

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in English Language and Literature
Unit 4 (6EL04/01)

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Overview

This series has produced some very creative and ambitious work with more students writing successfully in voices influenced by their own wider reading in addition to the source texts. It is excellent that many centres are giving students the freedom to pursue their own interests and choose their own core texts. Fewer centres seemed to feel the need to follow a particular formula with centre set tasks and have been encouraging real creativity in approach, both for the literary and non-fiction tasks. This has made the coursework very rewarding for the centres, the individual students and, of course, for the moderators.

However, careful guidance is needed if this approach is taken. If the choice of core text is unambitious the effect is frequently limiting. For example, a text that has been popular with students for the last two years is 'Five People We Meet in Heaven' which has led to predictable outcomes and lack of variety. Another problem has been when students have started by choosing a particular person, story or event and then invented a topic to match, not producing a convincing rationale for their choices of genre and approach.

Topics and Tasks

Popular topics were Dilemma of Duty, Crossing Boundaries, Forgiveness, Grief, themes related to War, Conflict, Identity, and Obsession. Dystopian themes still appear regularly but centres do need to ensure that focus on Dystopia (an AS topic) does need to show progression to A2. A core text that has proved to be successful in this respect is Atwood's 'Oryx and Crake'.

The theme of Identity/Image has inspired varied and sometimes genuinely exciting work, often stimulated by reading 'The Great Gatsby'. One successful example was the pairing of the Fitzgerald text with 'The Dubliners'.

Choice of core texts

The choice of a rich, multi-layered core text (whether fiction or non-fiction) is vital in ensuring that students are provided with a good style model and a variety of possible outcomes.

Texts that fall into this category are: 'The Kite Runner' (often paired with 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'), 'Birdsong', 'Atonement', 'The Great Gatsby', 'The Reader', and 'Jane Eyre'. Hemingway, Fowles and Garcia Marquez also featured this year and some centres chose a Shakespeare play as a core text. If texts of this nature are then supported by a range of wide reading in different genres, including students' own personal favourites eg, Jodie Picoult, this makes an excellent foundation for research and ideas for effective original writing.

Exemplars 1 to 3 illustrate fluid connections between topic, core text and tasks.

Exemplar 1

Introduction to a short story: Theme of identity and stimulus text of 'The Great Gatsby'

There was music from my neighbour's house over the autumn winds. Those still dwelling over the summer's end were those who made the extra effort to attend these parties. In his blue gardens were endless trees capturing moments that would be forgotten the next morning, and hid the strangers that knew nothing about one another but the simple repetitive information conveyed by the common conversation starter: 'I'm Juliet' and 'I'm Joseph'. About half of these guests turn up looking to fall in love, and the other half turn up because in reality they have nothing better to do. At high tide in the afternoon, the sun bounced off the burnished surface of the solitary sea and it became time for the boisterous party to start. I stood on my balcony and watched as the guests arrived. Watching over this party reminded me of when I looked over New York from my window, the dark city lit up by streetlights and workaholics, like me, in their expensive apartments. Really, I just saw the reflection of myself, a man of 23 years, endlessly tired and depressed, when really, why was I? I lived alone in the penthouse of a 48-story building. I had a great job. I was rich....I still am rich.

Moderator's comment:

An effective response to the stimulus text of 'The Great Gatsby' to reveal the theme of 'Identity'. There is evidence of the influence of the Fitzgerald text blended with the candidate's own ideas.

There is evocative descriptive writing, careful revelation of character and clues to intrigue the audience.

Exemplar 2

Extract from a biography of the candidate's uncle and aunt.

I didn't know a couple that I thought were more suited for each other than Diana and David. Everything Diana wanted, he wanted, and vice versa. They were probably the weirdest people I knew, who never got tired of each other, mainly because they didn't actually live in the same house. They lived on the same property, but both houses were a ten second walk from each other. Due to her intense relationship with Finley, her ex-husband, she'd gotten used to having her own space. The cosy pool area attached to my aunt's big house was connected by the small, painful and uncomfortable textured orange brick pathway to David's smaller sized wooden house that they soon built when it was time for him to move in. At times they'd go for a few days without seeing each other. This intrigued me because I couldn't decide myself whether I'd hate living like they do or love it.

Moderator's comment:

An original response for the non-fiction task, based on personal interviews. Effective shaping of the text demonstrating sound knowledge of genre conventions. The writer brings the subjects to life and, as many biographers, writes from a personal subjective viewpoint.

