



Examiners' Report Principal Monitor Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Language and Literature
Non-Examination Assessment: Investigating
and Creating Texts (9EL0/03)

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General comments:

It is once again pleasing to report that centres have risen to the challenge of coursework and that candidates have engaged with the spirit of the specification with energy and enthusiasm. Moderators consistently reported how engaging the work was; personal investment in the production of both creative pieces and the commentary was a recurrent theme of moderator reports throughout the series. Candidates who used personal experience and family interviews and histories produced some extraordinary work. Many candidates were politically engaged and there was much discussion of the state of the world.

The LWA portal seems to have caused very few issues, and most centres were able to upload their work in time for the May 15th deadline. As ever, 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.

As we requested last year, centres should submit a single file per candidate so that the front sheet with final marks and task details are included in one pdf file with the creative work. Coursework submitted sideways, upside down, or with missing or blank pages does not make for easy moderation. Some centres had let candidates submit their work without paragraphs or a discernible break between the pieces; in some cases, it was hard to know where work started and finished. There was a clear and unwelcome trend this year with many of the non-fiction pieces showing no indication of genre. Some candidates simply referred to their work as their 'non-fiction writing' or their "article" and in some cases the commentary offered little guidance or clarity. By contrast, the most successful centres had provided a brief introduction indicating genre, purpose, and audience.

Most centres have heeded advice from previous reports and exemplar material and have submitted superb and often very moving creative work, both literary and non-fiction. Many centres gave their candidates a free choice of topics and genres; feedback from moderators suggests that this is an effective way to improve engagement and achievement. Some centres used core stimulus texts, then encouraged impressive wider reading and genre research. Many bibliographies also included reference to a wide selection of multi-modal texts.

Many centres used the Coursework Advisory Service, usually in relation to the suitability of texts, and this will be covered in a later section.

We never ban texts, but experience shows that candidates who used ambitious literary and non-fiction stimulus texts achieved better than candidates who appeared to have taken an easy option. There was occasional confusion about what constituted non-fiction, both in the choice of stimulus texts and of creative tasks.

As ever, candidates, have used interests and insights from other A-level subjects; the most popular was Psychology but Theatre Studies and History also provided good starting points and it was pleasing to see a large number using knowledge of Greek and Roman history and literature.

Moderators commented on centres where the candidates had all studied the same text as well as producing identical genre pieces. They saw what they regarded as a lack of personal engagement. There is no reason not to take this approach, but many candidates flourish when they make their own choices. Some centres use the same basic stimulus texts but then allow candidates to follow their own ideas and wider reading. Some centres offered a broad topic such as Journeys, Entrapment, Racism and Persecution and then encouraged candidates to go their own way. Mental health and societal pressures were a common starting point and candidates tackled difficult topics with maturity and insight.

There was a clear connection between the ambition 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 clearly studied the genre; 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 differed from those of a novel. The Coursework Advisory Service receives frequent enquiries 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. This was a particularly common issue this year. There were fewer play scripts and screenplays this year; most offered prose fiction.

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. Too many candidates offered Young Adult texts as stimulus and were unable to say anything interesting about the influence of these texts and whether the influence was thematic or stylistic. Thankfully, *Diary of Wimpy Kid* was not included in any bibliographies this year but unambitious choices still surfaced.

Awareness of generic conventions is a key discriminator in both parts of the creative submission. Candidates were often willing to experiment with narrative and structural features in their literary writing. Split narratives, fragmented narratives using epistolary techniques, dramatic monologues, and use of non-fiction genres such as journalism and blogs all helped to tell the stories. Candidates then offered 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 especially popular. Gender politics and Identity were among this year's most popular themes. Covid and Lockdown were hardly touched on. However, dystopian themes were once again prominent and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* continued to be as popular as ever.

The most popular fiction continues to be *The Kite Runner*, but it was pleasing to see other texts.

Once again, some candidates offered two fiction texts as their stimulus, and moderators commented on folders which used single, online newspaper articles as the total of their non-fiction wider reading. Very often these submissions did not

contain bibliographies. Much of this work struggled to meet the requirements of AO5 and the Commentaries were unable to address all the necessary AOs.

Travel writing was as popular as last year and many candidates wrote travelogues. The most successful were those which reflected on family holidays or school trips. A few candidates had, unfortunately, invented journeys. Charlie Brooker continued his popularity as a starting point but, once again, few candidates were able to emulate an appropriate comic or satirical voice.

