OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470
For first teaching in 2015

H470/03 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.

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General overview

Introduction

The non-examined assessment (NEA) is a compulsory component of the A Level English Language qualification. It is worth 40 marks and counts as 20% of the total A Level. The non-examined component comprises two pieces of work: an independent language investigation and an academic poster.

For the language investigation, candidates should conduct independent research into an area of language study of their choice and produce an investigation report. The recommended word count for this investigation is 2000-2500 words, excluding raw data and appendices. For the academic poster, candidates should produce an overview of their investigation, repurposing the content of their investigation to meet the poster form and their chosen audience. The recommended word count for the academic poster is 750-1000 words.

Guidance on preparation and marking of the NEA 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 assessment, they cannot achieve all marks in the given level.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments.

Task 1: The Language Investigation

This has been another successful year for English Language NEA submissions where a diverse range of topics have been chosen, showing how centres continue to embrace the specification ethos of allowing candidates to explore familiar areas more deeply, or to traverse less familiar language areas. It is very clear that most centres continue to encourage and support candidates in exploring aspects of language which feel most immediate and of value to them, and as a result candidates have often produced engaged and lively pieces of work.

Many of the more successful projects have tended towards the representation of complex social and political issues within the media (across various platforms). Conscientious and socially engaged candidates have explored leading stories on elections, global warming, conflict, natural disasters, poverty, crime, protests, gender and racial stereotyping or discrimination – all in a critically engaged manner. There is ample scope to find rich data on these issues that can be thoroughly analysed for meaning, and because of the complexity of the content from a discourse to a forensic linguistic level there is plenty of material to analyse. Such projects lend themselves to a lively and relevant exploration of agenda-setting and audience positioning within a framework of an immediate, but often established, discourse around such issues, and this means candidates can readily explore AO2/AO3 in a meaningful manner. Issue-focused projects enable the data source to be treated as the focus of the discussion, and for theory and context to be applied authentically to the data source, rather than being synthetically applied. The moderation team encourage centres to consider this approach, especially where candidates are only broadly able to identify power or gender as a point of interest, but are unable to identify how these elements might manifest within credible data sources.

Some stand out examples of issue-led projects this year were: 'How are climate change activists presented in a range of media platforms'; 'How does the media present terrorists of different races' [in relation to Muslim and white, right wing terrorists]; 'How do various news platforms present murders committed by male and female perpetrators'; 'How are transgender people presented in different media publications' [especially in relation to preserving women's spaces and sports competitions]; 'How are female politicians presented compared to male politicians' [in relation to moments of scandal or during election campaigns/addresses]; 'How has the media reported on the Hillsborough case over the years' [in relation to victims and those considered to be at fault]; 'To what extent has the Phillip Schofield affair scandal been exaggerated in relation to coverage of other male celebrities who have dated younger women' [in consideration of why he has been vilified for dating a younger man and celebrities with younger girlfriends and wives are either not commented on or are celebrated].

As in every other series, focuses on power and gender have predominated, and candidates have often been interested in exploring the interaction between these two aspects. We have seen many 'Love Island' and 'First Dates' generated data sets, with a focus on interactions between mostly binary genders. These types of projects tend to focus on how gender is performed linguistically in a romantic situation, or during conversations between mixed or single gendered groups where romantic or sexual intentions/language is forefronted. The best of these explore how the construct of the programme also influences the language used and how much and which parts of the interactions the audience sees. There is perhaps not much new to say on these types of data sources, but we have found good examples of these projects at all levels of achievement. The very best candidates tend to focus on a rigorous exploration of language items and trends, in addition to discourse management practices, and the possible motivations for individuals to present gender linguistically to a greater or lesser degree. A tight focus on the exterior contexts for individuals is also a marker of a stronger response – consideration of age, profession, class, etc aids in understanding how much of the content is naturalised language use, and how much is purposefully performative given this simulated environment and the 'high-stakes' nature of romantic interactions in the bound context of the show and generally in real-life situations.

Strong candidates also consider the range of accommodations, convergences, face-saving activity that occur in these exchanges, subtly considering power dynamics and self-preservation techniques.

