

English subjects

English Language, English Literature A, English Literature B, English Language and Literature

AS and A-level

Summer 2021 exam changes and support

Version 1.0, Created 1 April 2021

Following JCQ's guidance on putting together a range of evidence for your students and deciding grades, here are some things to consider.

Choosing the range of evidence

There's no minimum amount of specification content that students have to study to be awarded a grade and we won't prescribe the evidence that must be used. However, teachers need to judge if sufficient content has been taught to generate a range of evidence to form the basis for a grade and also that there's been sufficient coverage to enable progression.

To make a judgement on the grade a student is performing at, teachers will use a range of evidence. Evidence should relate to the specification content and should reflect, as far as possible, the sorts of questions and tasks that students would usually complete for their AS/A-level English qualification.

Evidence can be drawn from a wide range of sources, such as:

1. **Student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the exam board.** This might be drawn from our Summer 2021 Assessment materials <https://www.aqa.org.uk/2021-exam-changes/about-our-assessment-and-support-materials> (in which we've provided groups of questions and mark schemes across different series in one place) or from previously published past papers and sample materials. These can be used flexibly, so you could use a full set of question papers that were completed as a mock exam; an individual paper; or even just a section within a paper.
2. **Student work produced in response to centre-devised tasks/internal tests** that follow the same format as exam board materials and have been marked in a way that reflects exam board mark schemes.
3. **Non-exam assessment (NEA)** – even where incomplete will be a valuable source of evidence and therefore can still be used.
4. **Student work produced at home via remote learning** – where teachers are confident that it's a student's own work and they weren't given inappropriate levels of support to complete it.
5. **Records of each student's progress and performance** over the course of study may also be useful in supporting a final teacher assessed grade.

Teachers can draw on existing records and available evidence from any point during the course, although more recent evidence is likely to be more representative of a student's level of achievement. There may be exceptions to this (for example if a student has been absent or had significant ill health since earlier assessments).

Schools and colleges should make sure that students are aware of the evidence that will form the basis of their final grade but must not disclose the grade submitted to the exam board.

The importance of consistency when collating evidence

As far as possible, teachers should use consistent sources/the same types of evidence for a class or cohort that relate closely to the specification requirements. If students have a similar range of evidence it makes it easier to compare student performance and assign grades consistently.

You should also consider:

1. **Work that's been produced under supervision and closely matches the assessment requirements of the AQA specifications. Mark schemes will provide you with a more robust basis for your grading judgement.** Centres should be confident that work produced is the student's own and that the student hasn't been given inappropriate levels of support to complete it, either in the centre, at home or with an external tutor.
2. **Considering the assessment objectives (AO) can help discriminate between different levels of achievement.** Whilst evidencing all the AOs isn't a requirement, due to the nature of the subject and how it's assessed, it's most probable that you'll have evidence covering all of the AOs for the AS/A-level English qualification(s) you teach.
3. **You've got until 18 June to submit your grades, so there's time to continue to teach** and use the assessment materials we've produced (or other available resources) to supplement or plug any gaps in your evidence accordingly.
4. **The marking exemplification materials** are a resource to help teachers apply the mark schemes consistently to individual questions/tasks or exam papers. This resource can also be used to moderate the standard of marking of student responses between teachers, across departments and even different schools, where this is possible.

Holistic judgements and assigning the grade

The standard of work to achieve a given grade is the same as previous years even though the coverage of content may not be as broad/wide-ranging. When determining the grade, teachers should reflect the standard at which the student is performing now, not their potential. You can only assign a grade based on the evidence you're submitting, not how you think the student may have performed if the exams had gone ahead.

When assigning a grade, you should make a holistic, objective judgement on the evidence available using the grade descriptors provided. The following points may also be useful:

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1. **The JCQ grade descriptors** (<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JCQ-Guidance-on-the-Determination-of-Grades-for-A-AS-Levels-and-GCSEs-Summer-2021.pdf>) are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics. They're based on the AOs for the relevant specification and are common across all awarding bodies.
 2. **The grade descriptors are contextualised through exemplification material.** This includes samples of student responses that illustrate secure (midgrade) performance. There's also an accompanying narrative from senior subject associates that further explains what the standard may look like for a particular task or question, which will help you to fine-tune your judgements.
 3. **Student performance across pieces of work may not be consistent** and may even show characteristics from different grade descriptors. As a skills-based subject, English teachers are quite used to applying a 'best-fit' approach to marking. Assigning a grade should be approached in a similar way. To arrive at a grade, you should make a holistic judgement where evidence crosses grade descriptors, balancing coverage of work at different standards across the course of study and accounting for conditions in which evidence was collected. This is particularly important when considering the NEA as students typically perform at a higher standard compared to the exam and therefore the NEA needs to be balanced appropriately against other sources of evidence.

Relevant resources

JCQ guidance to support you in making grading judgements can be found here:

Guidance on the determination of grades for A/AS Levels

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JCQ-Guidance-on-the-Determination-of-Grades-for-A-AS-Levels-and-GCSEs-Summer-2021.pdf>

A/AS grade descriptors

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Summer-2021-Grade-Descriptors-A-AS-Levels.pdf>

Worked examples to assist with determining grades

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Summer-2021-JCQ-Guidance-WorkedExamples.pdf>

AQA 2021 assessment materials and resources can be found here

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/2021-exam-changes/get-ready-for-grading#assessment>
and includes:

- editable assessments and their mark schemes
- mapping grids
- marked example answers with examiner commentaries
- exemplification of JCQ grade descriptors
- other training and resources.