OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

AS and A LEVEL
Teacher Guide

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H072/H472
For first teaching in 2015

Getting the most from reading critical material (in support of AO5)

Version 1

Introduction

There are numerous ways to explore 'different interpretations' to meet the AO5 criterion. These can include:

- Citing and discussing specific critics/ critical essays

- Discussing how interpretations have changed over time

- Discussing how different dramatisations of the text demonstrate different readings

- Discussing the text in relation to a school/ schools of critical reading (feminist/ Marxist etc etc)

- Discussing different interpretations of meaning (e.g.: 'Some readers may argue…whereas others may…')

The likelihood is that you shall provide your learners with a range of secondary readings to supplement their understanding of the text. Often it is possible to locate one or two very good critical essays that cover many of these approaches to exploring 'different interpretations'. Such essays are excellent models to help learners see how they can use one or several of these approaches to AO5.

Setting up for wider-reading

Reading critical essays represents no mean feat and not all readings will be manageable for (all of) your learners. It is advisable to use readings which explore themes that you have already discussed in class, and that on the whole you know your learners are comfortable working with.

As a rule of thumb, when setting up seminar style sessions (or other feedback processes) that centre on a single reading or on comparing readings, it is useful to begin your preparation early. If learners know from the outset that they shall be expected to undertake wider reading on a regular basis, and more importantly, to be able to actively feedback on the reading (eventually even to challenge the merit of the ideas presented in the reading), then they very quickly familiarise themselves with this process – and therefore gain more from it.

Asking learners to provide a separate file to keep their readings in is a great way to formalise the wider reading process. Students should be told that maintaining a well organised file is an excellent way to prepare for their assessment as everything they need is easy to access.

A gentle word of warning – Needless to say, before engaging in any wider reading task, it is vital that the readings are checked for quality, safeguarding and diversity reasons. Furthermore, it is vital that you have a very good knowledge of the reading(s) that you are working with as you must be able to answer questions and to make sense of difficult content. Wider-reading should not be used as a last-minute lesson filler, but as a fully planned lesson or programme of study activity.

Stage one – introducing wider-reading to your class

Selecting readings

When starting your wider-reading process always start with manageable resources. It may be that you can first work with some good quality past essays from a previous cohort, some useful critical sections of student guides, the introduction to your edition of the text if you have one ('The Everyman Shakespeare' edition of Measure for Measure is a good starting point for example). You could also selectively pull out extracts from overly lengthy or complex readings. The key thing is that readings are selected that have a very clear resonance within the literary texts that are being studied for the course.

Preparing learners for active reading

Ensure that learners are forewarned of the challenges presented by the readings you provide. Let them know that the reading(s) may contain difficult, unfamiliar, perhaps even discomforting ideas and that you do not expect them to be experts in interpreting academic content, theories or language straight away. However, also let them know that while they may find the task challenging, that you encourage them to persevere. You should let them know that they should expect to read articles more than once to really get to grips with them, in the same way they would expect to read the core texts more than once to really understand them. You should also prepare well for any areas you perceive are likely to be an issue within each reading you use by providing crib sheets, glossaries, introductions or summaries of the reading that will help learners get to grips with complicated terminology or concepts contained in the reading.

Stage two – undertaking 'active' reading

Active reading strategies

Make sure that whatever reading(s) you start with, that you discuss note-taking strategies with your learners before they engage in wider reading activity. Let them know that there is no point in engaging with wider reading if they forget everything they read as soon as they have read it. You can ask them to discuss strategies for note-taking that they already use or let them know about the following approaches:

Highlighting systems

Use a colour-coded system. Green = major/key ideas, yellow = supplementary ideas, red = any aspect that they have not understood, pink = any area that they feel merits wider discussion (they are not necessarily confused by the content, but feel it would be useful to know more) etc etc. You can make this approach uniform if you wish, but many learners will already feel confident in devising their own system. The great thing about such a system is that you can see at a glance that the text has been read. However, do beware of learners who highlight great swathes of the reading – this is often an indicator that the student is struggling to extract key points.