Exemplar 3

Extract from Commentary for Exemplars 1 and 2

Identity is the theme of my coursework, and I used stimulus texts such as 'The Great Gatsby' by F. Scott Fitzgerald and 'A Life Backwards' by Alexander Masters, a blend of biography and autobiography, written in reverse chronology. I also read 'No Country for Old Men' by Cormac McCarthy and these three works helped me shape the writing of my texts. One of my main interests was in the choices these authors made about what sides of their characters' personalities they exposed and what parts they chose to conceal. This mirrors our reality where we only have our own perspective of other people. I also became interested in the other side of this idea that some characters are anxious about their own identity, and set up an image of themselves in order to meet the expectations of others.

One way I responded to the theme of identity was by withholding information about my characters, so the readers only gradually discover more about their identity. This technique is used by Fitzgerald whose Gatsby is mysterious and unknowable. This inspired me to create the fictional character, Ben, who is difficult to read. Similarly I have always found my uncle enigmatic and centred my non-fiction piece on him.

Moderator's comment:

A very clear and precise rationale revealing a sharp understanding of the stimulus texts and the techniques used to shape the two genres.

The following exemplar illustrates the use of personal experience to form the basis of the fiction task.

Exemplar 4

Extract from a novel chapter: Theme of post-colonial India inspired by the novels of Anita Desai.

After being shown her room, Amelia was asked by mother to dress for dinner. Opening the closet in her new room she was overwhelmed by what she saw. There was so much silk and lace and cotton and sheer fabric draped over the rails in different colours. Deep blues, turquoises, purples, pinks, maroons, oranges, some yellow and greens of the richest tones and the most beautiful light blue that Amelia has ever seen. But no black, no navy and no white. She felt rather distressed at the concept of having to choose her own outfit as usually she would have her English maid do it for her.

She walked down the elegantly carved marble stairs to dinner. Amelia's hair was down, the dark brown curls falling delicately over her back. The light blue silk ghagra choli was embroidered at the bottom with silver sequins in the shapes of big yet elegant diamonds and the tight choli remained pure as it was made up of only the light blue silk. It fitted her

slender seventeen year old body perfectly as she stepped carefully down into the midst of this strange and unfamiliar culture.

'You look wonderful', Ipsa chimed in her high-pitched but heavily accented voice. The elegant sea-blue bindi was positioned perfectly on her forehead and when it caught the light glistened magically. Her dainty hands were covered in delicate henna and her shiny black hair in a long plait dropped down her back. She was one of the most beautiful sights Amelia had ever seen.

Amelia found sitting on the floor, well, awkward. Under the ghagra her legs were bare and they touched the icy stone floor sending nail like shivers through her. She sat waiting for the cutlery to arrive until Nishtha slyly whispered that she needed to pick up the food with her right hand, using chapattis and naan breads. The table was littered with some of the richest food she had ever experienced-with intense paprika and turmeric in every course. There was so much of it, the sheer quantity was overwhelming, especially compared with the war rations she was used to.

Moderator's comment:

Vividly descriptive. Good creation of character. Employs subject-specific lexis appropriately and references to contextual factors are skilfully embedded.

Exemplar 5

Opening paragraph of the commentary for the extract from the opening chapter.

After reading *The Customs of the Kingdoms of India* I was inspired to write a literary piece (an opening chapter to a novel) with the purpose to inform and entertain the young adult reader about the post-colonial culture clash between India and England. The main protagonist is Amelia and her experiences are based on my grandmother's when she migrated to India in 1943. The novel is about the discovery of the secrets of the arranged marriage in the Indian culture which leads her to form a stronger relationship with her emotionless mother.

To make the setting more convincing I incorporated Hindi lexis, revealing the personalities of the individuals in the family to come across in their names; 'Savar', means the King, 'Nishtha' means 'Faith' and 'Ipsa' means Desire; hinting at the hierarchy within the family. In addition, elliptical declarative sentences starting with a conjunction 'And they did. All seven of them followed Savar. And behind them were the servants', describe the formation of the family in a more informal register, conveying to the reader the patriarchal structure of the mid-20th century society whilst remaining easy to read. The compound modifiers emphasise the Indian culture using colours, for example, 'coconut-brown'. This description combined with the asyndetic list 'the biggest, warmest, most welcoming smile' encapsulates the warmth and friendliness of the family as they welcome Amelia inside.

