

## **A LEVEL**

*Examiners' report*

# **ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**H472**

For first teaching in 2015

## **H472/03 Summer 2018 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

The non-exam assessment (NEA) is a compulsory component of the A Level English Literature qualification. It is worth 40 marks and counts as 20% of the total A Level.

The non-exam component comprises two pieces of work. For Task 1, candidates can choose to do either a close reading or a piece of re-creative writing with commentary. For the close reading task, candidates critically analyse a single section of their chosen text or an individual poem selected from an anthology or collection. Candidates should select a manageable, continuous section of text: approximately three to four pages of prose or drama or up to 45 lines of poetry are recommended. Any selection made from poetry should be either a single poem or one extract from a longer poem. The recommended word length for this task is 1000 words, excluding quotations. For the re-creative task, candidates produce a piece of writing based on a selected passage or poem from their chosen text, with a commentary explaining the links between their own writing and the original passage. The recommended word length for the re-creative piece is 350–400 words with a commentary of 600–650 words, excluding quotations. For Task 2, candidates produce an essay exploring comparisons and contrasts between two texts, informed by different interpretations and an understanding of contexts. The recommended word length for this task is 2000 words, excluding quotations, task title, footnotes and bibliography. Across the two tasks, candidates must study one prose, one drama and one poetry text. All three texts must have been first published or performed in 1900 or later and at least one text should have been first published or performed in 2000 or later.

Guidance on preparation and marking of the non-exam assessment is included in the specification, including the marking criteria. Marking should be positive, rewarding achievement rather than penalising failure or omissions. The awarding of marks must be directly related to the marking criteria. Teachers should use their professional judgement to select the best-fit level descriptor that describes the candidate's work. Teachers should use the full range of marks available to them and award all the marks in any level for which work fully meets that level descriptor. Teachers should bear in mind the weighting of the assessment objectives, place the response within a level and award the appropriate mark. If a candidate does not address one of the assessment objectives targeted in the task they cannot achieve all of the marks in the given level.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of moderations.

## General overview

### Administration

Most centres responded promptly to the requests for sample material and presented the work in an organised and clear way with all the necessary paperwork, including cover sheets and selected poems and passages for Task 1. A number of centres also helpfully included copies of their text and task approvals. There were some centres that did not supply cover sheets, or who did not fill them in correctly, and several omitted the copies of the selected passage for Task 1, which caused delays to the moderation process. It was also apparent that some centres had not used the Text and Task Approval service, which is a requirement of the specification. Centres are also reminded that each candidates' work must be securely bound together with staple or treasury tag, as loose sheets of paper can easily become confused, especially if they are not named or paginated. Centres should also pay attention to the length guidelines. Most were punctilious about ensuring that their candidates adhered closely to these, with the result that the candidates wrote tight, focused and cogent essays. Others were less disciplined, allowing candidates to write over 3,500 words and in one case over 5000. Inevitably, such work lacked focus and precision, was argued loosely and suffered as a consequence. Writing within limits is a key skill and it is a good idea to train candidates in it.



#### OCR support

Centres should ensure that they have their texts and tasks approved each year, using the Text and Task Approval service available on the subject webpage: [ocr.org.uk/alevelenglishliterature](http://ocr.org.uk/alevelenglishliterature)

### Texts and Tasks

The non-exam assessment component is designed to offer a clear alternative to the examined components, encouraging centres and candidates to pursue independent lines of enquiry. This meant that Moderators saw work on a very wide variety of texts, ranging from the traditionally canonical, like TS Eliot, the modern canonical, like Butterworth's *Jerusalem*, and those outside the canon, like George the Poet. Juxtapositions between these different eras and styles often produced fresh, engaging work. A number of texts and authors emerged as clear favourites, with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The History Boys* and *Jerusalem* featuring frequently as the drama text, while Carol Ann Duffy, Seamus Heaney and Owen Sheers were very popular in poetry. The range of novels was wider, but *Atonement*, *The Kite Runner* and *The Road* were popular choices. Candidates presented work, though, on writers as diverse as Charlotte Mew, Elizabeth Bishop, Kate Tempest, David Greig, Caryl Churchill, Arthur Miller, Graham Swift, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Colm Toibin among numerous others. Sometimes, texts were chosen which did not offer candidates the range of literary technique or sophistication of concerns to allow them to address the assessment objectives at an appropriate standard for A Level. In some centres, the same three texts had been taught, while more adventurous approaches allowed candidates free choice of at least one text – sometimes it was all three. Most centres offered candidates a range of tasks from which to choose, allowing some individuality of approach. Where candidates chose their own extract or poem for Task 1 and had choice in at least one text for Task 2, they were compelled to create their own tasks and chart an individual route. Inevitably this often formed the most fresh, interesting and successful work.

## Features of Sampled Work

### Task 1: Close reading

The close reading task is designed to encourage close, detailed, analytical reading of a relatively short section of text, putting the emphasis on AO2. That selected poem or passage also needs to be placed in the context of the wider text from which it is taken, addressing AO1. This means that those tasks which focused clearly on a 'detailed discussion of...' or 'analytical reading of...' were often more successful than those tasks which were phrased more as general essay topics.

