

Moderators' report

A LEVEL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
English Language

H470

For first teaching in 2015

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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.

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General overview

The non-exam 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 NEA comprises two tasks: an independent language investigation and an academic poster. These tasks allow candidates to explore areas of personal interest, apply linguistic theory, and demonstrate analytical and evaluative skills.

This year, the moderation team was impressed by the range, ambition, and engagement evident in the submissions. Candidates explored both familiar and emerging areas of language study, often drawing on current social, political, and cultural issues. Many demonstrated a strong sense of ownership over their projects, and the quality of work across the ability range was commendable.

Task One: The investigation

We have seen many of the now familiar themes and topics this year, with the overwhelming majority still showing a particular interest in gender and/or power factors. Typical areas of focus include: the way language is used to represent male and female football matches and sports personalities; the ways in which male and female politicians use gendered language and how this impacts their influence and success; the representation of male and female celebrities as role models or during periods of scandal or challenge; the way in which advertisements are targeted to male and female audiences; how comedic strategies are influenced by gender; and how romantic language differs in heteronormative interactions compared to homosexual exchanges (often using 'Love Island' and 'First Dates') or how romantic relationships are represented in the lyrics produced/performed by male and female artists.

Those which were solely interested in power strategies have tended to focus on political rhetoric during times of crisis (conflicts, terrorist attacks, riots, pandemics or during natural disasters) or at points of political change (during election campaigns, within manifestos, within acceptance speeches or when announcing policy change). The usual suspects of political leaders featured, with most projects focusing on Trump, Clinton, Obama and Harris in America, and Starmer, Sunak, Johnson, Truss, Corbyn and Blair featuring most often amongst the UK leaders. One particularly interesting project drew comparisons between Rishi Sunak's speeches and AI-generated texts and the extent to which political rhetoric can be replicated. There were fewer Chamberlain/Churchill and Hitler projects this year, although these are still often treated as the benchmark of war-time rhetoric amongst the English Language cohort each year.

Power-focused studies also focused on host-guest, interviewer and interviewee, teacher-pupil, employer-employee, parent-child and peer to peer interactions and how status and degree of control influences language use.

Many candidates have drawn on their immediate, real-life experiences and interests, exploring language use within face-to-face interactions with their peers or educators or during social pursuits (such as exchanges between sports team players), in addition to exploring language use within online gaming and social media exchanges. Most candidates have been well supported by their teachers to generate appropriately transcribed data and how to apply various methodologies to interpret the data. Typically, such projects have centred on power dynamics, sometimes in concordance with gendered concerns and sometimes in isolation. However, others have tended to explore issues around sociolect and inter-generational language variances.

Topical areas which have been widely explored include the representation of mental health, climate change, environmental disasters and conflicts. Such projects have sought to explore how language is used to shape the narrative of such issues, how media outlets present the issue and the individuals and groups that are impacted to achieve a broader set of agendas and how audiences are positioned to receive the messages in specific ways.

We have seen fewer child language acquisition and second-language user projects this year, but as in previous years these have tended to be among the most successful responses. This is likely due to the complexities of the theories and concepts that surround these areas, that tend to be most often explored by more confident and competent candidates. It is also the case that in order to gather data for such projects a high degree of independence and resourcefulness is required, especially where primary data is generated, and this tends to attract the most diligent candidates. Some notable topics included a comparative study of wedding ceremonies across different religions/cultures and the way in which Newsround adapts language so that young audiences can engage with current affairs.

There also did not seem to be as many language change projects this year although one interesting project focused on the effect of the Norman invasion on hymns and others explored the language changes in various iterations of the Christian Bible.

Although we still have seen several projects drawing on data sources that can be problematic, it does appear that most candidates have been able to avoid most of the pitfalls these sources can present. Projects to be more cautious around are: those that rely on song lyrics, those that draw on advertisements, and those that use fictional texts, especially those emulating a historical period (such as 'Bridgerton') and fantasy/science fiction (for example 'Star Wars' and 'The Walking Dead'). However, just to reiterate a core set of messages:

- Projects using song lyrics are most successful when a fairly large body of songs form the data (so there is enough language items to analyse), there is a central theme that is explored across the music (presentation of love, female/male identities, protests etc), and there is a point of comparison (male/female artists, over a period of time, between genre/types of artists).
- Projects that use advertisements must draw on a range of examples to make sure there is enough data to discuss. The advertisements should focus on similar products and similar platforms/publications to allow for meaningful comparison. It is also better to explore specific audiences or contexts within the advertisements, e.g. male/female audiences, changes over a period of time, between the most popular brands, between customers (class/prestige).
- Projects that explore fiction must frame the use of language as being constructed: characters should not be confused as language users, the focus must be on what producers sought to achieve within the representation they have created, and contexts/theory should be applied to the producer of the text in order to be successful. Additionally, the thematic focus should aid in understanding why language is used in the way it is. For example, why a producer describes female and male characters in the way they do is something that can be readily explored. Exploring power relationships between characters is more difficult as those exchanges are much more to do with plot development rather than the producer's desire to replicate genuine power strategies. In particular, focuses on interruptions, emphasis, pauses, floor time, length and number of utterances, face acts, etc often become redundant in the context of analysing power strategies of fictional characters because they rarely reflect the reality of spoken exchanges.

Emerging trends

Emerging areas of interest include gendered commentary in sports beyond football, such as gymnastics, tennis, and track and field events. Given the historical preponderance of work produced on football, it is pleasing to see candidates forging new ground here, not least as it enables a discussion of a wider range of contexts unique to the specific sports, their audiences and broadcasting traditions.

Comparisons of the language used by neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals have also increased, and candidates have demonstrated considerable initiative in generating their own data for these projects.

Many candidates draw on language acquisition/development theories, in addition to medical studies to explore the range of factors, including the physiological, social and pedagogical elements that shape the language patterns and features of neurodiverse individuals. There has also been an increased number of studies that explore code-switching tactics of neurodiverse language users, where their familiarity with the person they are communicating with shapes the degree to which an exchange is successful, or where a short-hand method of communication can be readily understood.

Another emerging area has been the exploration as to the ways in which dementia sufferers' language is impacted by this disease. Candidates have sought to apply language acquisition frameworks to explain how dementia sufferers develop or adapt communication methodologies to be understood, or indeed the ways in which caregivers adapt their language use to communicate with dementia sufferers, modelling similar behaviours to a parent supporting the understanding and language proficiency of a young child.

Historically, power dynamics have tended to be most often explored in relation to male and female exchanges, often in a romantic context (Love Island, First Dates, etc) or in drawing comparisons between male and female language users who occupy influential positions, such as celebrities, politicians, teachers or parents. However, this series seems to have seen a proliferation of class-based power studies. Rap lyrics have been a useful source to consider how working-class culture is experienced and represented by artists from often deprived and challenging backgrounds. These types of projects are best when they also touch on the ways in which certain presentations of masculinity also manifest from particular class and sub-culture expectations, exploring the way language is used to categorise and to support the performative nature of gender and class identities. Other artists such as Oasis and Lily Allen have also been the focus of such class-based discussion, and such projects enable a close exploration of sociolect, dialect and the presentation of class and regional identities.

Class-based focuses have also been explored in the presentation of regional identities via characters in sitcoms, or how comedians draw on their class to shape comedic personas and content, or how criminals from various classes are depicted in the media. The intersection of class and racial representations in the media is also an interesting emerging area and a particular project of note was focused on the reporting of the Central Park Five case.

Representation of class identities and class dynamics have been a relatively overlooked focus in previous series, but certainly seem to be gaining traction now, and there is a vast number of untapped topics that could be explored in future, responding to contemporaneous class-based tensions. For example, Trump's rhetoric on South American immigrants (another class and race focus); the way Labour and other major parties discuss taxation (should the wealthy be taxed more?); how political parties are currently representing benefit users (pensioners getting winter fuel allowances, people with disabilities and PIP, young people seeking a range of benefits because they are not in work, education or training); the representation of young, working-class men (toxic-masculinity, Andrew Tate, 'Adolescence', Gareth Southgate discussing resilience and lack of male role models, media coverage of white, working-class educational and economic under-performance).