Annotation

It is often most useful when annotation is used in conjunction with highlighting systems. Underline key points, circle key phrases (because they are useful, are worthy of use in their own work), circle and underline key phrases or words or content that they do not understand. Leave notes summarising key points, asking questions, making links to other sections or personal thoughts/ previous learning points. This is another great way to see at a glance that the text has been read, and at closer-inspection it will be clear the extent to which the reading has been understood or engaged with due to the quality and quantity of the annotations. Again beware of large sections that have been underlined.

Symbol systems

Brackets for key content, stars against key terms, exclamation marks against anything they do not know, question marks against anything they want to know more about. Though another visual tool, in reality symbol systems are best utilised with annotations.

Summarising bullet points or paragraphs

Some learners find it difficult to work with a text full of annotations. In this instance encourage learners to make summaries of sections of the text and also the full text. This can be done via bullet points or paragraphs, but learners should be encouraged to probe what they have read so it is best if their summaries both outline what they have learnt and also ask questions about the material. They should seek where they can to make links between sections, previous learning and their own thoughts as they have read. These summaries can be written at the end of the document or sections of the document – but do remind them that if there is limited space on the document then a separate sheet of paper would be better to use (they can always attach this to the reading to keep them together).

Reading journals

This is increasingly a technique used at university level, the idea is to summarise the reading as you read through, asking

probing questions about the meaning of the content and questioning what you think about the content (How is your own interpretation of the text/ aspects of the text changed as a result of the reading? Do you subscribe to the views outlined by the reading? - if so why? if not why?). Eventually the journal may also provide space for learners to compare their views of a range of readings that they have addressed. The journal is usually more detailed than the average reading summaries (as outlined above), and it is best practice to reflect both as you are reading, and after absorbing the reading. In reality probably only the most conscientious of learners can be relied upon to regularly engage in such a process, and indeed, not all learners will necessarily feel comfortable with this format so be discerning about how you use this tool.

Voice/Video recordings

Some learners may prefer to record themselves discussing the reading as a way to record their thoughts. These can actually be really useful tools to place on online learning portals if you wanted to extend this to a group activity. Do make sure that you provide guidance on how they could format their ideas so that there is some structure to their discussion.

A key focus of these strategies should always be making direct links between the reading and the primary text that is being studied.

Stage three – activity engaging in discussion and feedback

Whenever I undertook wider-reading activities with my learners, I always ensured that I could see the document (and attached notes) of all learners. This enabled me to assess at a glance who had read the article, and to gain some initial ideas as to how deeply they have engaged with it.

As mentioned above, often the way in which a text has been highlighted or annotated can provide insights into how well a reader has engaged with a reading. Lengthy sections of highlights or underlining is often a warning sign. If you notice this approach has been adopted, it is worth asking why the learner has done this and to guide them into seeing which areas of the text are actually the most valuable. Learners who tend to take this approach may be doing so for one of a couple of reasons. Firstly, they may simply not understand what is most important – in which case helping them to be more selective will eventually mean their note-taking process is more useful.

Secondly, they may simply not understand the content of parts, or all, of the reading and are trying to disguise it – in which case make sure in feedback sessions you ask the lower level questions of this type of learner first and ensure that after the full discussion you provide a further strategy to help them make effective notes on the reading now they have a more secure understanding.

Thirdly, they have not really engaged with the reading (the usual thing: totally forgot until two minutes before class, left it too late to read the text and so have not really engaged with the material, read it while watching TV, read the reading in stages and so have not gained an appreciation of the whole, or they do not really see the point of further reading). If this is the case then it is important that the feedback to the learner matches the reason why they have not read the text. If they forgot or left it too late to read properly, and are not in the habit of doing so, then you can use a whole host of activities to enable them to fit into the feedback process. For example ask them to read to the class a particular section where a key idea is contained and to offer some initial thoughts - this will enable them to be an active part of the discussion. If you notice a habit of not engaging with the readings, or a haphazard engagement, then you need to ascertain the root cause of this before you can take action. For example, if they simply find the reading too challenging you may start to differentiate the readings you provide to the class. If they are in the habit of reading while watching TV then you can address effective study strategies with the learner.

