

Moderators' report

A LEVEL

ENGLISH LITERATURE

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
English Literature

H472

For first teaching in 2015

H472/03 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by the moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements, identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation, and comment on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. The report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

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General overview

Administration

A greater number of centres this year used the online Submit for Assessment to make their sample available to the moderator. A number of mistakes were made with the different component codes, which led to some confusion. Some reminders about successful submission may be in order:

H472/03 Submit for Assessment

1. Check the coversheets are accurate
2. Upload each candidate's complete folder as a single document
3. Make sure all pages are scanned, are correctly orientated and in the right order
4. Make sure the correct sample has been uploaded.

H472/04 Postal Submission

1. Check the coversheets are accurate
2. Bind each candidate's complete folder with a treasury tag or staple
3. Do not use paperclips or plastic folders
4. Make sure the correct sample has been included
5. Package the submission securely.

Moderators noted again that most centres conducted all aspects of the Non-examined Assessment with real professional care. Candidates often wrote on interesting texts, often of their own choosing, and assessments had been carried out with scrupulous care. In successful centres, there was abundant evidence of careful internal moderation to achieve a well-judged rank order. Detailed coversheets paid testament to this work, and were extremely helpful as the moderator's initial working document.

Sometimes coversheets were not correctly completed, with missing or incorrect candidate numbers, text titles and tasks missing, or submitted marks failing to tally with those written on the work. Such errors delay the moderation process and are easily avoided with a careful approach.

The summative comment too is important; it should balance the strengths and weaknesses of the ways in which the two pieces address the Assessment Objectives, making reference to the marking criteria. It is easier for the moderator to support the centre's marks if they can follow a clear rationale.

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 and on the individual pieces. These were often missing, or a total of 3000 was claimed which was clearly inaccurate.

It was clear that some centres had been punctilious about this, really training their candidates to hone their arguments precisely and edit their material so that their essays were completed within the guidelines. The result was taut, focused arguments.

In other cases, however, candidates seemed unaware of the suggested length and wrote well beyond the guidelines. Sometimes every candidate in a centre exceeded the appropriate length, writing essays that would have benefited from judicious editing. There were Task 1 essays, for example, that included critical or contextual material which could have been discarded to the benefit of the essay, while Task 2 essays sometimes featured lengthy explanations or generalised context.

Writing a length appropriate to the guidelines is part of the academic training of the component, as much as the acknowledgement of secondary sources in footnotes and bibliography. It is also part of the assessment of AO1. The length should be considered as part of the structure in the primary marking, as it is in moderation. It is also essential to have fairness of assessment between candidates and between centres.

Marking and Internal Moderation

Moderators often noted a real sense of joint enterprise between teachers and candidates, engaged with the texts and with the writing of the essays. It was apparent in the care of the marking, as teachers followed the candidates' arguments, noting both their achievements and where they left matters undeveloped. Marginal annotations were developed with evaluative comments, which then led to final comments which brought these together to give a considered evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the piece of work.

Where essays lacked such careful annotation, or marks were not clearly related to the Assessment Objectives of the marking criteria, moderators found it more difficult to understand how the teachers had arrived at their marks, making it more difficult to support the centres' judgements.

Similarly, carefully considered internal moderation also tended to lead to more accurate marking. It was very helpful when moderators were able to see why marks had been altered after discussion, but puzzling when marks had been altered without clear justification.

Texts and Tasks

The Non-examined Assessment 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. Where students are not confident with a completely free selection of texts, there are a number of different ways to offer them some choice:

- Allowing students to choose their own poem or passage when studying a common text for Task 1
- Guiding students to frame their own question when studying common texts for Task 2
- When studying three common texts, allowing students to choose which to use for Task 1, and which to compare for Task 2
- Studying a common text for Task 2, but allowing choice of the second text from a reading list
- Studying a literary genre or subject area with a reading list, and allowing choice from that list.

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 teachers to guide their candidates' choices, in order to make sure that they select 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.

