

## **MODERATOR REPORT FOR GCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 9EL0/03 2022**

### **General comments:**

After a two-year hiatus, coursework is back, and it is pleasing to report that centres have risen to the challenge and that candidates have entered into the spirit of the specification with energy and enthusiasm. The recurrent comment from moderators was how enjoyable the work was to read and how encouraging it was to see so much personal investment in the production of both creative pieces and the commentary.

Inevitably, there were teething problems with the new LWA portal, but most centres were able to upload their work in time for the May 15th deadline. A few centres had to be chased, especially when they had not included the highest and lowest folders. However, most were able to submit their work punctually and with all the administration in order. Where possible, centres should submit a single file per candidate so that the front sheet with final marks and task details is included in one pdf file.

It is also pleasing to report that most centres have taken on board the advice and exemplar material that has been available and have submitted superb and often very moving creative work, both literary and non-fiction. Most centres have given their candidates a reasonably free rein to select topics and genres; comments from moderators suggest that this is a very good way to improve engagement and achievement. A few centres started with core stimulus texts and then encouraged impressive wider reading and genre research. Many centres have used the Coursework Advisory Service, usually in relation to the suitability of texts, and this will be covered in a later section. We do not proscribe texts, but we do encourage wider reading; as a general rule, those candidates who used multi-layered literary and non-fiction stimulus texts did better than candidates who appeared to have taken an easy option.

Many candidates, as in the past, have used knowledge and skills from other A-level subjects, including History, Psychology, Music, Theatre Studies and Modern Foreign Languages, and these have often produced impressive results.

Moderators often commented on centres where the candidates had all studied the same text as well as producing identical genre pieces. Some observed what they regarded as a lack of personal approach or engagement. There is no reason not to take this approach, but anecdotal evidence from moderators seems to suggest that candidates flourish when they make their own choices. Many centres offered a broad topic such as Journeys, Entrapment, Racism and Persecution and then allowed candidates to develop their own direction and wider reading.

As usual, there was a clear connection between the quality of the wider reading and the quality of both the creative pieces and the commentaries. This applied to candidates who had written short stories and had actually read some; many candidates offered short stories but there was no evidence either in their creative work or their commentaries that they understood how the generic conventions are different from writing a chapter from a novel. The Coursework Advisory Service receives many queries about genre choices and the advice is always the same. Ensure that you have read appropriate examples of your chosen genre. Similarly, candidates who offered all-purpose “articles” without any sense of genre or audience were unable to shape their work appropriately or say anything interesting in their commentaries. It was noted that there were fewer play scripts this year and the vast majority of candidates opted for prose fiction. There were honourable exceptions and much to admire.

Candidates whose reading included ambitious literary texts were often able to imitate specific stylistic and structural influences and were also able to discuss this influence in the commentaries. Similarly, those who had clearly researched the specific generic features of their non-fiction work were able to produce convincing texts and analyse how form, content and reception were related. A few candidates seem to have gone for what seems like an easy option and offered so-called Young Adult texts as stimulus but were often unable to say anything interesting about the influence of these texts and whether the influence was thematic or stylistic. A candidate who chose *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* did not excel in this section.

Awareness of generic conventions is a key discriminator in both parts of the creative submission. Some candidates were willing to experiment with narrative devices and structural features in their literary writing. These included split narratives, fragmented narratives using epistolary techniques, dramatic monologues, extracts from plays and screenplays, use of non-fiction genres such as journalism and blogs to tell the story. These allowed the candidates to offer detailed and specific commentaries about the shaping of texts at both a lexical and

syntactical level and offer developed evaluation of whole text features. Similarly, the best non-fiction work was rooted in secure understanding of genre, purpose and audience; commentaries on this work often offered subtle, nuanced discussion of the nature of the text and how it had been shaped to meet expectations (and even to subvert them!)

