



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2016

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

General Certificate of Education

Summer 2016

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

UNIT 1: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CREATIVE WRITING

This was the first time that Unit 1 had been sat by candidates as part of the new AS specification in Wales. Whilst examiners expected to see some issues related to timing, exam strategy and new assessment objectives, on the whole, candidates responded well to these new challenges; most centres had taken on board advice from previous specifications, and in particular AS unit LL1, as well as from CPD training and had prepared students well for Unit 1.

Effective planning of time is essential in Unit 1, where candidates have two questions to answer: comparative analysis and creative writing, which has three strands to it. Unfortunately, some candidates did not plan their time effectively and so did not complete, or in some cases attempt, the comparison of their own writing, Question 2 (iii), and therefore were not able to achieve higher than half of the marks for Question 2.

Technical accuracy and quality of written expression is assessed in AO1 for Question 1 and 2 (iii) and in AO5 for Question 2 (i) and (ii) and candidates are reminded on the exam paper that assessment will take into account the quality of written communication used in their answers. However, in some responses, written expression contained lapses, not only in key spellings but in sentence construction, punctuation use and sometimes in clarity of meaning.

It is vital that candidates are equipped with a wide ranging set of technical terms before attempting this exam, in particular for Questions 1 and 2 (iii). The best responses this summer used a wide range of technical terms confidently (AO1), explored approaches meaningfully (AO2) and made thorough comparisons and contrasts between the texts (AO4). Contextual material (AO3) was also most effectively used when relevant to meaning. Weaker responses often struggled to use technical terms, with many using just one or two basic terms; had difficulty linking the approaches identified to the meanings in the texts for Question 1 or in their own writing for Question 2 (iii); and failed to compare and contrast effectively. There are online CPD resources available on the WJEC website to assist with the teaching of terminology as well as frameworks for supporting comparative responses. It is vital that centres make full use of the resources on offer to best serve the interests of their candidates.

Section A: Comparative analysis of poetry and unseen text.

Candidates had to write about the poem 'The Kraken', taken from their anthology, and had a choice of unseen text and could write either about an extract from a television documentary 'Searching for Sea Monsters' or an extract from 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea'. There was a reasonably even distribution of responses to the unseen choices offered, with perhaps more candidates opting for Verne's prose extract. On the whole candidates handled the analysis of the poem well, identifying some key linguistic and literary features, such as the prepositions Tennyson uses, and dealing well with the possible meanings of the text. Most centres had obviously prepared their candidates well with this anthology poem, and some responses were very insightful and perceptive indeed. Similarly, on the whole candidates handled comparisons well, identifying some key connections between the texts. Most responses correctly commented on the poetic form and metre of Tennyson's poem and

made useful connections to the more active and threatening sea monsters in the unseen texts. Productive links were made to the unseen extract from the television documentary with many candidates identifying key points of comparison between the two texts, with most commenting on the narrator's sensational and hyperbolic tone, in comparison to the more sleepy Kraken. Most candidates securely identified the audience and purpose for this spoken text and better responses made reference to its colloquial aspects. Similarly, candidates were able to use the similar dates to link Tennyson's poem and Jules Verne's extract, with many looking at the similarities of language used in the two, such as the use of metaphorical and rhetorical features to describe sea monsters.

The significance and influence of contexts in which texts were produced and received (AO3) was worth a quarter of the marks for this question, and candidates needed to make some sustained and embedded references to context in order to meet the requirements for the upper bands in their response. Some candidates struggled to say anything meaningful about the context of Tennyson's poem, limiting their comments to the fact that he was a Victorian poet, but not applying context more specifically than that. Centres should encourage candidates to think about the social, cultural, religious and political implications of the time that the poem was written, as well as the biography of the poet and any contextual issues raised in the poem's meanings. Candidates will also be rewarded in AO3 for comments on readership and interpretation, and some responses fruitfully commented on how the poem and the unseen texts manipulated the audience responses of excitement and fear in their descriptions. We saw some very confident evaluation of context in references to science versus religion, to Darwin's theories, to Leviathan and to Tennyson's own interesting life. Contextual analysis was most successful when it illuminated something in the poem.

Errors in the identification of terms was a sometimes an issue here, as in Question 2 (iii). Errors which occurred most frequently were the misidentification of 'Below' in the poem and some problems identifying word classes in all three texts. Listing often proved challenging, with misidentification of both syndetic and asyndetic lists, as did vocatives and narrative voice. Some candidates dealt very well with some challenging aspects of syntax in unseen texts, and this was pleasing to see, as they had obviously been very well prepared for the examination.