Although not conceived as a stalling activity, I recommend that you provide 5-10 mins of re-familiarisation time so that all learners are fully prepared to discuss the article. Often it is useful to ask learners to answer some initial questions or to write a summary to help them focus their ideas. This has the advantage of enabling you to question any learners who have forgotten to do the reading or for another reason have not read the article and determine how you wish to deal with this. (If it

is your strategy to ask learners to leave the class to undertake the reading elsewhere, then it would be useful to provide a reading response structure to guide learners to a comfortable engagement with the article.)

Discussing the formalities of the text

It is always useful to provide readings that contain bibliographical details. If these are not available on the document itself, ensure that you provide them on a PPT slide. It is important that these aspects are discussed so that learners can locate what they have read into a broader set of contexts:

Who?

Who wrote it? Are they male or female (transgendered or do not subscribe to a gender – though you may not know if either of these are the case). How might their gender impact the content/ views shown? What professional role does the author of the reading have now and when they wrote the text? How does their status impact the ways in which we may interpret or use the reading? Etc.

When?

When was the article written? How might this have impacted the views explored in the reading? How does the publication date impact how we should interpret the reading? How does the publication date impact the usefulness or relevance of the article and how we might use it? Etc.

What?

What is the reading? For example is it a university paper, a teaching resource, a newspaper article? How does the form/ genre of the reading impact the ideas/content of the reading? Etc.

Where?

Where was the article published? Does the publication house/organisation tell us anything about why the content/ideas within the text take the form they do? To what extent does the region or country of origin of author or publication impact the ideas/content of the article? Etc.

Placing the critical material/reading into a spectrum of critical discourse on the primary text is an important process. It's key that learners understand that the above elements will inform the interpretations of the primary text and that certain trends in interpretation are established within specific geographic, demographic, historical, political, social and literary contexts.

Discussing the content of the text

In setting up a seminar-style feedback session, it is always useful to have a clear outline as to how you shall address the reading. You can frame the discussion session as a series of questions that you work through together, or as a series of issues/challenges presented by the reading, or by selecting key sections that you want the group to discuss more broadly.

Ensure that you achieve active engagement from all members of the group – lower level learners should be asked more accessible questions initially to build their confidence while stronger learners should be asked to build on others' comments or to provide alternative insights. If you have a large group you might consider splitting the group so that while one group engages in the seminar activity the other group undertakes an independent learning task – this way you can ensure a more enriching experience for all learners.

The key thing about the feedback session is that all learners are left with two or three ideas/points that they can take away from the reading and how these can inform interpretations of the primary text. Initially when you are undertaking seminar style discussion or other formats of feedback on wider-reading, you should ensure that you capture the key points from the discussion in a centralised place (though learners should be encouraged to also take their own notes and/or add further annotations to the text). The centralised notes can then be translated into a final summary of key points/ideas that all learners should be able to take away from the reading – initially these may be the bare minimum ideas you want them to be able to work with, with one or two slightly more complex ideas. During later wider-reading activity you can grade the summary notes as 'simplified interpretations of the reading', 'more complex interpretations of the reading', to 'sophisticated interpretations of the reading' to show learners how they can work towards increasing their engagement with texts – do be encouraging to those learners who simply cannot work with the more complex ideas though, as in reality a competent engagement with the more simple interpretations can demonstrate a good engagement with the AO5 criteria.

