



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

AS ENGLISH LITERATURE (NEW)

SUMMER 2016

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ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education
Summer 2016
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced
UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

General Comments

There were some outstanding responses to a variety of texts which impressed the examiners. Indeed, many candidates demonstrated a confident understanding of their chosen texts, discussing how meaning is shaped with growing sophistication while taking into account the influence of relevant contexts and different interpretations. However, there were some candidates who did not address the AOs effectively.

Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

Points for Consideration: Extract

(i) AO1

- It is important that candidates clearly engage with the given extract, and select material relevant to the question, avoiding irrelevant comment on context or other parts of the novel.
- Some candidates lost focus on the question and drifted away from, for example, the **relationship** between two characters to talk generally about characterisation or plot.
- As stated in the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 paper, it is advised that **20 minutes** is spent on Section A, part (i). A significant minority of candidates spent too long on this question which affected the quality of their part (ii) response.

(i) AO2

- It was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writer's techniques, in addition to the use of language, when exploring how meaning is created. However, in some cases, candidates simply embedded quotations in order to produce a narrative re-telling of the extract with very limited analysis. It can be useful to think why a writer has used a specific word or technique and to discuss the connotations displayed.

Points for Consideration: Essay

(ii) AO1

- Effective planning is essential in order for candidates to produce a concise and clearly structured essay. There was some evidence of planning where candidates had taken time to think about their approach to answering the question. There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches.
- Centres should advise candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay response: candidates should not spend too long re-visiting the extract.

- Expression raised some concerns, especially the use of a colloquial register and candidates' inability to maintain an academic discourse. Centres should also discourage candidates from using terms taken from English Language – phrases such as lexical sets, semantic field etc. – as this often hindered literary analysis.
- Candidates should be conscious of embedding their contextual references (AO3), critical views (AO5) and their supporting comments from the text (AO2) with subtlety, clearly linking to the topic in question. Some candidates lacked both sophistication and relevance when attempting to integrate critical views and contextual information.

(ii) AO2

- As with the extract responses, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5.

(ii) AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Due to the heavier weighting of this AO, a significant number of candidates wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of extraneous contextual information. Contextual references, including biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake. Candidates are advised to use the formula: 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than engulfs their response.

(ii) AO5

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.
- It was, however, pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

Notes on Texts

(01) Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

There were some confident and perceptive responses for both the extract and essay question. However, the focus of the extract proved problematic for some candidates who failed to realise that Eliza, as opposed to Marianne, is the subject of Willoughby's conversation with Elinor. Indeed, many candidates seemed to find the essay question more straightforward and there were a range of interesting approaches to the idea of 'undisciplined desires' with some candidates choosing to explore the issue through character while others took a more thematic approach (e.g. undisciplined sexual desire/ desire for money or status).

(02) Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Although all five pre-1900 prose texts were taught across centres in Wales, *Jane Eyre* was, by far, the most popular choice. In a number of extract responses, candidates discussed the underlying power struggle between Jane and Rochester, successfully commenting on Brontë's use of techniques (e.g. Rochester's use of the possessive pronoun 'my') in addition to the contrast between Jane's sensible dialogue and Rochester's excitable language. A significant minority of responses, however, lost focus on the **relationship** between Jane and Rochester and produced a simple character analysis on either Jane or Rochester. With regard to the essay's focus on 'female empowerment', weaker candidates simply stated that it was not the 'novel's greatest appeal', and proceeded to write a pre-prepared essay on another unrelated topic, while the better responses explored the complexities of the issue. Candidates' answers were strongest when they analysed authorial techniques, with valid support, and then linked to contextual information or critical views to build a coherent argument. Centres should take note that bland, sweeping statements about patriarchal Victorian society did very little to allow candidates to access the top bands: candidates need to be specific when linking to the mid-Victorian context of *Jane Eyre*.

(03) Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

Too few responses were seen on this text to comment.

