

A-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

7707/C: NEA - Making Connections
Report on the Examination

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General

In the third series of the non-exam assessment, students continue to produce some impressive work, demonstrating clear engagement with the requirements for the task. It is pleasing to see students operating as independent learners, taking full ownership of their text choices, investigating foci and linguistic methods to produce investigations of an exceptionally high quality. Moderators were impressed with the wide range of literary and non-literary material studied this year, and the depth of analysis offered this year, informed by stylistically-informed methods, was outstanding.

The opportunity to explore themes and representations of their own choosing enabled students to explore some original and thought-provoking text pairings, and it was pleasing to see students engaging with secondary reading based on analytical methodology. Stylistics is often represented as an interdisciplinary enterprise, and moderators saw some creative and interesting practice, with students drawing effectively on literary criticism, linguistics, narratology, psychology and politics to inform their studies. It is hoped that students will continue to engage with such wide-ranging and productive wider reading.

Students had clearly responded to guidance from last year's report and had drawn upon skills and concepts drawn from study of the whole course. This was demonstrated in sound text and extract selection and detailed knowledge of narrative, point of view, register and interaction. Literariness was explored in some detail, with some interesting insights into more subtle aspects of mode and genre. Contexts were well explored, but there was a tendency to foreground biographical and socio-historical contexts, mainly linked to study of the selected literary texts. For future series, it would be useful for students to draw upon learning from *Remembered Places* when addressing context, particularly when addressing genre, mode and form of non-literary material.

The investigation focus may address a chosen theme or representation (eg representations of body image, representation of grief, attitudes towards the poor, changing ideas about racial or gender equality, power and oppression), or could focus on the use of a specific linguistic concept or feature (eg the representation of dialectal features, narrative strategies to present personal experiences, linguistic strategies to exert control).

Investigations focused around a particular theme or representation again proved to be the most popular choice for students. It was pleasing to see that these topics were underpinned with rigorous analysis of linguistic features, with careful shaping of the Analysis sections to ensure that a detailed analytical approach was adopted throughout. Where students had selected less linguistically focused subsections within their analyses, discussion tended to be more descriptive and generalised.

This year, it was pleasing to see investigations inspired by study of the whole course, with some students choosing to investigate real and imagined journeys, or ideas surrounding different aspects of conflict. More successful approaches drew on concepts from the whole course, such as narrative, point of view, genre, register and interaction, to inform the study of their chosen texts. Concepts such as face, politeness and speech act theory were particularly well explored by some students, illustrating how these concepts can be applied to a wide variety of text types.

Centres are reminded of the key concepts for each of the A-level papers which can be found in the *AQA Companion Guide*

<https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7706-7707-COMP-GUIDE.PDF>

Key messages for students

Do:

- consider how learning from the wider A-level course may be used to inform your study for the non-exam assessment
- select a clear focus for the investigation, with a precise linguistic focus for analysis and clearly stated aims
- ensure that all texts selected are suitable to explore the chosen investigation focus/topic
- select methods which will illuminate the texts and investigation focus
- select secondary sources that will illuminate ideas about the chosen topic and key linguistic methods under study
- explore meanings and interpretations using an appropriate linguistic register
- examine different aspects of context, including text production and reception, mode and genre to consider how these contribute to the creation of meanings
- consider connections that move beyond similarities and differences.

Don't:

- select texts that offer only limited scope for close linguistic analysis
- prioritise study of the literary material with only brief reference to non-literary material
- focus on secondary sources that are solely based on the topic or theme of the investigation
- produce an extended essay without subheadings within the Analysis section
- lose sight of linguistic detail, offering instead a sociological or psychological study of a particular topic or theme.

The non-exam assessment

The following marks are available for assessment objectives:

AO1 (15 marks) – Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

AO2 (15 marks) – Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts.

AO3 (10 marks) – Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received.

AO4 (10 marks) – Explore connections across the texts, informed by linguistic methods and literary concepts and methods.

AO1 assesses more than just the use of terminology. For the non-exam assessment, the AO1 mark focuses in particular on students' ability to provide a clear account of the literary and non-literary material under study, to reflect on the aims of the study, and consider how the selected extract(s) relate to the aims of the investigation. It also rewards the selection of suitable methods and secondary reading to inform the study.

It is also useful to think about AO1 knowledge as comprising of concepts (ideas) and methods (tools of analysis), together with an ability to highlight features (specific textual examples). The AQA glossary remains a good starting point for more general terminology as well as definitions of key concepts.