Due to the Ukrainian invasion, the situation in Gaza, tensions with Iran and illegal immigrants featuring so perpetually in British (and American) media, we have seen increased projects on political and media representations of conflict, acts of aggression and refugees. I think we can probably expect to see more of these types of projects, especially around how the ethnicity, religion and economic status of the countries involved in the conflict impacts the extent to which the media reports the events/issues and the ways in which powerful, developed countries represent individuals, groups and leaders from developing and less influential nations. These are all perfectly viable, and extremely worthwhile, topical areas, although perhaps more than any other topical areas candidates will need to employ a nuanced and objectively removed approach within their discussions given the contentiousness of the topics. Centres are encouraged to help students extract meaningful insights from current events by prompting them to

consider why a topic is newsworthy and how it connects to broader linguistic issues. Not only does this support a more authentic engagement with AO3 but also provides an immediacy and depth of relevance that some retrospective topics are unable to achieve. And, of course, there is so much value in helping young people to critically engage with current affairs.

We did still get the Heard-Depp trial featuring prominently this year, although its popularity may decline given the time-lapse since the coverage. There was a noticeable reduction in studies on the Royal Family, suggesting a shift toward more topical and culturally relevant subjects. Love Island did not seem to feature as much, although it was still a reasonably popular choice. There seems to also be fewer projects on the more problematic fictional texts (such as 'Star Wars', 'The Walking Dead', 'The Office' etc) this year, which hopefully means centres and candidates are starting to consider data sources and topical areas that are likely to be more fruitful.

Task Two: Academic poster

This task is assessed under AO5, which emphasises how well candidates have synthesised and reshaped material from the investigation. Success here depends on how effectively candidates select and transform the most pertinent content of their project into a new format. The key is not just to copy and paste but to thoughtfully select the most important elements and adapt them into a clear, engaging poster.

Strong posters will initially clearly (but briefly) outline the aims and objectives of the investigation and then invest more substantial focus on the data analysis and findings section to offer a thorough explanation of the key outcomes of the study. Conclusions and evaluation sections should be concise and focused (and certainly should not be copied, as is often the case, directly from the investigation). There are 750-1000 words available for this task. As such, candidates should expect the written content to be detailed and developed so that after reading the investigation candidates are able to fully understand the purpose, data trends and the outcomes. It is important that candidates use these in the most effective manner. This means avoiding spending too many words on introduction sections, unnecessarily detailed methodologies or theory overviews, and overly lengthy concluding sections.

Since the poster is intended for an academic but non-specialist audience, it's important to use strategies that make the content accessible. This might include: the use of glossaries, definitions, and brief explanations of complex ideas; clear layout features such as sensibly ordered content, columns, text boxes, numbered sections or arrows (to show the order the content should be read); and visual aids such as charts, graphs, tables or annotated excerpts.

While the written content is the priority, the visual presentation also plays a role. Effective posters use thoughtful design choices — such as consistent fonts, colour schemes, and icons — to guide the reader and enhance clarity.

Lower scoring posters tend to be either too sparse or vaguely expressed to offer any depth of insight, poorly organised so that it is hard to understand how the material relates to one another, or overly dense so that there is little sense of the key outcomes from the investigation. A less common issue that occurs now there is more familiarity with the academic poster format, but one that does persist to a lesser degree, is the copying of large chunks of the original investigation without adapting them for the new format.

Applying the Assessment Objectives

AO1 evaluates how effectively candidates analyse the discourse and linguistic features of their data, as well as the methods and frameworks they use to interpret it. At the top performance levels, candidates offer detailed and insightful interpretations, identifying patterns and specific features with precision. Their analysis is supported by a sophisticated use of subject-specific terminology and a confident academic style. These interpretations are not only well-reasoned but also convincingly backed by evidence.

In the middle bands, candidates typically provide solid and often perceptive readings of the data. Their work is generally accurate and appropriate, although at the lower end of this range, some points may lack depth or development. At the lower levels, interpretations tend to be vague, overly broad, and insufficiently supported by textual evidence. These responses often feel pre-formed rather than emerging from close analysis of the data.