The NEA also offers the opportunity to study texts which are very contemporary or might be unlikely to feature on an examination set text list. In recent years moderators have noted a diversification of the range of literature studied for the component. It is still the case, quite rightly, that students study traditional poets such as Hardy, Owen, Larkin, Plath, Heaney and Duffy. There was often been a real freshness, however, in writing on Raymond Antrobus, Fatimah Asghar, Marilyn Nelson, Nina Mingya Powles, Jo Shapcott, Warsan Shire, Lemn Sissay, Danez Smith and Kae Tempest, for example.

A range of novels has also become almost standard in NEA submissions, particularly McEwan's *Atonement*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. However, moderators also read enthusiastic and perceptive essays on a range of novels and short stories, both recent and more established, like Graham Swift's *Waterland*, James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Sally Rooney's *Normal People*, Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, Zoe Heller's *Notes on A Scandal*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Paul Harding's *This Other Eden* and Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These*. Such a variety of texts created opportunities for discussion of a wide range of styles and concerns.

Writing on drama continues to be dominated by Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* with Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* coming in second place. Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* provides an excellent alternative to *Streetcar*, while *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* also featured in submissions. Spreading the field wider, adventurous candidates and centres successfully chose classic and contemporary plays, such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and *A View from the Bridge*, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Jez Butterworth's *The Ferryman*, Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*, Conor McPherson's *The Weir* and Inua Ellams' *Barber Shop Chronicles*.

Of course the traditional texts have earned their place in the canon and are worthy of academic study, but where they were the common texts in a centre's submission, it often seemed that the work was heavily scaffolded and that the students had been taught to reach particular conclusions about them. On the other hand, those who studied their own choices or more contemporary common texts usually produced engaged and thoughtful writing. Candidates seemed to relish studying ways in which literature grapples with the political and social concerns which surround them. This allowed them to recognise that literature is a changing, responsive medium of immediate relevance.

Features of Sampled Work

Task 1 Close Reading or Recreative Writing

The assessment of AO2 is dominant in both options of Task 1, as they require detailed close analysis. 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. The central part of the essay should be a clear analytical reading of the poem or passage. It is important that candidates discuss how the literary features communicate the developing meaning, rather than cherry-pick individual words and images. Many candidates restricted themselves to analysis at word and image level, with thoughtful comments on choices of diction and the effects of metaphor, but consideration of structure and form was often undeveloped. Moderators were surprised at how many poetry essays made no reference at all to poetic features such as stanza length, rhythm, rhyme, enjambment and patterning, or considered their effects. A sign of this was how often lines of verse were quoted as prose. Free verse was particularly challenging, as often candidates seemed to think that acknowledging that a poet used 'free verse' was enough. They seldom considered how the poet exploits that freedom, with the particular line breaks, the emphasis at the beginning and end of lines, the spacing on the page, and so on. Successful prose responses discussed narrative voice and perspective, and the structure of chapters, paragraphs and sentences. Strong drama responses looked closely not just at the stage directions but at their theatrical realisation, with references to the audience's perception of costume, setting and stage action. Such responses were much more successful than those which kept to what characters do and say, where it was not always clear whether drama or prose was under discussion.

In discussion of the wider text, candidates achieved greatest success when the references illuminated particular points of the discussion of the poem or extract. The references need to be developed enough to support the point of argument clearly, but controlled enough to avoid overbalancing the essay's focus on the selected extract.

It is interesting that recreative poems and passages often demonstrated a more successful awareness of form, as candidates imitated the original text's verse patterns, narrative structures or stage directions. Moderators saw examples of recreation which were highly persuasive, demonstrating a sensitive and careful engagement with the source text's style and concerns. The most successful commentaries made purposeful connections between the candidate's writing and the original text, demonstrating an analytical understanding of author's work. It is important to remember that in the commentary, the prime analysis should be of the original text. Centres should also advise candidates that the recreated poem or passage should be relatively brief, about 350 words with a maximum of 400, in order to have sufficient words within the guidelines of 1000 to write a suitably developed commentary.

Task 2 Comparative

Successful candidates opened their comparative essays with a clear initial address to the task, with an overview of the texts demonstrating how they related to it. Strong essays developed the argument with carefully organised, directed paragraphs. A careful selection of key references and quotations, supporting that argument, demonstrated the candidate's understanding of the texts. Strong responses were fluently written in a literary register and care had been taken with editing and proofreading. Well-shaped arguments should be aligned to the guideline length of 2000 words; anything well in excess of this demonstrates a lack of precision in the argument.

