

A-level English Language NEA guidance

This resource provides guidance in relation to the non-exam assessment component of A-level English Language, covering both the language investigation and original writing. The guidance is presented in the form of answers to common queries.

What does the NEA consist of?

The NEA component requires students to carry out two different kinds of individual research:

- a language investigation (2,000 words excluding data)
- a piece of original writing and commentary (750 words each)

Where does the NEA appear?

The NEA is only part of the A-level. There is no NEA in the AS level.

How many marks are awarded for the NEA?

The language investigation is marked out of 50 and the original writing and commentary out of 50 (25 for each).

Overall, the NEA forms 20% of the overall marks of the A-level.

What's different about the new language investigation?

If you are completely new to AQA A-level English Language, please skip this section.

If you taught the old AQA B specification, there is very little difference in the content of the new specification's language investigation.

For teachers of the old AQA A specification, there is now no need to focus solely on spoken data. As the specification outlines, "*Students can choose to pursue a study of spoken, written or multimodal data, or a mixture of text types, demonstrating knowledge in areas of individual interest*".

How is the language investigation assessed?

The investigation is marked using the following AOs:

- A01 15 marks
- A02 15 marks
- A03 20 marks

(total marks 50)

These AOs are more clearly defined in the specification, but one way of viewing them for this task might be to see them as follows:

A01 What students do: their application of appropriate language methods, their analysis and their written expression.

A02 What students understand about language, including others' ideas and research, along with an understanding of how to conduct a linguistic investigation.

A03 What students interpret and understand from the language being used. In other words, the significance of the language in the data, its meanings and contexts.

The weighting of the AOs might have implications for the ways in which you supervise this work and the focus that students offer. With A03 having the most prominence (20/50 marks), you might want to encourage students to consider the different contextual factors of language production and reception in more detail. A03 is also connected to the creation of meaning, so it is a good idea to encourage students to consider the possible effects of language choices along with identifying and labelling those features (something credited in A01).

The weightings for AOs might also lead you to encourage students to show the importance of meaning creation in the data that they select.

There is also a requirement to include a bibliography. Students who submit references and a bibliography will be more likely access level 5 of the A02 mark scheme.

What difference will the decreased word count make?

The word count upper limit has been reduced from 2500 words (excluding data) to 2000 words (excluding data). Students might need to think more carefully about the amount of data they collect and how they can select the most relevant material for their investigation question to be answered. In practice, this might mean choosing a smaller, more carefully defined data set, and making sure that the research question is focused enough to prevent overly long and/or diffuse analysis.

The structure of the analysis will also need to be considered and students might be encouraged to write using concise and focused analytical sentences, well-chosen subheadings and clear, contextualised examples from the data (which of course, will not count towards the overall word count).

Some suggestions are given in the *NEA sample language investigation extract* document.

Can students choose any topic for their investigation?

Yes, but the final decision is down to you as a teacher and your professional judgement. The specification says:

Students are not obliged to restrict themselves to those areas that are formally taught, as the basis of the investigation is the value of student-led enquiry supported by open learning. Therefore, any area seen by supervising teachers as yielding interesting questions about language in use may be chosen.

If you do not feel comfortable supervising and marking an investigation, you can suggest alternative topics or approaches. While there is scope to do any topic – even those not covered as part of the course itself – you will be the one marking and internally moderating the work.

What else do students need to include in their language investigation submission?

Along with the usual cover sheets, students should include clean copies of their data.

What kinds of thing can students produce for original writing?

The specification states:

Students will produce one piece of original writing based on one of the following three areas:

- *the power of persuasion*
- *the power of storytelling*
- *the power of information*

The specification also provides some examples of potential pieces:

Examples of pieces of writing students could consider.

The power of persuasion

- *A piece of investigative journalism.*
- *A speech delivered on a controversial topic.*
- *A letter to an MP.*

The power of storytelling

- *A short story.*
- *An extract from a biography.*
- *A dramatic monologue.*

The power of information

- *A piece of travel journalism.*

- *A blog focusing on social issues.*
- *A piece of local history.*

Any kind of writing that fits into one of the three areas outlined on the specification and that, in your professional judgement, is a suitable and appropriate task, can be set here. If in doubt, consult your NEA adviser.

Can students submit two pieces for the original writing NEA?

No. The specification says that it must be one piece of writing, along with a commentary and annotated style model.

Do students have to submit a style model with the original writing?

Yes, this is a requirement of the component and is specifically referred to in the mark scheme for AO4. A student who does not submit an annotated style model, or who does not refer to a style model in their commentary, will only be able to achieve a maximum of 3 marks for their commentary.

The specification states:

In preparation for the writing, students will study a range of style models before selecting and analysing one style model in detail. Students will select their own style model in consultation with their supervising teacher. Students will then use this research to inform their own piece of original writing. The commentary will allow the student to consider and evaluate the style model, the writing process and the effectiveness of the final piece of writing. The folder submitted should contain:

- *a piece of original writing*
- *an annotated style model*
- *a reflective commentary*
- *references (paper and web-based)*

What guidance and support are you permitted to give students for their NEA?

As detailed on page 31 of the specification:

You may provide guidance and support to students so that they are clear about the requirements of the task they need to undertake and the marking criteria on which the work will be judged. You may also provide guidance to students on the suitability of their proposed task, particularly if it means they will not meet the requirements of the marking criteria.

When checking drafts of a student's work, you must not comment or provide suggestions on how they could improve it. However, you can ask questions about

the way they are approaching their work and you can highlight the requirements of the marking criteria.

[...]

Once a student submits work for marking and it has been marked, you cannot return it to the student for improvement, even if they have not received any feedback or are unaware of the marks awarded.

It is also important to note the JCQ instructions – please refer to the JCQ website (www.jcq.org.uk) for the latest guidance.

How can I make best use of my NEA adviser?

NEA advisers are in place to assist you with guidance about this component. You will be assigned an NEA adviser in the Autumn term of each academic year and be informed of his/her name and contact details.

NEA advisers can help you with general guidance about interpreting the NEA aspects of the specification and over the suitability of certain topics or methodologies. They cannot provide detailed guidance about individual investigations or mark work for you, but will be able to use their experience and professional expertise to work with you in supporting your students.

You can contact your NEA adviser at any point during the academic year.