

# A-level English Language and Literature

Non-exam assessment: Making connections  
Report on the Examination

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## **General**

In this first series of the new A-level specification, it was extremely pleasing to see that students had responded very well to the opportunity to engage in independent study of literary and non-literary material.

Students were able to draw on wider study from the A-level English Language and Literature course to inform their non-exam assessment, applying a range of concepts and methods to the texts under study.

There was an impressive level of study evident from many students, showing that they had engaged fully with a stylistics-informed methodology. Moderators commented on the carefully chosen texts, the range of non-literary material that had been selected, and the often incredibly useful secondary reading that genuinely illuminated the overall focus of study. Moderators were also impressed with the level of linguistic detail that explored textual meaning in detail, with some very perceptive and insightful observations about the texts under study.

The investigation focus may address a chosen theme or representation (e.g. the representation of villains, differing realities of war, social manipulation and oppression), or could focus on the use of a specific linguistic concept or feature (e.g. the creation of reliable narrators, power and hierarchy, the representation of real and scripted dialects).

Investigations based on a particular theme or representation proved most popular, with fewer students selecting specific and precise linguistic devices to investigate. However, students who did opt to focus on linguistic techniques tended to produce highly focused investigations with rigorous and detailed analyses on a variety of different levels.

Investigations that focused on themes and representations were more successful when they employed precise and detailed linguistic techniques to explore how those themes and representations were presented in their chosen texts. Some investigations moved away from close linguistic detail, offering only very general and impressionistic accounts of the texts under study and general discussion of the chosen themes or representations.

## **Key messages for students**

- 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
- ensure that texts selected are suitable and appropriate for study according to the chosen investigation focus
- select suitable methods which illuminate the texts under study
- be prepared to apply terminology accurately and to link features to interpretation
- be prepared to consider different aspects of context and how these may shape and influence the creation of meanings

## **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.

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.

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:

- made careful selection of both their literary and non-literary texts
- selected a clear focus for the investigation, with precise title and aims
- selected secondary reading that illuminated the focus for study
- selected suitable methods for their analysis
- shaped the investigation using clear and precise sub-headings
- applied terminology accurately and precisely
- used precise terminology to explore in detail how meanings were shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and tools (e.g. types of narration, creation of a storyworld, power, representational factors when exploring key topics or themes)
- reflected on suitable contextual factors to consider how meanings were shaped
- covered both texts evenly in the Analysis section
- produced well expressed, clearly structured analyses

As a general overview, less successful approaches:

- provided descriptive accounts of the literary text
- selected non-literary texts that did not work well with the chosen topic, theme or focus for the investigation

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- did not remain focused on the selected titles or aims of the investigation
  - produced uneven analysis of the literary and non-literary texts, often favouring the literary text and making only brief reference to the non-literary material
  - referenced secondary reading that did not illuminate the investigation focus
  - did not use terminology, or made errors in the application of terminology
  - used general labels (e.g. ‘word’, ‘tone’, ‘imagery’) rather than precise terms
  - feature spotted, with very little exploration of meaning
  - made broad assertions that were not supported by close reference to the chosen texts/extracts
  - included very long quotations with minimal discussion of meaning, or did not suitably contextualise quotations, thus divorcing them from meaning
  - made limited links and connections between the chosen texts

Moderators noted that some centres were adopting a ‘whole-centre’ approach to the NEA, where a single literary text was studied and, although there was some variation of non-literary material, they were very similar in terms of topic, theme and genre (e.g. all taken from *The Guardian*). In some cases, titles and subheadings within the Analysis section were also very similar, thus not fulfilling the independent study element that is a requirement for this component.

### **Text choices**

For the non-exam assessment, students are required to produce a personal investigation, selecting their own texts for study. It was pleasing to see that many centres had encouraged students to pursue individual lines of enquiry by selecting their own literary and non-literary texts. Students had clearly enjoyed the opportunity to study their own text choices, and this was evidenced in the quality of the work produced; those who undertook personally selected investigations engaged fully with key ideas, themes and linguistic detail. Some centres had guided students towards a narrow range of literary texts, and moderators found that this sometimes proved limiting for students at the bottom end of the mark ranges as they were unable to engage with complexities of linguistic detail and subtleties of meaning.

