
A-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

7707/C NEA: Making Connections
Report on the Examination

7707/C
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General

The non-exam assessment affords students the opportunity to undertake independent study of literary and non-literary material.

As with previous years, moderators were pleased to see that students had responded very positively to the demands of the task. There was a wide variety of investigation topics driven by students' personal interests. This task allowed them to explore some original and thought-provoking text pairings and moderators were impressed with the depth of analysis offered this year.

There was some outstanding work submitted this year. The strongest investigations were cohesive, seeing how each section of the investigation could be built on and developed throughout the investigation to provide a thoughtful exploration of their chosen texts.

Assessment criteria

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. Approaches to the task

For this task, students are able to focus on a theme or representation (eg. representations of women, mental health and grief) or they may focus on a specific linguistic concept or feature (eg. narrative strategies to present personal experiences). The majority of students opted to focus on idea about representation with topics as varied as pride/vanity, female ambition/desire, toxic relationships, obsessive behaviour, fear, deceit, journeys and outsiders to name but a few. The best investigations explored these representations through the lens of rigorous linguistic analysis, thus maintaining an analytical and evaluative approach to their studies.

It was pleasing to see students respond to significant social issues in the choice of their investigation foci. Last series saw interest in representations of race following the death of George Floyd. This year, students were inspired by incidents surrounding the overturning of Roe versus Wade to explore ideas about gender, power(lessness) and agency.

Some centres are adopting a 'whole-centre approach' to the non-exam assessment whilst still allowing students free choice of literary and non-literary texts. Some centres' submissions saw similar text genres (eg. dystopian fiction), similar secondary sources, and the same language methods used 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.

Titles can often be an indicator of how successfully a student has understood the task requirements. Some titles were lengthy, confused and sometimes incredibly broad, such as ‘strategies to represent themes of religion, faith, despair and hope’ which is overly ambitious given the word limit. Titles intending to investigate the effects of racism or prejudice were similarly unworkable; whilst exploring differing methods of expressing racist views is perfectly valid, considering the effects of racism on others is not achievable within the scope of this task. Titles which were clearly focused tended to work much better, enabling students to sustain a clear focus on their investigation aims.

When offering close analysis of their chosen texts, students need to select suitable extracts or passages from their literary text, and also from their non-literary material if it is a lengthy text. Stronger responses made careful selections from their chosen texts, choosing passages that would allow for detailed exploration of their chosen theme and aims. Some students made very brief reference to their texts, sometimes limited to a handful of quotes. This led to a general discussion of the texts under study, with some broad assertions about textual meanings and representations.

The word count of 2,500-3,000 words was frequently exceeded, sometimes more than double the recommended limit. Across the board, students did not benefit from overly lengthy investigations and often the quality of the work was compromised. This was particularly evident in the Introduction section which saw many detailed descriptions and plot summaries, and in the Analysis section where too many sections had been included – one or two sections could easily have been cut without affecting the quality of the work. Editing work is a skill in itself, and students should be guided towards judicious selection and editing of their work. The best investigations successfully worked within the word limit.

Text choices

Moderators noted that there were far fewer examples of students working with a ‘set literary text’ than in previous series and it was pleasing to see the level of independent study on show.

As with previous years, more students opted to work with novels than poetry or drama. Some very popular choices included: 1984, To Kill a Mocking Bird, Little Women, and Pride and Prejudice. It was pleasing to see literary texts as diverse as The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo, The Hobbit, American Psycho, Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, Norwegian Wood, Murder on the Orient Express, Stephen King’s The Stand and Misery and Song of Achilles. Short story collections were less popular than novels, but there were some interesting studies based on The Bloody Chamber. Centres are reminded that students must refer to a short story collection, not short stories in isolation. Some students had opted to study The Yellow Wallpaper, responding to this as a standalone text rather than as part of a collection of Perkins Gilman’s stories. This does not meet the requirement of study of a substantial text for this component.

There were some responses to Sylvia Plath’s Ariel and Rupi Kaur’s Milk and Honey and these were mostly well handled, but there were significantly fewer students who focused on poetry collections than in previous years. Similarly, there was very little focus on drama texts with occasional study of The Crucible and Macbeth but otherwise drama was not a popular choice this year.

