

GCSE English Literature

TEACHING FROM 2015

Frequently Asked Questions

Is my centre able to make entries for WJEC GCSE English Literature?

The WJEC GCSE English Literature specification, accredited by Welsh Government for first teaching from September 2015, is available to:

- all schools and colleges in Wales
- schools and colleges in independent regions such as Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

These qualifications are **not** available for candidates in schools and colleges in England.

Do you offer training for centres?

Yes. Details of our [training](#) can be found on the WJEC website and we offer a range of [support material](#) on the [subject page](#) and the dedicated WJEC [digital resources](#) site. On demand [webinars](#) to support your teaching of GCSE English Literature can also be found on the training tab.

Where can I find important dates for this course?

Key Dates are posted on the WJEC GCSE English Literature webpage. A list of all important dates for the academic year can be downloaded from [here](#).

Can WJEC GCSE English Literature be studied in one year?

Yes, it is possible to study the course in either one or two years. See pages 7-9 of the [Teachers' Guide](#) for possible long-term, course plans.

What texts can I study for WJEC GCSE English Literature?

The prescribed text list can be found in the summary of assessment of the [specification](#). The list is reviewed every three years to ensure continuing suitability for teaching and assessment. The texts fit into the following units of study:

- Unit 1 Section A: Different Cultures Prose
- Unit 1 Section B: Comparison of two unseen poems

- Unit 2a: Literary Heritage Drama and Contemporary Prose
- OR**
- Unit 2b: Contemporary Drama and Literary Heritage Prose

- Unit 3 Section A: Any play by Shakespeare
- Unit 3 Section B: Welsh Writing in English

What poetry is studied during the course?

In preparation for the **Unit 1 Section B comparison of two unseen poems**, centres can choose their own contemporary poems for study. However, in the [specification](#) (see p.19), WJEC have provided a list of contemporary poets whose work could be used to prepare learners for this section.

For **Unit 3 Section B non-examination assessment**, learners are required to study 15 specified poems from a stipulated list from the Library of Wales anthology, Poetry 1900- 2000: One Hundred Poets from Wales (edited by Meic Stephens, 2007 edition). Learners then answer a thematic-based question where they consider the ways in which the thematic link is explored in at least two poems from the stipulated list. The list of poems and the theme are changed on an annual basis and can be accessed on the Non-Examination Assessment task tab on the [WJEC secure website](#).

Is spelling, punctuation and grammar assessed on the course?

Yes, however, there are no discrete marks attached to the study of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Indications of the required degree of accuracy/clarity for each band is stated within the assessment criteria descriptions.

Are the examinations open or closed book?

Whilst learners can be given clean copies of the text(s) during Unit 3, the Non-Examination Assessment, **examination Units 1 and 2 are closed book**.

How can learners demonstrate textual knowledge and support in a closed book exam?

This can be done through confident use of specific details, paraphrase, and very short, embedded quotations (a word or two, a phrase at the most). Extensive quotation has always been discouraged. Learners, particularly those in the middle range of achievement, can get trapped into quoting at great length, and not always entirely relevantly, when they have the text in front of them. Similarly, such learners can be prone to simply copying out annotation or editorial notes, for which credit cannot be given.

Useful information on closed book examinations can be found in the Key Information section of the [Key Documents](#) tab. Closed book, open minds.

How do I approach teaching the extract question?

It should be made clear that, in the extract question, if learners can back up their argument with evidence from the text, their interpretation is likely to be valid. However, they should not get so caught up in analysing the detail that they neglect the content – what is actually going on in the extract. Learners should check the focus of the question and ask themselves why this particular extract has been chosen. They need to focus on the whole extract and avoid being general; they should always be specific and support what they say with reference to the text of the extract. Learners must also be encouraged to write a strong, focused opening, summing up the argument they will present in the answer as a whole, and clearly addressing the question posed.

For more guidance on teaching the extract question, see p. 10 of the [Teachers' Guide](#).

Furthermore, the [January 2020 Principal Examiners' report](#) stated the following, which may be helpful in preparing learners for the extract question:

Characteristics of good extract responses:

- Clear and sustained focus on the specific extract, not the context of the novel or storylines
- Selection of short, apt references to support points made
- Clear grasp of subtext, what's 'really' going on in the extract.

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- Clear knowledge of the assessment objectives being assessed
- More thorough coverage of the extract
- More selection of supporting references rather than general impressions
- **Don't answer questions on novels you have not read!**

Should Learners be encouraged to use Point, Evidence, Explain (PEE)?