We also see gender and power topics in other areas such as in relation to the presentation of celebrities, politicians, and other high-profile individuals. The presentation of male and female sports personalities and competitions in the media has been extremely popular this year, with tennis, football, rugby, swimming and athletics being the focus of projects. Projects tended to focus on adjective use to describe male and female individuals, teams, or matches and other linguistic trends. Contextually, it would benefit candidates to consider how much airtime, what type of airtime (as in prime time or not), positioning (which is mentioned first in a written text or in the news, for example) and the credentials and status of the presenter or publication in which the individuals, teams, matches are discussed, as this is revealing about which is considered of higher value to the producers and the anticipated audiences. There seems to have been fewer topics on the airtime given to male and female pundits, but there were still a few worthy projects.

Gender and power (either separately or combined) have also been considered in real-life exchanges, often in relation to how peer groups interact, how teachers of different gender use power strategies differently (sometimes depending on the gender balance of their classrooms or the gender of individual students), how parents interact with children of different genders, and how homosocial groups interact across generations. The moderating team is always pleased to see these types of projects because they represent genuinely investigative approaches, as obviously identifying worthwhile exchanges/instances of language use, transcribing the data and then finding the appropriate tools to interpret the data is all more challenging than when the data is already available.

The presentation of gender in advertisements, song lyrics and fictional texts provided a mixed bag in terms of the quality of engagement. Generally, the success of the advertisement and song lyric projects relied on the breadth of the content and the depth of comments that could be made about the data. Where the advertisements are very brief, then a very large set of advertisements will be needed in order to draw any meaningful conclusions. As such, the projects which explore presentations of gender over time via several data sources are more likely to be successful.

In relation to song lyrics, one or two songs is unlikely to yield enough data to explore anything meaningful about presentations of gender. Most songs have several repeated phrases which reduces how many lexical items can actually be explored. Furthermore, most songs are not written by the person who sings them (thereby causing issues about who is presenting what about presentations of men/women), are full of cliches (so are not likely to be a personalised or specific presentation of anyone's thoughts on gender), and are often not drawn from real-life experiences (and so do not necessarily reflect the artist's thoughts, but rather reflect a societal narrative about gender politics and romance). This being said, the way rap and RnB artists describe women is very different from how One Direction do, and so in looking at a body of work from very different artists you can build a picture of how they interact with their audiences in relation to these contrasting synthetic ideas about gender. If candidates can move away from the idea that the song lyrics reflect the artist, but instead focus on a consideration of how the lyrics may engage with a wider social discourse on gender, then some meaningful things can be said. For example, a candidate could take a female artist's body of work over two years to explore: how many songs are on breakups, how many songs are about powerlessness due to men, how many are about empowerment against/despite men – and what form does this take (is it sexual control, not needing a man, doing for yourself, etc), how many are about homosocial relationships; how many have nothing to do with relationships at all. Exploring the discourse and linguistic trends across these 'texts' will then offer insights into how far these elements engage with a broader societal presentation of gender dynamics. Linking the focal years of production to a key historical moment, such as the #MeToo movement, will also aid in understanding how much events and broader trends influence the presentation of gender dynamics within music. This certainly will require

more work than the types of projects that we have seen, but because so many lyric-based projects are limited in success, this would be a more fruitful approach to take if candidates want to focus on music. As a final point about lyrics, unless a candidate is looking at attitudes of men or women (or some other focus, such as protest language) over time, then there does not seem considerable value in exploring songs from the 20th century as these are not really reflective of our current societal views on issues of gender relations. Among the moderating team there has been comment that some of the 'older' choices of artists/songs seem to have been generated more from a parental or teacher's interest than the candidates' own and this has resulted in some unfocused projects.