<https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7706-7707-GLOSSARY-CTT.PDF>

The AO2 mark focuses on students' interpretations and ideas in response to the investigation focus, and their ability to examine the ways in which meanings are shaped in the selected literary and non-literary texts.

The AO3 mark focuses on students' ability to consider how different aspects of context influence the negotiation and shaping of meaning.

The AO4 mark focuses on students' ability to make links between the literary and non-literary texts to explore similarities and differences in light of the investigation focus and aims.

As a general overview, successful approaches:

- constructed the title carefully, ensuring there was a clear investigation focus
- made careful text choices, considering how the literary and non-literary texts worked together in light of the investigation title/focus
- outlined clear aims that were relevant to the investigation focus
- clearly explained which extracts were used for close analysis, providing a rationale for choices in light of the investigation focus
- selected secondary sources that genuinely supported the study and investigation focus
- made precise and controlled use of appropriate terminology to explore how meanings were constructed
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and tools (eg speech and thought presentation, metaphor, storytelling, genre, register)
- covered the literary text and the non-literary material evenly in the Analysis section
- offered thoughtful and considered contextual comment, addressing how aspects of mode, genre production and reception informed creation of meanings
- produced well expressed, clearly structured investigations within the recommended word limit.

As a general overview, less successful approaches:

- provided titles that lacked linguistic focus or were overly ambitious and thus did not lend themselves to clear exploration of the texts under study
- selected texts that did not work well with the chosen topic, theme or focus for the investigation, particularly the non-literary material
- produced general aims that were not addressed throughout the investigation
- did not identify which extracts from the literary text were to be used for close analysis, or used isolated examples from across the whole text in an unstructured way
- made reference to secondary sources that were of limited value to the investigation focus
- adopted a feature-spotting approach that made reference to some linguistic detail but offered limited discussion of meanings
- made broad assertions that were not supported by close reference to the texts/extracts studied
- made limited comment about contexts of production and reception, mode or genre, particularly for the non-literary material
- made broad comments about context for the literary text, often drawing on biographical information about writers, and not linked to the investigation focus
- treated the texts separately with only isolated connections being drawn
- produced very lengthy investigations, sometimes nearly twice the recommended word limit, adopting a highly descriptive approach that lacked focused comment.

Text choices

For the non-exam assessment, students are required to produce a personal investigation, selecting their own texts for study.

This series, it was pleasing to see students working from personally selected texts, and there were certainly more examples of this independent approach to text selection than in previous series. Moderators noted that students who had selected their own texts for study produced the most engaged responses, with highly focused analyses and discussion of textual meanings. There was an impressive range of investigations this year; students have clearly responded well to the demands of this component and are offering thoughtful, often insightful exploration of a range of interesting text choices. This genuinely independent approach conveyed a sense of personal engagement with key aspects of linguistic and literary form, with perceptive study of how writers and speakers present key themes in different text types.

This series, there were fewer instances where centres had guided students all students to a single or narrow choice of texts. In the majority of cases where a narrow literary text choice was studied, students had been encouraged to select their own non-literary material. Moderators commented that whilst this approach allowed for an independent approach to the task, it did not always enable students to perform to the best of their ability; they were restricted to particular investigation foci and methods that did not always allow them to explore texts under study fully.

Some centres are adopting a 'whole-centre approach' to the non-exam assessment, with restricted text choices, both literary and non-literary, a designated list of secondary sources, and the same structure of subsections for close analysis across the cohort. Moderators found this approach to be extremely limiting for student attainment; more able students were prevented from accessing the higher mark bands, and less able students struggled to grapple with linguistic methods and interpretation of meanings. This approach to the non-exam assessment is to be discouraged as it is not within the spirit of the specification.

Literary text choices:

Prose fiction remains the most popular text choice, but there was some study of poetry and drama texts this series.

Prose fiction texts were extremely varied this year. Dystopian fiction remains a popular choice, with many students opting to focus on *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*. A wide range of young-adult fiction was also very successfully studied, with Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Will Hill's *After the Fire* offering interesting areas for close study and exploration. Texts such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Oryx and Crayke*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Career of Evil*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Small Island*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* illustrate just a small selection of the many varied texts that were studied by students this year. It is particularly heartening to see such personal engagement and investment in text choices, some of which were new to moderators and thus allowed for refreshingly original insights into texts being used for language and literature study.

There was less focus on poetry and drama texts this year, but where poetry collections were studied, there were some thoughtful choices which allowed for some close focus on linguistic methods. Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* proved a popular choice, as did Angelou's *Sill I Rise*, Plath's *Ariel* and collections by WB Yeats and Robert Frost. Suheir Hammad's *Born Palestinian Born Black* allowed for a fresh take on the struggle for personal identity. It was pleasing to see such diverse texts being used to explore a range of interesting topics and themes.