(04) Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*

Although this was not a popular choice of text, there were some very good responses which demonstrated a level of sophistication and confidence when handling a long Victorian novel. The extract proved generally unproblematic with many candidates successfully demonstrating a secure knowledge of relevant concepts and selected appropriate textual support to build a fluent discussion which analysed the power struggle between Uriah and Mr Wickfield. Likewise, there were some perceptive essay responses as most candidates took the opportunity to explore the way in which characters other than David are used by Dickens to criticise class/ sexual/ moral inequalities of Victorian society (Mr Micawber and Little Em'ly proved popular choices).

(05) Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

This was a popular choice of text and examiners saw some sophisticated responses. The extract question on Lucetta proved generally unproblematic and most candidates identified that Lucetta's despair is set in contrast to Hardy's depiction of Elizabeth-Jane. Less successful responses, however, tended to lose focus on the extract to comment on Lucetta's previous relationship with Henchard and, as such, slipped into a narrative re-telling of the causes of the skimmington. With regard to the essay, for the most part, candidates engaged well with the statement that the 'relationship between men and women inevitably ends in discord', with the majority of responses discussing Henchard and Susan/ Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane. Candidates' answers were strongest when they wove contextual information and textual analysis together rather than spending time discussing Hardy's relationship with Emma in a disjointed manner.

Section B: Drama

Points for Consideration

AO1

- As with Section A, planning is essential for candidates to construct a perceptive and coherent discussion of the text. As stated on the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 exam paper, it is advised that candidates spend **one hour** on Section B. Strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing brief and underdeveloped responses for Section B.

- The use of terminology is vital in so far as it creates precision and economy in drama essays. However, a listing of dramatic techniques will not in itself contribute to the quality of an essay and frequently only works to undermine clarity and relevance.
- The strongest answers kept focus on the question throughout the essay, using the beginning and end of each paragraph to develop a perceptive argument.

AO2

- As with Section A, a significant number of candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These essays tended, therefore, to slip into narrative which undermined critical engagement.
- Some candidates wrote with confidence on language and sub-text but did not pay attention to the effect of the dramatic devices used (e.g. stage directions, lighting, music etc.) and the way a play is structured.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5.

AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Due to the heavier weighting of this AO, a significant number of candidates wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of extraneous contextual information. Contextual references, including biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake. As with Section A part (ii), candidates are advised to use the formula: 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than engulfs the response.

AO5

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, some candidates quoted lengthy sweeping statements from critics and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.
- It was, however, pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

Notes on Texts

Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

Overall this proved to be a popular choice of text with the majority of candidates choosing to answer Question 6 on pity rather than the alternative question on necromancy and magic. A large number of very strong discussions on whether Faustus is a figure that audiences pity moved away from the very obvious material to explore the complexities of his character, successfully using Aristotelian theory as relevant literary context to produce a perceptive and coherent discussion. However, weaker responses simply listed some technical terms to describe a tragic hero without any attempt at engagement. Question 7 also produced some very good responses which purposefully placed *Doctor Faustus* in context to explore the effect of magic and necromancy on the audience. Some candidates who selected this task, however, ignored the question's emphasis on 'Marlowe's **dramatic** use of magic and necromancy' which prevented them from achieving the higher bands for AO2.

Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

There was a balance of candidates responding to both questions and examiners read some confident and perceptive discussions of this late-Victorian play. The strongest responses to Question 8 focused on staging as well as dialogue, for example the symbolic and dramatic effect of the fan and its links to the theme of deception. Less successful candidates wandered away from the issue of deception to generally discuss the character of Mrs Erlynne while some made sweeping statements about Oscar Wilde's biography without using it to inform their own argument. Similarly, Question 9 responses were, on the whole, focused on the statement that 'an obligation to family is secondary to selfish passions' but candidates need to be cautious in overenthusiastically agreeing with the question's critical quotation: this often undermined creative engagement with the text.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

This was the most popular choice of drama text with many candidates opting to answer Question 11 on the fragile nature of female identity. Indeed, the majority of responses were able to engage with the character of Blanche Dubois although the weaker candidates did this at a more narrative level. The more successful essays discussed the roles of Stanley/ Mitch/ Stella to address Blanche's vulnerability, exploring Williams's use of symbolism while making relevant contextual links to the position of women in 1940s America. Question 10 also produced some excellent answers with the more confident candidates analysing the juxtaposition between physical violence and psychological suffering. However, less successful responses simply listed the instances of Stanley's violent outbursts with some descriptive commentary.

