not a Rubric Infringement, a few essays contained references to up to eight poems, which led to a superficial coverage of the texts. Informality continues to be a problem with many candidates writing in a non-academic register.

AO2

Stronger essays included an analysis of specific textual evidence as a link to contextual detail. Some candidates analysed their chosen poems in full, tracking through each line. This is unnecessary and time-consuming.

Examiners noted that it was pleasing to see some thoughtful and purposeful discussion of the poets' use of structure as well as close analysis of language and literary techniques. However, including references to form and/or structure are only rewarded if they are relevant to the question.

The use of linguistic terminology is often not linked to analysis. Such an approach should be discouraged. Indeed, candidates can sometimes seem to have a more comprehensive knowledge of techniques than an understanding of how poems work.

AO3

A major concern this year was the inaccuracy of contextual details. Many candidates failed to gain marks for this AO due to incorrect information pertaining to the poets' lives, eras and relationships. Some inaccuracies were seen across whole centres.

Contextual details were most successful when linked to specific aspects of the poems chosen while also linked to the question. Some original contextual links were seen but some, unfortunately, were not always relevant to the question.

Band 5 responses made excellent use of specific context linked to poems/quotations and included literary, social and historical context and not merely general biographical detail.

Context was woven into the essays more successfully this year and not tagged on to the end of responses. However, it was slightly worrying to see that some centres had omitted AO3 altogether.

Examiners saw many underdeveloped contextual links. As this AO is worth 20 marks, specific details are recommended. Conversely, some responses were dominated by historical detail. Examiners saw responses which included whole pages of (frequently irrelevant) facts which lost focus on the task and the text.

AO4

Many excellent and perceptive connections were made between texts with the strongest discussing similarities and differences while using specific quotations or commenting on the poets' use of techniques. However, due to lack of planning, links in some responses were very sparse.

Stronger responses included connections throughout and not just after the analysis of two poems. Planning and structuring the essay is vital to ensure this. Many confident connections were made when dealing with how the poems affected the reader.

It is recommended that candidates develop their links as many stated the connection between the poems but limited their marks by failing to expand upon their ideas. Attempting to link four poems simultaneously is unwise as it almost inevitably leads to a superficial approach.

Centres are reminded that linking poems by the same poet provides a limited scope for discussion. Connections made through AO3 (context) are to be discouraged.

AO5

More perceptive candidates dealt with this element with confidence and sophistication, weaving their critical discussion throughout their responses. Some candidates named critics and provided quotations from their sources which should be regarded as a prompt for critical discussion. Sadly, unless the candidate develops the view by linking it to the poem/quotation, they can only achieve limited success.

Likewise, examiners again saw the overuse of 'arguably' or 'perhaps' without a following interpretation or discussion. This approach could limit the candidate to Band 2 as they only acknowledge an interpretation. Sadly, some candidates did not explicitly address this AO at all in their responses. Such responses were self-penalising.

Thomas and Lewis

The most successful candidates produced well-structured, well-developed responses which incorporated context and made effective comparisons. The question on change was well-handled with explorations of changes in personal relationships, wartime, industrialisation and more. Less successful candidates focussed exclusively on the poets' experiences of war only. Responses to journeys were less evident, but they generally dealt with physical and spiritual journeys quite successfully.

Abse and Yeats

Question 14 on the depiction of loss was much more popular with very few candidates choosing the question on the depiction of women. Some of the same poems were used for both questions. Candidates made use of a range of poems covering historical, familial and personal relationships for both questions. Candidates also made good use of context, although there was a tendency to address context more directly for Yeats than Abse.

Hughes and Plath

Question 16 was by far the more popular of the two questions with many candidates successfully exploring the poets' thoughts and feelings through the presentation of nature. The most successful responses examined a wide range of poems all linked clearly to the question focus, whereas less successful responses dealt with nature but not always with its link to the poets. A recurring issue with this pairing is that some candidates over-emphasise the relationship between the poets without considering their influences beyond that relationship. Fewer candidates attempted Q15 but, in general, their focus was clearer and avoided over-biographical AO3.

Larkin and Duffy

Larkin and Duffy continue to be a very popular choice for centres and therefore a wide range of responses was seen by examiners. Question 18 proved to be clearly the most popular with successful answers including some perceptive and well-selected contextual detail. Some responses lost focus on the strength and weakness of human nature in Q17 and instead wrote responses dealing with characters only. Very few also displayed a clear understanding of Larkin's satirical tone in many poems selected for this question. Sweeping statements about the poets' private lives were prevalent in responses to both questions, with many inaccuracies on Duffy's background and upbringing and on Larkin's complicated private life.

Heaney and Sheers

Q19 was clearly the most popular choice with this pairing producing some confident responses to Heaney and Sheers' depiction of vulnerability in men. Examiners saw a range of responses using a generally relevant choice of poems although many responses tended to focus on the theme of men instead of their vulnerability. Responses to Q20 were less prevalent but made use of a broader range of poems and were generally quite successful. AO3 in responses to both questions tended to be dominated by Heaney at the expense of Sheers.

