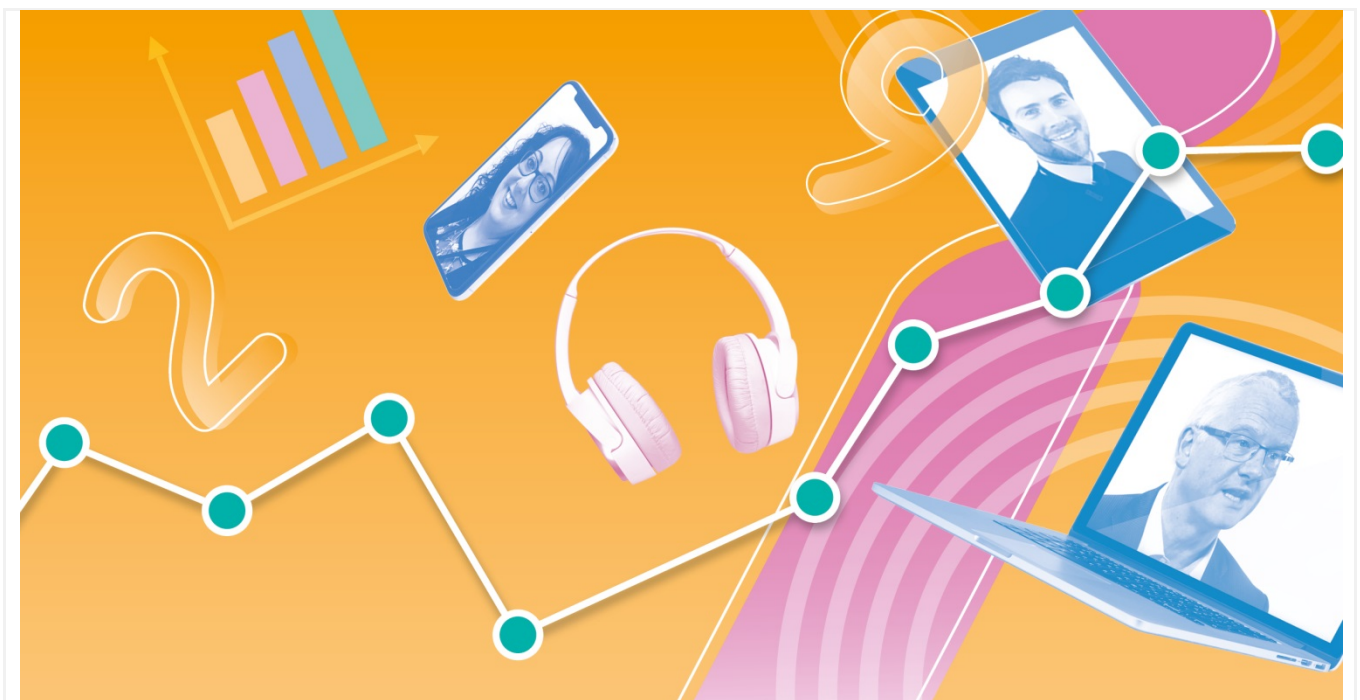


GCSE English Literature webinar Your questions answered

GCSE English Literature in the spotlight: results insights webinar resource

Autumn 2019



Contents

Contents	Page
How to use this resource	3
Theme one: general questions	4
Theme two: AO1 response to text and task	6
Theme three: AO2 writers' methods	8
Theme four: AO3 context	9
Theme five: AO4 – spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG)	11
Theme six: comparison	12
Contact us	14

How to use this resource

This webinar resource booklet collates and summarises all of the questions asked during the GCSE English Literature in the spotlight: results insight webinar. Here you will find detailed responses to all of your questions from our subject experts – including those unanswered on the day. We have grouped related questions into themes and questions and answers into tables, to make this resource as concise, clear and accessible as possible.

For any questions asked that are not related to results insights, or for any further questions, you can get in-touch with your subject team.

For extra information on results:

- Join our Heads of Curriculum for a [video breakdown of GCSE results](#).
- Access our free Enhanced Results Analysis tool. We've created [two-minute tutorials](#) to show you how.
- Navigate to [e-AQA](#) to download the full report on the exam for a detailed breakdown.
- Book on to one of our [Feedback events](#), for a detailed view of results, student answers and examiner commentaries.

