

GCE 2008 English Literature and Language FAQs

What support will be available for new centres?

There is a wide range of support available for all centres.

Ask The Expert - email the senior examining team with your query

The specification

Sample Assessment Materials

Getting Started

Student Book

Teacher Guide CD ROM

Scheme of Work for AS

Exemplar coursework material for Unit 2

Unit 1 marked exemplars

From April January 2009 Unit 1 examination paper and examiners' report

Training from Edexcel - face to face and on-line.

Unit 1

1) Question 1ai

Is there any advice I can give to my students to help them answer question 1ai

The key to a good answer is to exemplify, accurately from the extract

2) Question 1Aii

Is there any advice I can give to my students to help them answer question 1A ii

The key to a good answer is to use the extract in your answer - it is the function within the extract

3) I have noticed that context is not a requirement of the question on the prose text, but context seems to be important so why is it not being assessed?

The focus of the teaching and the assessment is upon voice, in your teaching you will find you need to provide contextual information and indeed in the shaping of voice and identity of character context does play a part.

4) In question 2 are the two bullets assessed separately?

No, question 2 requires a detailed analysis and the first bullet is a hook. The extract is a starting point and should be analysed in detail. It also prompts further analysis which goes beyond the extract. The second bullet allows for the development of the argument. A candidate can answer with two separate responses or one complete response.

Unit 2

- 1) I am thinking about letting my students have a free choice of topic, how shall I organise the support to them?

You could select extracts from a range of texts based on the topics to whet the students' appetite. You may have some favourite texts you want to introduce them to and presenting extracts of these provides an introduction to the students for them to follow up their own interests.

You could attempt to identify a core text which is appropriate to more than one topic, for example 'Jane Eyre' can be used for Entrapment, Women's Lives, Gothic and Super Natural, Journeys and Pilgrimages.

- 2) I want to get some reading links going between Unit 1 and Unit 2 to ensure coherence and a sense of structure for the students.

Any reading links that can be forged between the two units will be beneficial, for example Angela Carter short stories from Unit 1, whilst being taught gives rise to considerations of gothic literature, the iconographic features of the vampire, an extract from Francis Ford Copula's Dracula film can all feed into the reading for the topic Gothic and Supernatural.

'The Color Purple' could prompt wider readings in preparation for Women's Lives

- 3) Can you suggest some suitable poetry and drama for Dystopia ?

Dystopia, The Crucible or any Pinter play

General

- 1) With ref. to Q.1 Section B Sample Assessment material on The Color Purple.

A) For Bullet point one, directing students to use the given extract as a "starting point" are they expected to focus on voice (in this case, Harpo's) only as used in the extract or also in the novel as a whole. If also in the novel as a whole, should the time be balanced equally?

B) For open book texts does "clean copy" allow highlighting, underlining, cross referencing please?

For Q4 (Section B) on The Color Purple bullet point 1, students should explore the voice of Harpo and one other character in the extract and then extend to the novel as a whole in the second bullet point.

The mark scheme on p75 of the sample assessment booklet should help you to clarify this.

On your second question re: 'clean copies' highlighting, underlining, cross referencing is not allowed.

2) The set texts are of varying lengths. Does this mean that some texts provide 'easier' choices?

No-the texts have been chosen because of their particular use of voice. A slim text may offer just as many opportunities to explore the concept and representation of voice as a lengthier novel. The reason for this variety is to enable teachers to choose a text which fulfils the needs and interest of their cohort and which may also be a personal favourite of the teacher.

3) If a centre chooses short stories, do they have to study all of them?

Yes, with only one question in the exam it would not be possible to omit any of the stories as candidates are required to discuss a specific story.

4) If centres decide to study poetry could they make their own anthology with poems drawn from a number of poets?

Yes, this could offer more scope for exploring the topic.

5) Do centres have to seek endorsement from Edexcel for text choices?

No - it is assumed that centres will have the experience to select texts that are suitable for study at A level. If centres wish to confer with the awarding body or to ask advice they can do this via the 'Ask the Expert' facility.

6) The word length for the commentary is very short. Can candidates write more if they wish to?

No. The skills are to select the appropriate features for comment, to be precise, to avoid repetition. It also ensures that the demands on both students and teachers are controlled.

7) Are quotations to be included in the word count for the commentary?

Yes

8) Do we have to adhere to the suggested word limits for Unit 2 creative pieces?

No these are recommendations only: the only absolute is the **total** combined word count for both texts is 2,000-2,500.

