A LEVEL

Moderators' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H472
For first teaching in 2015

H472/03 Summer 2024 series

Contents

Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Online courses

We have created online courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

Cambridge Nationals

All teachers delivering our redeveloped Cambridge Nationals suite from September 2022 are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

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GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

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Following this you will find a subject-specific course for your individual qualification, covering marking criteria with examples and commentary, along with interactive marking practice.

Accessing our online courses

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General overview

Administration

This year brought the choice between traditional postal moderation and digital Submit for Assessment. In most cases both of these worked well and material was either dispatched or uploaded on time, though there were several centres who submitted their work late, delaying the moderation process. There was also some confusion about the new component codes; the wrong one was used a significant number of times. H472/03 now refers to online submission of work, while H472/04 refers to postal moderation. When submitting work digitally, it saves much time for both centre and moderator for a candidate's work, including coversheet, to be uploaded as a single document. Physical folders should be bound with a treasury tag or staple. Loose sheets invite serious confusion, paperclips become detached and plastic folders are fiddly and environmentally unsustainable.

Most centres, as usual, conducted the Non-Examined Assessment with professional care. Work had been carefully set and marked, internal moderation had ensured a clear rank order across teaching groups, coversheets were carefully completed and work attached with a treasury tag.

As it is the moderator's working document, it is important for the coversheet to be completed accurately, with Centre and Candidate numbers, correct marks, text titles and tasks. The summative comment is important; while comments on the individual essays may have the candidate as the target audience, the coversheet summative comment is aimed at the Moderator, and should balance the strengths and weaknesses of the two pieces' address to the Assessment Objectives. The clearer and more detailed the rationale for the mark is, the easier it is for the Moderator to support it.

Centres are reminded that it is a component requirement to include a copy of the selected poem or passage for Task 1.

Word length guidelines

A clear and accurate word count, both total and without titles, footnotes and bibliography, should appear on the coversheet. These were often missing, or a total of 3000 was claimed which was clearly inaccurate.

While some candidates had worked with real care to edit their arguments to fit within the guideline 3000 words, others had been allowed to ignore the length guidelines and submitted folders which exceeded them to a significant degree. When looking at the development of arguments, it is not a level playing field to compare a folder of 3000 works with one of 3500, 4000 or above.

Although there is no specific penalty for exceeding the guideline length, the specification indicates that 'any response that significantly differs from the word count will be self-penalising either by not demonstrating the AOs to the required level or through lacking coherence and concision.' It is expected that candidates will be able to complete their work and address all the Assessment Objectives within 3000 words, so exceeding the guidelines should be taken into account when assessing AO1 in both marking and moderation.

Allowing candidates to exceed the guidelines with impunity is similar to allowing them extra minutes in a timed examination. Centres should also consider that the NEA offers the opportunity to learn key skills for future study, which include reading, research, and the crafting of argument within specific guidelines. Training candidates to write to a specific length is one of the learning opportunities of the component; permitting them to submit work that is beyond the guidelines does them a disservice.

Marking and internal moderation

Moderators noted many examples of centres marking their candidates' work with real care. Accuracy in marking judgements tended to follow detailed engagement with the essays, the Assessment Objectives and the Marking Criteria. Marginal comments included evaluative comments related to the AOs, which had in their turn been considered carefully in the writing of the summative comment.

Where essays lacked such careful annotation, it was often difficult to discern how the teachers had arrived at their mark, making it more difficult to support the centres' judgements.

In successful centres, there were clear signs of internal moderation, sometimes with all essays having been double-marked. There was often evidence of clear debate and joint consideration, with a clear rationale for any movement of marks. In some other cases, marks had been changed without justification, making it difficult for moderators to follow the centres' processes. Where there are different teaching groups, internal moderation is essential to ensure there is a consistent rank order across the Centre or Consortium.

Texts and tasks

The Non-Examined Assessment (NEA) is designed to provide candidates with an opportunity for individual research and study. The liveliest and most interesting work came from those centres who had encouraged their candidates to embrace this opportunity, following their own interests in text choices and lines of enquiry. Other centres facilitated choice in different ways, by allowing choice of one of the comparative texts, for example, or at least encouraging candidates to choose their own poem or passage for Task 1.

As well as the excitement and engagement that personal choice offers, it also allows candidates to choose material which matches their confidence in the subject. It is helpful for centres to guide their candidates' choices, in order to make sure that they opt for texts which will allow them to access the Assessment Objectives at an appropriate level. This would avoid stronger candidates being limited by a lack of complexity in their texts, and less confident candidates struggling with literature which presents too great a challenge.