General

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked questions about the workings of the mark scheme.</p>	<p>For a comprehensive introduction to how to apply the mark scheme please refer to our mark scheme support materials which are accessible via e-AQA. This includes a 30 minute video of our Chief Examiner talking through the ethos and design principles of the mark scheme and a walk through the levels of response with reference to student responses which are available in both annotated and unannotated formats.</p> <p>Please bear in mind that this resource was produced around the time we released the specification so whilst the standard has not changed there are many more student responses available since this was first published.</p>
<p>We were asked questions about where to find student example responses.</p>	<p>Example student responses are provided in the various professional development courses AQA run. The materials from these courses are available to download from the secure key materials area of e-AQA, under 'teacher support materials'.</p> <p>Our annual series of Feedback events on exams meetings are running this term and the materials will be made widely available to all teachers after the series of meetings has ended.</p> <p>You might also consider a subscription to Exampro Highlights which gives you access to interactive marked and annotated responses to exam questions for both GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature. An annual subscription for the whole department costs £60. For more information please visit the Exampro website https://www.exampro.co.uk</p>
<p>We were asked questions about how to support specific groups of learners – lower attaining students aiming for Grades 4/5 and high achievers aiming for Grades 8/9.</p>	<p>We have previously run courses with these specific groups of learners in mind.</p> <p>In e-AQA, under teacher support materials you will find the materials from the following two courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reaching for grade 8/9• Stretching grade 4 to 5. <p>These materials include a range of example student responses and suggested teaching activities.</p>

<p>We were asked questions about the practice of entering students early for examinations in GCSE English Literature.</p>	<p>As an awarding organisation we're not in a position to present a view on entering students early for our qualifications. It's a complex issue and there's limited literature on the merits/pitfalls of this practice.</p> <p>What we do say is that GCSEs were designed as a two year course with the intention that students take exams at the end of Year 11. This year is the first time we've published results data by age so those schools that do enter students early can now compare their own data against the national data.</p> <p>We have to be cautious about what conclusions we draw from the data but what it tells us is that students are more likely to be entered early for GCSE English Literature compared to GCSE English Language and that the proportion of students who were entered early has increased slightly compared to 2018 but this upward trend is stabilising.</p> <p>There is some research in this area published by the FFT education data lab '<i>The effect of entering GCSEs early on overall attainment</i>' https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2019/09/the-effect-of-entering-gcses-early-on-overall-attainment</p>
<p>We were asked questions about optionality on our specification and the comparability of text choices.</p>	<p>These are complex issues which were covered in depth as part of the summer 2019 hub network meetings. All the material from those events is available to download from the website: https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/hub-schools-network</p>

A01 – response to text and task

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked questions about AO1, specifically in relation to students' use of quotations.</p>	<p>Remember that the wording of the assessment objective explicitly states that students should be able to 'use textual references, <i>including</i> quotations' – so this recognises that students can evidence their knowledge of the text in a number of equally valid ways: both through references <i>to</i> it and direct quotations <i>from</i> it.</p> <p>Note that the mark scheme does not refer to 'quotations'; instead we use the term 'references' at all levels of response. This is important because students are operating in a closed book context. A reference is a student 'pointing to' a moment, or a word, or a phrase that demonstrates their working knowledge of the text. At the top end of the mark scheme these references will be 'judicious' and 'precise'; at the bottom end of the mark scheme students will typically refer to relevant details.</p> <p>Examiners are rewarding the efficacy of those references, not the amount of them. So the skill is in being selective – choosing apt textual details that illustrate the particular interpretative point the student is making in response to the question.</p> <p>Ultimately, students who come to the exam with a comprehensive working knowledge of the text, rather than a long list of quotations, are the most successful.</p>
<p>We were asked questions about Paper 1 and the best approach to answering the extract-to-whole questions?</p>	<p>The wording of the question stem – 'starting with this' – is designed to prompt students to use the extract as a starting point for their thinking; it doesn't mean that they have to start their answer by addressing the extract first. However, this is the most common approach – which is cited in the 2019 Report on the exam for Paper 1.</p> <p>Our examiners have no expectation that there will be a particular 'order' to the student's response and they recognise the variety of ways in which students might use the extract to facilitate their answer.</p> <p>The Report on the exam notes that a feature of the highest-level responses is the student's knowledge and understanding of the text, which enables them to dip in and out of both the extract and the whole text to select details which support their argument as appropriate.</p> <p>You may also find our teaching guide '<i>Further Insight – Extract to whole</i>' helpful: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-8702-INSIGHT-EXTRACT-WHOLE.PDF</p>

<p>We received questions about the use of structures/models/writing frames.</p>	<p>We explored the issue of using writing frames/model paragraphs as part of the summer 2018 hub network meetings, which focused on common skills across GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature. These materials are available to download from the website: https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/hub-schools-network/english-meeting-materials-archive.</p> <p>See pages 23-27 of the presentation slides for the section on ‘acronyms and mnemonics – help or hindrance?’ The corresponding activities booklet provides an example where the student has used an acronym/structure to drive their response – see page 15. You could discuss in your department whether you think the approach is helpful to the student?</p> <p>We recognise that providing structured approaches can be enabling for some students, but examiners see many cases where such approaches limit students’ responses. The report on the exams cite that students who follow a prescribed structure tend to produce a sequence of similar paragraphs, demonstrating the same level of achievement repeatedly, rather than develop their ideas which would enable them to progress up through the mark scheme.</p> <p>Of course it’s for you to use your professional judgement on whether students benefit from this level of scaffolding and where, perhaps, others might flourish if the ‘stabilisers’ were removed.</p>
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A02 – writers’ methods