9) Are stage directions to be counted in the total word count for creative drama texts?

Yes

10) For the poetry core text, is there a recommended number of poems that we need to study?

It is at the discretion of the teacher to ensure that it offers a sufficient scope and stimulus for candidates own writing.

11) Would the Curriculum 2000 Lang & Lit A Level Poetry Anthology be useful with the new specification

The Edexcel Anthology is not a prescribed text for the new specification but could be useful as a resource for wider reading.

12) We are about to deliver the new specifications and have chosen for Unit 2 the theme of 'Journeys and Pilgrimages'. I know we have free choice of text but want to confirm that 'Two Caravans' by Marina Lewycka would be considered an appropriate choice of text alongside 'Our Country's Good'.

Your suggestions for Unit 2 key texts is absolutely ideal. Not only are both texts at the right intellectual level but they are very much in keeping with the spirit of the new specification.

13) Could you tell me whether there is any requirement for students to compare the texts given for each question or is it OK to just give an account of each text.

This does depend on the wording of the actual question. The specifications (see page 18) says 'students are required to make evaluative analyses of single texts OR contrastive analyses and evaluations of two or more texts'. I would therefore suggest preparing students for some element of comparative analysis, particularly as this is an A2 skill.

A possible approach would be to analyse each text in detail and include a concluding paragraph which identifies and comments on any significant similarities or comparisons.

Do consult past papers and mark schemes for practice material.

Regarding the new AS in Lang and Lit:

1) Can films be used as texts, if of good quality?

Yes as part of wider reading, but not as core texts.

2) What is the approximate equivalence of grades for Original coursework at GCSE and the AS? I.e. if I think it would be worth an A in GCSE terms, roughly what is that in AS terms, assuming that the criteria are met for audience, theme etc?

3) Although we will be studying 2 plays and poems for the Listening audience piece, will it be alright if their eventual piece is inspired, after all, by a novel they have read? So they could be adapting some aspect of it to a listening audience.

1. Films can be used as 'wide reading' to support the topic area and to stimulate ideas for writing-they don't have to be adaptations of literature texts but could, for example, be a documentary relating to the topic area.

2. We don't usually give equivalent grades between GCSE and AS and I'm not sure how helpful it would be.

3. Students must study one prose fiction text and either a drama or poetry text (you don't mention the prose fiction). You can choose any texts for wide reading.

It is not intended that the chosen texts should each have a specific link to one of the writing outcomes, in fact, all texts are meant to be used as a general stimulus both for ideas about content and as style models. If students want to write a monologue or an audio guide then they need to study style models for that particular genre and mode, although the actual inspiration may come from a lit text.

It is fine to adapt part of a novel for a listening audience.

4) Is it intended that each of the core texts should relate directly to one of the writing outcomes? Are there any genres that would not be appropriate when writing for a listening audience?

The wording of the specification makes it clear " Students will use this reading as a stimulus to create their own writing within their chosen topic area".

If the decision is to invent a TV interview, ask the student to consider why this particular genre and task is effective in relating to the topic area.

Creating texts

1) We are studying a stage play of Rough Crossings. based on Simon Schama's book about the War of Independence.

For the writing for a listening audience, could the candidates do a scene from a radio play?

Also, if they do an audio guide for a celebratory exhibition on this particular area, could they write both a snippet of dramatised dialogue and also a commentary for the guide? (They would therefore be writing a commentary on their audio commentary so to speak so they would have to discuss two types of writing for the listening audience)

As a companion piece they are studying a novel - Wide Sargasso Sea. If they choose, could they write something for a listening audience based on WSS? And a piece of writing for a reading audience based on Rough Crossings the stage play? - the spec seems to suggest that this is not what is required - could you clarify?

Do they have to add in their commentary whether they tried it out on a listening audience? -This is a feature of A2 log work but does it apply to the AS as well? I didn't think it did but the online session seemed to suggest that they did.'

Assuming it's Journeys and Pilgrimages - a scene from a radio play is fine the audio guide could include both the commentary on the exhibition and a short dramatised extract-the changes in approach could then be discussed in the commentary.

If you do WSS and Rough Crossings together your choices of outcomes are suitable, what you will be doing is concentrating on text transformation/adaptation for both tasks. This is acceptable but I would suggest explaining the rationale for the adaptations in the commentary as discussed in the Student Book.

The idea is that all the literary texts and wider reading should form a collective stimulus for the original writing. It isn't the intention that you should link each lit text with one specific outcome, the overall topic should give a range of ideas for inspiration.