Summary of key points

- Avoid references to AO3 in Section A. Some comments might be rewarded for AO2 but it would be better to avoid references to contexts.
- For Section A, candidates should consider the poem as a whole in the light of the question. Analysing through focusing on specific techniques is not the most successful approach.
- Candidates should plan their essays carefully in Section B. Balancing all the AOs is a difficult task and requires some thought before beginning the essay.
- In Section B, candidates must write on four poems, two by each poet.
- Biographical information is often the most interesting contextual detail for the candidate, but literary and cultural contexts are usually far more rewarding in analysing the poetry.
- Making and developing connections is essential in Section B essays.
- If using a critical quotation in Section B, candidates need to ensure that they develop the points made and integrate them into their analysis and argument.

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UNIT 3: POETRY PRE-1900

Overview of the Unit

Candidates were clearly well-prepared for this paper. Responses were generally relevant, engaged directly with the questions and showed detailed knowledge of the texts. In most cases, Chaucer and Rossetti were the most popular, with Blake and Donne not too far behind. *Paradise Lost* was, as last year, a minority choice. There were candidates who based their answers (part ii) on two poems, the minimum really, often limiting the range of points they could make. However, it was gratifying this year to see many more who were able to discuss and make use of three or even four poems, giving candidates, writing about Donne for example, the opportunity to affirm and address different kinds of ‘close relationships’.

All three accompanying poems in Section B were used more or less equally to make comparisons with Murray’s ‘A Troop Train Returning’. However, there were still a small number of candidates who, as last year, ignored Poem A. They were able to obtain marks at AO1 and AO2 could not be awarded the marks available for making a comparison (AO4) with Poem A.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

On the evidence of this year’s performance, it’s fair to say that exam technique has gradually improved. Most candidates addressed the relevant AOs in a sensible manner. There are still concerns over the way some candidates deal with AO3 in part (ii). There was no shortage of contextual knowledge, which could be excessive at times, but there was still some tendency to present contexts in separate bits, unrelated to the question/text. The strongest responses linked relevant contexts to lines of text to enhance meaning and to develop the argument. Some candidates could have managed their time better, spending too long on the extract questions and sometimes writing too much on a part of the paper for which there are relatively few marks.

One feature of the scripts, that stood out inevitably, wasn’t so pleasing; examiners saw rather a lot of inaccurate writing this year, poor spelling and weak punctuation. There does seem to be more inaccurate writing than in the past. There are, no doubt, many reasons for this – reduced reading, social media – but the effect is to weaken the cogency of responses. The strongest candidates didn’t just offer confident answers (Band 5), they also wrote with clarity and fluency.

Chaucer

Part (i)

Candidates wrote very well about this extract, showing detailed knowledge of Chaucer's language and techniques, his use of irony, and showing a clear grasp of the complexity of the merchant's character. Responses were focused on the whole. Two weaknesses, though, are worth mentioning: some candidates wrote too much, going line by line through the passage. More than two sides on this question could leave insufficient time for the other questions on the paper. Less convincing responses addressed AO2 in a descriptive way, another weakness, often using terms like 'highlighting' or 'showing'. More analytical answers placed more focus on 'how' effects were created.

Part (ii)

Most responses clearly addressed 'masculine values'. More thoughtful drew attention to the ways in which Januarie and Damyant were used to explore the hollowness of the more idealised values of courtly romance and the bible. And argued that May and Proserpina were used by Chaucer to underline and undermine male hypocrisy. On the whole, 'masculine values' came in for a bit of a pasting. Theophrastus, the fabliaux and courtly romance were popular contextual references, mostly used relevantly.

Donne

Part (i)

Responses at their best showed close analysis of pertinent conceits, such as threaded eyes and 'firmly cemented', the latter a word everyone commented on while discussing 'togetherness'. The relationship between body and soul proved more elusive for many candidates, suggesting that some students were not very familiar with the poem. A surprising number of candidates referred to lines of the poem that were not in the extract suggesting they were familiar with the poem and wanted to show that. They didn't lose marks but wasted the opportunity to examine more closely the extract itself. (There were some interesting discussions as to whether the last line of the extract, 'And we said nothing all the day' meant true togetherness.)

Part (ii)

The key word in the question was 'close'. Candidates who paid close attention to it, were able to focus on oneness in 'The Good Morrow', or the mixture of bloods in 'The Flea', or the irritation of being in it in 'The Sun Rising', or the painful absence of it in some of the other love poems and in some of the Holy Sonnets. 'Stiff twin compasses' was a favourite conceit to illustrate just how close lovers could be. Some candidates underestimated the importance of the word and tended to write more generally about relationships in Donne's poems, resulting in responses that could lose relevance.

Milton

Part (i)

Most candidates commented on the separation from God, the shame felt by Adam and his desire to cover up and hide. At AO2 there was general awareness of the imagery of light and darkness in the passage. Many singled out the word 'savage' for comment. However, there was a significant group of candidates who seemed unclear as to just where the passage came in *Book IX's* narrative and struggled to place 'heaven of shapes' and found the references to woods a little 'impenetrable'. Their responses suggested, perhaps, limited preparation.

Part (ii)

The soundest responses looked closely at the changes in Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit and most commonly referred to the effects on the Garden itself. Some candidates showed quite remarkable knowledge of the whole of *Book IX* and argued that Milton had prepared the reader for the Fall right from the opening words of the Book. But examiners also noticed candidates who seemed to fall back on prepared essays on the Fall which typically placed *Book IX* in the context of the whole of *Paradise Lost*. Such an approach tended to neglect AO2 and even the central event of what you might call the Fall itself, namely latter part of *Book IX*. Candidates should try to avoid relying on prepared essays as they often lead to irrelevance and lack of focus. Some interesting responses discussed the relative responsibilities of God, Satan and Adam and Eve for the Fall; and these were often well supported by references to Milton's political views on authority and women.