Successful approaches:

- showed careful selection of texts, with a clear focus on the overall investigation aims
- selected literary and non-literary texts that worked well together
- selected texts that were appropriate for detailed study (NB there is no requirement to select texts which are part of the literary canon, but those texts selected should have interesting patterns of language that can form the basis for interesting and thoughtful linguistic study)
- selected interesting and diverse non-literary material (e.g. biographical / autobiographical texts, travel writing, letters, transcripts of speeches or spontaneous talk)

Less successful approaches:

- selected texts that did not clearly complement each other in terms of topic, theme or linguistic techniques
- showed little care with the selection of non-literary texts, often selecting broad news or magazine articles that were only loosely based on the topic or theme under study
- selected non-literary texts which were linked in terms of theme, but contained limited interesting linguistic techniques, thus making it difficult to sustain detailed analysis throughout the investigation

This series, prose fiction proved the most popular text type, with only some students using poetry collections or drama texts. Popular prose fiction texts included:

- *The Yellow Wallpaper and Collected Short Stories* – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- *Lolita* – Vladimir Nabokov
- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* – John Boyne
- *Great Expectations* – Charles Dickens
- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* – Ken Kesey
- *1984* – George Orwell
- *Room* – Emma Donoghue
- *A Thousand Splendid Suns* – Khaled Hosseini
- *The Color Purpose* – Alice Walker

Fewer students focused on poetry, but there were some responses to *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin, *World War I Poetry* and Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel*. Drama texts were relatively rare, but there were some responses to *Pygmalion* and *An Inspector Calls*. This may be as a result of when the non-exam assessment is completed: many centres focused on NEA at the end of the first year of study, before they had covered Component 2: Dramatic Conflict, and thus students may not have covered many drama texts by this point. This seems like a perfectly sensible place to introduce students to the NEA; however, it would be useful if centres introduced students to all three literary genres in preparation for their NEA and then allowed them to make informed decisions about final text choices.

## Introduction

Successful approaches:

- provided a clear, conceptualised overview of the literary text under study
- made clear reference to the extracts that had been selected for close analysis, and explained why these extracts had been chosen
- clearly described the choice of non-literary material and explained how it related to the investigation focus and aims
- presented clear aims that were rooted in linguistic study

Less successful approaches:

- offered a descriptive account of the literary text, recounting the plot and central characters and themes
- made very broad or no comments about the chosen extracts, so that the direction and focus of the investigation remained unclear
- made very brief comment about the non-literary texts without explaining how these related to the literary text, or the investigation focus
- provided broad aims that were not rooted in linguistic study

## Review

Successful approaches:

- selected a range of sources, reflecting on both the literary and non-literary material
- made careful and purposeful selections from the secondary reading

- reflected on key linguistic techniques and considered how these related to the chosen texts and investigation focus
- used secondary reading to inform and shape the main analysis

Less successful approaches:

- selected secondary reading that was based solely on the chosen theme or topic (e.g. articles that explained mental health). Whilst this was useful for providing information about the topic/theme, this reading did not illuminate the focus for study
- provided only very brief secondary reading that did not explore the texts in a meaningful way
- referenced only the literary text and did not consider the non-literary material
- used non-academic sources when outlining explaining linguistic techniques (NB whilst non-academic sources such as book reviews may be suitable for exemplifying responses to texts, authoritative sources should be used when referring to a body of academic knowledge)
- appended the Review section after the Conclusion, suggesting that it had not been used to inform the investigation as a whole

## **Analysis**

More successful responses:

- shaped the analysis using precise and well-focused subheadings
- offered close analysis of the chosen texts/extracts
- used linguistic techniques precisely and accurately
- explored how meanings were shaped in a subtle and insightful way
- integrated comments about context to consider how meanings were shaped
- made appropriate reference to a range of carefully selected contextual factors
- produced an even response, addressing the literary and non-literary texts equally

Less successful responses:

- produced an extended essay without subheadings to shape the analysis
- used broad or non-linguistic sub-headings
- selected overly ambitious language methods which were not always accurately or precisely explored in light of the investigation focus
- offered a broad analysis of the literary text, without close focus on precisely selected extracts
- used terminology imprecisely or inaccurately
- rarely used linguistic terms, using only broad terms such as ‘tone’
- made only occasional references to context in very broad terms
- made over-simplified references to contexts of representation, especially gender roles over time
- made only very brief reference to contexts of production, reception and mode. This was particularly concerning when students were working with texts in different modes, e.g. prose fiction alongside spoken language
- produced an uneven response, usually favouring the literary text with only minimal focus on the non-literary text. This was particularly the case where centres had selected only one literary choice for the NEA, suggesting that the text had been taught to students. It should be remembered for future series that it is advisable that texts for the NEA are not be taught as

they would for the examined unit as this often leads to students struggling to demonstrate evidence of independent study.

## **Conclusion**

More successful responses:

- reflected on the investigation focus and aims in order to consider connections between the chosen texts
- reflected on the relative successes and weaknesses of the texts, methods and approaches
- reflected on the usefulness of the secondary reading in illuminating their study

Less successful responses:

- repeated some of the main points from the Analysis section without reflection
- produced a very brief statement or comment that did not reflect on 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

## **Administration**

Most folders were carefully put together. 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 NEA:**

Students' work should be marked making close reference to the marking 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.

It is helpful to reference the Teacher Online Standardisation Materials (TOLS) when awarding final marks. These can be found on the secure AQA website, and provide a useful guide to the required standards for marking for this component.



### **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.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

### **Converting Marks into UMS marks (*delete if appropriate*)**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.  
[UMS conversion calculator](#)