Section B: Creative Writing and Commentary

The key to doing well on this section relies on effective time management and planning in order that enough links and connections are embedded in the two written pieces so that pertinent connections can be made in 2 (iii) at relative speed. Candidates needed to pay careful attention to genre, audience and purpose in the written tasks and should have made sure that they were producing the text type that they have been set.

2 (i) An extract from a travel article

2 (ii) An extract from a play script

Responses were generally sound in 2 (i) and most candidates demonstrated a secure awareness of the appropriate genre, audience and purpose for the task of travel article writing. This is a text type they should be more than familiar with from GCSE study and their preparation for this AS unit. Locations ranged from the local to the exotic (including, notably, Chernobyl and the moon as possible travel locations!) Some wrote convincingly about places they had obviously visited, and using personal experience was a good starting point for many in this task. More ambitious responses were met with some degree of success; travelling to Australia 'for the weekend' or long-winded descriptions of airports that read more like diary entries than articles. Some adopted a heightened promotional tone, which again was a hit and miss approach and often lost a secure sense of audience and purpose.

On the whole, the play script task was more problematic, with many candidates struggling with what a play script was and instead writing narrative prose. Candidates might have studied a play script at GCSE level, and most certainly would be studying a play script for AS Unit 2, so should have been familiar with conventions of layout, stage directions and other paralinguistic features necessary. Some candidates used quotation marks for speech and for some it was hard to see any recognition of appropriate audience and purpose. The more successful responses were able to use staging to craft and shape dialogue and create dramatic tension, and some were so genuinely imaginative in their use of location and time (pirates and captains from sailing ships, historical pieces set in fishing villages, to name some of the most memorable).

Technical accuracy and quality of written expression was a problem for some candidates

2 (iii) An analytical commentary

It was in responses to this question that candidates who had not managed their time effectively struggled. Often, over-long poetry responses and / or creative pieces tended to result in students not completing or in some cases even starting this question. The key to success here was in the strength of the links made between the two written pieces, and it is sensible to suggest to students that they should prepare and plan for these links by including similar and different features in their two pieces. Some were lost for what to compare and offered very general comments, often venturing into evaluation of what was and what was not successful in their written pieces, which is not necessary. Whilst there are a range of approaches that could be taken in this question, those who opted to analyse linguistic and literary features of both pieces concurrently did well, as did those who used the frameworks of language loosely to structure their connections, but who moved beyond it in order to improve the quality of their links. Whilst terminology (AO1) is worth only 5 marks here, it seems the use of a range of terms is crucial to their analysis of language choice and impacts too (AO2), which in turn has an impact on the quality of links (AO3).

There are several key points to note for future examinations:

- Section A responses which are often rich with terminology sometimes struggle to explore meaning or impact.
- Other Section A responses included barely any terminology and were difficult to reward given that one text has been studied and prepared before the examination.
- Section B, Question 2 (iii) responses need to comment on and explore connections between written pieces thoughtfully and this is best done when candidates embed into and then comment on a range of linguistic and literary terms.
- Comparisons are key to Question 2 (iii), and responses needed to do more than just comment on one written piece and then another.
- Errors noted this summer include the misidentification of syndetic and asyndetic lists, noun phrase modification, as well as confusion over basic word class terms.
- Candidates should be accurate in their assessment of context: Tennyson was sometimes referred to as a Romantic poet.
- Responses should be clear, coherent and accurate, common misspellings included: peice, repetition, similie, metaphore, sentance, eachother, alot, tripling, pre-modifyer, would of/could of.

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UNIT 2: DRAMA AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS

For the first examination of this unit, it was very encouraging to read so many thoughtful and perceptive responses to the set questions. There was clear evidence that centres had thoroughly prepared their candidates for the examination, and that candidates had enjoyed studying the texts on offer. The best responses demonstrated an ability to discuss meaning with confidence (AO2) and link this to relevant contextual comments (AO3), whilst evaluating the use of both literary and linguistic features (AO1) in the texts. However, there were some centres where the depth and thought behind analysis was thin, and as with the previous specification, knowledge and understanding of terminology is very uneven. Candidates are to be reminded that discussion of a **range** of terminology is essential in an integrated course; this should include discussion of terminology which goes beyond simple identification of sentence mood. There were also too many occasions when candidates would use a quotation and simply discuss the 'verb' without identifying which word they were attempting to analyse—they must be specific in their identification of terms.