Blake

Part (i)

Most candidates wrote relevantly and with enthusiasm about Blake's 'The Tyger'. It was clearly a poem they had studied in depth. Selective and focused responses were highly rewarded. But having detailed knowledge of a particular poem can have its pitfalls. Knowing so much meant that some candidates wrote too much. And some strayed into offering too much contextual information. Most responses were centred around Blake's questioning of God's nature and balanced this against his awe of God's creation.

Part (ii)

Most candidates based their answers on a contrast – of a benevolent, fatherly God and one of a seemingly crueller figure, a God Blake was critical of. They showed Blake's God to be a complex figure. And often related this view to the changes seen when comparing poems from 'Songs of Innocence' to those in the later, post-Revolution 'Songs of Experience'. Nearly all candidates were aware of Blake's attitude, as a dissenter, to the Established Church. This could be used relevantly but sometimes led to responses focused on the Church or religion more generally rather than on God. The majority of candidates were extremely well informed about the contexts of Blake's poetry and mostly used this knowledge appropriately. However, there were still too many gobblets of context included with little connection to question and text.

Rossetti

Part (i)

The majority of responses to the extract from 'Goblin Market' were of a high standard, often including an assured and detailed analysis of Rossetti's poetic techniques. Of all the poems and extracts in the parts (i) on the paper, this one showed the most enthusiastic engagement. But such enthusiasm could be dangerous and did lead too often to candidates writing too much and leaving as a result less time for part (ii). And also to candidates linking the extract to other parts of the poem and to more general understanding. Some candidates wanted to discuss sisterhood or to what extent the goblins resembled men.

Part (ii)

Rossetti is popular and there were many focused and detailed responses on 'relationships'. Many discussed the human relationships in the poems 'Have You Forgotten', 'No Thank You, John' and 'A Triad', and what social attitudes meant for relationships in 'An Apple Gathering'. Most argued that Rossetti's main relationship was with God and often used 'Twice' with its 'two parts' to show this Again, as with Blake, candidates were really well informed about the contextual influences on Rossetti and it was good to see knowledge of literary influences, such as Petrarch and Dante, being used effectively. Sometimes, too much zeal led to more biographical information than was necessary or relevant.

Section B

It's largely the nature of the connections that is important in this task. Strong responses focused on the kind of journeys in the poems, so on the peaceful, smooth train journey away from war in Poem A, compared to the rougher sea passage of Poem B, or the harm and guilt caused by the car journey of Poem C. Candidates noticed the importance of the natural world in all four poems, both as a setting and as the creator of atmosphere. This was often a source of extended comparisons. Some responses focused on connections based on smaller details and explored their significance: such as the 'white birds' of Poem A and the 'white bird' of Poem B; or the occurrence of trees, such as the 'willow-trees' of Poem A, the 'redwoods' of Poem C, and the 'trees . . . half-erased' of Poem D. Another useful area of connection was found in discussions of the voices of the poem, the use of first person singular as opposed to first person plural.

Other forms of connection were not so fruitful, such as comparing titles, an approach which could result in a lack of focus on 'journeys' and which candidates often found difficult to develop. Another approach, difficult to develop in meaningful ways, based connections on finding similar poetic techniques in the poems, looking at alliteration or enjambment for example. A significant number of candidates thought that a lack of regular form meant a poem lacked structure. Many responses claimed that the poems apart from Poem D, written in couplets, were unstructured. This seemed to show a confusion of structure and form. Indeed, many of the candidates who pronounced poems A, B and C to be lacking in structure then went on to show, successfully, how the shapes of the poems and use of lines helped to create the experience of the journey itself. Candidates in preparation for this paper might find it useful to discuss the relationship between form and structure. To judge a poem unstructured is virtually to condemn it to incoherence.

This year's candidates showed a marked improvement in the skill of comparing poems. Most of them shaped their responses around connections (AO4) of a meaningful kind. Relatively few discussed poems at some length separately, before then looking for connections. And the strongest responses showed an overall grasp of the poems before embarking on a more detailed discussion. Nevertheless, examiners felt that there were many candidates who didn't seem to have been exposed to the reading of a range of poems. It was often felt that misreading could be put down to lack of experience, to an unfamiliarity with the ways in which poems work. Probably nothing can replace the experience of reading and rereading of a range of poems as a preparation for the unseen section of Unit 3.

Summary of key points:

- Candidates should aim to write on at least three poems in the essay question in Section A part (ii).
- Contexts should always be relevant and be used to inform the reading of the text(s). The strongest responses link relevant contexts to lines of text to enhance meaning and to develop the argument.
- Candidates need to write with more accuracy, clarity and fluency.
- Poem A *must* be used in the response in Section B.
- In preparation for Section B, nothing can replace the experience of reading and rereading of a range of poems.
- Candidates need a better grasp of poetic form and structure and the relationship between them.

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UNIT 4: SHAKESPEARE

Overview of the Unit

This year the standard of work has been impressive, and there has been much that has been a pleasure to read. It is important to remember that this is a year group who have not experienced formal GCSE exams and who have had prolonged disruption to their secondary education. This is a closed text exam and, as in previous years, most candidates were able to draw upon a broad range of quotations from the texts.