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

For the limited number of candidates who had studied this text, there was not a marked difference in popularity between Question 12, which asked candidates to explore the difficulty in sympathising with characters that mainly represent issues, and Question 13 on adventure as a means of women experiencing freedom. With a play such as *Top Girls*, there was plenty of opportunity for candidates to approach both questions in a number of ways by focusing on a variety of characters. However, it is important that characters in Act One of the play are treated as literary constructs rather than straightforward historical people to ensure that responses are critical in nature.

Joe Orton: *Loot*

For the very few candidates who had studied *Loot*, Question 14 on the farcical excesses was marginally more attractive than Question 15 which focused on Orton's use of characters to expose the disorders and self-interests of 1960s society. Weaker responses to Question 14 simply described the farcical scenes of the play at a narrative level while the better candidates took the opportunity to explore how farce and black comedy shapes character, purposefully engaging with the question's critical statement. Likewise, there were some good responses to Question 15 although less successful candidates drifted into a bland discussion of context without demonstrating a clear understanding of the text as drama and its use of dramatic technique.

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POETRY POST-1900

General Comments

Some excellent and highly perceptive responses to the texts were seen although some responses were self-penalising due to a lack of focus on relevant AOs. Some candidates' work was very difficult to decipher due to handwriting issues and the use of very light ink. As these examinations are scanned, it is vital that the candidates use black ink pens. We would also urge centres to provide candidates with timed practice in order to avoid rushed and illegible responses.

Duffy and Larkin were clearly the most popular choice of poets although, in view of context and background, it has been noted that it was disappointing to see so few centres choosing to study Welsh poets.

Section A: Critical Analysis

Many perceptive and sophisticated responses were seen with some writing in great detail and length for the time allowed. It is recommended that candidates spend no more than 45 minutes on Section A as the broad AO coverage and 80 marks on offer in Section B require planning and a longer response.

It was disappointing to note some candidates including lengthy references to contextual detail in this section as it is clearly noted that only AO1 and AO2 are assessed.

AO1

- As AO1 accounts for 50% of the marks, it's imperative that candidates focus on the wording of the question. Many candidates provided a general analysis of the poem chosen without clear reference to the theme stated in the question.
- Accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation is also a focus of AO1, and some candidates' marks were affected by careless errors in expression which led to a lack of clarity. It was also saddening to see the mislabelling of basic parts of speech by many candidates.
- Likewise, some candidates did not write in an appropriate register and were strikingly informal.
- It is recommended that candidates are discouraged from using linguistic terminology usually seen in English Language A level as it frequently hampers literary analysis.

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 responses, however, 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.

Q.1. Edward Thomas

Re-read 'And You, Helen' on page 130. Explore the ways in which Thomas depicts commitment in this poem. [40]

There were some confident and thoughtful responses to the question with stronger answers containing a precise focus on tone and structure as well as Thomas' use of language. These answers also dealt purposefully with the theme of "commitment" thoroughly. Unfortunately, some candidates addressed the theme of "love" which, although obviously having links to "commitment", was not the requirement of the question. Contextual details of Thomas' and Helen's relationship were also far too prevalent in some responses and, in a minority, dominated the essay.

Q.2. Alun Lewis

Re-read 'The Public Gardens' on page 26. Explore the ways in which Lewis observes human behaviour in this poem. [40]

Unnecessary contextual detail was also present in many responses mainly dealing with Lewis' wartime experiences. Nevertheless, some responses offered a perceptive analysis of the poem and it was pleasing to see different but valid interpretations of the text. Few candidates, however, made reference to the italicised "coda".

Q.3. D H Lawrence

Re-read 'A Snowy Day in School' on pages 20/21. Explore the ways in which education is presented in this poem. [40]

Although this was not a popular choice, there were some confident responses dealing not only with the teacher's point of view but also the mood created by his pupils. Again, there were many overlong references to Lawrence's own teaching career at the expense of AO1 and AO2.