Methods such as Point, Evidence, Explain (PEE) or Point, Evidence, Technique, Explain, Refer (PETER) may be ways in which learners can effectively engage with texts, organise their ideas and give their arguments direction. Such approaches should be used as scaffolding – to be removed once the skill is mastered – and not be seen as a means to an end for analysing texts. Candidates will be credited for thoughtful selection and engagement with the writer’s craft. Introducing such strategies could help learners with the following, but must be used in the context of the question/extract set:

- link to the focus of the question – learners should use key words or phrases from the question
- use evidence from the text to support what they think – including references to language techniques or structure
- include discussion of the evidence, and links to any other possible evidence, before referring back to the question.

How many quotations should learners aim to use in the essay question?

Learners should not be concerned about counting the number of quotations they have used. The mark scheme states that “relevant selection of key scenes and events” is a key skill and learners can show this either by direct quotation, or by paraphrasing or referencing, to show their knowledge of the text. In the top band, it is expected that “references will be wide-ranging and detailed” and that ideas are conveyed with “apt textual support”. As this is a closed book exam, it is helpful for learners to be encouraged to include quotations to demonstrate these skills, but examiners are not expecting a certain number of quotations. It would be difficult to quantify the number of quotations typical of a ‘successful’ response as learners may approach the essay question in different ways; it is important that WJEC does not prescribe an approach that could prove limiting to some.

Learners are credited on what they can do and ‘textual reference’ does not exclusively imply direct quotation.

The [January 2020 Principal Examiners' report](#) stated the following, which may be helpful in preparing learners for the essay question:

Characteristics of good essay responses:

- clear appreciation of how context shapes characters' attitudes and motivations
- selection of a range of apt events and quotations to develop and support ideas
- some analysis of how the writer's message is conveyed through characters, relationships and events.

Ways in which performance could be improved:

- practice in how to structure and sustain a response
- practice in creating clear, cohesive arguments which address the question asked
- more focused discussion of how contextual factors affect characters' personalities, choices, ambitions, stories
- practice in selecting detailed textual evidence for ideas.

Where is AO4 assessed?

AO4 (relating texts to their social, cultural and historical context) is assessed in Unit 1 Section A essay questions, and in Unit 2a (literary heritage drama) and Unit 2b (literary heritage prose) essay questions.

How can learners address AO4 in these questions without using too much biographical detail or writing a history essay?

Learners need to be reminded that context is only one of the areas that they are being assessed on; the text they have studied should be the main focus of their attention. It is also important to note that the social and cultural aspects of the text are as important as the historical elements.

Learners should focus carefully on answering the question. Questions which assess AO4 have been structured to help learners focus on this aspect of the texts in their responses. It will remind them to write about how a character, relationship or theme in the text they have studied is affected by the time and place in which the novel or play is set. For further guidance in how to use social, historical and cultural context in an essay, see p. 12 of WJEC GCSE English Literature [Teachers' Guide](#).

How do I approach teaching the unseen poetry comparison question?

Learners should be encouraged to read and re-read the unseen poems in Unit 1 before they begin to write about them. They should be aware that their opinions may alter once they've read through a poem a couple of times. Learners should be able to select evidence that supports their interpretation of the poems and explain their interpretation. They should be encouraged to track through the poem systematically, reading in units of sense, not line-by-line.

When comparing and contrasting the poems, there are three main approaches:

1. After a general introduction about both poems, write about poem one, then about poem two. Then make points of similarity and comparison between them.
2. After a general introduction about both poems, write about poem one, then write about poem two, referring back to poem one and noting similarities and differences as you do so.
3. Discuss both poems at the same time (sometimes called an integrated approach).

Whichever approach learners choose, they must make sure that they write a roughly equal amount for each poem and ensure that they are highlighting similarities and differences between them.

For more guidance on teaching the poetry question, see pages 22-23 of the [Teachers' Guide](#).

Furthermore, the [January 2020 Principal Examiners' report](#) stated the following, which may be helpful in preparing learners for the unseen poetry comparison question:

Characteristics of good poetry responses:

- practise timing responses for coverage of both poems as well as a clear comparison
- probing of subtext, tentative interpretation rooted in the poems
- strong focus on images, language and effects.

Ways in which performance can be improved:

- more exposure to ways in which poets use language in different ways
- more focus on how ideas are conveyed through imagery
- careful reading of poems to avoid misunderstanding

Practice in supporting ideas about mood and meaning with detailed reference to the poems.

Is there any non-examination assessment (NEA) in the qualification?

Yes. **Unit 3: Shakespeare and Welsh Writing in English** is internally assessed and externally moderated.