Although drama remained the least popular text choice, there were some interesting texts studied. Particularly successful were modern drama texts such as Kushner's *Angels in America* and Laura Wade's *Posh*. These allowed for some thoughtful text pairings to explore interesting and challenging themes, and were grounded in close linguistic analysis. Shakespeare's plays remained a popular choice, with particular focus on the tragedies *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. *A Doll's House* and *Pygmalion* also proved popular this series.

It is worth noting that for this specification, literary texts should be selected on the basis of offering scope for close and detailed stylistic analysis, and as such it is not necessary to prioritise texts that are part of the literary canon. Texts can be considered unsuitable if they do not offer sufficient scope for detailed study, such as books written for very young children.

Non-literary text choices:

Last year there was much greater range of non-literary material studied for the non-exam assessment than for the first series, and it was pleasing to see that students have continued to explore a wide range of text types this year. News and magazine articles remain popular choices, but students are to be commended for their carefully considered text choices that extended beyond articles.

It was pleasing to see a range of spoken data this year. Song and rap lyrics proved particularly popular this year, with students drawing from a range of artists including Stormzy, Tupac Shakur and Arctic Monkeys. As with previous years, lyrics proved most successful when they were linguistically rich, offering scope for detailed analysis. Lyrics that were brief, or contained repeated choruses limited discussion of linguistic features. Television, film and documentary scripts were also successfully used this year; Louis Theroux's documentaries afforded some interesting exploration of sensitive and highly emotive themes, and TED-talks also proved popular. Speeches were popular again this series, with many students focusing on Donald Trump's political speeches.

Graphic memoirs, although not widely used, made effective choices for non-literary material, and it was encouraging to see one student exploring haptics and proxemics in a detailed study of a graphic novel.

Less successful non-literary material tended to be broadly based on the topic or theme under study, and did not always allow for close detailed study of linguistic features. Some of these texts may have been better used as secondary reading to provide information about the topic rather than forming the main non-literary text. For instance, when focusing on representations of mental health, interviews with those affected by or living with mental illness may have proved more useful than informative articles or websites that explained particular mental health issues.

Some students selected a number of texts for their non-literary material. There is no requirement for students to study a range of non-literary material and when students addressed three or four extended articles, they struggled to find meaningful points for discussion and, given the constraints of the word limit, produced a superficial analysis. Some students had constructed mini-corpora of articles surrounding a particular theme; this was a more productive way of addressing a number of non-literary texts without becoming overwhelmed by excessive data sets.

Sections of the Investigation

Introduction

Successful approaches:

- offered a clear, conceptualised account of the literary text under study
- maintained a clear focus on the investigation focus when explaining which extracts had been selected for close analysis
- offered a clear account of the non-literary material and explained how it related to the investigation focus
- presented clear aims that were rooted in close linguistic study.

Less successful approaches:

- provided a descriptive, often very lengthy, account of the literary text under study, focused on recounting plot, central characters and broad themes
- made generalised, if any, comments about which extracts had been selected for study, showing little sense of having a rationale for the focus for close analysis
- made only very brief comment about the choice of non-literary material, without discussion of how this text related to the literary text or the investigation focus
- offered either very general aims that were not rooted in linguistic study, or made no reference to the aims for the investigation.

Review

Successful approaches:

- selected a wide range of sources, reflecting on both the literary and the non-literary material
- addressed sources that focused on the texts and themes under study
- explored concepts and linguistic methods to be explored within the Analysis section, eg narrative, rhetoric, metaphor, dialectal representation methods
- made careful and purposeful selections from secondary sources to inform the focus of the study
- reflected on key linguistic features and considered how these related to the texts under study and the investigation focus
- used secondary readings to inform and shape the main analysis.

Less successful approaches:

- selected secondary reading that was based solely on the chosen theme or topic (eg information about the Civil Rights movement). Whilst this was useful for providing information about the topic/theme, this reading did not always illuminate the focus for study
- provided very brief secondary reading only very loosely relevant to the investigation focus/topic
- provided biographical detail without considering relevance to the investigation focus/topic
- used non-academic sources when outlining and explaining linguistic features (NB whilst non-academic sources such as book reviews may be suitable for illustrating text reception, authoritative sources should be used when referring to a body of academic knowledge)
- offered dictionary definitions of linguistic terms that were often vague and imprecise.