Translated texts continue to be used, sometimes very successfully but in some cases contextual factors surrounding these text types were not fully understood. Some students selected very ambitious texts, eg. Pilgrim’s Progress, Portnoy’s Complaint. Some students were able to respond

successfully to such challenging texts, but some struggled to engage with complexities and nuances of textual meanings. It is worth reminding centres that, for this component, literary texts should be selected on the basis of offering scope for close and detailed stylistic analysis. It is not necessary to prioritise works that are part of the literary canon.

Non-literary material was selected more thoughtfully than in previous years. As seen in last year's submission there were many speeches, including ML King, Trump and Obama. There were also some articles, but there was less reliance on these than previously. Song lyrics proved popular, as did documentaries and screenplays. Extracts from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* proved successful in exploring changing representations and attitudes towards women's power, as was Pankhurst's 'Freedom or Death' speech.

Screenplays were perhaps less successfully responded to, with many students describing aspects of plot or visuals without engaging with dialogue and interaction between characters. Where screenplays based on literary texts were selected, there was a tendency to approach these as a literary text rather than as a screenplay, with many genre aspects ignored. In these cases, it may have been more useful to study the literary text that the screenplay was based on instead of the screenplay version.

Some students selected texts that were not suitable for study. Factsheets gleaned from websites often offered little by way of interesting linguistic detail. Some students opted to focus on academic reports or factual TED talks which may have been better used as secondary reading.

If centres are unsure about task or text choices, they should contact their NEA Adviser for guidance.

AO1

This assessment objective focuses 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 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>

Secondary reading is also rewarded for AO1. This should support, contest and underpin ideas explored for the investigation and can come from any field, including literary criticism, linguistics, stylistics and so on. The AQA guide to stylistics and further reading provides some useful suggestions for wider reading: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7707-STYLISTICS-CTT.PDF>. Students should not, however, be limited to the suggestions provided and should be encouraged to examine sources that are relevant to the task and language features being discussed.

More successful responses:

- offered detailed, conceptual accounts of the literary and non-literary texts chosen for study
- explained which extracts/passages were to be used for close analysis and provided a clear rationale for decisions about their selections
- outlined aims clearly and precisely
- selected methods for analysis purposefully, considering the investigation focus and aims

- drew on a wide range of secondary sources, addressing themes, critical approaches and linguistic features relevant to the study
- shaped their investigation appropriately with clear subheadings
- had proof-read their work to check for accuracy of terms and expression across the investigation.

Areas for development:

- very lengthy introductions tended to comprise of descriptive accounts of the literary and non-literary texts, often offering a plot summary of the literary text which did not take the investigation focus into account
- aims and discussion of extracts chosen for close analysis were often overlooked, making it difficult to determine the main focus of the investigation
- methods selected were sometimes simple or unclear, eg. 'lexis and semantics', 'word choices', leading to a generalised discussion of the chosen texts
- some linguistic methods, such as pronouns, semantic fields and sentence types, proved somewhat limiting for students, offering little scope for interesting discussion about how they were used, making obvious points about their prevalence within texts. Discussing pronouns with reference to power, agency or othering offered more fruitful discussion. Considering patterns of language across a text or passage proved more useful than identifying semantic fields. Discussion of sentence types was mostly obvious and basic
- secondary sources that were limited to a discussion of the chosen theme did not illuminate the study, merely offering an account of the topic under study
- some references to linguistic features and concepts drew on simple sources, eg. Bitesize or dictionary definitions. This led to superficial comment and some misunderstanding of terms and concepts
- some students provided a Review section merely as a means of fulfilling the task requirements, seeing it as an 'add-on' rather than a useful section that could inform their analysis
- while all students shaped their investigations according to broad headings, eg. Introduction, Review, Analysis and Conclusion, some students did not organise their analysis into subsections, or labelled subsections unclearly, leading to some disorganisation in the presentation of the final report.

AO2

This assessment objective 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.

Students who had carefully thought about their linguistic methods and subheadings offered thoughtful, precise and well developed analyses, showing genuine engagement with textual meanings. Those students who had thought carefully about their investigation to meet AO1 performed best for AO2, not seeing each section as separate but able to see how the different sections linked together to produce a cohesive investigation.

More successful responses:

- maintained a close focus on their investigation focus and aims throughout the analysis
- selected quotes from the literary and non-literary material carefully, and used these to explore subtle textual meanings
- offered detailed analysis, underpinned with carefully selected language methods and precise terminology
- used ideas gleaned from their secondary sources to inform their discussion of textual meanings and patterns of language features across their texts/extracts

- approached both the literary text and non-literary material evenly.