Section A: Shakespeare gives learners the opportunity to study any play by Shakespeare chosen by the centre. WJEC set a generic task on a specific theme which centres may use or modify.

Section B: Welsh Writing in English requires learners to study poetry from the Library of Wales anthology *Poetry 1900-2000: One Hundred Poets from Wales*. Learners study fifteen specified poems listed for the chosen theme. WJEC set generic tasks on the theme and centres may use or modify one task. Centres must ensure that the task requires comparison of at least two of the poems.

The generic tasks, stating the focus for study for both Section A and Section B, are published annually via the WJEC [secure website](#). Please ensure that tasks are valid for the year of entry.

When should I do the NEA tasks with my learners?

Centres can choose to cover the NEA at any point during the course. Centres should, however, ensure that there is sufficient time to allow for marking and internal standardisation, to undertake and complete any internal appeals, and to input marks prior to the deadline of 24th March. (The Unit 3 NEA submission deadline for PRUs and special schools is 5th May.)

Are centres required to have the NEA tasks formally approved by WJEC?

No. There is no requirement for centres to submit their modification of the tasks for approval. However, if you are uncertain about or need support with any non-exam assessment tasks, please email gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

We will be happy to offer advice.

How do I administer the NEA?

It is important that non-exam assessment is rigorously monitored by centres to ensure that learners' work is their own.

Learners may have up to two hours to complete each section of the non-examination assessment (which can be broken up into shorter units of time to suit the centre's needs) and the assessments must be completed under formal supervision, where no teacher feedback or assistance is allowed.

Learners are **not** permitted to take notes into the non-examination assessment sessions. They may, however, have access to clean copies of the texts.

A coversheet must be completed for every learner (coversheets can be found on the [Key Documents](#) Non-Examination Assessment section of the WJEC website). Each coversheet must be signed by the learner and the teacher as a declaration that it is solely the learner's work, even if their work is not part of the moderated sample.

Centres may find it helpful to refer to the [NEA Checklist](#) to ensure that all the administrative elements have been completed.

AO3 is double the weighting of AO1 and AO2 in Unit 3 Section B NEA. Should learners be spending half their assessment time on AO3?

The assessment weightings of this section of the NEA does mean that learners will need to address AO3 in some detail as it has a 50% weighting. In their links and comparisons, learners should consider the different ways writers express meaning and achieve effects in relation to the stipulated theme.

It is important to remember that AO1 and AO2 also need to be addressed in this assessment and learners can do this by looking at the poems individually, as well as through exploring connections.

Care should be taken in setting the specific tasks for learners so that it can be ensured that they can fully access the criteria for AO3, as well as for AO1 and AO2.

When awarding a mark for Unit 3 Section A and B, should an individual mark be given for each separate assessment objective?

Yes, teachers should award separate marks for each assessment objective when deciding on the overall mark for the Unit 3 NEA. Furthermore, supporting comments for the overall mark awarded are necessary. The assessment cover sheet is structured so that this requirement is made explicit.

What happens if a learner goes over the word count for the NEA?

Each assignment should be **sustained** and around **1000-1500 words** in length. This word count is advisory only, to steer learners to produce a response of an appropriate length. As such, there is no fixed penalty if learners write more or less. Learners who offer work that is too short, however, are self-penalising by not allowing appropriate coverage of the required assessment objectives; those who exceed the advisory word count are penalising themselves through a lack of precision and focus.

What should I do if I need to request an extension to the NEA submission deadline?

Where a centre has been affected by circumstances beyond its control, it may, in exceptional cases, be possible to grant a short extension. Such exceptional cases could include technical issues at the centre; individual candidates with health issues; school disruption for example, fires or severe weather issues at or around the submission date.

In such instances the centre should contact the Subject Officer who will consider the request for an extension. Contact details can be found on the [subject page](#).

It would not be possible to grant an extension on the basis of internal mark appeals, school holidays, or long-term teacher sickness, for example.

How do I submit the marks for the NEA?

Marks are submitted to WJEC via the Internal Assessment Mark Input System (IAMIS). IAMIS will be open for centre use at least ten days ahead of the deadline for submission (24th March).

The first step in preparing to input marks is to request a secure website log-in as a secondary account holder from your Exams Officer. Your learners' names/candidate numbers are pre-populated on the system from the entries your centre has made. You can submit marks as soon as the submission window opens. Marks **must** be inputted and submitted by the submission deadlines.

For further details, please refer to the guidance on the WJEC webpage: [Internal Assessment – Submitting Marks](#).

How do I choose the NEA sample?

Once the marks have been submitted on IAMIS, a sample of candidates will be identified automatically by the system. This sample will ensure that at least two folders per teaching group are included.

