Below you will find an exemplar student response to a section B question in the sample assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Sample script - AS Paper 1, Section B, band 3 response

Examine the view that Richard Lovelace presents the speaker in this poem as having a selfish attitude to love.

Richard Lovelace does present this speaker as having a selfish attitude to love. The speaker is a man who has just had a night of passion with a woman during which he made her a promise that he would commit to her. However, in the morning he has changed his mind and now is even telling this woman that he intends to sleep with other women before he decides whether to commit to her.

Lovelace does not allow the woman to have a voice which shows the speaker's attitude that, whatever the woman has to say about the situation, it is what he has decided that matters. The speaker begins by posing questions to the woman at the beginning of stanzas one and two which have a rhetorical effect because we do not hear her responses and so it conveys the idea that the speaker does not care about her views. The first question: 'Why should you swear I am forsworn,/Since thine I vowed to be?' shows his disbelief that just because he made a promise to her last night, she should not expect him to keep to it. The second question: 'Have I not loved thee much and long,/A tedious twelve hours' space?' also suggests that he cannot understand why she is not satisfied with their night of passion. His description of their passion as 'tedious' suggests that he has easily grown bored of her and referring to commitment as an 'impossibility' - emphasises his decision not to remain faithful to her. A reader can well imagine this man making all sorts of promises to the woman in order to seduce her but, once she has given in to him, happily discarding her.

Having told her that he will not commit to her now, his selfishness continues as he tells her how he 'must search the black and fair' as if he has the right to try out other women. However, he makes this worse by saying how these women will be 'Beauties' and virgins, i.e. 'treasure in un-plowed-up ground.' The ultimate selfishness comes in the final stanza when this speaker suggests that
‘if, when I have loved my round,/Thou provest the pleasantest she’, he will return to the woman. What, of course, we don’t know is whether she will take him back, but the verbs ‘laden’ and ‘sated’ imply that he will have enjoyed his time with the other women whatever the outcome. Lovelace has structured the poem so that the selfishness increases as the poem unfolds and becomes more humiliating for the woman so that the politically correct reader likes the speaker less and less.

Lovelace was a cavalier poet and so part of a group of poets who wrote poetry which portrayed life in the Court of Charles I with the purpose of entertainment and with a message that you should live life to the full, an attitude known as Carpe Diem (or ‘seize the day’). One interpretation of ‘The Scrutiny’ therefore would be that the poet was writing for a private, mainly male audience at Court and so was able to portray a speaker with a tongue-in-cheek selfish attitude without fear of offending readers whereas modern readers, including women, might not appreciate the speaker’s selfishness.

Other Carpe Diem poems include ‘The Flea’ by John Donne and ‘To His Coy Mistress’ by Andrew Marvell, which both try to persuade a woman to seize the day and have sex with them. Although the speakers in these poems could be said to be selfish in their demands, they do not humiliate the woman in the ways that Lovelace’s speaker does. In ‘The Flea’ the woman’s action of squashing the flea lets the reader know the woman’s response to the speaker, which Lovelace does not do—so helping to make his speaker seem more selfish.

Others have interpreted Lovelace’s speaker as not entirely selfish as he does seem to show some feelings for this woman in the thought that he could ‘still dote upon thy face’ and in his ‘joy in thy brown hair’. True, he has not abandoned her completely in the suggestion that he might return to her but he is still portrayed as selfish in his arrogant tone in even thinking that his behaviour would be acceptable to the woman.

**Examiner commentary**

A01 – The response focuses on the task throughout and is structured clearly with sensibly ordered ideas. The writing is clearly expressed and mainly accurate if at times a little colloquial.

A02 – There is straightforward understanding of how Lovelace presents the speaker as having a selfish attitude to love with relevant supporting textual evidence. In working through the poem chronologically, the response falls into description/narrative rather than a focus on the poet at work although it does offer some comment on how the structure of the poem conveys the idea of a selfish attitude.

A03 – There is a straightforward understanding of how the attitude to love discussed reflects the conventions followed by the cavalier poet, although this feels bolted-on rather than being integrated into the discussion of the poem.

A04 – There is straightforward awareness of the typicality of the attitude to love shown in this poem to other poetry of that period. Relevant comments are made
specifically about two other poems which, although not required, help to demonstrate this understanding.

AO5 – The candidate is clear in offering a straightforward judgement that Lovelace presents the speaker as having a selfish attitude to love. Different reader responses to the presentation of the speaker are tentatively suggested but not fully explored.

Overall: Straightforward and relevant. This response seems consistent with the Band 3 descriptors.