In Section A, the extract question, candidates are only assessed on AO1 and AO2. There continues to be a not insignificant proportion of candidates who are not aware of this and make reference to contexts (AO3) and critical opinions (AO5), which can only be rewarded in Section B. There was also a notable trend of candidates writing lengthy introductions to their Section A answer, discussing the play as a whole or how the characters have been presented prior to the extract. Brief consideration of this can inform the response but at times there was almost a page of writing before the candidate began to analyse the extract.

In Section B, context is heavily weighted and worth 30 marks. Those who score highly on AO3 draw upon a range of contexts and always seek to establish the connection between text and context. Some centres appear to be teaching a 'set' introduction, often context related, which is of limited use unless the candidate is able to move from context to text. This approach can also lead to a 'false start' to the essay, as often the introduction bears little relation to the question.

As was noted last year, very long essays often deteriorate as they progress. There were also a significant number of candidates who extensively crossed out sections of the essay and used multiple asterisks, to add in extra material. These characteristics can indicate a lack of organisation and planning and a loss of control of the argument. Candidates might have been better off spending some time planning and writing a shorter, more organised response.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A (extract)

King Lear

King Lear was the most popular text this year. As the question asked about Cordelia and Lear, candidates found plenty to engage with in this extract. Responses considered both characters, although there was a slight leaning towards more comment on Cordelia. Stronger responses were able to comment on Shakespeare's use of Kent and the Doctor to add to the presentation of Cordelia. Less successful responses included a long summary of events leading up to this point in the play or heavy emphasis on foreshadowing, which lead to lengthy comments about other parts of the play.

Antony and Cleopatra

Candidates responded well to the dramatic tension between Antony and Cleopatra in this extract. They showed a strong awareness of the dynamics of the dialogue, including Cleopatra's initial dominance and the ways in which this shifted as Antony's attempts to interrupt became more commanding.

Hamlet

This was the second most popular choice of text. Candidates wrote with enthusiasm about Claudius' manipulative techniques, including how Shakespeare uses rhetorical questions and how Claudius bait Laertes with emotive language. Very successful responses showed awareness of the irony of many of the king's comments and how Laertes' short interjections are reflective of how masterfully Claudius engineers the response he desires. There was some misreading of the imagery of the 'flame of love', where candidates picked up on the fire references but did not consider the context of the line.

King Henry IV Part 1

A very small number of candidates studied this text. The few who wrote about this extract found plenty to say about tension and rising anger.

The Tempest

More successful candidates took careful note of the question, which asked about Prospero's 'thoughts and feelings' and were able to appreciate how Prospero's account of the past is carefully constructed to shape Miranda's understanding, as well as that of the audience.

Section B (essay)

King Lear

Question 6 was the most popular. Candidates were able to comment on the 'personal and political self-interest' of a range of characters and many successfully counterbalanced the view in the question by looking at Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and the Fool. Question 7 also produced many good responses. Candidates wrote well about the complex relationship between obedience and loyalty and how seeming obedience can disguise lack of loyalty. Contextual links tended to centre around the disruption of the 'Chain of Being' or 'Divine Right of Kings' but there were some very productive comments on parent and child relationships and attitudes towards the elderly.

Antony and Cleopatra

There were a small number of responses to both questions. Question 9 was more popular and candidates were able to draw upon a wide range of moments from the play where pleasure and duty were in conflict.

Hamlet

Question 11 was the most popular and candidates engaged in lively debate about whether the play is more about the consequences of 'excessive grief' than revenge. Many concluded that grief and revenge are inextricably tied together and looked at the different types of grief suffered by Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes and Gertrude. Question 10 produced some very interesting answers. Some insightful responses included analysis of the problematic identity of the ghost and Ophelia having her identity 'written' by men. Less successful answers tended to track through how different characters are 'playing a part' but not necessarily addressing the concept of 'identity'.

King Henry IV Part 1

Of the few who chose this text, most candidates responded to essay Question 13. There was enthusiastic engagement with the text, but some candidates needed to consider a wider range of contexts.

The Tempest

Some candidates struggled with the view in question 14 about Shakespeare drawing a 'fine line between authority and tyranny'. There were a good number of essays about 'authority' in the play but with no consideration of its relationship to 'tyranny'. Question 15 was answered more successfully, and the colonial context was used to good effect here. Candidates were able to clearly define what constituted 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' behaviour and examine a range of characters.

Summary of key points

- In Section A, the Shakespeare extract, there were some excellent responses where candidates had focused on language and imagery and carefully selected quotations to enhance the depth of their analysis. Answers which scored highly were not always the longest, reinforcing the point that quality is more important than quantity.
- As mentioned earlier, some candidates strayed into AO3 and AO5 which are not assessed in Section A.
- A successful response will usually move quite quickly to analysis of the extract. AO2 is the dominant assessment objective and so it is wise to avoid too much discussion 'beyond' the extract, as this will be assessed in Section B.
- In Section B, successful candidates were clearly seeking opportunities to address a range of contexts in their writing.
- Context is heavily weighted in Section B, but candidates should be reminded that context must always relate to their discussion of the text. There is still a tendency for some candidates to use a rehearsed 'block' of context at some point in the essay, sometimes in the introduction. If context is not clearly linked to the text, there is a limit to which band can be awarded for AO3.
- Use of material from the extract should be kept to a minimum in Section B, which is testing candidates' knowledge of the wider play.
- As noted last year, very long essays tended to deteriorate, in terms of quality of expression and analysis, as the essay progressed. Encourage candidates to see planning time as a valuable part of the writing process and discourage too much crossing out and use of asterisks.
- Handwriting that is difficult to read can make awarding a mark very difficult. It is always worth considering whether candidates might fare better if they use a word processor.