Moderator's comment:

Clear explanation of choices. Demonstrates understanding of the YA genre. Evidence of research and effective use of personal family history.

Choice of tasks**Fiction**

The trend to move away from diary entries has continued and standards achieved are significantly better. Popular tasks for fiction continue to be extracts/openings for short stories, chapters of novels, television and stage drama and occasional monologues. Epistolary stories are increasingly popular as is the use of contrasting narrative voices. The concept of 'the unreliable narrator' is popular with many students.

Non-fiction

The choice of newspaper articles often seemed an arbitrary one; many had too much of an all-purpose approach with little awareness that readers of 'The Telegraph' and 'The Guardian' would have very different expectations.

Obituaries are increasingly popular as a non-fiction task but centres are advised against using this genre as a centre-set task as only the more confident students seemed able to handle it well. The majority of students appeared well versed in the more obvious genre conventions but may need more familiarity with obituaries and blogs.

The literary/non-fiction divide: although more students are now making a clear distinction between imaginative and factual writing this continues to be problematic as a number of submissions for the non-fiction task were actually fictionalised e.g. writing new speeches for famous historical figures such as Winston Churchill or inventing a character/story for the fiction piece and using this as the subject of a non-fiction article. This can work well if the non-fiction task is topic based e.g., PDST or domestic violence but not where the story/character is unrealistic. An extreme example is the case of some students writing a first person account for the fiction task and then converting this into an informal magazine article for the non-fiction task.

Exemplar 6

Extract from an article for an American e-magazine: Theme of America as the home of freedom. Inspired by a range of American literature and magazine articles including 'Of Mice and Men' and 'View from the Bridge'.

New American

That freedom shall not perish

The fierce debate regarding gun control has exploded in recent times following tragedies such as the Aurora Theatre and the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. Pinkos would argue that if gun ownership was made illegal, then these tragedies could

have been averted. I disagree, and say that guns must remain illegal in the USA.

Obama, thinking he is some kind of sheriff, has been clear in his intention to restrict gun ownership by the introduction of the *Assault Weapons Ban*. This would outlaw many types of guns, for example semi-automatic rifles with capacities of over ten rounds as well as 157 specifically named firearms. This is massively hypocritical: Obama is trying to outlaw weapons while he and his family are under heavy protection funded by the taxpayer's money, armed with weapons that would be made illegal for an American citizen to own. Some people will say that because Obama is president the situation is different: he is under far greater threat than most people. This is true but by siding with him you're also valuing his life over others. The massive double standard shows that Obama doesn't care about the American people. He only cares about himself. His proposed ban is sickening. If he really thinks that guns should be banned then he should try to be an example for what he believes in. Obviously though he thinks too highly of himself to be under the same laws as the American populace. He is not a man of the people.

Moderator's comment:

Coherent and convincing. Approaches the topic from an unexpected viewpoint. Lexical choices and style in keeping with the genre and specific publication.

Exemplar 7

Extract from commentary for the article on gun laws

My article on gun control in America conveys a strong right wing Republican view on the topic, with the purpose to persuade readers that the option to own a gun should remain legal. As the article is written for the e-magazine, *New American*, readers will likely have Republican views. To empower the individual, a first person perspective is taken. This aligns with right wing philosophy where importance is placed on the individual. However, at times, the plural non-specific 'our' is used. This creates a feeling of unity within the readership, who already have something in common, which is their political views.

Moderator's comment:

Clear rationale and precise explanation of audience which supports the persuasive article and demonstrates careful research and genuine interest in the topic.

Blogs are another unclear area. There is a tendency to assume that as the blog genre is non-fiction, then anything presented as a blog is automatically non-fiction, even if the content is completely invented and even more suited to the genre of Fantasy. In fact, several submissions presented as blogs could easily have been news reports or essays, lacking any generic features of a blog. The non-fiction issue often seemed linked to lack of research and insufficient reading of appropriately challenging texts. Some bibliographies in fact gave the impression that the student had only seen a film of a core text followed up with some internet searches.

The following exemplar illustrates a thoughtful approach to the topic supported by suitable research.