For the listening audience text we suggest that students record it and 'road-test' it to see how effective it is. It isn't a requirement to discuss this in the commentary but a brief reference would enrich the commentary, particularly if they made changes after trying it out.

2) 'We are focusing on the Gothic and Supernatural topic. How far do students' pieces have to reflect this genre? Do they have to be intrinsically 'gothic' themselves?'

This would depend on the nature of the assignment e.g., an audio-guide for a tour of a gothic building would reflect the generic audio guide style, but could, for example, contain a short extract from a story or diary integrated into the voice-over (so, if, for example, a student wrote an extract from the script for an audio guide to Whitby Abbey, a few sentences of 'Dracula' could be featured as a dramatic reading: this would then give the opportunity to discuss the contrast in the 2 styles of the audio-guide in the commentary.

If the reading audience text is a short story the obvious choice is to write in the gothic/ghost story style. The Student textbook refers to a collection of modern, urban short stories, some of which have a 'gothic' approach and might be useful as style models.

3) 'I am working on the theme of Entrapment with my students and have read The Collector. Is it acceptable to use some of the poetry of Sylvia Plath as the poetry text. I would prefer it to Auden.'

The texts are only suggestions and you can choose any that you feel would work. The Collector is a good choice for this topic and Plath would be an excellent accompaniment. Another possibility is to use some dramatic monologues of Browning (Porphyria's Lover and My Last Duchess, for example) where there is a strong narrative. Centres are also able to make up their own poetry anthology which would give a great deal of scope.

4) 'I am writing with reference to the new GCE AS course Unit 2 Creating Texts.'

Please can I clarify a few things with regards to task setting for the two pieces of coursework and suggested resources.

A. Pieces can be individually negotiated with students - can I confirm the whole group does not have to do the same piece?

B. I understand that the two pieces must have a different genre and one for reading/listening audience; but do they also have a "different" audience (i.e. students cannot write two pieces aimed at young adults for example) and purpose (i.e. can both piece be written to entertain?)

I come from teaching AQA B for the last five years where this is a requirement but cannot find it anywhere in your guidance. Please can you clarify exactly the requirements for the two pieces in terms of audience and purpose? I am putting together a coursework proposal form for them to complete and I want it to be watertight. I have all the word limit information from the specification and guidance.

C. The students are studying the topic of Dystopia - do you have any

additional guidance on good non-fiction wider reading for this topic; we have read *Handmaid and Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Modest Proposal* by Swift, selections of *Brave New World*, watched *Children of Men* etc as well as them doing their additional work but I would welcome any advice on this.

D. One final point - previously we have always been advised that students should not aim to "script the unscriptable" when it come to writing for a listening audience ; I assume the same applies that they should not be trying to write "spontaneous speech" in terms of live interviews or conversations?'

A. The main distinction is between listening and reading audiences. The two creative pieces do not HAVE to be for different audiences but some distinction here would be helpful e.g. try to refine 'general adult audience' into something more specific-perhaps on age, gender, interests etc. It is also likely that there will be some distinction in the purposes of the listening and reading audience texts: most texts have to have some element of entertainment to grip the audience, so, again, a further purpose would be helpful.

B. Your choice of texts is excellent. Other suggestions are: *The Crucible*, *Memoirs of a Survivor* (Doris Lessing), JGBallard's novels (too many to list) but 'Kingdom Come' is set in a shopping mall and an extract would be enough. There is a dystopic film called 'Blindness' which reminded me of John Wyndham's 'Day of the Triffids'. The opening chapters of the Wyndham text could be useful.

C. Yes, you are quite right in thinking that we are not looking for scripting of the unscriptable. Anything which would have an actual script (e.g., audio guide) is fine.

D. It is excellent practice to negotiate individual tasks with students.

5) Our coursework topic is Entrapment. For this we have been studying slavery through *Rough Crossings* (play), adapted by Caryl Phillips (drama component) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* - Jean Rhys (fiction component.)

One of the candidates would like to develop the writing for a reading audience based on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She would like to write a short story but look at modern day oppression in Tibet. Although this is not specifically about slavery she would like to use the techniques that Jean Rhys uses to create her own short piece of fiction.

The key idea is to use the topic as stimulus so, as the topic is Entrapment, this should work. A short story would be suitable if the student has studied the short story genre. She would of course need to make some reference to the texts which she has been influenced by as models for content and stylistic approaches.

6) Is it possible to use *The Bloody Chamber* for study in Unit 2 as a coursework text if it has not been chosen as a prescribed text for Unit 1?