All task titles should focus on the 'presentation', 'portrayal' or 'ways in which' the topic is 'presented', so successful responses will maintain a literary focus. This should ensure that the analysis directly contributes to the candidate's developing argument. Less successful essays discussed the concern itself, or the characters and their actions, sometimes treating them as real people rather than literary or dramatic constructs. In essays comparing drama with prose, candidates sometimes gave little indication of whether their characters appeared in the prose text or the play, as they were discussed in the same way. The two texts in Task 2 will always be of different forms; this should be the starting point of the literary discussion and the comparison.

Candidates referred to a wide range of appropriate contexts to illuminate aspects of their chosen texts. Successful use of contextual material focused on the significance and influence of those contexts, using specific and relevant detail to develop points. Less confident candidates relied on generalisations and assumptions, or made reference to contexts without directly relating them to the texts. This was particularly true of the socio-historical contexts of older texts, with rather loose comments on social attitudes, gender, history and politics. Some candidates had clearly relished the opportunity to conduct research and apply their findings. Their essays were more successful than those which relied on a page of contextual 'snippets' supplied by centres or revision websites.

The most successful comparative essays moved between the texts regularly, keeping them in balance, and were clearly focused on comparing the writing of the texts rather than the content. Passages of closely blended comparison were a feature of the strongest essays, where the paragraphs were still controlled and directed. Less confident candidates often tried to blend comparison by merely pushing two paragraphs together, leading to unwieldy paragraphs of up to three pages in length. Another feature of less successful responses was the use of discourse indicators such as 'Similarly...' or 'In comparison...' without actually developing comparison beyond the opening phrase.

The exploration of different readings is another area which offers students opportunities for academic research. Candidates who had discovered their own critical perspectives were more likely to engage with them and consider their implications. Conflicting critical judgements were particularly helpful, as candidates negotiated between them; others successfully challenged critics' views. Less successful candidates tended to incorporate statements by critics at the end of paragraphs to confirm points of argument, or to use them in place of their own argument. It should be remembered in the marking that citation alone only indicates awareness of readings; some engagement is necessary to count as discussion. Of course such engagement is made easier if the critical judgements are pertinent and interesting. Centres should direct candidates to appropriate sources, such as reviews and articles in quality newspapers and literary journals, or academic sources available online. Sources as LitCharts, Shmoop, Goodreads, Quizlet and similar seldom offer useful material. A centre-provided sheet of critical soundbites will lack the context of the critics' wider arguments. A surprisingly large number of comparative essays lacked footnotes or bibliography to acknowledge secondary sources. This should be part of students' academic training. It is also a requirement of the specification.

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

Raising Attainment

Task 1 Close Reading

Candidates should:

- present a coherent reading of the selected extract or poem
- use analytical detail to demonstrate their understanding of ways in which the author guides the reader or audience response
- relate the selection to the whole text, considering methods as well as content and concerns
- consider form and structure as well as language in order to address AO2 fully.

Task 1 Recreative

Candidates should:

- keep the recreated passage or poem relatively brief (350-400 words max for prose and drama) to allow for a developed commentary
- explore the methods and concerns of the original text in the commentary
- discuss how they have reached their choices of language, structure and form in their own piece of writing.

Task 2 Comparative

Candidates should:

- focus on writers' presentation or methods rather than characters and concerns directly
- show clear awareness of the difference in form between the two texts and compare the different methods and effects
- explore different critical readings and consider their implications
- use tight, focused paragraphs to make sure the essay fits the length guidelines.

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 (i.e. the use of footnotes) 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.

Additional comments

A Guide to Task Setting is available on Teach Cambridge.

Task 1 titles are most successful when the wording directs candidates to consider a particular aspect of the passage.

e.g. Comment closely on Pinter's presentation of the relationship between Max and Lenny on pp. x-y, considering how far it is characteristic of *The Homecoming* as a whole.

Task 2 titles need to refer to both comparison and presentation. Again a focus is helpful.

e.g. By comparing Dean's and Jennings' presentation of illness in *Becoming Strangers* and *Selected Poems*, say how far they can be said to offer hope.

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