AQA

A-level
English Language & Literature

7707/C Non-examined assessment: Making Connections
Report on the Examination

7707/C
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General

This series saw the second submission of the NEA, and moderators were pleased to report that students continue to respond very positively to the requirements for this component. Students had clearly enjoyed the opportunity to engage in independent study of literary and non-literary material, and moderators saw a wide range of different text types that had been explored in depth and with insight.

Students were able to draw on wider study from the A-level English Language and Literature course to inform their non-exam assessment, and it was pleasing to see that students were drawing on concepts, methods and ideas about representation, identity and story-telling to inform their study of literary and non-literary texts.

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 wide variety of non-literary material, and the often incredibly useful secondary reading that genuinely illuminated the overall focus of study. This year saw students drawing on a wide range of disciplines, including literary criticism, linguistics, stylistics, narratology, psychology, biographical studies, politics, as well as a range of different kinds of reading, including academic papers, online reader reviews and book chapters. This allowed for detailed exploration of the literary and non-literary material under study, and it is hoped that students will continue to engage with such interesting and useful wider reading. 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, changing ideas about racial or gender equality, social class differences, power 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 features 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 most successful when they were rooted in a precise focus on linguistic devices. Those investigations that moved away from close linguistic detail tended to be quite generalised and often descriptive, offering only an impressionistic account of the texts under study.

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
- ensure that all texts selected are suitable and appropriate for study according to the chosen investigation focus
- select methods which will illuminate the texts and chosen focus for study
- 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 may shape and influence 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 the 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 useful to think about AO1 knowledge as comprising of concepts (idea) 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:

- made careful selection of both literary and non-literary texts
- selected a clear focus for the investigation, with a clear title and aims
- selected secondary sources carefully to address the topic and theme under study, the literary and non-literary texts, and specific linguistic features to be examined in the analysis section
- selected suitable methods for analysis, informed by appropriate secondary sources
- made precise use of appropriate terminology to explore how meanings were shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and tools (e.g. speech and thought presentation, metaphor, narrative, storytelling, and representation of people, places, events and issues)
- reflected on suitable contexts of production and reception, as well as mode and genre 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:

- selected texts that did not work well with the chosen topic, theme or focus for the investigation
- selected texts that did not allow for close consideration of connections according to the theme or topic
- did not remain focused on the title or on the aims of the investigation
- produced an uneven analysis, often prioritising the literary text over the non-literary material
- used terminology in a general way without precise terms
- adopted a feature-spotting approach, with very limited exploration of meanings
- made broad assertions that were not supported by close reference to the chosen texts/extracts
- offered only very brief quotations, sometimes only isolated words that were not placed within the immediate context of the text(s) or passage; this made accuracy difficult to determine as identification of word class was unclear, and this sometimes led to unconvincing interpretation of meanings

- made only limited reference to contexts of production and reception, and mode or genre, particularly for non-literary material
- offered broad and rather simplistic comments about representational topics, particularly gender and race
- made only limited connections across the chosen texts.

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 schools had encouraged students to pursue individual lines of enquiry by selecting their own literary and non-literary texts, and it was certainly notable that more students had selected texts independently than in last year's submission. Students had clearly enjoyed the opportunity to study their own text choices, and this was evidenced in the quality of the work produced, with some impressive and perceptive exploration of a range of themes and representations, underpinned with a rigorous linguistic analysis.

Some schools had guided students towards a narrow range of literary texts with a small minority of schools focusing on the same literary text for all students. However, those that did, offered a suitable range of non-literary texts thus maintaining a close focus on independent study.

It was notable that where schools had restricted both the literary and the non-literary text choice, there was a marked lack of independent study, with the same investigation focus and aims, and leading to examination of the same extracts using the same linguistic methods. Moderators found this approach to be limiting, particularly for lower-achieving students, who struggled to grapple with linguistic features and interpretations 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:

There was a wide variety of text choices from all three genres which was pleasing to see.

Prose fiction was still the most common choice, with texts ranging from *The Wasp Factory* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Students had clearly been inspired by their study of other components on the course, and opted to study texts by Atwood, Hosseini and Seabold, as well as dystopian fiction, with *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Road* proving popular choices. Texts such as *The Time Traveller's Wife, The Help, Go Set a Watchman, Trainspotting* and *Heart of Darkness* illustrate the wide range of texts that were studied. Some short story collections were also studied, including *The Bloody Chamber* and various collections of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's stories, but novels tended to be the most popular text choice.