Another slightly problematic focus for gender and power projects are fictional texts. As has been fed back many times, these projects are among those which have the greatest number of mark changes. It takes a very competent candidate to engage with language as a construct in fictional texts, whether the data source be a novel or screenplay, and because this vital point is missed in the majority of cases it tends to limit how successfully candidates are able to engage with all of the AOs against which the investigation is assessed. For example, it is very difficult to make a convincing point about character's intentions or background contexts when seeking to interpret the data, as, being constructs, they do not have any. This in turn makes it very difficult to apply theories related to spontaneous language use or power, as the exchanges are not real-life examples. Indeed, it has been rarely explicitly addressed that for the most part most decisions about the presentation of characters is more to do with creative choices and plot requirements (characters serving a function) than anything else.

Furthermore, where the texts have a fantasy, science-fiction or alternative history component, they cannot meaningfully be said to reflect real-life use on many levels at all. For example, an individual engaged in extreme events such as a zombie apocalypse (*The Walking Dead*) or an intergalactic power struggle (*Star Wars*) is not very likely to use many recognisable features of language exchanges or power strategies (I rarely have to determine whether I should leave someone behind to face a horde of zombies alone for the greater good or attempt to get a bunch of dispossessed and brutalised individuals to step once more into the breach, for example). It is similarly difficult to make a case for how the fictitious *Bridgerton* reflects previous societies' use of language and the gender dynamics that have prevailed in a distant past. It can only shed a highly romanticised (and historically inaccurate) light on what a series of producers (the original writer and then those involved in creating the show) want to say about gender relations/roles in an imagined past – it may not even say anything especially meaningful about wider society's views on the issue. So, more care needs to be taken over which fictional texts are used for these projects. It often appears to be the case that had centres applied more rigour in guiding candidates towards suitable texts, fewer candidates would be disadvantaged when it comes time to apply marks, whether the centres themselves accurately reflect the limitations of erroneous approaches or this is something that is addressed via the external moderation process. However, as many candidates do wish to work with fiction texts, projects that explore why authors use particular adjectives to describe physical appearance and temperament, verbs to describe the dynamism of the actions attributed to male or female characters, and adverbs to describe the manner of the actions in addition to semantic fields trends tend to be more successful as the candidates generally do not seek to make a case for character intentions or to treat plot points and backstories as contexts. Children's literature tends to offer fertile ground for this type of project, probably because the often didactic nature of such texts lends itself to a certain amount of gender stereotypes (whether these are upheld or undermined by the author).

As a final point, it is nearly always the case that the themes that the candidates wish to explore in fictional texts can more readily and meaningfully be engaged with via real-life examples. If a candidate is interested in exploring the language of powerful women then there's great benefit in looking at female politicians such as Angela Rayner, Diane Abbott, Theresa May, Liz Truss, Caroline Lucas, Daisy Cooper, any local councillors (if candidates can gain access to them or data about/generated by them), who have real instrumental power (whether you agree with them having power or not). If a candidate

wants to explore the language of conflict and jeopardy then current conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, and elsewhere in the world supply considerable options – just look at the powerful language surrounding the need for a ceasefire in Gaza or President Zelensky's various speeches calling his population to continue the resistance against Russian incursions or calls for support from foreign agents. These projects come with an array of contexts and far fewer potential pitfalls that can limit success. Perhaps it is also fair to say that encouraging candidates to engage with real-life examples promotes the very best in what English Language studies has to offer – an ability to recognise how external mechanisms and agents impacts our everyday lived experiences and how we view the world.

The final, but certainly by no means the least valuable, type of project that focuses on gendered language are those that focus on how transgender, non-binary or gender fluid identities are created through language strategies. In fact, this area is becoming increasingly popular, and generally we have seen highly successful responses on these topics. We have also seen several projects on how homosexual or bisexual individuals communicate within romantic exchanges, often utilising 'First Dates' as a data source, but also candidates' observation of their peers. These projects are especially impressive as often candidates reference concepts and theories beyond the scope of the specification, or repurpose established theories to suit their needs. Furthermore, candidates tend to be highly alert to the societal trends and the specific contexts of the language users and how this influences the features to be found in the data.