Another key feature of the NEA is the opportunity to study texts beyond the traditional canon. Over the last few years there has been a notable diversification of the range of literature studied for the component. That does not preclude canonical texts, of course, and poets such as Carol Ann Duffy, Thomas Hardy, Seamus Heaney, Philip Larkin, Wilfred Owen and Sylvia Plath appeared frequently. However, collections by Simon Armitage, Blythe Baird, Imtiaz Dharker, Inua Ellams, Juan Felipe Herrera, Clive James, Jacob Sam La-Rose, Theresa Lola, Nina Mingya Powles, Marilyn Nelson, Warsan Shire, Lemn Sissay, Danez Smith, Kae Tempest and Derek Walcott, for example, proved fruitful in both Tasks 1 and 2.

Similarly, while novels by Kazuo Ishiguro, James Joyce and Ian McEwan continued to prove popular, some more recent writing also facilitated engaged, perceptive writing. Examples included such novels as Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture*, Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, Caleb Azumah Nelson's *Open Water* and Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch*.

Writing on drama was again dominated by Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*, with Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* making something of a comeback.

As alternatives, Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and Butterworth's *The Ferryman* were successful choices, while Lorraine Hansberry's plays *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Les Blancs* were the subjects of successful writing. Other contemporary plays which stimulated thoughtful discussion were Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*, Conor McPherson's *The Weir*, Suzie Miller's *Prima Facie* and Temi Wilkey's *The High Table*.

A focus on contemporary literature usually produced energetic and thoughtful writing from candidates, who appreciated the ways in which literature grapples with current political and social concerns. It also encourages a fresh approach from candidates and teachers alike, as literature is seen as a changing, responsive medium of immediate relevance. The liveliness of candidates' responses and their recognition of the relevant contexts usually lead to higher attainment. Such study produces more challenging, innovative work than candidates who build on a familiar scaffold of heavily taught texts with contexts and critical snippets provided.

Features of sampled work

Task 1 Close reading or recreative writing

Task 1 in both options requires close detailed analysis, which is why the assessment of AO2 is dominant. In close reading, the balance between analysis of the selected passage or poem and the informed view of how the selection relates to the rest of the text is crucial. An ideal response will give a clear analytical reading of the passage or poem and use the wider references demonstrate ways in which its features are characteristic of the whole text. Candidates achieve greatest success when the wider references are directly pertinent to the discussion of the selection and develop points of their argument. A surprisingly high number of responses this series made very little if any reference to the wider text.

On the other hand, some Task 1 essays focused on the whole text without the required focus on a particular extract. To address the two Assessment Objectives for this task, it is essential that the right balance is struck and that the task wording directs candidates clearly to the correct approach. Many responses were sophisticated and detailed in their analysis, although a frequent weakness was the consideration of form. Poetry essays usually considered language and metaphor, but versification was frequently neglected, with lines often quotes as prose. Writing on prose and drama was quite often indistinguishable, discussing characters and what they do and say, rather than looking at narrative structure and voice or at intonation of dialogue, pace, proxemics or other aspects of dramaturgy. The analysis in strong prose answers ranged from narrative voice and perspective to paragraph and sentence structure, while successful drama essays considered the text from an audience perspective, aware, for example, of the visual and aural effects of stage directions, costume, setting and stage action.

Moderators noted that a number of close reading essays this year included extensive discussion of contexts and occasionally critical views. While these, of course, can add to a candidate's understanding of the text and help to address AO1, it should be noted that AOs 3 and 5 themselves are not assessed in Task 1. Such material could be edited out, bringing pieces to a more appropriate length, or to create space for more relevant analytical discussion.

The recreative responses themselves often demonstrated a more successful awareness of form, as candidates imitated verse patterns, narrative structures or stage directions. Sometimes these were done so well, they became plausible additions to the text, showing a sensitivity to the original writing and its concerns. A completely successful Recreative piece also requires a detailed analytical commentary.

At their best, these moved purposefully between the candidate's writing and the source text, making specific links between them to show an analytical understanding of the original author's work and how that had been recreated. While poems tend to be shorter, it is important for the recreated prose or drama passage to be relatively brief, about 350 words, in order to have sufficient words within the guidelines of 1000 to write a suitably developed commentary.

Task 2 Comparative

A feature of the most successful comparative essays was an initial address to the task, with an overview of the texts demonstrating how they related to it. These followed that opening with carefully organised, directed paragraphs which clearly advanced the argument. Understanding of the texts was shown through careful selection of key references and quotations. Strong responses were fluently written in a literary register and care had been taken with editing and proofreading. Tight, well-crafted arguments should approximate to the guideline figure of 2000 words; anything much more than this demonstrates a lack of precision in the argument.

Such responses also maintain a literary focus on the presentation or treatment of a topic or concern. The analysis, therefore, is consistent and directly contributes to the developing argument. Less effective essays tend to discuss the concern itself, or the characters and their actions, sometimes treating them as real people rather than literary or dramatic constructs. The focus on characters sometimes meant that, in essays comparing prose with drama, it was difficult to recognise the candidate's awareness of which was which. The two texts will always be of different forms, and this really should be the starting point of the discussion.