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked questions about subject terminology.</p>	<p>Again, this is another topic that was explored through the summer 2018 hub network meetings.</p> <p>See pages 18-22 in the presentation slides and there are two student responses in the corresponding activities booklet pp.13-14. In the first response you could discuss whether labelling features adds value. The second response was awarded Level 6 – how does the student’s approach compare with the first?</p> <p>Please also refer to the extract from the 2017 report on the exam (provided in the activities booklet on page 12), which explains that we treat ‘subject terminology’ in the broadest sense, to mean ‘the language of the subject’; this includes literary devices (such as alliteration, metaphor, oxymoron etc) but also terms students use to explore authorial methods, such as implies/suggests/highlights and so on.</p> <p>Most importantly, it is what students say about the craft of the writer that examiners are looking to reward – not the number of technical terms they’ve referenced in their response. Nor is there inherent value in using complex terms – there is no hierarchy of terminology for this specification.</p> <p>For more detailed commentary on subject terminology please refer to the 2019 and previous reports on the exams.</p>

A03 – context

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked many questions about context.</p>	<p>All components across the two papers assess AO3 in the same way (the exception being the unseen poetry, where we do not assess context as this would place an unnecessary level of demand on students).</p> <p>Please refer to our definition of context, which you'll find in every mark scheme. This highlights that students can approach context in a flexible way; meaning that the contexts that are most relevant will vary depending on the text, author and the focus of the task.</p> <p>Students can address context in any way they choose. They might explore the context in which the text was written; the contexts in which the text is set; contexts in which the text is received; its literary context (genre). Students might also consider authorial intentions (but be cautious here – especially if the writer is no longer living).</p> <p>Our mantra is that as long as students engage with the focus of the question/task, they will naturally address context.</p> <p>For example, paper 1, question 1 Macbeth (June 2019): 'starting with this speech, explore how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character.'</p> <p>The steer towards context in this question is ideas about violence and as long as students maintain focus on this they will gain credit for AO3. Their reading and understanding of the text will be informed by their schematic knowledge – in this case they'll bring to their response what it means to be 'violent'.</p> <p>Of course, the indicative content suggests some points students might make but it's not exhaustive or conclusive. Students might talk about how Macbeth's violence is accepted and even admired in the context of war/conflict; students might refer to</p>

	<p>other violent scenes – the killing of Duncan and Banquo and relate this to the religious context and belief in the Divine Right of Kings etc.</p> <p>Most importantly, context should inform – not dominate – their reading of a text. This is reflected in the allocation of marks: AO1 and AO2 are equally weighted at 12 marks each, whereas AO3 accounts for 6 marks, so a fifth of the total marks available can reward understanding of context.</p> <p>You will also find our teaching guide Further Insights guide: Context in Literature helpful.</p>
<p>We were asked questions about whether students can reference literary theory in their responses.</p>	<p>It is not a requirement at GCSE level for students to study literary theory or critical perspectives on the texts they're studying. That said, you may feel that for your most able students, introducing such content might challenge and stretch their thinking or be a taster for what A-level study in this subject involves – and we certainly wouldn't discourage this. However, examiners observed that where students cited literary theories, it was often merely 'bolted on' to their discussions and did little to enhance the quality of their response to the task.</p> <p>Remember that examiners are looking to reward students for their personal response and interpretations, not the thoughts of a scholar/critic. For it to add value, students would need to demonstrate how it contributes to their own interpretation of the text. Whilst wider reading is likely to enrich their understanding/appreciation of the text, there isn't an expectation that students cite this in the examination.</p> <p>Please see the <i>reports on the exams</i> for further commentary on this.</p>

A04 – SPaG

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked for clarification on how students are assessed for SPaG.</p>	<p>Marks for AO4 SPaG are awarded for the student's response in Section A (on both papers), regardless of the order in which they have completed the paper. However, if the student has not attempted Section A, marks for AO4 will be awarded for their response in Section B.</p>

Comparison

Questions and answers

Question	Expert answer
<p>We were asked questions on the final task on Paper 2 – unseen poetry comparison.</p>	<p>Please refer to the Paper 2 <i>reports on the exam</i> for detailed feedback on the best approaches to this question.</p> <p>Remember that this response is worth 8 marks, assesses AO2 only and it's the final task on a long paper, so it's critical that students present a focused, succinct answer.</p> <p>The key to success in answering the question is to root their response in the idea that connects the two poems, which is suggested in the question itself (eg on the 2019 paper, ideas about happiness and contentment connected the two poems).</p> <p>Given the comparably low mark tariff, we aren't expecting students to write a full, balanced essay. We suggest that students focus on 2-3 methods the poets use to present the idea/subject matter stated in the question.</p> <p>There are a number of scripts included in the 2018 Feedback on exams course materials with marked responses to this task (available in secure key materials, e-AQA under teacher support materials).</p>

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