Despite gender and power predominating we have also seen an increase in the number of projects on bilingual language users and the strategies they adopt in different contexts. The very best of these projects tend to focus on both language competency as a determiner of language features, but also on inter-generational attitudes on certain issues such as education, work ethic, relationships and taboo language or topics. The broader focus on what is talked about rather than how well someone talks about a topic (in terms of language range) offers a greater degree of complexity to the investigation, which is richly rewarding. The idea of contexts determining language use has also been considered in relation to autistic language users, and one fascinating project focused on how the candidate's sibling adapted their language depending on who was offering them care. It was an instructive project, serving as a reminder that competency is not the only determiner of how well or how readily an individual will engage in language exchanges.

The moderating team have also commented on the increase in candidates using their younger siblings, or other young children in their social circles, as ready sources of data for language acquisition projects. It is certainly helpful to have a young person around who can be observed over several sessions to see developments, and it is an approach that should be encouraged. Many candidates who do language development projects also take extra efforts to visit primary and pre-school settings to gain access to data sources and this is also highly commendable – not least as it takes a highly independent and resourceful candidate to set this up. Where candidates are unable to access handy siblings or settings, sources such as 'The Secret Lives of Five Year Olds' and the 'Educating…' series have been used. Others take a different approach and explore how televisual programming helps to stimulate language development. These types of projects are very often within the more successful half across the cohort, and this is likely due to the discrete nature of the data sources, which enables a discriminating application of AO2 and AO3 and a close focus on AO1 interpretations.

It seems that the projects that focus on an individual language user or niche group tend to forefront AO1 skills – the technical and rigorous engagement with the data – while those that focus on power or gender tend to be led by AO2 and those that focus on social issues tend to forefront AO3 contexts more. No approach is preferable, as long as there is strong utilisation of the other AOs, but it simply shows there are numerous ways to engage with the investigation task.

Applying the Assessment Objectives

AO1 assesses the quality of the analysis of the discourse and linguistic features of the data sources and the methods and approaches that have been brought to bear in order to interpret it. At the higher levels the interpretation of the data will explore trends and specific features in detail, and apply nuanced assessments as to why features may be present, utilising a sophisticated register and subject terminology. The interpretations will be well-evidenced and convincing. At the mid-levels the interpretations will be thorough, sometimes illuminating, and generally accurate and acceptable – at the lower end of the mid-range some points might have benefitted from greater development. At the lower end interpretations tend to feel assertive, generalised, untethered to specific evidence and quite often will come across as having been pre-determined.

Generally, it seems that candidates at all levels are able to use sectional headings as outlined in the specification, often also using subheadings appropriately in the analysis sections. The orderly approach is recognised as a strength in folders, and tends to ensure that for AO1 most candidates can at least access Level 3 at the lower end, even if the lack of analytical focus in interpreting the data limits a candidate from reaching higher levels in the mark scheme.

The moderating team have tended to find that AO1 has been one of the AOs that is most often overmarked. Usually because candidates have been placed in Level 5 for a reasonably rigorous and thorough approach to unpacking the data, but without the nuance and sophistication of interpretation expected at this level. The overmarking seems to most often appear where a candidate has created a detailed survey of language features, utilising specialised and precise terminology to label the features, but the level of interpretative comment is less developed. More often AO1 is overmarked due to the presence of several issues with expression and poor editing. In the series immediately after COVID, the moderation team saw a decline in the quality of academic register, and it seems to be the case still that too many submissions are inappropriately informal (either because of colloquialisms or contractions) or contain too many typos and grammatical lapses. While the quality of the writing is not the most important trait to consider for AO1, it certainly can limit access to Level 5 if there are numerous quality issues.

AO1 does also take into account the methods used to determine which data sources to use, what language levels are likely to be most revealing and the level of discernment around what content to include. We have tended to find that centres are allowing candidates to submit work of ever-increasing word counts, as if this is somehow a merit. However, it is vitally important that centres enforce the word limits (which are more than reasonable to meet the higher levels of the mark scheme), because candidates cannot demonstrate discernment in what they choose to include, if they simply include everything that occurs to them (however valid and interesting it may be). Please therefore either ask for an edited, reduced submission, or reflect the fact it is over the word limit in the mark you give AO1. This is important to establish academic discipline for your candidates, but also so it does not distort the assessment of work that will appear less rigorous due to abiding by the wordcounts but that nevertheless is worthy of a top AO1 mark.