Yes - the requirement is to choose one prose fiction text, one drama or poetry and a range of wide reading.

7) Will Unit 1 'Voices' Question 1a) and 1b) always be the same?

Yes - the format of the question will always be the same.

8) We are studying the topic of Journeys for our coursework topic. We have read *Cloud Atlas*, a range of travel writing such as Bill Bryson, Laurie Lee, travel features for newspapers and blogs. We are about to embark on a selection of poetry.

We are now coming up with coursework tasks for a reading audience and would like some assurance we're on the right lines. I've attached a list of my students' proposed tasks if you have time to glance over it.

However, if you don't have time for that, then my main worry is that some students won't actually refer to their main text of *Cloud Atlas* at all in their writing - they are doing journalistic travel writing. Is that ok as they are still being influenced by their wide reading?

Also, some of the students who are doing tasks inspired by the different genres in *Cloud Atlas* aren't really doing much about travel and others are taking characters from the novel and developing them in some way (e.g. an obituary about one of the characters) - is this still appropriate?

The tasks are fine, very imaginative and a good variety. They are connected and inspired in some way by *Cloud Atlas*, either the

characters or the concept of journeys.

Your students should refer to the text and the initial inspiration (briefly) in their commentary.

It may also be the case that they were impressed or influenced by aspects of Mitchell's style or by the style of their wide reading, so this can also be referred to.

9) In the new coursework requirements for the AS part of this course (Unit 2), is it acceptable to offer a short story as a piece for a reading audience? My students have studied the gothic genre and have looked at 'The Bloody Chamber' and would like to have a try at that style.

Yes, a short story is acceptable for a reading audience for Unit 2 coursework. The Student Book has a section on writing a short story which might be helpful.

10) Where is opportunity to use Shakespeare at AS?

Unit 2 - option of drama text in coursework

11) Can we use texts in translation?

Yes

12) Unit 2 - Can the writing be non-fiction for both audiences or fiction for both audiences

Yes - it is crafting for the different audiences that is important

13) Unit 2 - Can both pieces be for the same purpose?

Yes, it is crafting for the different audiences that is essential. However, within the broad purpose, students should aim for some variety.

14) Unit 3 - could a student answer on a different topic in Section B from the one chosen in Section A?

Students have to identify the topic chosen on the exam paper. They would waste time in selecting a different topic which might disadvantage them. Their exploration of attitudes and values will be informed by previous study of the topic.

15) Are there any standardisation materials and when will coursework exemplars be available?

Exemplars and commentaries are now on the website.

16) Are there any descriptors for the grade boundaries?

Centres should work on the bands supplied.

17) Is there a contact number to phone for coursework advice?

Ask The Expert email service should be used

18) Does the word count for the commentaries include quotations?

Yes

19) How closely do the stimulus texts relate to their own writing?

The stimulus texts may be 'spring-boards' or the basis for transformation

20) How do students make reference to the stimulus texts in their commentaries?

In order to achieve the higher bands, it is essential that students explain which aspects of the stimulus texts have influenced their own writing.

21) What is the most important element in the coursework process, the texts, the theme or the wide reading?

All three. Look at the Assessment Objectives. Note A03 is important

22) What is the closing date for coursework submissions?

See website.

23) How do we obtain cover sheets for the coursework folders?

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCE%20New%20GCE/english-langlit-GCE-cwrc.doc>

24) What is the purpose of the wide reading for Units 3 and 4?

The wider reading has a crucial role to play throughout A2. A wide variety of texts in different genres is needed for Unit 3 to support the topic and to provide contextual background for Section B.

25) Could we choose a Unit 2 topic to use for Unit 4?

No

26) We are a school in Africa with limited internet access. Are there websites that have critical reviews of performances? I'm a little confused. Are the students exploring the text, literary criticism, reviews of performances or all three?

I really hope you can clarify since initial reading of the plays is finishing and I need to push my students in the right direction...

The secret here is to concentrate on the literary texts you have chosen but not exclusively so that what your candidates are doing is putting their texts first and using any critical responses they can find or any accounts of performances to argue or agree with in such a way that they are developing, sustaining or informing their own opinions.

Do not worry about internet based material though your candidates might find videos say of Olivier as both Hamlet and Othello might help them with the creative critical piece, or they might fancy writing an article to be included in a theatre programme.

Refer to Unit 2 Scheme of Work at

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCE%20New%20GCE/Unit1-GCE-EnglishLangLit-SoW1.doc>