### **Themes and core texts:**

Many centres used the original thematic suggestions from the specification while others developed their own ideas and most of these worked very well. Issues relating to mental health were still popular but topics such as coercion, sexism and body shaming also featured. Gender politics and Identity were often explored. There was some exploration of Covid and Lockdown, but it was not a dominant concern; many candidates clearly wanted to put the last two years behind them. However, dystopian themes were prominent and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Brave New World* were ubiquitous as prose starting points. There were successful explorations of literal and metaphorical journeys and a willingness to experiment with form and content. Some candidates were ambitious in terms of literary playfulness and used interesting literary strategies such as multiple narrators and epistolary forms, although not everyone was clear about their understanding of the term “epistolary.” Unreliable narrators were often successfully used. Occasional play scripts and screenplays featured, sometimes unsupported by any evidence that the candidate had read any examples of their chosen form

The most popular fiction text is still *The Kite Runner*, but it was pleasing to see other texts making headway and centres are to be congratulated for encouraging some impressive but less obvious wider reading. Sally Rooney, John Fowles, Madeline Miller, Charlotte Bronte, Sylvia Plath, Thomas Hardy and Kazuo Ishiguro made welcome appearances as did Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson. There was also work inspired by Angela Carter and Aldous Huxley. A useful but reliable choice was often made from texts already listed as set texts for either 9EL01 or 9EL02, provided they were not being studied for those exams. A candidate who chose *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* did not excel in this section.

A few candidates offered two fiction texts as their stimulus, and some seemed to rely on single newspaper articles as the sum of their non-fiction wider reading. Very often these submissions did not contain bibliographies.

Bill Bryson was one of the most referenced non-fiction authors although the success of imitating him was often limited. For obvious reasons there was less travel writing this year, but many candidates wrote travelogue style pieces about their home towns, usually with great success. Candidates who used Charlie Brooker as a starting point often under-estimated the skill required to establish a comic or satirical voice. Joan Didion and Vera Brittain proved to be inspirational, as did Elie Wiesel, Grayson Perry, Maya Angelou and Truman Capote.

### **Pairings of texts:**

Many centres/ candidates offered imaginative pairings of fiction and non-fiction texts, and there are extensive lists in previous Moderator's Reports. Oscar Wilde and Grayson Perry proved an extremely popular combination this year. Another pairing which worked well was *The Handmaid's Tale* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Candidates should be encouraged to spend time on their own wider reading to come up with suitable and inspiring text choices.

### **Tasks:**

**FICTION** It is always pleasing to report that many candidates were adventurous in their choice of literary writing. Many were encouraged to take risks and there were inspiring choices in terms of literary forms. The best work was, simply, easy and enjoyable to read. This does not mean it was not sophisticated but that it communicated its message in interesting and arresting ways. Candidates are advised to avoid too much (or any) dialogue as this often clogged up the narrative. The same applied to those candidates who felt the need to modify every noun with an adjective (or two) or who relied on adverbs at every turn. The key discriminator was the effective creation of narrative voices and an awareness of structure. The influence of stimulus texts was often evident in terms of narrative devices e.g., unreliable narrators or multiple perspectives.

**NON-FICTION** Most centres seem to have got the message about what constitutes non-fiction, and a pleasing feature of this year's submissions was the number of candidates who

took a personal approach, either offering memoirs or interviewing family members and re-shaping the material into biographies or articles. An effective guide for candidates is to be able to describe in a single sentence the genre, purpose and audience for their work (and putting this on the front sheet.) Too many candidates offered all purpose “articles” with no evidence that they really understood what they were writing, for whom or, indeed, why. Some bibliographies seemed to suggest that they had not read any articles. However, the non-fiction part of the submission was often the most engaging and moving for moderators who repeatedly commented on the power and effect of what they had read.

**COMMENTARIES** Although worth less than half the total marks, the commentary often became a key discriminator when assessing the folders. There are plenty of exemplars available for candidates to use as models of how to integrate the AOs. The best examples were concise, focused, and able to evaluate all aspects of the candidate’s research as well as their shaping of the text to meet the specific requirements of a carefully identified audience. Some folders contained basic mistakes which restricted AO1 achievement, and which should have been addressed in the drafting and editing stages. It is perfectly possible to achieve full marks for this section by staying within the suggested 1250-word count. Candidates are getting better at focusing on AO2 in terms of analysing their own writing, rather than just identifying techniques. Thankfully, the use of polysyllabic linguistic terms for their own sake does seem to have declined. Merely identifying linguistic and literary techniques will ensure that a commentary stays in the middle bands. The following paragraph from the first Moderator’s Report of this specification still applies:

“Weak commentaries often described the content of work or quoted at length without developed analysis at either word, sentence or whole text level. Conclusions about particular choices were often limited to superficial references about making the work easy to relate or making the reader want to read on.”