AO2 assesses against the candidate's ability to identify and apply conceptual and theoretical frameworks that can aid in interpreting the data and the reasons why certain features exist. Concepts/theories may also be applied to why the language user has created the data set, what agenda they are seeking to serve, and how they position audiences so that their message is understood/ received in the way it was intended. The level of critical engagement with broad concepts and named theories is a determiner of success, and certainly to access the higher levels there has to be a sense of probing the relevance of concepts/theories and an assessment of how far they support an interpretation of the data. The best examples of AO2 engagement assess the value of the theory - what seems to be supported in the data, what is not, and if the theory is unable to aid in an interpretation, what other theoretical framework could be more helpful or whether alternative tools for interpretation are required.

At the higher levels where traditional theorists (Tannen, Cameron, Zimmerman and West, Lakoff, and Grice, Goffman and Fairclough) are drawn on but are seen to be inadequate tools to interpret the data, candidates tend to be able to engage with alternative, more recently introduced or specialised theories to aid their interpretations of the data. Generally, candidates at the mid-levels will be able to identify which features of the data seem to comply with theory or not, but do not always offer enough comment as to why this is the case, or if they do it is a generalised, un-evidenced comment that is provided. At the lower end candidates tend to find that that what they had hypothesised would be found in the data, was indeed what they found.

Generally, it is the case that working with several theorists is the best way to ensure at least mid-level AO2 marks, as it is easier to compare what different theorists have said in relation to data, than to provide the level of detailed and thorough engagement that would be needed to apply just one theory (especially where the theory has to be discounted and there is no other conceptual tool to support alternative interpretations).

The best projects will use AO2 conceptual and theoretical frameworks to help in the construction of the project, to base hypothesis on, and to determine which are the most appropriate language levels to focus on. Candidates working at the higher levels will then use this theoretical underpinning to drive their analysis forward, in exploring how far the conceptual frameworks are supported by the data. Candidates can still access the higher levels if they do not introduce the theory until the analysis section, but there is greater need to offer a nuanced and critical assessment of the relevance of the data required to achieve the same level of rigour as the previously described approach. At the mid and lower levels candidates tend to describe what the theory is about, without satisfactorily explaining how this relates to the specific language data they intend to analyse, and this is increasingly untethered to specific aspects of the data sets moving from Level 3 to Level 2.

AO3 assesses against the candidate's ability to identify specific and broad contextual factors that might influence the data sources. Contexts will include a focus on the language producer and specific contexts (such as their gender, age, profession, class, race, world view), the manner in which the data set was produced and for what purposes, and who the intended audiences are. Broader contexts will take into account the social, political and cultural events that might influence the producer to produce the 'text' and how this might influence a response from an audience. As advised in last year's report: *Localised and universal events, dominant cultures and ideologies, attitudinal shifts, generational or sector-related norms etc can all offer scope for interpretations of data. Candidates should seek to investigate and integrate contexts that are likely to offer the most revealing interpretations of the data, in addition to helping to establish the ways in which they could have shaped meaning.*

Higher level responses are characterised by an early engagement with contexts, establishing why the data source has been produced, who the intended audience(s) are and how the text is drawn out of a broader discourse on a particular topic or is a response to and/or a product of a particular historical moment. During the analysis section candidates will then use contextual commentary to explain why features may exist, and why certain features might be due to a specific set of contexts when the theory seems to be insufficient to interpret the data. At the middle levels the contextual comments tend towards generalisation and assertion – usually along the lines of patriarchal rules influencing people or power being binary (people 'in power' have all the power and people without power are always powerless).

We have tended to find that a common misinterpretation of contexts is that candidates provide their motivations for writing the investigation on a topic or data source. Unfortunately, although it is nice to have sense of a candidate's personal interests, there is no AO that this content can be assessed against, and so such comments are an unhelpful use of words (in that such comments cannot attract marks).