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UNIT 5 (NEA): PROSE STUDY

Overview of the Unit

The Moderation Process

This is to ensure that centres assess their candidates' work consistently and fairly, applying the criteria in line with agreed standards exemplified in supporting materials. Moderators judge the accuracy of the centre's overall marking, paying close attention to the on-script annotation from primary markers and the summative comments in support of the separate marks for each Assessment Objective.

In the majority of cases this series, the moderators were pleased to report candidates' work had been rewarded appropriately and the centres' assessment was secure. However, in just under a third of the centres entered, the initial sample suggested the criteria had been applied too generously. When this happened, the centre's work was referred to a senior moderator who reviewed the sample to decide whether to recommend adjustment to the centre's marking to bring it in line with accepted standards. In some instances where the rank order was insecure, the centre was contacted to request more examples of the candidates' work. No centre's marks were altered on the advice of a single moderator; only when the work had been seen by at least two moderators were adjustments considered.

An individual report was written for each centre, giving constructive feedback on assessment and internal standardisation to help the centre make their marking as secure as possible in future submissions. Moderators have a unique opportunity to see a wide range of different text combinations, approaches to task setting and good practice in annotation which can provide a useful perspective for centres who often see only their own candidates' work.

While centres had a free choice of text and task in this component, all texts had to be submitted for prior approval by WJEC. No indication of how the texts would be combined was required at that stage, however, so moderators may have commented in the report on the centre's text pairing. Reports may also have included reflections on the wording of titles and how well they allowed candidates to address all the Assessment Objectives. Centres were often directed to existing advice on task setting and standardisation on the WJEC website.

This Principal Moderator's report outlines the main findings of the moderation process condensed from the moderators' centre reports and is intended to help self-reflective departments review and adapt their own plans for preparing future cohorts for this component.

General Comments

The Unit 5 Prose Study provides a unique opportunity at GCE level for centres and candidates to pursue their own interests in terms of texts and tasks. It allows candidates to engage in close study over an extended period of time, developing academic skills that will be vital to candidates in further education and the world of work. The most successful centres balance the thorough teaching of the skills necessary to analyse prose texts with opportunities for independent study, allowing candidates to produce an original response.

Following a very unsettled period for candidates since early 2020, it has been good to see teaching and learning beginning to return to normality at most centres. It is still recognised that candidates sitting this unit in 2023 have experienced a great deal of upheaval, but hopefully most will have benefited from far more face-to-face teaching and a more consistent academic experience in their centres in the past year. As a result of such an inconsistent period of teaching and learning, however, centres have inevitably seen changes in the ways in which their candidates approach their studies, and this has perhaps had more impact on the Prose Study than on other units in the qualification. As noted in last year's report from the Principal Moderator, some areas in which progress had been made since the introduction of the unit are now proving problematic for many centres.

To reinforce the good practice seen in previous years and to ensure that Unit 5 continues to provide a valuable experience for candidates, this report will focus on these areas, with much of the advice very similar to that provided in previous years. As was the case last year, four areas are crucial in ensuring the most successful outcomes for candidates:

- Text combinations and task setting
- The importance of close literary analysis of texts
- Careful use of online study resources
- Secure assessment

This report will contain examples of best practice and problem areas from this year's submissions, but centres are strongly advised also to consult the Principal Moderator's Report from 2022 for a comprehensive review of this unit.

Administrative Issues

Despite the ongoing challenges of candidate and staff absence at many centres, moderators were pleased to note that the majority of samples arrived on time and in good order. Many centres took an admirably professional approach to the submission of the sample, and receiving work that was carefully presented made the moderators' task much more straightforward. Where good practice was seen in terms of administration, this meant that coversheets were completed in full, including comments specific to each AO, work had been annotated in detail to justify the decisions made, and all marks and signatures had been checked carefully. Where possible, careful internal moderation had been undertaken and the dialogue between markers was clearly indicated. In centres where teachers were working alone to deliver the unit, some chose to make close reference in the annotation to WJEC example essays to demonstrate the centre's understanding of and close adherence to the standards. Where there had been any problems with signatures or marks, contacting the Subject Officer or relevant department first is essential, and in such cases a covering note to explain the problem was always helpful. Such organised samples were a pleasure to moderate.

It is worth mentioning, however, that unfortunately many administrative problems were seen and these often caused considerable problems with the moderation process. The following issues arose most often:

- Incomplete coversheets or coversheets completed in pencil rather than ink. As the coversheet is a document of record, it is vital that it is completed in full; summative comments must be included here, even if comments have also been made at the end of the essay. Marks or signatures were also sometimes missing.
- Missing sample printouts or NEA checklists. The latter can be downloaded from the GCE English Literature page of the WJEC website.
- Essays sent as loose sheets, not securely stapled together, or with pages in the wrong order (this was particularly difficult when pages were not numbered).
- Clerical errors with adding up marks or marks on the response not corresponding to those entered on IAMIS. This tended to be an issue particularly when internal moderation had been undertaken but the final marks agreed upon were not clear.
- Lack of clarity about candidates being entered as part of consortia. The consortium issue can sometimes be unclear to both moderators and centres; a brief covering note to explain who has studied where can be helpful in clarifying the situation when candidates from different centres are entered in one sample.