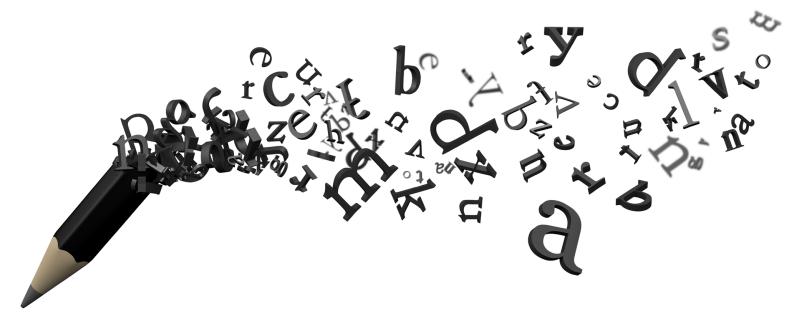# Stage four – contextualising the reading into practical applications

One of the first things to do when moving on from the feedback session is to ensure you congratulate your learners for working with (often) university level readings. Making the quality of the reading clear to learners is a useful starting point to start considering the conventions of embedding critical material into an essay response. Luckily having just read an article that has referenced and drawn on other critical material, you have a useful visual tool to show learners how they can embed references and quotations of other people's ideas into their own essays. It is useful also to show them how to be selective in their choice of references or quotations, how to use appropriate length quotations, and how to decide whether to paraphrase someone else's idea or to quote directly. Inevitably learners will also ask about whether they can quote one of the sources that are referenced in the text, and this will enable you to both explain the process, and to discuss useful ways where the ideas of the author of the article, and those presented by one of the sources within the article can be used to compliment or challenge one another.

A useful exercise when preparing learners to use sources that they have read is to ask them to select three quotations from the article and then write P.E.E.L (point, evidence, evaluation, link) paragraphs where they use each of the quotes. I typically would ask them to make an interpretative statement about the primary text (the novel, drama, poetry that is being studied), which they support with textual evidence (they can use two or three examples if they choose) and then go on to evaluate both the point and the evidence, and then use the secondary source (the reading) as a linking point by either using a complimentary quotation or a quotation that offers a differing view. You can advance this by asking them if they can find another critical view which they can add to the PEEL paragraph to further develop the discussion on this aspect of the text.

It is vitally important that learners are able to see how to draw aspects of the critical text into a broader discussion of how the primary text could be interpreted. It is also useful for learners to critically assess the extent to which the interpretations have value and whether the interpretations offered by the reading are dominant, emerging or lesser acknowledged interpretations.

Next steps

Encouraging learners to read widely is always valuable, so even if not all of the readings can be approached in class time it is useful to make them available to learners via your online learning tools, or by setting up a centralised hard copy "library" that learners can gain access to.

We'd like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on the 'Like' or 'Dislike' button you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click 'Send'. Thank you.

If you do not currently offer this OCR qualification but would like to do so, please complete the Expression of Interest Form which can be found here: www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest

OCR Resources: *the small print*
OCR's resources are provided to support the teaching of OCR specifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by OCR. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources. We update our resources on a regular basis, so please check the OCR website to ensure you have the most up to date version.

This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this small print remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:
Square down and Square up: alexwhite/Shutterstock.com • Page 3 Young girl studying, wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock.com • Page 4 Group of students discussing, Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock.com • Page 5 Group of students, Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock.com • Page 6 Young man studying, Syda productions/Shutterstock.com • Page 7 Pencil with letters flying out, Festa/Shutterstock.com

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications: resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk

Looking for a resource?

There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find **free** resources for your qualification:

www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/find-resources/

www.ocr.org.uk/alevelreform

OCR Customer Contact Centre

General qualifications
Telephone 01223 553998
Facsimile   01223 552627
Email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge. *For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored.*

© OCR 2016 Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registered office 1 Hills Road, Cambridge CB1 2EU. Registered company number 3484466. OCR is an exempt charity.

A DIVISION OF
CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

LLOYD'S REGISTER · LRQA

UKAS
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS

ISO 9001   001