Task 2: The Academic Poster

The academic poster is assessed against **AO5**, and as such it requires a close engagement with the content of the Investigation and the other AOs. As the focus is on synthesis and reformation of the content from the investigation, the priority for this task is a rigorous repurposing of the key written content. A marker for success is how appropriately the candidate has selected the most relevant content and reshaped it into a poster format. The best posters offer a summary of the aims and objectives of the investigation, a detailed discussion of what was learnt during the investigation in an analysis and findings section (this should make up most of the words) and a brief overview of the conclusions that can be drawn from the project and an evaluation of how successfully the projects aims were met. Since this poster has a new audience of a generally academic, non-specialist audience, the candidate should apply strategies that aid in interpreting the content, this may be in the form of visual communication tools (graphs, charts, tables, annotated texts), glossaries and key concept definitions. In addition, as this is a visual medium, some care should be taken over the aesthetic presentation, such as the use of graphology, symbolic colour schemes or iconography and discourse signposting strategies (such as via numbering systems, boxes, columns or arrows).

The best posters marry the requirement for detailed written content with engaging visual tools, and we have seen some superb examples this year. Indeed, at the higher levels the posters have become increasingly effective, and this year the moderating team have commented on the professional quality of a number of the poster submissions. At the mid-levels it tends to be the case that the posters have not focused on the analysis sections in enough detailed, tending to over invest words on the introductory sections or perhaps using too many visual tools and therefore running out of space. At the lower end posters are either far too brief, disordered, lacking in detail, or are too dense and unfiltered to meet the needs of the new audience. We do still find too many examples where candidates have lifted too much content from the investigation and have either made no effort, or too little effort to reshape the content. These responses are rarely able to be awarded more than Level 2 (for at least some re-writing of content), and it is generally these types of response where a downward change of marks is required.

We do also find that some centres are universally unfairly harsh on the posters. This seems to quite often be the case where candidates have prioritised the appropriate content but may not have been especially ambitious in their choice of visual aids. However, since visual tools are the secondary consideration, the quality of the content should take priority in the allocation of the marks.

Final words

On behalf of the entire moderation team, I would like to extend my congratulations for another productive year which has resulted in many engaged and lively, and some exemplary, NEA folders. Well done all for your efforts and I look forward to seeing what gems of language investigation will emerge next series.

As in previous series, the marker of successful and less successful folders are as below:

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
- established a clear set of aims, hypothesis and concise methodology supported by AO2 and AO3 considerations - produced a logically structured report that had clear headings and sub-sections (and tables/graphs where appropriate) - prioritised the analysis section and offered detailed and nuanced analysis of the data sets, supported by AO2 and AO3 interpretations - offered authentic conclusions assessing the extent to which initial hypothesis had been observed in the data and considerations as to why it may not have done - offered evaluations of the investigation that recognised the success and limits of its outcomes - produced posters that prioritised providing a detailed, reflective summary of the investigation (utilising the 750-1000 words available effectively) - used visual tools to aid in communicating information and to provide aesthetic appeal - demonstrated a commitment to careful editing.	- had unclear aims and/or were too wide or too narrow in scope - had over-committed to the introduction/methodologies - had focused on personal reasons for studying the topical area, rather than on why the topic is an interesting language investigation - had not identified language frameworks/levels to be considered in the initial sections - had not engaged with AO2 and/or AO3 in the formulation of the investigation and to determine the focus of the investigation - lacked organisation and did not prioritise the analysis section - produced posters that were too brief or contained copied content from the investigation - produced posters that did not address the purpose or audience - produced posters that did not use some form of visual tools - presented work in an un-edited condition.

Most common causes of centres not passing

Where centres' marking falls outside of OCR's nationally agreed standard, it tends to be due to over-generous marking. This can easily occur when the marks are applied by AO rather than as a holistic mark, as each time the higher of two marks is given for each AO it will cause an inflationary effect. Centres are advised to balance the successes and limitations for each AO. If there are only individual occasions of skill shown in a level, or inconsistent application of a skill within a level, then this should elicit a mark at the bottom of that mark level. Or, if the higher level evidence of the skill is very minimal (and possibly questionable) it may mean that the top of the level below is more appropriate as this is where the candidate is most often working. Taking this approach to each AO may mean a candidate demonstrates a slightly spiky profile, but this would not be unusual to see as candidates all have different strengths across the skills.