Across all levels, most candidates make good use of structural conventions such as section headings and subheadings, as recommended in the specification. This organised approach is a strength and often helps candidates secure at least a Level 3 mark for AO1, even when their analytical approach is not always secure or consistent. However, moderators have frequently observed that AO1 is one of the most commonly overmarked assessment objectives. This usually happens when candidates are given Level 5 for work that is methodical and detailed in identifying language features, but lacks the interpretive nuance and sophistication expected at that level. Over-marking also tends to occur when candidates use accurate and technical terminology to label features but do not offer deeper commentary on their significance. Additionally, issues with expression—such as awkward phrasing, poor editing, or inconsistent academic tone—can undermine the quality of the analysis. Many submissions are too informal or marred by typos and grammatical errors. While writing quality is not the primary focus of AO1, persistent issues can prevent work from reaching the highest level and certainly prevent access to full marks for this AO.

AO1 also considers the rationale behind data selection, the relevance of chosen language levels, and the candidate's ability to make discerning choices about what to include. Increasingly, centres are allowing candidates to submit excessively long pieces, as though length equates to quality. This is extremely problematic, not least as it can significantly repress the assessment judgements for pieces of work that are within the word limit but demonstrate very high performance, but also because it undermines the integrity of the assessment as a fair tool to measure the success of candidates across all other centres. Word limits are generous enough to allow candidates to meet the highest criteria and exceeding them often indicates a lack of editorial judgement. Submitting everything that seems relevant, rather than selecting the most pertinent material, undermines the clarity and rigour of the analysis. Centres should therefore require candidates to edit their work to meet the word count or reflect the overlength in the AO1 mark. This not only promotes academic discipline but also ensures fairness, so that concise, high-quality work is not disadvantaged in comparison. Where pieces are overly lengthy centres should address this in their marking of AO1 (and should consider also reducing the mark for AO2/AO3 given that there is likely excess content related to both of these AOs).

Across centres, AO1 was generally well addressed. Most investigations were clearly structured, often with the support of subheadings and contents pages, which contributed to a more academic presentation. However, some centres allocated too much space to introductions and methodologies, detracting from the analysis section. A reminder of suggested word counts for each section may help rebalance this. Evaluations were inconsistent in quality; many candidates defaulted to generic reflections such as "I would use more data," limiting the usefulness of this section. There was an increase in quantitative methods, although not all were effective—simple counts of conjunctions, for example, added little analytical value. While lexis and semantics remained the dominant frameworks, some centres

began exploring discourse and pragmatics, which yielded more insightful discussions when applied thoughtfully.

AO2 evaluates how effectively candidates apply conceptual and theoretical frameworks to interpret language data and explain why certain features appear. Strong performance in this area involves not only identifying relevant theories but also critically assessing their usefulness in relation to the data. This includes exploring why a language user may have produced a text, what agenda they might be pursuing, and how they position their audience to receive the intended message. There was a noticeable shift from spoken language investigations to those examining representations of gender, although many candidates struggled to apply speech theory effectively to planned texts. Encouragingly, some candidates engaged with more nuanced gender theory, referencing scholars such as Cameron (1990), Mills (1995), Connell (1987), and Barker-Plummer.

At the highest levels, candidates demonstrate a probing and evaluative approach to theory. They assess the extent to which specific frameworks support or challenge their interpretations, and they are willing to question the adequacy of traditional theorists—such as Tannen, Cameron, Zimmerman & West, Lakoff, Grice, Goffman, and Fairclough—when these do not fully account for the data. These candidates often draw on more recent or specialised theories, or propose alternative conceptual tools, to deepen their analysis. They use theory not just to explain findings, but to shape their hypotheses, guide their focus on particular language levels, and structure their overall investigation. Of particular note is the number of candidates who have applied theoretical concepts from outside of A Level English Language studies – for example those who explore medical and clinical language to explain physiological or behavioural factors which might impact the language use of individuals (this has most often been seen in relation to projects on neurodivergent language users and when exploring the language use of serial killers with a psychiatric diagnosis).

Mid-level candidates typically recognise where data aligns with or diverges from theoretical expectations, but their commentary may lack depth or specificity. Explanations are sometimes generalised or insufficiently supported by evidence. At the lower end of this range, candidates may describe theories accurately but struggle to connect them meaningfully to the data, or they may rely on surface-level comparisons without critical engagement. Lower-level responses often treat theory as a formality—referenced in introductions but not integrated into the analysis. These candidates may simply confirm what they expected to find, without questioning or testing their assumptions. Their use of theory tends to be descriptive rather than analytical and increasingly detached from the data as performance drops from Level 3 to Level 2.