The new aspect of the specification which appeared to cause most concern is the application of contextual knowledge (AO3). Centres should prepare their candidates with a wide and broad understanding of the social, political, historical and cultural context of their chosen text, but also how this can be interpreted in contemporary society. Far too frequently, context was simply addressed through biographical information relating to the author, and whilst this can be relevant at times, too many candidates simply included this as 'bolt-on' information at the end of a paragraph. Context should be integrated into the response where possible, and there were many candidates who performed this aspect of the course very effectively.

Section A

The most popular text in this section was 'A Streetcar Named Desire' followed by 'Kindertransport', but responses were seen on all of the texts on the specification

In Part (i) of this section, candidates are required to respond to an extract specified in the examination. This requires the candidates to read, think and write at speed, and some candidates spent too long responding to this part, with some writing up to 4 pages. This is unnecessary, and candidates should aim to focus only on 3 or 4 parts from the extract to discuss. In doing this, they will be able to focus on language use in greater detail, and avoid reliance on narrating the passage. Candidates should be reminded that they must only discuss passages from the specified extract and not from other parts of the play.

Considering that context (AO3) is not assessed in this part, it was disappointing to see a number of candidates spend time applying contextual information to their analysis. This was often at the expense of using terminology to discuss meaning. In fact, this part of the examination is a key opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of terminology, and too many did not extend their discussion beyond sentence mood. Some did not use any terminology at all. Candidates should be encouraged to use terminology for each quotation.

In Part (ii) of this section, candidates are instructed to refer to **at least two** other episodes from the whole play in their discussion. Far too frequently, examiners were unable to reward discussion due to candidates commenting on the extract from Part (i) of the question. It is clearly stated in the question what candidates are required to do, but careful planning and preparation are skills which perhaps need revising prior to the examination. For this part, there should be careful selection of different episodes from the whole play, to enable candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the text and their analytical prowess. For an episode to prove successful, it should be a passage of the play which is significant and potentially rich in both language and content. This provides candidates with more opportunity to analyse and discuss, rather than when some candidates chose multiple passages but said very little about how they were relevant to the question. This, all too often, led to highly descriptive responses. It is also essential to remember that context is heavily weighted in this response, but that it should be woven into their essay, rather than something which is simply added at the end.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Question 1 was by far the most popular choice, and candidates were able to identify the tension and difficulty of this first meeting between Blanche and Stella. Most then were able to discuss Stella in relation to women of the time and whether or not she was typical of their presentation. A small number of candidates spent too much time discussing Blanche in their response to Part (ii). Question 2 required a clear focus on drama and tension, and most responded with some confidence to the complexity of the situation between Mitch and Blanche. Discussion of the presentation of 'desire' in the rest of the play produced some exceptional responses, where candidates were able to draw on a number of contextual issues.

Peter Shaffer: *Amadeus*

Candidates performed well on this text, drawing heavily on contextual links to the Age of Enlightenment. Question 4 proved to be more popular, with candidates exploring the presentation of jealousy primarily through Salieri, but also other characters. In responses to question 3 Part (i), there were some responses which tended to focus too much on Mozart's attitudes, rather than on attitudes towards Mozart, as stipulated in the question. Responses to Part (ii) of this question 3 were generally very successful.

Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard: *Shakespeare in Love*

A few responses were seen on this text, with question 6 being far more popular. Whilst most candidates were able to address AO3 well, it was sometimes to the exclusion of close analysis in the second part of the question.

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Question 7 was more popular than question 8 for this text, but both provided the opportunity for candidates to engage with language and meaning. Gender roles featured heavily in responses to Part (ii) of both questions, sometimes to the exclusion of other contextual factors. Responses to Part (i) of both questions, tended to suffer from a lack of close linguistic analysis, however there were some notable exceptions to this.

Diane Samuels: *Kindertransport*

Most candidates responded to question 9 on the challenges faced by mothers, and responded with confidence on the presentation of Evelyn and Faith in the extract. When discussing challenges for mothers in the whole play, some also made pertinent references to the later effects of separation on Evelyn and her role as a mother. However, there was sometimes a tendency in Part (ii) responses to give too much attention to contextual issues at the expense of discussing meaning. This was equally true of responses to question 10.