Areas for development:

- limited quotation from the literary and non-literary material, sometimes only 2 or 3 quotes for each text across the whole investigation, often led to narrow and general discussion of textual meanings
- quotations were sometimes taken out of context, quoting only the word class under discussion. This was often the case for pronouns and modal verbs. This made it very difficult for students to discuss these features in a meaningful way
- some students selected a number of language based subheadings, sometimes 5 or 6 different features. The extensive number of these led to a list-like approach, with minimal development of ideas
- some students framed their subheadings to mainly address the literary text. This led to limited discussion of the non-literary material and thus resulted in an uneven analysis
- some students lost sight of their investigation focus or aims, offering a straightforward response to their texts and extracts.

AO3

This assessment objective assesses students' ability to consider how different aspects of context influence the negotiation and shaping of meaning.

As with previous series, students tended to prioritise social and historical factors, particularly if they were focusing on texts by Sylvia Plath or novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Little Women* with some broad comment about mental health and women's rights. Genre aspects were overlooked by some students, particularly when addressing speeches, with limited consideration of audience or circumstances surrounding delivery of the speeches. Centres are reminded that drawing on study of the Paris Anthology can be a useful reminder of the many varied ways in which context, mode and genre can function in texts.

More successful responses:

- selected relevant contextual factors and explored these with reference to the investigation focus and aims
- showed good understanding of social/historical factors which had been carefully researched
- reflected on different critical views to offer open-minded analysis
- considered genre, mode, audience and purpose when addressing the non-literary material
- reflected on relevant contextual details to consider how these could influence or shape interpretations of the texts.

Areas for development:

- contextual comments focused on the theme of the study were often general
- comments about women's roles, the patriarchy and social status were often broad and sometimes inaccurate
- information about writers' personal backgrounds were sometimes included without reference to the investigation focus
- interesting genres for the non-literary text including speeches, song lyrics, documentaries, cartoon strips were often not discussed for aspects of mode and genre. It was disappointing to see so many contextual details overlooked.

AO4

The NEA task is structured around Making Connections between literary and non-literary texts, and this assessment objective rewards students' ability to make links between their chosen texts to explore similarities and differences in light of the investigation focus and aims.

More successful responses:

- offered thoughtful connections throughout the investigation, reflecting on theme, language features, contextual factors and secondary sources to explore links between the texts
- saw that similar topics can be presented using very different language features depending on contexts of production, reception and genre
- considered how similar language features can have very different effects when used in different text types
- explored subtleties of similarities and complexities across the texts under study
- used the conclusion to draw strands of the investigation together.

Areas for development:

- adopting a text-by-text approach offered minimal scope for discussion of connections
- some students used simple sentence frames to introduce a link between texts, but did not expand on these statements and thus connections were overlooked
- some students assumed that the choice of texts was sufficient to suggest connections and did not address these beyond brief reference in the introduction and conclusion
- some students made broad comment about very broad connections, offering limited discussion of similarities or differences of language use.

Key messages for students

Do:

- select a clear focus for the investigation, with a precise linguistic focus for analysis and clearly stated aims
- ensure that the texts selected are suitable to explore the chosen investigation focus/topic
- select methods which will illuminate the texts and allow for detailed discussion and exploration
- select secondary sources that will illuminate ideas about the chosen topic and key linguistic methods under study
- analyse the chosen texts to explore subtleties of meaning, offering open-minded interpretations
- select quotations from the literary and non-literary material carefully and purposefully to illustrate points under discussion
- use terminology precisely
- consider how different aspects of context, including text production and reception, mode and genre contribute to the creation of meanings
- consider connections that move beyond simple similarities and differences.

Don't:

- select texts that offer only limited scope for close linguistic analysis
- prioritise the literary (or non-literary) text; both texts must be covered evenly throughout the analysis
- 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
- lose sight of the investigation focus or connections between texts.

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 important to ensure 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. Errors in students' work should be noted so that it is clear that any errors, particularly with application of terms, have been taken into account when awarding marks.

Administration

Most folders were carefully put together. In some cases, data was not included or was in the form of thumbnail images that were illegible. 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 (not an extended bibliography)
- 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.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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