If the sample contains a learner whose work is incomplete, then subject teachers should indicate on the system the nearest learner (either higher or lower) with complete work. This should be from the same teaching group. The incomplete work should not be sent to the moderator.

An explanatory note to the moderator must accompany the folders in such cases where the sample sent by the centre differs from the sample chosen by the system.

How do I access my NEA moderator report?

Moderators' reports will be available on the [WJEC secure website](#). They will be available to view and download from results day until Christmas.

Some candidates may be entitled to certain arrangements to support them whilst taking examinations.

A wide range of access arrangements are available, for example, provision of reader, scribe, extra time etc.

All applications for access arrangements and reasonable adjustments should be processed using the online system, Access Arrangements Online (AAO), used by all JCQ awarding bodies. AAO can be accessed from the JCQ Centre Admin Portal (CAP) via the [WJEC Secure Website](#).

Where can I find past papers and mark schemes?

Past papers and their mark schemes for all WJEC GCSE English Literature examinations from the past three years of exam series (for both Higher and Foundation tiers) are available on the [Past Paper](#) tab of the subject webpage.

How can I access exemplar that demonstrate the marking standards for this qualification?

[Exemplar responses](#) for Units 1, 2 and 3 can be found within the Key Documents tab on the WJEC GCSE English Literature webpage. In addition to this, there is also an [Online Exam Review](#) site. From here, you can download responses annotated by the Principal Examiners and clean versions of the responses to use in the classroom. (Please note, you may need to download the marked and annotated exemplar on OER using Adobe Acrobat Reader.)

What resources are available to help me deliver this course?

There are plenty of new and engaging resources tailored to support you in delivering WJEC GCSE English Literature. These can be found on the [Resources](#) tab on the website.

Under [Digital Resources](#), you can find: interactive **blended learning resources** on texts such as *Of Mice and Men*, *Heroes*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Blood Brothers* and *A Christmas Carol*, as well as Welsh Writing in English, Poetry resources for the NEA; **Knowledge Organisers** for examination and NEA texts and for the unseen poetry comparison; and an **Exam Walk Through** for each of the English Literature examinations.

The [Teachers' Guide](#) also offers detailed advice on ways to successfully deliver the specification, from guidance in delivering the NEA and advice for examination preparation, to long-term course plans and mark schemes.

We have also produced a detailed [Resource Guide](#), which is an essential document for teachers as it curates the key support, guidance and resources offered by WJEC.

Where can I find Sample Assessment Materials for the specification?

[Sample Assessment Materials](#) are available within the Key Documents tab on the WJEC GCSE English Literature website. This document contains sample examination papers and detailed marking guidelines.

In addition, examination papers will be available on the WJEC secure website on the day the results are issued for that series. Assessment materials will then be published on the WJEC public website six months after each assessment, that is, in July for the winter series and in December for the summer series.

Are there any re-sit opportunities for WJEC GCSE English Literature?

Learners may re-sit an individual unit once only. The better mark score from the two attempts will be used in calculating the final overall grade. If any unit has been attempted twice and a learner wishes to enter the unit for the third time, they will have to re-enter all units. This is referred to as a 'fresh start'. When retaking a qualification (fresh start), a learner may have up to two attempts at each unit. However, no results from units taken prior to the fresh start can be used in aggregating the new grade.

Marks for NEA may be carried forward for the life of the specification. However, if learners wish to re-take the assessments, a new task must be given. If a learner wishes to re-sit unit 3, then both sections must be completed, and new tasks must be undertaken.

If a candidate has been entered for, but is absent for a unit, the absence does not count as an attempt.

Do normal unitised assessment regulations still apply?

Yes, unitised assessment regulations still apply, that is, at least 40% of the qualification must be taken at the end of the course, and learners may re-sit a unit only once before certification. Please refer to section 4 of the [specification](#) for further details.

Can candidates sit units at different tiers?

Yes, as a unitised qualification, it is permissible for candidates to be entered for different tiers in WJEC GCSE English Literature, as raw marks are converted to UMS.

If I have any more questions who do I contact?

The GCSE English Literature team and the wider WJEC team will be happy to answer any queries you might have.

For administration queries please contact:

GCSE Admin Section
029 2026 5082 / 5154 / 5420
gcse@wjec.co.uk

For access arrangements please contact:

Special Requirements Section
029 2026 5155
Specialrequirements@wjec.co.uk

For all other subject queries please contact:

Kirsten Wilcock
Subject Officer
029 2240 4291
gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk

Sara Charles
Subject Adviser
029 2240 4291
gcseenglish@wjec.co.uk