In general, working with multiple theorists tends to support stronger AO2 performance, as it allows for comparison and contrast, and provides a broader interpretive lens. Relying on a single theory requires a much deeper level of engagement to be effective—particularly if the theory proves inadequate and no alternative framework is offered.

While AO2 was a relatively strong area overall in this series—with few candidates falling into Level 2 and none into Level 1—it remains the least secure assessment objective for many candidates, especially those working at the lower levels. Too often, it is treated as a secondary consideration rather than an integral part of the analysis. The most successful projects fully embed theoretical perspectives throughout, using them to drive interpretation and to interrogate the data with intellectual rigour. Notably, some of the most compelling investigations explored intersections between power and gender, demonstrating how theory can be used not just to support findings, but to challenge and refine them.

AO3 assesses how effectively candidates identify and integrate both specific and broader contextual factors that shape and influence language data. Strong responses demonstrate a clear understanding of the language producer's identity—considering aspects such as gender, age, profession, class, race, and worldview—as well as the circumstances of production, the intended audience, and the communicative

purpose of the text. Broader contextual influences, including social, political, and cultural events, dominant ideologies, generational norms, and attitudinal shifts, are also essential to a nuanced interpretation.

At the highest levels, candidates engage with context from the outset, framing the data as a product of particular historical moments, societal trends or part of a broader discourse. These candidates explore how the text participates in or responds to wider conversations, and they use contextual insights throughout their analysis to explain why certain linguistic features appear—especially when theoretical frameworks alone do not fully account for the data. This integrated approach allows for a more layered and insightful interpretation.

Mid-level responses tend to acknowledge relevant contexts but often rely on broad or reductive claims. For example, they may reference patriarchy or power structures in overly simplistic terms, presenting power as a binary or failing to explore how such dynamics operate in specific, situated ways. These responses may identify contextual factors but struggle to explain their significance or how they shape meaning in the data.

A recurring issue at the lower end is the misapplication of context, where candidates discuss their personal motivations for choosing a topic or data set. While such reflections may offer insight into the candidate's interests, they are not relevant to AO3 and cannot be credited. Candidates should instead focus on the contextual factors that influence the language data itself, not their own research process or preferences.

Overall, AO3 was often one of the strongest-performing assessment objectives in this series. Many centres successfully guided candidates to include a wide range of contextual considerations in their introductions, and the best candidates continued to weave contextual analysis throughout their work. Historical and socio-economic influences were frequently addressed, although genre, audience, and purpose—particularly in written texts—were sometimes underexplored. These areas offer rich potential for interpretation and should be more consistently integrated into analysis.

In summary, the most successful AO3 responses are those that treat context not as a checklist item, but as a dynamic and interpretive lens through which the data is understood and meaningfully analysed.

AO5 remains the most variable assessment objective. That said, there is a clear trend of improvement in the quality of academic posters. Many candidates demonstrated creativity in their visual presentation, using glossaries, speech bubbles, and annotated images to communicate findings. However, the most common issue was a lack of substantive content. Posters that did not use the full word count often lacked depth, which limited their effectiveness.

Notably, quite a few centres recorded lower marks for the academic poster in comparison to Task One. While the overall marking was competent and aligned with the standard, most of the candidate samples submitted were given Level 4 or lower in AO5. This suggests that there is considerable scope for development in this area to help more candidates reach the highest performance levels. Centres might consider identifying common areas for improvement and offering targeted guidance. This could include encouraging greater consistency in the integration of data and commentary, supporting students in making more effective layout and design choices for improved visual coherence, and promoting more explicit awareness of how to tailor findings for a non-specialist audience. Candidates should also be encouraged to enter into a proper process of transformation when designing their posters, considering elements such as borders, symbolism, image size, use of colour, and information density. Posters that are too crowded tend to be visually uninviting and less effective in communicating key messages.

Additionally, some centres appeared uncertain about how to assess AO5, with posters frequently placed in the same level as the investigation despite differing levels of achievement. There are still some

examples where centres have universally marked posters too harshly, especially when students have chosen to prioritise the written content, and where in doing so they have selected the most pertinent information but have used simpler visual tools. Remember: while visuals enhance the poster, the quality and relevance of the written content should always be the main focus when awarding marks.