Section B

In this section, 'In Cold Blood' and 'Once in a House on Fire' were the most popular texts, but responses were seen on all of the texts on the specification.

This section of the exam has the potential to lead candidates into a more literary style of approach due to the size of the texts being used for analysis. However, if there is careful selection of specific 'episodes' from the text, there is more scope for close literary and linguistic analysis, which will enable candidates to access the upper bands of the mark scheme. Prior to the examination, candidates could select a wide range of episodes from the text they have studied for close exploration. Remembering that they will have the text in the examination with them, this should enable them to quickly identify which 'episodes' are most relevant and plan their response accordingly. The selection of examples to support their argument is also addressing AO1, as this Assessment Objective considers their line of argument and the organisation of their response.

Most of the responses seen demonstrated an understanding of the conventions of non-literary writing, and many candidates were able to successfully discuss the importance and influence of contextual factors on the texts. But it was the range and breadth of evidence from the text which seemed to limit candidates in this section. For example, considering that there is a wide variety of essays to choose from in the Minhinnick text, a large number of candidates only referred to episodes from 'Rio de Journal'. Whilst this is an essay rich in material, it is only a limited example of what the text has to offer. Also, being the first essay in the collection, it is possibly one of the only ones some candidates may have actually read. Candidates should be able to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of different episodes from the text they have studied, including detailed analysis of language, and an awareness of the significance of contextual factors.

Andrea Ashworth: Once in a House on Fire

The majority of candidates answered on question 11, and most managed to move around the text and show secure understanding of the autobiography. There was much sound analysis and use of integrated approaches with some sensible discussions on attitudes towards education, but many struggled to address AO3 – there were some who discussed education in terms of status and social class, occasional discussion of selective schools and quite often a strong focus on Terry's attitudes, but it was not always easy to reward. Similar problems arose with Question 12 with regard to AO3. Some discussed the issue of domestic abuse and the role of women in the 1970s, as well as problems facing single parents, but comments tended to be brief and rather generalised. Again, there was some sound analysis of language and exploration of literary techniques, and candidates had clearly enjoyed studying this text.

Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood*

This was the most popular text on the paper, and candidates had been very well prepared for this text, possibly due to it being so popular on the previous specification. Candidates were able to respond to AO3 with more confidence for this text, and it presented few problems for them. Whilst most tended to respond to question 14, and wrote very well on the presentation of women, there was a tendency to have a fairly narrow focus. Nearly all discussed Nancy and Bonnie Clutter, but the more successful responses branched out from this to include Marie Dewey or Josie Meier. With question 13, most focussed on the experiences of Perry and Dick in prison, but others also commented on Perry's friendship with Willie-Jay and made some interesting points regarding attitudes towards capital punishment at the time.

Dave Eggers: *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*

Both questions were equally popular with this text and produced some engaging responses. For question 15, many candidates discussed contextual issues such as youth culture, post-modernist fiction and the role of men at the turn of the century, and integrated them carefully into their explorations of difficulties faced by young people. Similarly, responses to question 16 involved an exploration of differing approaches to fatherhood, cultural concerns in America and attitudes towards single parents in order to address AO3, but most paid close attention to literary and linguistic features and selected a wide range of examples in order to demonstrate their understanding of the text.

Robert Minhinnick: *Watching the fire-eater*

Question 17 on poverty was the far more popular choice, and it produced some interesting responses. The majority of these tended to focus on 'Rio de Journal' and included comments relating to how skimpy clothing worn by the people on Copacabana beach was evidence of poverty in Rio. Others selected more relevant examples, such as the dead man on the pavement or his experiences in the jungle, linking this with extracts from 'The Scheme of Things' or 'On the Pill', but AO3 still presented problems, with often only fleeting contextual comments.

George Orwell: *Down and Out in Paris and London*

There were engaging responses to both questions for this text, and candidates tended to use episodes from both the Paris and London sections, however the majority of responses were dominated by references to Orwell's time in Paris. Many discussed the poor living and working conditions at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux and Orwell's time as a plongeur. There were secure references to contextual factors, especially the inter-war years and treatment of the homeless at the time.

Key points

- Context must be addressed in a meaningful manner where assessed
- Terminology should be extended beyond sentence mood and demonstrate a range of knowledge
- Technical accuracy and correct spelling is essential
- Selection of suitable and significant 'episodes' is key for Section A Part (ii) and Section B
- Avoid narrating/describing the text. Follow S/E/A and include at least one term for each quotation.



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