We tend to see many folders placed into Level 5 for all AOs, without taking into account that AO3 (for example) is not explored in terms of shaping meaning, or AO2 (for another example) is not addressed in a critical manner, even though many theories/concepts have been mentioned and discussed. AO1 is often over-awarded in Level 5 where there are many typos, issues with expression, informal register, misapplication of terminology. Conversely, we do see many folders at the lower end significantly under-awarded and this is often the case where it is the least successful folder within a cohort. Often this work has shown more success than centres credit, and so it is important to note that very few pieces of work will wholly exhibit Level 1 or low Level 2 marks, most lower-scoring candidates are generally able to achieve four marks for the majority of the AOs.

We do still identify trends in the marking of posters where centres are universally harsh or lenient across all posters, or where the mark given to the poster aligns to the marks achieved for the investigation AOs (even though the poster can be of markedly differing quality). Centres are reminded that the written content should be prioritised over visual tools, and that within the content the findings and outcomes should account for the majority of the focus. Visual tools do not need to dominate, or be especially numerous for a candidate to be consider for the higher levels, as it is the written content that is most important.

Common misconceptions

There is evidence of increasing ambition in the tasks that have been selected which shows that centres are not only capable of interpreting the task requirements, but are confident in guiding candidates to take more unique approaches. For the most part centres who are encouraging more unusual routes are also applying the marking criteria appropriately. However, there have been a few occasions where the marking had been either too generous or too harsh for these types of projects, and so it is important to think about each project in terms of how successfully the candidate has achieved what they set out to do, or if not, how well they are able to assess the reasons why. Moderators are often encouraged to think about how convincingly the candidate has shaped the project, interpreted the data, applied conceptual and contextual analysis and drawn conclusions. Exceptional projects may cause an experienced reader to feel they have learnt something new, a middle-level response will feel competent but not often illuminating, and a low-level response will be characterised by moments of ambiguity or a sense of lacking completeness (in terms of the thoroughness of the discussion).

Most centres are applying the mark scheme appropriately to the poster task but please continue to apply advice given out in previous years: *If a candidate completely copies sections from the investigation, then they cannot achieve beyond Level 1. If they copy some sections, but re-word and refocus others, then they can achieve up to Level 3. The quality of purposeful visual tools and transformation of register will then determine whether they are at the bottom or top of the appropriate level (based on how much*

content has been copied). Another common misconception within the academic posters is the tendency to focus on aesthetics rather than the synthesis of content (the priority) and the use of visual tools to present information or provide contextualisation.

Avoiding potential malpractice

The independent nature of the language investigation means that there is less likelihood of plagiarism between candidates within centres. However, now that there are several series worth of OCR and centre generated exemplars available, centres should be alert to derivative topics and approaches. This is more of a consideration for written text-based sources as their content is by nature unchangeable, and candidates may be drawn to the same interpretations as work that has been produced in previous series. Centres can avoid this potential malpractice issue by encouraging candidates to choose other sources, but explore similar topics, or change the focus and use similar sources. Candidates should also make sure that they use appropriate referencing systems and attach bibliographies (citing all secondary sources) to make sure that all sources are appropriately credited. Where candidates are generating transcripts from real-life scenarios, centres should make sure that appropriate safeguarding and ethical considerations are addressed (especially if the data requires access to vulnerable individuals).

AI is an emerging area of concern and centres must be vigilant regarding the potential for candidates to generate material using AI tools. It is important that candidates' work is thoroughly checked to ensure that AI material is not included, or if it is, that it does not represent significant sections and any material is appropriately referenced (though it would not necessarily be considered best practice to draw on AI produced material to cite from). There have been several projects this year that have focused on AI generated language, and understandably this means candidates have drawn on data from AI created sources. This is a current and relevant area of language study, but centres must advise and support candidates who wish to explicitly work with AI generated source material to ensure that the investigation and poster themselves are written in the candidate's own words.