Almost all moderators are working teachers themselves and recognise the busy nature of school life, however spending some time checking the sample thoroughly before it is submitted ensures that the process is a fair one for candidates and their hard work can be evaluated appropriately.

Preparing for 2023

As noted above, the same areas proved the most problematic for centres again this year and much of the advice remains similar to that provided in previous years. Happily, however, there were also a great many examples of good practice and moderators were keen to praise those centres that took time to prepare their candidates thoroughly for this unit. The majority approached the work with enthusiasm and creativity, and there was a real sense that candidates had benefited from the experience. These extracts from centre reports reflect the excellent work seen by many moderators:

Candidates produced very impressive, sophisticated responses. (They) offered confident arguments with sustained academic tone, firmly rooted in the craft of the writer.

It was a pleasure to read responses demonstrating such clear purpose and engagement. The candidates and their teachers are to be commended for their hard work and commitment.

All the sampled essays had been dual marked and there was detailed, thoughtful annotation throughout. It was also very helpful to have such clear evidence of internal standardisation. Given such good practice it was not surprising that the centre's assessment overall was accurate and in line with agreed standards.

Now is the time for centres to reflect on their practice and, hopefully, to use the advice contained in this report to refine their approaches further after this unsettled period.

1. Text combinations and task-setting

It was pleasing to see a variety of texts featured in this unit, and moderators were impressed by the range and ambition shown in a number of centres. As noted above, however, although most texts had been approved by the board as being of sufficient literary merit for A-level study, they were not always combined in ways that were helpful to candidates. The best combinations were those that provided a range of possible ideas to explore (rather than being chosen to focus specifically on one issue), with sufficient contrast for this element also to be productive. Most candidates wrote about novels, with some opting for short stories and a very few using memoir. In a reflection of current trends in publishing, more centres than ever this year chose to pair pre-2000 texts with post-2000 works inspired by them, often featuring the same characters or settings. Examples included *The Great Gatsby* with *The Chosen and the Beautiful*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with *Tenderness* or *The Secret History* with *When We Were Villains*. While this can seem to be an interesting approach and reflects the enthusiasm in popular culture for the 'backstory' of fictional characters, these combinations tended to be unhelpful to candidates, who often conflated the two novels into one 'world' and found it difficult to explore separate contexts and ideas.

Similarly, texts combined on the basis of issues explored, such as *The Color Purple* with *The Help* or *The Handmaid's Tale* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* also proved problematic for candidates, who again conflated the ideas and wrote largely about contextual material such as racial oppression or the subjugation of women in patriarchal societies, leading them away from close analysis of the ways in which the writers shaped meaning. At times, it seemed as though the centre had first decided on an idea or issue and had chosen the novels to fit this, a reductive process that would not provide candidates with a true sense of how and why novels are written.

Similarly problematic was the linking of texts by genre, such as dystopia or the gothic, which although at first glance might seem to provide a more literary focus, in practice often led to candidates resorting to describing the world of the texts or comparing the texts on the basis of a list of typical features; such approaches again led candidates away from thoughtful evaluation of the writers' methods. As last year's report advised, pairing a dystopian text with a non-dystopian one was helpful in ensuring candidates focused on writers' individual choices, rather than seeing the texts as merely representations of a genre.

When delivering the teaching of the unit, centres took a range of approaches, with more than one route to success. On the whole, candidates did not fare well when left entirely to their own devices in terms of study; candidates at this age are unlikely to have enough experience of studying prose texts to be able to do so entirely independently. However, the following approaches all worked well, and centres should decide what works best for their own candidates:

- Teaching both texts but providing a range of tasks to ensure originality and independence in candidates' responses.
- Teaching one text and allowing candidates to study the other text independently. In this case, the most successful centres had clearly kept a close eye on their candidates' independent study. Teachers had clearly provided guidance in terms of how to go about this task and how to identify useful critical and contextual material.

- Providing a free choice of both texts, but within a carefully planned and supportive framework. Where centres had taken this approach, the most successful had clearly delivered a structured programme of study around the analysis of prose techniques and successful ways of addressing the five Assessment Objectives.

Careful text selection is essential, and centres should consider, where possible, being prepared to adapt selections according to the individual candidate or cohort. The pairing of *The Great Gatsby* with *Atonement* continues to be very popular, but moderators felt that those candidates who could demonstrate confident and sophisticated understanding of these challenging texts together were few and far between. In the case of *Atonement*, it was clear that a great many candidates had not read the whole text, far less understood its very complex ideas. Most English teachers will recognise that, sadly, many A-level English Literature students are not the keen readers we would hope for and many would have done better with a shorter text, equally rich in prose techniques.

Task-setting continues to be a problem for many centres and a wealth of advice has been provided through CPD and Principal Moderator's reports to help centres with this aspect of the unit. All this material remains available on the WJEC secure website.

Carefully worded tasks are essential to candidates' success; more able candidates may be able to succeed despite a poorly worded task, but often have to spend time at the start of their essays defining what is meant by their tasks. For many candidates, their task wording will be a real hindrance to their success in this unit. For this reason, decisions on task content and wording cannot be left to the candidate and should ideally be the result of a dialogue between candidates and their teachers. Centres will recognise the work that goes into crafting exam questions to ensure that they provide the best possible opportunities for candidates, and Unit 5 tasks should be given the same care and attention.