When discussing contemporary texts, candidates considered relevant social and political contexts, with race, colonial aftermath and gender featuring heavily. Historical contexts need research to gain a full understanding. Reference to detail and specific references allow candidates to avoid generalisations and apply their awareness of the significance and influence of the contexts. Moderators saw candidates refer to a wide range of contexts, including socio-historical, political, gender, cultural, scientific, philosophical and literary. Biographical contexts can be useful, but can also lead to simplistic assumptions.

Less successful comparison saw essays switch from text to text between paragraphs, using paragraph openings such as 'Similarly…' or 'In comparison…' as the only sign of comparison. Occasionally this was exacerbated by essays written in two halves with little meeting of the texts. While there is no problem with key points about particular texts being developed in focused paragraphs on that text only, the most successful essays bring the two texts directly together within paragraphs for at least part of the response. Top level essays maintain this consistently in focused paragraphs.

The approach to alternative critical readings remains a weakness in many folders of work, as many centres and candidates view a reference to a critical point of view to be successful address to AO5. However, merely citing a reference, often at the end of a paragraph to confirm a point, forms only partial address to this AO. Stronger work needs exploration of those readings; candidates should show how reading these judgements has modified their own interpretation. Others might tease a way between differing critical opinions, or even challenge critics' views. Even when agreeing with a reading, candidates can further support it with their own evidence. Candidates should be encouraged to research the critical field available in an academic way, rather than rely on LitCharts, Shmoop, Goodreads or similar. Contemporary texts may not have an established critical field, and in this case, candidates

should be directed toward reviews in quality newspapers and literary journals available online. It is a requirement, as well as good academic practice, to acknowledge all secondary sources with footnotes as well as a bibliography.

It is important not to view the Assessment Objectives as a set of separate hoops through which to jump, or items on a list to tick off. Successful essays blend the AOs throughout the essay so that they inform each other and are difficult to separate.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
- structured clear and developed arguments within the word length guidelines - showed clear awareness of poetic, narrative or dramatic form - maintained a literary analytical approach - blended their address to the relevant Assessment Objectives.	- relied on a narrative approach - paid little attention to poetic, narrative or dramatic form - concentrated on plot and character - paid less attention to the relevant Assessment Objectives - exceeded the word length guidelines.

Avoiding potential malpractice

It is advisable to train candidates in the correct practices for acknowledgement of secondary sources used in their essays. Oxford or MHRA referencing is preferred.

Teachers should be alert to sudden changes in the quality of candidates' writing and style. They should also compare the quality of thought and expression in class work with the work produced for the NEA in order to spot the potential use of AI.

Supporting you

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We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

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You will need an Interchange account to access our digital products. If you do not have an Interchange account please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username, or nominate an existing Interchange user in your department.

Online courses

Enhance your skills and confidence in internal assessment

What are our online courses?

Our online courses are self-paced eLearning courses designed to help you deliver, mark and administer internal assessment for our qualifications. They are suitable for both new and experienced teachers who want to refresh their knowledge and practice.

Why should you use our online courses?

With these online courses you will:

- learn about the key principles and processes of internal assessment and standardisation

- gain a deeper understanding of the marking criteria and how to apply them consistently and accurately

- see examples of student work with commentary and feedback from OCR moderators

- have the opportunity to practise marking and compare your judgements with those of OCR moderators

- receive instant feedback and guidance on your marking and standardisation skills

- be able to track your progress and achievements through the courses.

How can you access our online courses?

Access courses from Teach Cambridge. Teach Cambridge is our secure teacher website, where you'll find all teacher support for your subject.

If you already have a Teach Cambridge account, you'll find available courses for your subject under Assessment - NEA/Coursework - Online courses. Click on the blue arrow to start the course.

If you don't have a Teach Cambridge account yet, ask your exams officer to set you up – just send them this link and ask them to add you as a Teacher.

Access the courses **anytime, anywhere and at your own pace**. You can also revisit the courses as many times as you need.

Which courses are available?

There are **two types** of online course: an **introductory module** and **subject-specific** courses.

The introductory module, Building your Confidence in Internal Assessment, is designed for all teachers who are involved in internal assessment for our qualifications. It covers the following topics:

- the purpose and benefits of internal assessment

- the roles and responsibilities of teachers, assessors, internal verifiers and moderators

- the principles and methods of standardisation

- the best practices for collecting, storing and submitting evidence

- the common issues and challenges in internal assessment and how to avoid them.

The subject-specific courses are tailored for each qualification that has non-exam assessment (NEA) units, except for AS Level and Entry Level. They cover the following topics:

- the structure and content of the NEA units

- the assessment objectives and marking criteria for the NEA units

- examples of student work with commentary and feedback for the NEA units

- interactive marking practice and feedback for the NEA units.

We are also developing courses for some of the examined units, which will be available soon.

How can you get support and feedback?

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We welcome your feedback and suggestions on how to improve the online courses and make them more useful and relevant for you. You can share your views by completing the evaluation form at the end of each course.

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