Other popular texts (in no particular order) included; *The Poisoner's Handbook*; *Persepolis*; *Girl, Interrupted*; *Weyward*; *Frankenstein*; *The Price of Salt*; *Enduring Love*; *The Three Faces of Eve*; *Invisible Women*; *The Secret History*; *Circe*; *The Song of Achilles*; *The Virgin Suicides*; *Where the Crawdads Sing*; *12 Years a Slave*; *American Psycho*; *In Cold Blood*; *A Little Life*; *Native Son*; *Why Be Happy when You Can Be Normal?*; *The Crucible*; *Exit West*; *Life of Pi*; *Fight Club*; *The Color Purple*; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; *Tender is the Night*; *Never Let Me Go*; *Little Women*; *Dubliners*.

Pairings of texts:

Oscar Wilde and Grayson Perry again proved an extremely popular combination. Another popular pairing from previous series was *The Handmaid's Tale* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Tasks:

The best work was, as ever, enjoyable to read. Sophisticated writing was often notable for its clarity although some candidates seemed to think that dense, unreadable prose was the same as sophisticated. Candidates who avoided too much (or any) dialogue were the most successful with their narratives and used reported speech (with some sparing direct speech) and other strategies to convey character. Once again, some candidates felt the need to modify every noun with an adjective (or two) or used adverbs for every verb. The key discriminator was the creation of narrative voice and 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 now understand what constitutes non-fiction, and candidates often took a personal approach, with memoirs or interviews with family members, re-shaping the material into biographies or articles.

As ever we suggest that candidates should be able to describe in a single sentence the genre, purpose, and audience for their work (preferably on the front sheet.) Many centres did this and it was noticeable that the commentaries were clear and well-structured. There are still too many all-purpose “articles” with no evidence that candidates really understood what they were writing, for whom or, indeed, why. Some candidates offered newspaper articles, with no evidence that they had actually read a newspaper. However, the non-fiction part of the submission continued to offer the most engaging and moving experience for moderators. They often reported on the effect of what they had read.

COMMENTARIES Although worth less than half the total marks, the commentary continues to be a key discriminator. There are examples available of how to integrate the AOs. The best commentaries 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.

There are still too many folders with basic proof-reading errors which restricted AO1 achievement and which should have been addressed in the drafting and editing stages.

It was also noted this year that too many candidates were spending too long analysing the stimulus texts, often with lengthy quotations and detailed descriptions of the content. These commentaries often exceeded the word limit and missed the point about analysing the specific linguistic or structural influences of the stimulus texts,

It is possible to achieve full marks for this section by staying within the suggested 1250-word count. The best candidates offered detailed analysis of their own writing, and often the Assessment Objectives were seamlessly integrated. Merely describing the content and identifying linguistic and literary techniques will ensure that a commentary stays in the middle or low bands. We repeat, once again, the following paragraph from the very first Moderator’s Report of this specification:

“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 specific choices were often limited to superficial references about making the work easy to relate to 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. Fewer centres submitted careless work although some pieces looked as though they had been typed at the last minute. Candidates should start each piece on a new page and it should be immediately clear to the moderator what they are assessing. Moderators continued to complain that it was sometimes not possible to work out what they were supposed to be reading. Newspaper pieces set out in columns with distracting graphics were, thankfully, almost totally 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, often prefaced with a single sentence synopsis of content and theme. Exemplar material is available on the Pearson website.

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 Most centres submitted their work in time to meet the 15th of May deadline, with all the requested folders, including the highest and lowest, authentication sheets completed accurately. It was sometimes difficult to read pencilled annotations; folders 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. Most centres who were contacted to submit missing work responded quickly but there is no excuse for not submitting the appropriate work and it is time consuming for moderators having to contact centres.

ASSESSMENT The quality and accuracy of centre assessment was particularly good. 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 for outstanding work, which does not need to be perfect, not to be awarded full marks. Most centres seemed willing to use the full mark range, although responses below Level 2 were rare.

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: Most 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 suitability of texts and tasks. Centres should look at the board's exemplar material which can provide models of how to approach specific aspects of the submission.

Finally, centres are to be congratulated for encouraging and inspiring so much excellent work. The most frequent observation from everyone who has sampled this work is how committed candidates are. Their ownership of the material is what makes 9EL03 such a special part of the specification.