Without repeating what has been explored in considerable detail in the 2022 Principal Moderator's Report, the following points are vital in ensuring a successful task-setting process:

- Rather than imposing a topic on the whole class, allow for the interpretation of texts in a number of ways and be guided initially by the candidates' interests. In a number of centres, although the tasks were worded differently all candidates were essentially writing about the same issue, for example patriarchal oppression or class barriers.
- Work with candidates to craft the wording of the task in a way that ensures a specifically literary focus.
- Ensure that the task will work equally well for both texts. With this in mind, it is usually best to avoid using a quotation from one of the texts in the task, which can lead to an imbalanced approach.

- As noted in the 'Text combination' section above, avoid directing candidates towards an issue-based approach with tasks on racial inequality, class barriers, female repression and identity. These tend to encourage candidates to write solely about the issues, often treating the characters as though they were real people, and to lose sight of the writers' craft in presenting a range of nuanced ideas. Asking a candidate to write about the 'individualised experience of trauma exacerbated by war and its effect on the psyche', for example, means the candidate will inevitably psychoanalyse the characters as though they were real. The concept of 'identity' has become increasingly popular in recent years, but in fiction is particularly slippery and difficult for all but the most accomplished candidates to define.
- Many centres find it helpful to include a critical statement as part of the task, as a useful starting point for the candidate's argument. Where this is most productive, however, centres have ensured that this takes the form of a contentious statement and that it provides a critical view of the texts being studied. Vague philosophical or sociological statements, such as 'Love often ends in tragedy', or 'Life is cruel rather than kind' again detract from the view of the texts as works of literature. Some candidates sought to over-complicate their tasks with very highbrow philosophical quotations in a bid to attain a sophisticated academic register; often the candidate was not fully able to engage with these and the essay lost focus as a result.
- Some tasks are too broad, such as 'the presentation of women' or 'the depiction of power'; a qualifying adjective and/or critical statement, as noted above, can help to narrow the task and focus the candidate's ideas.
- Equally, overly complex tasks asking candidates to look at several different areas, for example 'observation, surveillance and freedom' or 'power, money and social class' also led to unfocused arguments as candidates tried to grapple with too many ideas for a 2,500-3,500-word essay.
- Tasks requiring candidates to make value judgements on which text is better or how successfully writers meet certain criteria, such as the conventions of the crime genre, were also less successful. The unit requires the candidates to work with texts of equal literary merit and they should be encouraged to see them as such.

Difficult as task-setting might be, many centres do get this right and succeed in providing the best starting point for their candidates when embarking on this demanding piece of work. Examples of well-crafted tasks can be seen as part of previous Principal Moderator's Reports and in the CPD materials on the secure website.

2. The importance of close literary analysis of texts

We might reasonably expect that the analysis of writers' craft – 'ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts' – would be the foundation of any literary essay. Although equally weighted with AOs 1 and 2 and double the weighting of AOs 4 and 5, however, AO2 is increasingly the most neglected element of Unit 5. Moderators noted this year how many essays included less specific textual detail than ever before and this may be connected to the problems of reliance on online study materials, as outlined in point 3. Although AO3 has the same weighting as AO2, engagement with the craft of the writers should be the main driver of candidates' essays, with contextual and critical references used to enhance understanding, rather than taking over. Too often, texts were seen as evidence for contextual issues and candidates described or asserted ideas about the writing, rather than providing close analysis of aspects of the texts. Where analysis was undertaken, 'micro-analysis' was increasingly prevalent, with candidates plucking isolated words or phrases from the texts – often with little indication of where they came from – and using them to make large claims about characters or plot development. Characters were often seen as real people, treated as autonomous beings and products of their upbringing, often with candidates speculating beyond the evidence in the text about what might have led to their behaviour or decisions.

Many candidates focused on grammatical terms or on effects more relevant to poetry, such as alliteration or plosive sounds, but neglected important prose features such as narrative voice, character arc, structure, atmosphere, patterns of imagery etc. The most successful candidates showed a clear appreciation of specific prose devices and were able to 'zoom in and out' of the texts, by linking their close analysis of specific sections to wider patterns in the writing throughout each text. While the application of literary terminology is rewarded under AO1, the labelling of effects without exploration of how they were used often gave candidates a false sense of having met AO2 criteria when in fact little analysis had been undertaken. Even though candidates have studied a novel at AS level, the most successful centres recognise that they will still need considerable reinforcement of their understanding of the novel form and its conventions. Encouraging candidates to make detailed notes, to plot character development and to identify patterns in language and imagery can all help to consolidate their understanding of the texts as carefully crafted works of art.

Again, some of the problems outlined above stemmed from candidates having insecure knowledge of their texts and therefore lacking the confidence to range across them and make these connections. In these cases, candidates tend to turn to online materials, which can provide a 'quick fix' to explain plot or outline character, but rarely provide in-depth analysis of the ways in which texts are crafted.

3. Careful use of online study resources

Far too many candidates seemed to have spent more time reading *about* their texts through online study guides and contextual material than they had on ensuring really thorough knowledge through reading the texts themselves. These websites can mislead candidates about what constitutes appropriate literary analysis, as they tend to provide commentary of meaning with embedded quotation rather than close evaluation of writers' techniques. With their informal, conversational style and desire to make the texts accessible, they tend also to encourage a 'real people' approach from candidates, where characters' motivations are discussed as though detached from any authorial responsibility. This translates into superficial responses with a narrative or descriptive approach. The construction of an argument, the use of an academic register and close analysis of texts are all diminished by overuse of such online material.