Q.4. Gillian Clarke

Re-read 'Front Page' on page 45. Explore the ways in which Clarke explores sorrow in this poem. [40]

For the limited number of candidates who responded to the poem, there were some sensitive and thoughtful answers to Clarke's portrayal of sorrow. Stronger answers commented on her use of imagery and the purpose of the structural choices.

Q.5. Ted Hughes

Re-read 'Bayonet Charge' on page 11. Explore the ways in which Hughes depicts war in this poem. [40]

Some confident responses were seen although some candidates wrote solely on the soldier and not on the focus of war. Contextual detail was also a problem with some answers with many referring to Hughes' father's experiences in the First World War. Some candidates did not cover the entire poem, missing the opportunity therefore to comment on the change of pace/tone in the three stanzas.

Q.6. Sylvia Plath

Re-read 'Morning Song' on page 21. Explore the ways in which Plath portrays motherhood in this poem. [40]

A popular and largely successful choice which brought up a range of interpretations. Some candidates viewed Plath's attitude as close to nihilistic whereas others thought her view of motherhood was realistic: both are valid. There was some unnecessary contextual detail regarding Hughes and Plath's marriage along with details of their children. It is strongly advised not to include any other AO apart from AO1 and AO2 in this section.

Q.7. Philip Larkin

Re-read 'Ambulances' on page 31. Explore how Larkin presents mortality in this poem. [40]

The responses to this very popular question included some outstanding and almost philosophical discussion of the poem's presentation of mortality with close analysis of Larkin's use of imagery. However, some wrote entirely on the theme of death with very small minority writing on morality. Close reading of the question is obviously a high priority.

Q.8. Carol Ann Duffy

Re-read 'Confession' on page 11. Explore the ways in which Duffy portrays religion in this poem. [40]

Another highly popular choice where most candidates responded successfully. Despite this, many included detailed contextual links to Duffy's attitude to the Catholic Church, her sexuality and her childhood: again, not relevant to the question. There were also some candidates who included examples of AO3 and AO5 which detracted from the quality of the AOs assessed.

Q.9. Seamus Heaney

Re-read 'The Toome Road' on page 7. Explore the ways in which Heaney explores conflict in this poem. [40]

Many candidates responded with detail to the question and were generally quite successful. Some weaknesses included a misreading of "headphoned soldiers" and "backdoors on the latch", where some believed the latter to mean "locked". There was, unfortunately, a preponderance of contextual detail mainly relating to the "Troubles".

Q.10 Owen Sheers

Re-read 'Valentine' on page 6. Explore how Sheers portrays love in this poem. [40]

This proved to be quite a popular choice with some perceptive analysis of imagery, structure and meaning. There was, however, some misreading as some candidates believed that Sheers' depiction of love was entirely positive especially in the final line. Although there were fewer contextual links witnessed, it's important to note that discussing the poem's position within the anthology was not awarded any credit.

Section B: Poetry comparison

AO1

- Stronger responses in this section usually showed clear evidence of planning. It is recommended that candidates spend some time planning their essays as structuring and developing their argument is crucial due to the assessment of all five AOs.
- Some rubric infringements were seen, mainly with candidates focusing on fewer than the four poems required.
- 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.

It is important for centres to note that poems named in Section A should on no account be used in Section B; this also constitutes a Rubric Infringement.

AO2

- Stronger essays included a well- selected analysis of the texts as a springboard for contextual detail and links.
- Many excellent explorations of texts were seen but some dominated the essay at the expense of AO3 and AO4.
- 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.

AO3

- As this AO is worth 20 marks, contextual references need to be focused and relevant to the question asked and the poems used.
- Band 5 answers made excellent use of specific context linked to poems/ quotations and included social and historical context not merely general biographical detail.
- Furthermore, it is recommended that context be woven into the essay and not added onto the end of the essay.
- The inaccuracy of some contextual detail is a matter of concern as some candidates referred to incorrect birthdates, locations and relationships.