Helpful resources

[Setting up a language investigation](#)

[Approaching the language investigation task](#)

[Independent investigation of language in use](#)

Additional comments

Administration

There have been a number of late submissions this year, and examples of samples being sent with inadequate postage or via an untracked postal method which has resulted in missing and delayed work. There have also been several instances of incorrect marks being inputted into the system and cases where candidate numbers have been missing from work. Each of these errors has the potential to cause delays to the moderation process, and in the case of postal mistakes could result in candidate's work being lost.

There have also been a few issues with the Submit for Assessment process where there have been delays to samples being uploaded, or incomplete sample submissions. As this is a new, and unfamiliar, system please ensure that ample time is taken to upload documents appropriately. It is especially

important that scans are clear, all pages are the correct way up and in the right order and that page numbers are shown.

Where work is delayed, moderators, and representatives from within OCR, will email and/or call to try to locate the work. This is an additional and sometimes time-consuming task for the moderating team, and so it would be appreciated that when emails have been sent or phone messages have been left they can be responded to swiftly. This year, various members of the moderating team have had to send various forms of communication on several occasions before they gained a response. On each occasion the moderator was notified that the original messages had been received but had been overlooked for one reason or another. It is fully understood that moderation occurs during the busiest time for our centres, and that this can impact communication, but in order to ensure all candidates get their results on time, the moderating team do need prompt replies and an equally prompt approach to forwarding any missing work or updating systems.

The following represents best practice in the presentation of candidate folders:

- Folders should be securely bound with treasury tags/ or staples.

- Please avoid loose sheets of paper or plastic sleeves.

- All front sheets should be attached to the front of the folder and all details should be correctly recorded: name of centre, centre number, candidate name, candidate number, task titles and intended audience for the academic poster.

- Word counts should be recorded.

- Bibliographies and (relevant) appendices should be attached to the folder.

- The academic posters should be word processed and preferably on A3 paper (even if this means sticking two A4 sheets together).

Internal moderation

Most centres had undertaken some form of internal moderation, and this was generally a key factor in ensuring accurate allocation of marks.

Best practice for both first and second markers is to:

- annotate scripts in the margins

- provide summative comments linked to achievement within each AO

- address both strengths and limitations of the work within comments

- differentiate comments of different markers using different coloured pens or using signatures

- clearly identify which mark has been decided upon where marks have been contested

- make sure final marks on the front sheet and within summative comments match and are correct.

Supporting you

Teach Cambridge

Make sure you visit our secure website **Teach Cambridge** to find the full range of resources and support for the subjects you teach. This includes secure materials such as set assignments and exemplars, online and on-demand training.

Don't have access? If your school or college teaches any OCR qualifications, please contact your exams officer. You can forward them this link to help get you started.

Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the OCR website.

Access to Scripts

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.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our website.

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, sign up here.

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is a free test-building platform, providing unlimited users exclusively for staff at OCR centres with an Interchange account.

Choose from a large bank of questions to build personalised tests and custom mark schemes, with the option to add custom cover pages to simulate real examinations. You can also edit and download complete past papers.

Find out more.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

Find out more.

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?

If you have any queries, please contact our Customer Support Centre on 01223 553998 or email support@ocr.org.uk.

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.

Need to get in touch?

If you ever have any questions about OCR qualifications or services (including administration, logistics and teaching) please feel free to get in touch with our customer support centre.

Call us on
01223 553998

Alternatively, you can email us on
support@ocr.org.uk

For more information visit
- **ocr.org.uk/qualifications/resource-finder**
- **ocr.org.uk**
- **facebook.com/ocrexams**
- **twitter.com/ocrexams**
- **instagram.com/ocrexaminations**
- **linkedin.com/company/ocr**
- **youtube.com/ocrexams**

We really value your feedback

Click to send us an autogenerated email about this resource. Add comments if you want to. Let us know how we can improve this resource or what else you need. Your email address will not be used or shared for any marketing purposes.

👍**I like this**   👎**I dislike this**

Please note – web links are correct at date of publication but other websites may change over time. If you have any problems with a link you may want to navigate to that organisation's website for a direct search.