Exemplar 8

Extract from an article for a male magazine: Theme of taboo relationships inspired by 'The Reader'

The Cougar: An investigation into the World of One of Society's Least Talked about Taboos

Large wild cats which originate from the Americas and inhabit the Western Hemisphere are known as cougars. Older women, usually between the ages of thirty and fifty, who seek relationships with younger men are also known as cougars. At first, it's tough to see the link between these two seemingly different specimens, but as soon as we research the animal further, there are clear similarities to be found. Described by David Attenborough on Planet Earth as 'the lions of the Andes', cougars stalk their prey before ambushing them, and it's this quality that lends its name to these types of women. Naturally, it is not that human cougars physically attack their so-called 'male prey', but they go 'on the prowl'-a phrase that we now use frequently.

Some say we still live in patriarchal societies across the world but the concept of cougars turns this power allocation on its head. One view is that, due to a wealth of experience, older women are able to seduce and ultimately take advantage of young, vulnerable men. This consequently poses the question of whether, in fact, cougars are good or bad. Male octogenarians such as Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi appear with girlfriends young enough to be their daughters and society doesn't raise an eyebrow, but Demi Moore and Ashton Kushner's relationship went viral, so why is one more acceptable than the other?

Moderator's comment:

An original topic for a defined audience with an appropriate register and use of effective stylistic techniques. Written with maturity and some sophisticated expression with appropriate use of a more informal style.

Exemplar 9

Extract from the commentary to accompany the article

The concept of taboo relationships is one that has interested me greatly ever since I first read 'The Reader' (B Schlink) and within this, I have been fascinated by the bravery and courage needed by individuals to break away from societal norms. The two pieces that I have created are closely related, as both deal with certain people's struggles to overcome taboos. In my non-fiction piece I have invited identification, providing the reader with a different perspective on life. The opening part of the title for my article is short and emphatic, and is followed by the carefully chosen noun 'investigation', which implies discovery. Found in a men's

magazine such as GQ or Esquire, it is an article exploring relationships between older men and younger women...

The tone is engagingly informal and this should not be confused with the level of intellectuality of the readers as the main readerships of the two afore mentioned magazines are affluent and educated. This aspect of my work is demonstrated by the use of the inclusive personal pronoun 'we' which immerses the reader in the article and the presence of elision in the form of it's and 'he'll' makes it accessible and less rigid syntactically. 'Us blokes' is again conversational and 'well, after a few beers at least', uses humour to identify with the reader.

Moderator's comment:

A discriminating explanation of the writer's intentions with a definite understanding of audience and purpose.

Exemplar 10

Extract from a film review for 'Empire Magazine' inspired by the topic of 'On the Edge' and the core text of 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time'.

Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise explore the world of autism in their 1988 film 'Rain Man'.

Director Barry Levinson still, even today, continues to take audiences through an emotional roller-coaster, leaving us deeply moved with a film that won Oscars for Best Director, Best Picture, Best Actor and Best Original Screenplay.

And boy, didn't it deserve them?

In essence, the plot of 'Rain Man' follows an egotistical, self-absorbed young man named Charlie Babbitt (Tom Cruise). Upon the death of his estranged father, he realises that he should inherit a large fortune. However, unbeknownst to him, Charlie Babbitt has an older brother who suffers from severe autism and has been living in a home. This older brother receives the bulk of his father's money, property and possessions, but is completely unaware of the importance of this within his life, as he lives in a world disconnected from the harshness of reality...

For Tom Cruise, these were the early days. 'Top Gun' of 1986 was, of course, one to remember, but it had only been seven years since his cinematic debut in 'Endless Love' in 1981. Taking this into account, it's hard to dispute the fact that his role in 'Rain Man' convinced the world of his worth as an actor. As Charlie comes to learn that his brother is a valuable person, not just for the vast sums of cash he now owns but for his own distinct personality, he becomes less narcissistic. It would have been straightforward for Cruise to play this in some sentimental, quintessential, 'Hollywood' way. But he doesn't. This role has depth and character, and is perfectly portrayed by Cruise's talent and capability as an actor.

Equally hard to dispute is the fact that Cruise, although meriting high praise, is outshone by Hoffman. The way that Hoffman holds his head slightly to the right, his facial expression barely changing, demonstrates a remarkable understanding of the role at hand.

Moderator's comment:

Excellent understanding of the genre conventions of film reviews for a niche audience. Employs appropriate stylistic techniques. A genuinely interesting and thoughtful response with very clear awareness of audience, purpose and context.

Commentaries

It is good practice for students to begin the commentary by establishing the topic and core text and therefore clarifying the links. It is also good practice to indicate these texts in the bibliography, many of which have been impressive. The advice to students again is to make more use of their wide reading, emphasising the connections in their commentaries. Care needs to be taken to ensure equal coverage of the creative tasks in the commentary.