AO4

- The strongest answers linked specific quotations/ use of techniques/ structure and discussed the differing effects on 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.

- Some candidates attempted to link poems by the same poet which provided a limited scope for discussion.

AO5

- Unfortunately, some candidates omitted this AO completely without any reference to alternative readings or critical views which led to a mark of zero.
- Some others named critics and provided quotations from their sources. Sadly, unless the candidate makes some use of the view by linking it to the poem/ quotation, their marks are limited.
- Likewise, examiners saw in some essays the overuse of “arguably” without a following interpretation or discussion.
- However, some candidates responded with excellent critical discussions and provided sophisticated and autonomous readings of the poems.
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Thomas and Lewis

Q11. How far do you agree that Thomas and Lewis are alike in the way they portray the effect of war on people? You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Q12. "One can never overstate the influence of setting on the poet." In response to this view, explore connections between the ways in which Thomas and Lewis write about their surroundings. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Examiners read some perceptive and well developed responses on the texts with the strongest candidates linking Lewis and Thomas’ poems with confidence. Q 11 was the most popular choice but both questions yielded some strong answers analysing the poets’ writing and selecting relevant contextual detail. Some responses’ contextual points, however, focused almost exclusively on the poets’ struggle with depression. Although this could be relevant (depending on the texts chosen) many over-emphasised the link and would have been more successful examining other influences/ links between Thomas and Lewis.

Lawrence and Clarke

Q13. "While focusing on the natural world, the poets may also explore other issues." In the light of this view, explore connections between the ways in which Lawrence and Clarke write about nature. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Q14. "For both Lawrence and Clarke, the world can be an uncomfortable place." In the light of this view, explore the connections between the ways Lawrence and Clarke write about suffering. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

A limited number of candidates studied these texts but most answers displayed a clear and generally well balanced approach to the AOs required. Connections between Lawrence and Clarke’s poems were interesting but examiners would remind centres that specific text based links are generally more successful than merely context based links.

Hughes and Plath

Q15. How far do you agree that Hughes and Plath are alike in the ways they write about landscapes? You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Q16. Some readers have argued that "Both poets express exaggerated reactions to ordinary life." In the light of this view, explore connections between the ways in which Hughes and Plath present powerful emotions. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

A popular choice which produced some interesting connections. It was pleasing to see such a wide range of texts used for both questions with many candidates not only examining the poets' backgrounds but the literary influences on their works. Some responses to Q15 did lose some focus on "landscapes" and primarily dealt with the poets' portrayal on nature. Although there are similarities, some AO1 marks would have been affected.

Larkin and Duffy

Q17. "Their attitudes towards society are critical, even cynical." In the light of this view, explore connections between the ways in which Larkin and Duffy write about society. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Q18. "In the work of both poets, there is a strong sense of the past." In the light of this view, explore connections between the ways in which Larkin and Duffy write about the past. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

By far the most popular choice of texts, and examiners saw a wide range of responses. Stronger answers dealt with a range of poems and included some perceptive and well selected contextual detail. However, many responses contained some basic references to Duffy's sexuality and Larkin's relationships regardless of their relevance to the texts/question chosen. There were a few rubric infringements in Q18 where candidates chose "Confession" as one of their four poems; this has a detrimental effect on AO1 and AO4.

Heaney and Sheers

Q19. "Writers can never fully escape their heritage." In the light of this view, explore connections between the ways in which Heaney and Sheers write about their respective cultures. You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

Q20. How far do you agree that Heaney and Sheers are alike in conveying their views about their communities through the creation of characters? You must analyse in detail at least two poems from each of your set texts.

A popular choice with most candidates choosing to answer Q19. Examiners saw a range of responses using quite a wide choice of poems. Stronger answers examined the poets' techniques and use of structure as well as creation of meaning, making perceptive links throughout their responses. Sadly, some candidates referred to "The Toome Road" which constituted a rubric infringement; centres are reminded of the ruling regarding the use of any poem named in Section A for any Section B answer.



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