**BIBLIOGRAPHIES** These are required by the specification and are an opportunity for moderators to gauge the extent and quality of the wider reading and research. They should include references to primary texts, as well as web sites, articles, films etc. There was often a correlation between the quality of the bibliographies (and the care with which they were presented) and the overall achievement.

**PRESENTATION OF WORK** On the whole, this was of a high standard and made the moderation process straightforward. A few centres persist in submitting work which could generously be described as careless. There is sometimes evidence of the work having been rushed at the last minute. As a rule of thumb, it should be immediately clear to the moderator what they are reading. Moderators did complain that it was often not possible to work out what they were supposed to be reading until they looked at the commentaries because the work offered no clue as to whether it was an article, essay or blog. Newspaper pieces set out in columns were thankfully few and far between and distracting graphics were also largely absent.

The coursework front sheet is a good place to clarify genre, purpose and audience. Many centres submit fully word-processed versions of the authentication sheets, personalised by the candidate. Some prefaced the work with a single sentence synopsis of content and theme. Exemplar material is available on the Pearson website. We have included another example of how this focus might be achieved:

**Stimulus Text:** Raymond Carver, Short Cuts.

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**Genre:** Short story, imagined to be featured in university newspaper

**Theme:** Class Identity

**Audience:** Young adult readers, more particularly university students who may relate to domestic conflict or tension between roommates.

**Stimulus Text:** Maya Angelou, All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes

**Genre:** Chapter of Travelogue collection

**Theme:** Identity

**Audience:** Young adult readers who are interested in descriptive travelogues and are able to closely relate to the theme of growth/changing identity. To share experiences and give an insight into New York City.

Although most centres no longer submit journalistic work in columns, specific styles such as scripts should adhere to genre conventions. Different fonts can be an effective way of differentiating narrative voices.

Work should be printed single-sided, spaced, in a font such as Times New Roman or Arial, font size 12. Candidate and centre numbers and names should be checked, and each piece of work should have a word count. The marks submitted online should match those on the cover sheet and be correctly totalled. Several centres included a check list for their candidates, and this ensured that these folders were fully in line with specification requirements.

**ADMINISTRATION** The overwhelming majority of centres submitted their work in plenty of time to meet the 15<sup>th</sup> of May deadline, with all the requested folders, including the highest and lowest, authentication sheets completed accurately. In some cases, it was difficult to read pencilled annotations; those folders which were annotated in dark ink were easy to read. As mentioned elsewhere, it is much easier for moderators to assess a single downloaded file per candidate.

**ASSESSMENT** One of the most pleasing aspects of this series was the quality and accuracy of centre assessment. There was little over-rewarding of work, and this was mostly in the commentaries, where observational, explanatory and narrative accounts of the content were sometimes given high marks. The criteria for Level 5 require an evaluative approach, with sophisticated structure, discussion of nuances as well as an appropriate register and style. For creative work to achieve Level 5, it must be accurate and assured, with an individual voice suited to audience and function. However, there is no reason why outstanding work, which does not need to be perfect, cannot be awarded full marks. Most centres seemed willing to use the full mark range, although responses below Level 2 were few and far between.

The purpose of annotation is to justify the awarding of marks and to allow moderators to see how decisions have been reached by centres. Where possible, two markers should read and annotate scripts, although in some centres this is not practical. The best annotations address the candidate's personal achievements and reflect the character and style of each submission. They should be individual rather than merely copying level descriptors from the marking

criteria. Achievement in relation to specific AOs should be highlighted and supported by comments on the nature of the work. Some centres provide separate, personalised marking grids and these were always welcome. However, the quality of summative comments on the work can be helpful in confirming the centre's judgements.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The majority of comments from moderators referred to how enjoyable it was to read work from candidates who had entered the spirit of the specification and produced entertaining, engaging and often very moving work, supported by thoughtful evaluation of the shaping of these texts.

The Coursework Advisory Service will offer guidance on the selection and suitability of texts and tasks. Centres are advised to look at the board's exemplar material which can provide models of how to approach specific aspects of the submission.

Finally, it seems appropriate to thank centres for inspiring and encouraging their candidates, especially in what must have been difficult and unfamiliar circumstances. A constant refrain from moderators was how enjoyable the moderation process was and how impressed they were by the quality, originality and rigour of so much of what they read.