Conversely, some centres have significantly overmarked posters where very little content has been produced and there has been indifferent success in transforming the content and register so that a new unspecialised audience will be able to extract meaningful insights.

Only a handful of centres relied on cut and paste content from the investigation, so this practice appears to be declining. However, when this has been the case this is not always appropriately reflected in centres' application of the mark scheme. Any response where all the content is copied directly from the investigation should be awarded within Level 1, if there is some attempts to refocus the written content then Level 2 might be considered, if there is only one or two examples of copying and pasting (often this will be the conclusions/evaluation) then a mark up to Level 3 can be considered.

Final words

On behalf of the entire moderation team, I would like to thank the candidates and their delivery teams for their efforts in producing a range of interesting and engaging investigations and academic posters this year. I extend my congratulations to all the candidates on their achievements. We now look forward to another equally productive year, where no doubt we shall see many more successful submissions.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
- shaped tasks which clearly identified language user, audience, purpose and context - selected data sets that were rich enough for rigorous analysis and discussion - established clear aims and hypotheses supported by AO2 and AO3 - produced logically structured reports with effective use of headings and visuals - prioritised detailed, nuanced analysis supported by theory and context - demonstrated critical engagement with theory and context - produced reflective, audience-aware academic posters - used visual tools to aid communication and enhance appeal - edited work carefully and adhered to word count.	- had vague, limiting or too broad titles - selected data sources which were too limited or too vast for purposeful/meaningful analysis - had unclear or overly broad/narrow aims - overcommitted to introductions/methodologies at the expense of analysis - focused on personal interest rather than linguistic analysis - referenced theory without applying it in analysis - submitted posters that were too brief or copied from the investigation - lacked visual coherence or adaptation for audience - submitted unedited work with excessive length or errors.

Most common causes of centres not passing

Very few submissions of the NEA are unable to achieve a passing mark for this component. Examples of those that would sit below the pass grade tend to be incomplete, likely as a result of lack of candidate engagement or adequate preparation; whether this is a reflection of external factors that prevented the candidate from being able to successfully complete the task, or some other factor relating to the individual's effort. Generally, there is more evidence that can be awarded in the investigation, where some rudimentary knowledge is seen and some analysis of the data, but there is a lack of AO2/AO3 support (either because it is entirely missing, or it is so flawed, limited or generic it adds little value). On occasion, we do receive submissions where no poster has been produced, or where a poster is submitted but very little time or care has been applied to the task. However, since this type of work is very rare, and where we see examples it is often a single candidate within a cohort, this seems to be an individual issue rather than a significant area of concern.

A very low proportion of centres do seem to produce academic posters which are of significantly lower quality than the investigation, and as a trend across the cohort this is more an area of concern. It is important that centres do build in ample time for the production, checking and editing of posters since they are a significant task in their own right, and are worth a quarter of the total NEA marks.

A recurring issue this series was the awarding of AO1 marks within Level 5 for work that lacked the necessary academic register, contained frequent typos, or demonstrated lapses in expression. While the content of these investigations was often strong, the lack of careful editing meant that the quality of written communication did not consistently meet the expectations of the highest level. Centres are reminded that clarity, fluency, and academic tone are integral to AO1 and should be reflected in the final mark.

Another common issue was overlong submissions. Candidates who significantly exceeded the word count often did so at the expense of selectivity and focus. This not only impacted the quality of analysis but also created disparities within cohorts, where more concise responses were disadvantaged by comparison. Centres should make sure that candidates understand the importance of working within the recommended word limits and are supported in refining and editing their work accordingly.

In Task Two, the academic poster, some centres awarded marks that mirrored the investigation rather than assessing the poster on its own merits. Posters should be judged independently, and it is entirely possible for a candidate to perform better — or worse — on the poster than on the investigation. Misalignment between the two tasks was a frequent cause of disagreement between centre and moderator marks.