At the top level, there were examples of sophisticated and perceptive analysis, showing a real appreciation of how writers communicate their meanings and shape the reader's or audience's response. The best responses gave a clear, cogent reading of their selected poem or extract, developed through precise attention to ways in which it was constructed and expressed. Less confident answers sometimes relied on a narrative approach, or focused analytically on individual words or images taken out of the context of the text's developing meaning. When writing about novels and plays, candidates usually made suitable connections to other parts of the text, and these links were most successful when they looked at characteristic language or technique rather than restricting the connections to plot, character and content. Candidates sometimes neglected this aspect of the task when writing about poetry and in some essays there was no reference at all to any poem beyond the one selected. Sometimes candidates gave a general sense of the collection but no specific reference. As a general guide, some reference should be made to three or four poems within the essay, in addition to the selected poem. If using poetry for the Comparative Task 2, the guidelines are that some reference is made to four or five poems, depending on length, to show knowledge and understanding of the text as a whole. In both instances, it's recognised that the discussion of some poems may be more detailed than others.

### Task 1: Re-creative writing with commentary

The re-creative option for Task 1 is not as widely done, but was nevertheless well represented in samples of work. In this task, candidates show their understanding and appreciation of the writer's methods and concerns by employing them themselves in their own passage, scene or poem, accompanied by an analytical commentary comparing their text with the original and justifying their choices. To achieve the right balance, candidates are well advised to write around 350 words for their recreated poem or passage, leaving about 650 words for the commentary. This year, a number of these commentaries only offered evaluation and analysis of the candidate's own work; it should be remembered that they need to return to the original text to show how they have created their imitation. Again this year, Moderators saw some highly skilled examples, with re-perceptions of episodes from *Atonement*, work on *Regeneration* examining the characters of Owen and Sassoon, additional scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire* which captured not only the voices of the characters but elements of Williams' plastic theatre, and some astonishingly accomplished extra poems from *The World's Wife*.

### Task 2: Comparative essay

It will always be the case that the two texts under consideration in the Comparative Task 2 will be of different genres. It is, therefore, a good place to start the comparison – how do, for example, a poet and a playwright approach a topic? How do the forms of a novel and a play affect the way the texts communicate? This task addresses all five assessment objectives and thinking in this way helps candidates to see the AOs as guides to ways of thinking about literature, rather than five hoops through which to jump. The most successful essays – and Moderators saw many excellent examples – construct organised, cogent theses based on a careful comparison of ways in which the texts are written and organised, illuminated by careful consideration of relevant contexts and engagement with a range of different responses to the texts. Less confident work tended to focus the comparison on character and plot, rather than ways in which those elements were constructed and presented, which limited

candidates' ability to address of AO2. As with Task 1, many candidates showed ability to discuss language and imagery, while consideration of features of form and structure were far less common. Sometimes, in the discussion of characters, there was no indication at all that they featured in texts of different genres. This is where the starting point of genre can be very helpful. Socio-historical considerations dominated the approach to context and worked best with specific detail applied to key elements of moments within the texts. In that way, candidates could actively explore the significance and influence of those contexts. Biographical contexts could be awkward, often leading to texts being seen purely as autobiography, but Moderators saw interesting use of cultural, literary, political, philosophical and geographic contexts in essays. Often contexts informed readings of the texts, by considering the contrasts between the time of writing and the candidates' time of reading, which often produces widely differing response shaped by events. This was key to some thoughtful consideration of Bennett's presentation of Hector in *The History Boys*, for example, and responses to the presentation of gender and power in a number of texts shaped by the #MeToo movement. Some candidates had conducted extensive reading about their texts and were able to show how reading various critical discussions had shaped their own response, engaging thoughtfully with different readings, sometimes posing them against each other, and considering their implications for the text as a whole. Writing of that nature gains high reward for AO5, while merely citing critics' views or incorporating them into the candidate's own argument is much less successful. It is the quality of engagement which is rewarded, rather than the number of citations.

**OCR support**

The OCR guide to task setting offers support with structuring task titles so that they reflect the assessment requirements.

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/258969-component-03-literature-post-1900-guide-to-task-setting.pdf>

**Marking and Annotation**

Most marking of work in centres had been carried out with real care and professionalism, with careful annotations on the work, thoughtful final comments and concise, focused summative comments on the cover sheets which carefully balanced the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Signs of second reading and internal moderation were often evident, showing the care with which this had been carried out. Such detailed consideration of the work and marking criteria usually led to final judgements which were very close to national standards. It was noted that marginal annotations were most helpful when accompanied by a brief evaluative comment – ie. 'AO5 view explored' rather than just 'AO5'. In reviewing the essay, this kind of marking gives clearer guidance for the final comment and judgement. It is also helpful if clear reasons are given when a mark is raised or lowered during internal moderation. Detail about the centre's decision makes it much easier for the Moderator to support the marks. Where there are different teaching sets, or different centres within a consortium, it is essential that the whole cohort is internally moderated together to ensure an accurate rank order before the submission of marks to OCR.

## Additional comments

### Raising Attainment

In Task 1 close reading, candidates are advised to present a clear reading of the selected extract or poem, looking in analytical detail at ways in which the writer communicates and guides reader or audience response. In relating the selection to the whole text, they should look at methods as well as content and concerns. Candidates should consider form and structure as well as language in order to address AO2 fully.

In Task 1 Re-creative writing, candidates should ensure that their commentary explores the features and concerns of the original text in order to discuss how they have reached their decisions in their recreated piece of writing in order to address AO2 fully.

The comparison in Comparative Task 2 should focus on writers' presentation or methods rather than characters and concerns directly. It is much more successful to write 'Williams presents Blanche as...' rather than 'Blanche is...', for example, as the former requires support from the text and consideration of literary and dramatic features. Candidates need to consider the genre of the texts under discussion. This will improve the address to both AO2 and AO4. In order to improve the address to AO5, candidates should consider carefully the implications of critical views for a reading of the texts and actively explore them.

**OCR support**

Support for this component is available from [www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk](http://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk)

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