The best responses were those where candidates clearly had a confident knowledge of their texts, established a strong line of argument, closely linked to the wording of their tasks, and were able to analyse in detail how writers shaped meaning. Increasingly this year, however, moderators observed that many essays not only shied away from close analysis, but also seemed only loosely linked to the task wording, with texts often treated largely separately. In many cases this seemed to stem from candidates collating a range of generalised material from study sites and other sources, rather than thinking through and structuring a specific response to their task. This lack of confidence in their own reading skills is perhaps an inevitable result of the upheaval of recent years, making it all the more important that centres take a rigorous approach to the teaching of prose techniques and the candidates' study skills.

Online resources are naturally also candidates' first port of call for contextual detail, but even as context becomes increasingly dominant in candidates' responses, secure understanding of contexts has in many cases diminished. As we move further into the twenty-first century, the twentieth century is increasingly being referred to in the sweeping terms previously reserved for the more distant past. Moderators were surprised to find the last century - perhaps the century seeing more political, societal and technological change than any before, referred to in its entirety as an 'era', or to see such assertive statements as 'Like every other woman in the 20th century, Celie has been conditioned to believe that she must rely on her husband for material items such as clothes'. Such statements were not helpful in shedding light on the texts. Again, providing candidates with the tools to recognise subtlety in their use of context will result in a more productive understanding of how it can be used when reading the texts. Centres which provided candidates with printed materials or with links to useful resources helped them to make use of more relevant material in their responses. CPD materials also contain resources that can be used directly with candidates to reinforce their understanding of the effective use of context.

4. Secure assessment

Centres where marking was secure provided realistic assessments of their candidates' achievement, balancing strengths and shortcomings in their annotation. Rather than focusing purely on what has been done well, it is always helpful to see what the candidate might have done better in order to ascertain why the centre has placed the work in a particular band.

Best practice in this area meant detailed annotation throughout candidates' essays, with close reference to both AOs and descriptions of attainment within those AOs, for example 'AO2 B4 secure grasp' or 'AO4 B3 clear and appropriate'. However, in order to assess these qualities accurately, centres must be familiar with the standards as exemplified through the benchmark responses available on the WJEC website. Where problems were found with a centre's assessment, often these qualifying terms had been used where understanding of the standards was not secure and the work did not support this judgement. Where possible, dual marking and/or internal moderation was helpful in ensuring secure assessment of candidates' work; when moderation has been undertaken in a centre, it is helpful to provide some annotation to convey how this has influenced the final decisions made and to ensure that final marks are clear. The use of the term 'Agreed' on every essay from some centres did not convince moderators that the internal moderation process had informed the final marks awarded. For small centres or where internal moderation is not possible, referring to the WJEC example essays mentioned above in the annotation can be helpful to justify assessment and to indicate understanding of the required standards.

The importance of careful task-setting was again evident when evaluating the accuracy of centres' assessment. Where candidates were all writing in response to the same texts and task, often the centre had scaffolded their responses and candidates tended to make the same points and use the same textual support throughout. This made it much harder for the candidates to show originality and for the centre to distinguish between the quality of different essays. In these cases, the rank order was often insecure.

Although centres were on the whole confident about what constituted AOs 1, 2 and 4, AOs 3 and 5 have become increasingly confused over recent years, leading to inaccuracies in assessment. While the band descriptors for AO5 refer to 'relevant interpretations of texts', indicating critical views of the texts themselves, many centres have been rewarding the expression of any view by an external source as AO5, even when this is a statement about context. At times this year, annotation appeared as 'AO3/AO5' suggesting the two were interchangeable. Close reference to the benchmark folders on the WJEC website would assist centres in recognising the differences between the two. CPD materials also contain useful tasks that can be used with candidates to demonstrate how to use contextual and critical material productively.

Moderators were impressed by the many examples of good practice seen in the assessment of candidates' work, however, particularly where centres were responding positively to recommendations in the previous year's report. Some centres continue to have their marks adjusted every year and should review their assessment procedures as a matter of urgency to avoid further disappointment for their candidates.

Summary of key points

Following the observation in last year's Principal Moderator's Report that candidates were perhaps being subjected to a great deal of misery in their Prose Study texts, there seemed to be a slightly more positive element emerging this year through some candidates' text choices. Hopefully this trend will continue as we all seek to remind our students of the joys of reading and its value in enriching our understanding of the human experience.

In promoting the pleasure to be had through reading, however, we all recognise that it can increasingly be a struggle to ensure that candidates read their set texts in full, and to do so more than once. Candidates should feel reassured that the most important aspect of the Unit 5 Prose Study must be close reading and secure knowledge of the texts being studied, surely a more accessible starting point than trying to collate chunks of material from a range of online study guides. Happily, there were many examples of excellent work from candidates demonstrating what can be achieved in this rewarding unit. As well as taking on board the familiar messages outlined here, centres are encouraged to consult last year's Principal Moderator's Report as well as CPD materials on the WJEC website for further detailed guidance on all aspects of the delivery and assessment of this unit. Hopefully, centres will find the advice contained in this report helpful in refining their approaches and ensuring the most successful outcomes for candidates next year.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team are on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4292

Email: gceenglish@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/english-literature-as-a-level/#tab_overview

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

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Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

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ⁱ *Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.*