The effects of literary and linguistic features are not always consistently explored. There is still a tendency to adopt a tick list approach, meaning that features are identified without developed discussion of purpose and effects. Commentaries are then only observational with vague repeated references to 'engaging' the audience. Most students demonstrated basic linguistic knowledge, often confined to a limited set of terms eg, first person, triadic structure, rhetorical questions and declarative sentences. Key literary terms such as metaphor, simile and hyperbole were often over-used.

Explaining the rationale of the choices is important but should not be at such length that it is at the expense of close analysis.

Exemplar 11

Extract from a commentary on the theme of 'On the Edge'

My fiction piece 'The Destruction of Sanity' fits within the theme of 'On the Edge', exploring the topic of mental illness; more specifically bipolar disorder. I have chosen to structure my piece in the form of a first person narrative from a mentally ill protagonist. The audience for this would primarily be an educated adult audience, perhaps with a pre-existing interest in the subject matter.

Using 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' as my stimulus text, I was able to draw upon its integral merging of reality and hallucination to inspire my protagonist's visibly unstable condition. Personification ('the door began to quiver in its frame') displays these hallucinations whilst also acting to symbolise Christina's own projected feelings. This is shown particularly through metaphorical references and a consistent use of sibilance here where Christina is describing her experience with the hushed patients.....'the quivering prey for the silent, starved predator'....This zoomorphic reference is reiterated through the personifying post-

modification; 'her nails penetrating the worn leather as if it were the helpless deer....'suggesting once more the character's animalistic persona.

Structurally, I have used a split narrative to display the variance between the protagonist's past thoughts and present experiences. The occasional irregular sentence structure such as'trite phrases lining, unevenly, those clean walls....'is designed to add to the disjointed feel of Christina's account. In this example, the sentence structure highlights the adverb 'unevenly' as the key information. Her growing confusion is also displayed through the oxymoron 'miniscule yet horrific'.

Moderator's comment:

A very focused commentary which sustains close analysis of the text and explores the intended effect of the chosen techniques.

Internal Moderation

There was much evidence of careful and thoughtful internal moderation. However, some centres do need to apply the criteria more rigorously. There was significant over-rewarding of AO1 with, on some occasions, writing which did not sustain accuracy or coherence being awarded the highest marks. It was surprising that issues of spelling, syntax, grammar and carelessly omitted words were ignored by some internal moderators. Many students who had produced excellent creative tasks and sound commentaries let themselves down by lack of proof-reading. AO1 seems to be the least accurately applied AO. There was also a tendency to reward marks for AO3 for commentaries when the analysis was under developed and too observational.

The breakdown of AOs should be clearly shown beside a comment at the end of each of the three tasks, with totals for the AOs and the final mark on the front cover.

Centres do need to check that front covers are completed correctly and that the marks on the front covers agree with those on the OPTEMS.

In general there was much detailed, careful moderation with full summative comments to indicate how and why marks had been awarded. These details are very helpful for external moderators.

Advice to centres

- Ensure that the choice of core text is robust.
- Avoid modelling the fiction piece on only one text to avoid simply reduplicating that writer's style. Include a sufficient range of support texts/wide reading to allow students to see and appreciate different approaches.
- Emphasise the importance of starting with a clear decision about topic/theme.

- Explain to students that they must consider the audience, purpose and context of each of their creative pieces before they start writing to avoid writing purely for self interest.
- Commentaries need to be well organised, analytical and show true interest in the stimulus texts and an understanding of the crafting of two different tasks.
- Centres should make clear to students that graphics, illustrations and any form of layout features (except of course stage directions) should not be included. This issue mainly occurs with articles written in columns and interspersed with illustrations and varying font sizes.
- Journalists do not present their work in this way and these are editorial features. In addition to spending too much valuable time on decorative features, some students then devote part of the commentary to discussing graphology, which will not gain them any credit.
- Emphasise the importance of proof-reading, careful editing and observing the word count.
- It is good practice to keep a cumulative total of the word counts.

Conclusion

In general this has been another excellent year for Unit 4 with moderators commenting on the number of well crafted, emotive and genuinely moving fiction tasks and well researched, mature non-fiction pieces. There was pleasing evidence of enthusiasm, effort, originality and commitment to the ethos of the unit.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