Analysis

More successful approaches:

- selected subheadings purposefully in light of the investigation focus
- offered close and detailed analysis of the chosen texts/extracts
- made precise and accurate reference to linguistic concepts and features
- explored how meanings were shaped in an insightful way, offering some subtle and nuanced comment about interesting and carefully selected points of textual meaning
- maintained an open-minded approach to explore meanings and interpretations
- supported comments and discussion with well selected quotations from the literary and non-literary material
- made appropriate reference to a range of relevant contextual factors
- integrated discussion about relevant contexts to consider how meanings were shaped
- produced an even response, ensuring that both literary and non-literary texts were covered equally.

Less successful approaches:

- produced an extended essay without subheadings to shape the analysis; folders without subheadings in the Analysis section showed limited organisation and moved between points without guiding the reader
- used broad or non-linguistic sub-headings which led to descriptive exploration of textual meaning
- selected language methods which were not always helpful in light of the investigation focus; this series, this was particularly the case with phonology
- identified linguistic features without discussion of how these had been used to shape meanings
- used terminology imprecisely, inaccurately or very broadly, using terms such as ‘tone’ or ‘imagery’
- offered a broad analysis of the literary text, referencing quotations from across the whole text without careful selection
- made only occasional references to context in general or over-simplified terms, eg role of women; racial issues; ideas about oppression
- made brief or no reference to contexts of production, reception, mode and genre, instead favouring biographical information about the literary text writer which did not illuminate the investigation focus. This was particularly concerning when students were working with texts in different modes. For instance, when examining documentaries, or film/television scripts there was very little comment about how the mode and genre contribute to the construction of meanings for audiences
- produced an uneven response, usually favouring the literary text with only minimal focus on the non-literary text
- explored connections in a basic way, usually by referring to shared topic or theme and without considering text type, genre or text producers’ choices.

Conclusion

More successful responses:

- reflected on the investigation focus and aims to examine and explore connections between the chosen texts
- reflected on the usefulness of the secondary sources in approaching the texts and in illuminating the study

- reflected on the relative successes and weaknesses of text choices and the methods selected for close analysis.

Less successful responses:

- repeated points from the main analysis section without reflection
- produced a very brief statement that did not reflect the investigation focus or aims.

References

More successful responses:

- made clear reference to all texts referenced within the body of the investigation
- used an established academic set of conventions to accurately reference all texts used.

Less successful responses:

- produced a bibliography rather than references, listing a range of texts that were not explicitly or clearly referenced in the body of the investigation
- provided web links to internet sites rather than presenting precise references
- did not make use of a formal academic referencing system.

Administration

Most folders were carefully put together, but in some cases, data was not included. Centres should make sure that students provide copies of all extracts and materials used for close analysis. As a reminder the NEA folder includes:

- Investigation
- References
- Appendices, to include all data used for the investigation. For the literary text, this should be copies of the extracts that have been chosen for close analysis. For the non-literary material, this should be copies of all texts used: physical copies of any texts taken from online sources, transcripts of any spoken data, and photocopies of any print based data.

Draft copies or copies of secondary reading are not required and should not be enclosed with the final NEA folder.

Marking the non-exam assessment

Marking was often detailed, making close reference to the assessment criteria. Some centres had produced their own internal mark sheets which were very helpful in illustrating how final marks were awarded. Marginal annotation was often very detailed, clearly illustrating how final marks had been awarded. In some cases, annotation simply listed AOs in the margin; this does not indicate levels of attainment, and it would be useful to have some comment making use of the descriptors from the assessment criteria to indicate how marks were awarded.

There was clear evidence of internal moderation in the vast majority of centres, and this is to be encouraged as it ensures parity of marking across a centre. Some centres showed very little evidence of internal moderation, sometimes limited to a second teacher's initials on the work but with little further comment. Some centres showed no evidence at all of having completed internal moderation. This is mandatory for the non-exam assessment and centres should ensure that all marking within a centre has been standardised.

It was disappointing to see that few centres explicitly referenced the Teacher Online Standardisation materials. These should be referenced to ensure the required standards for marking are being applied.

Students' work should be marked making close reference to the assessment criteria, and marginal or final summative comments should be framed around the descriptors therein. Comments should not be directed at the student – the audience for all annotation is AQA/moderators.

Final summative comments should make explicit reference to all four assessment objectives, and should not be a general, holistic comment. It is important to ensure that all marginal comments match the final marks awarded, so if 'uneven' is noted in the marginal notes, the folder should not be placed above Level 2 for AO2. It would be very helpful if errors were noted, as well as strengths and qualities, as it is not always clear to moderators if errors have been identified and marks awarded accordingly, or if they have been missed.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.