There was some focus on poetry collections this year, notably World War I poetry, and Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*. It should be remembered that when focusing on poetry, a collection needs to be studied, not just the few poems selected for close analysis. Some students, particularly those focusing on Wilfred Owen's poetry, showed little evidence of having studied an entire collection.

Drama, whilst not as popular a choice as prose fiction, was studied by significantly more students than last year, and it was pleasing to see a range of drama texts under study, including several Shakespeare plays ranging from *Much Ado About Nothing* to *Hamlet*, as well as more modern drama texts including *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, A Doll's House, The Crucible, Jerusalem* and *Angels in America.*

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. However, some texts can be considered unsuitable as they do not offer sufficient scope for detailed study, particularly books written for very young children.

Non-literary texts:

It was pleasing to see a much wider choice of non-literary material this year. Whilst news and magazine articles remained a popular text choice, there was a much larger range of text types under study.

It was particularly pleasing to see a range of spoken data this year. Speeches by noted figures proved popular, ranging from Malala Yousafzai to Frederick Douglass, as well as a variety of political speeches. There was some focus on transcribed extracts from film, television broadcasting and documentaries, including extracts from documentaries by Stephen Fry and Louis Theroux, as well as extracts from films such as *Suffragette* to explore a wide variety of topics, themes and representations.

Song lyrics also proved a popular choice this year, and they were mostly very successfully chosen, particularly where the chosen lyrics were linguistically rich, such as those by Eminem or The Weekend. Lyrics were less successful when only loosely linked to a theme, such as 'love' when they contained minimally interesting linguistic detail.

Some extended texts were also selected for study this series, such as biographies by public figures or memoirs based on war or criminal incidents. It should be noted that when working with an extended non-literary text, students should carefully select extract(s) to focus their close analysis on, in much the same way they would with their literary text.

There were some less successful text choices, and they tended to be either those which offered only limited scope for close linguistic study such as graphologically driven advertisements, or those which were only broadly based on theme and topic. These texts seemed to have been selected very much as an afterthought and as such were not explored in sufficient detail to illuminate the topic and theme under investigation. In some cases, the texts selected may have been more successful as secondary sources, providing alternative insights into the investigation focus than as texts suitable for close detailed analysis.

Some students selected a number of texts for their non-literary material. This is to be discouraged as a wide variety of texts can lead to quite superficial analysis given the constraints of the word limit.

Introduction

Successful approaches:

- offered a clear, conceptualised account of the literary text under study
- explicitly stated which extract(s) had been selected for close analysis and linked them to the investigation focus and aims
- offered a clear account of the non-literary material that had been selected and explained how it related to the investigation focus and aims
- presented clear aims that were rooted in close linguistic study.

Less successful approaches:

- provided a descriptive account of the literary text under study, focused on recounting plot, central characters and broad themes
- made very generalised comments, or no comment at all 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 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 range of sources, reflecting on both the literary and the non-literary material
- addressed sources that focused on theme as well as linguistic features
- explored concepts to be examined in the analysis section in detail, e.g. narrative, rhetoric, accent representation, metaphor, speech and thought presentation
- 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 (e.g. information about women's liberation movements). Whilst this was useful for providing information about the topic/theme, this reading did not illuminate the focus for study
- focused on secondary sources as a precursor to production of the non-exam assessment, thus addressing readings which had contributed to topic or text selection, but not focusing on the study itself
- 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 and explaining linguistic features (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)
- used secondary sources to provide definitions of terms.

Analysis

More successful approaches:

- made careful use of well selected subheadings to shape their analysis
- offered close and detailed analysis of the chosen texts/extracts
- used linguistic terms precisely and accurately
- explored how meanings were shaped in an insightful way, offering some subtle and nuanced comment about interesting and carefully selected points of textual meaning
- 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
- 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, inaccurately or very broadly, using terms such as 'tone' or 'imagery'
- focused on identifying and labelling linguistic features with little discussion of meanings
- made only occasional references to context in very general or over-simplified terms
- made only very brief occasional reference to contexts of production, reception, mode and genre. This was particularly concerning when students were working with texts in different modes, e.g. examining drama texts, or documentaries, etc. Non-literary texts in particular offered scope for very detailed examination of mode and genre, but these were often ignored in favour of socio-historic comment that did not always illuminate discussion
- produced an uneven response, usually favouring the literary text with only minimal focus on the non-literary text.

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. 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 schools had produced their own internal mark sheets which were very helpful in illustrating how final marks were awarded. There was clear evidence of internal moderation in the vast majority of schools, and this is to be encouraged as it ensures parity of marking across a school.

It was disappointing to see that few schools 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.