Common misconceptions

As with every year, there have been many occasions where candidates have chosen unhelpful focuses for their investigation, where the topic, data or simply the framing of the task has limited their ability to create a successful NEA submission. It seems prudent to reiterate that while the specification requires candidates to work independently, teachers are encouraged to help candidates to explore fruitful projects and so they can offer advice on projects, data sets and topics that may not offer much scope for purposeful exploration. This advice should be offered at the outset but also during the process. Sometimes candidates do fall down the rabbit hole with their projects and support can be offered to guide towards a better outcome. For example, where they realise they do not have enough data, they can be encouraged to work with more examples. Where they have too much, they can be shown how to collate the data so they can explore trends rather than the minutia of each data set or helped to identify which data is proving less profitable and so therefore can be removed. Where a task is formulated unhelpfully, for example anticipating a forgone conclusion or being too specific, teachers can support candidates in making refinements to the task, so it opens up a greater range of insights. It should also be noted that the Text and Task support process is operational throughout the academic year and submissions for changes to titles can be made where this is necessary at any point. It is preferable to guide candidates to a successful reshaping of their task rather than they doggedly try to make a stunted project work.

One of the areas where the greatest degree of candidates' misconception is seen is in the treatment of fictional characters as real language users, particularly in projects based on scripted texts. This undermines the validity of the analysis unless the candidate explicitly acknowledges the constructed nature of the dialogue and frames their investigation accordingly. Where AO2/AO3 is applied it needs to be in relation to authorial aims and purposes in producing the texts, considering why they have elected to present characters in the way that they have.

A common misconception is that the academic poster should replicate the investigation. In reality, the poster should transform the investigation's content, highlight key findings and adapting them for a new audience. The priority is synthesis of the key information, which means extracting the most pertinent and illuminating information and re-packaging it into a new format. This may require providing helpful frames of reference such as glossaries and summaries of theory, visualising trends in graphs/tables and using bullet points to cover contextualising information. While aesthetics are important, they should not overshadow the content. Posters that prioritised design over substance often lacked the depth and clarity needed to meet the assessment criteria. Candidates should be encouraged to use visuals purposefully—to support communication, contextualise findings, and engage the audience.

In terms of marking, candidates who simply copied and pasted sections from their investigation were limited to Level 1 or, at best, Level 3 if partial transformation was evident. Markers should also be alive to the fact that performance across the two tasks may be equal, but candidates may also perform better in one of the tasks than the other.

Avoiding potential malpractice

The independent nature of the language investigation reduces the risk of plagiarism between candidates within the same centre. However, with multiple series of OCR and centre-produced exemplars now available, centres should remain vigilant for derivative topics and approaches. This is particularly relevant when candidates use written, text-based sources, as their fixed content can lead to similar interpretations across different investigations. To help prevent potential malpractice, centres are encouraged to guide candidates toward alternative sources while still exploring related topics, or to shift the focus while using similar materials. Candidates must also make sure they use a suitable referencing system and include a full bibliography citing all secondary sources, so that credit is properly given. When candidates are producing transcripts from real-life interactions, centres must make sure that appropriate safeguarding and ethical protocols are followed — especially when the data involves vulnerable individuals.

AI is one risk area which centres should be alert to, as with any NEA task. Knowing your candidate's quality and style of writing may help with recognising content that has not been produced by them and where AI has been used to support their work. It is also good practice to see regular iterations of the work, both to support progress and to check that the work is the candidates' own.

Please note candidates are allowed and invited to explore the impact AI may have on language use, or how it may be able to replicate language use of real-life users as the focus of their project. However, any data created by AI should be cited and none of the 'write-up' of the report or poster should be generated using AI.

Helpful resources

- [Setting up a Language Investigation](#)
- [Approaching the Language Investigation Task](#)
- [Independent Investigation into Language in Use](#)

Additional comments

Administration:

Every year there are a number of late submissions, and examples of samples being sent with inadequate postage or via an untracked postal method which results 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 candidates' 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 make sure 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. On several occasions 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 over-looked 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 to make sure 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 on 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 the exam paper builder platform for a range of our qualifications. [Find out more](#).

Free for all OCR centres with an Interchange account, it allows unlimited users per centre. We require an [Interchange](#) username to verify your centre's users for ExamBuilder.

If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

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](#).

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 the link to the **Online courses** under the **Assessment** or **Training** tab – hover over **Assessment** or **Training** on the horizontal menu and select **Online courses** from the dropdown.

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?

We recommend all teachers complete the module on Online courses – NEA for their subject. These courses provide subject-specific information about course content; how to prepare for planning, marking and submitting; and support with understanding the marking criteria.

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.

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our resources.



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☎ 01223 553998

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