

GCE 2008 English Literature FAQs

1) 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.

GCE English Literature

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lit/Pages/default.aspx>

2) Will I be able to see exemplar material for coursework?

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lit/Pages/default.aspx>

3) There appears to be no non-coursework option in the 2008 specification. What can overseas centres do if they want to offer this qualification?

QCA directed all awarding bodies to make a decision about whether to offer coursework for English. The decision was that coursework would be offered. Details of how to approach the coursework are contained in the Specification and 'Getting Started'.

There is also an Edexcel Student Book and Teacher Guide CD Rom for AS which is an interactive book for students to carry out independent learning-ideal for a tutorial college. You should have the Specifications and Getting Started in your centre but all of these resources can be obtained from the website.

4) I am in a new school starting to teach AS for the first time and the school has never done it before! I feel rather lost. I have been teaching Unit 2 which I seem to have muddled through, but am struggling to find any exemplar marking material for coursework.

As I have nothing to compare it with, I am finding it difficult to grade my students' work.

Can you tell me where I would be able to get hold of exemplar work in order to use as a reference for my marking?

Unit 2 exemplar materials and commentaries are now on the website. There will be feedback sessions from the GCE AS English Literature January series in March.

5) Can I take my text into the exam with me?

For the new GCE 2008 the set texts can be taken into the exam session but must be clean copies. Centres are also allowed to take photocopies of the Unit 1 poems (clean) into the exam room where the centre has a licence to copy.

6) Can I annotate my set text?

Yes but you would need to have 2 copies of the set text, one copy will be used throughout the school year for studying purposes and one copy will be kept clean for examination purposes.

7) Where can I get a teachers' guide for new specification for English literature AS

If you click on the link below

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lit/Pages/default.aspx>

This will take you to the GCE2008 Literature page on the Edexcel website. If you click on the little cross against "tutor support material" and then click on download.

There will be a PDF document that will open for you and it's all about getting ready to teach the qualification.

8) For Unit 1, what is the purpose of the short, stepped questions for Section A of the exam?

To allow accessibility to all students and to provide an opening task which is non-threatening as a confidence builder to bridge the gap between GCSE and AS. It also provides a good grounding for the unseen question on Unit 3 at A2.

Unit 2

9) Do I need to teach both plays to the same level of detail?

No. Many centres teach the core text and then introduce the students to the second text via a production, dvd ,etc and then consider particular areas for study and in the light of this select and closely study scenes from the second text. Having made a focused study means that AO3 comparisons can then be explored.

10) Is it true that the students must adhere to the word limit of 2,500.

Yes. Experience to date is showing that centres are using the word limit to encourage students to focus closely on the AOs, rather than attempt to range more widely.

11) What does the *creative* mean in the creative critical task?

The AO s require the students to write in an appropriate format and register and to interpret the text in context. In the creative critical piece context refers to the successful application of the chosen format.

The opportunity to experiment should be encouraged. Many centres have told us that they are enjoying the student- led nature of this activity. Students relish the chance to make links with other areas of study such as Theatre Studies, Media Studies and their own experiences as performers.

12) Why has there been a decision to enforce the word limits on coursework by discontinuing marking when the limit has been reached?

This is an effective method to remove tension from the teacher/student relationship if the word limit has been exceeded. Centres should encourage students to understand the value of editing and re-drafting. Writing to a prescribed word limit is an essential skill in any area of journalism, media etc. The importance of adhering to word limits should be stressed at the beginning of the coursework process and students should be offered the opportunity to write, re-draft and edit short texts for regular practice. The word limit also encourages a clear focus on the assessment objectives.

13) 'The new course for my new AS batch beginning instruction next week for the examination in June 2009 is causing me some problems with regard to coursework (Unit 2). We have never done coursework before - and I'm at a complete loss how to get about it! These are my specific problems:

A. The specs say there is free choice of texts for Unit 2 - so how do I go about choosing texts?

B. After the choice is made, is there free choice in the questions set too?

C. Do all the students (there are 10 in my new batch) do the same question or do they vary?

D. Can you provide me with some guidelines in choosing texts and providing questions based on the texts?

If there is any chance of doing a written exam instead of submitting coursework. This is because there is the minimum training and face to face discussion with examiners etc in our part of the world. I've had nearly a 100 % success with my students so far - and I would like it to continue that way!

There is a lot of material to help. In addition the Student Book and the accompanying Teachers Guide. There really is a mass of information in these four items.

Now, to answer your questions specifically:

A. Coursework texts should have the same qualities as examined set books, that is they should first of all be literary and worthy of study at this level.

B. Yes, there is also free choice of question, though again it needs to be appropriate in its demands, analytical rather than descriptive for example.

C. Whole groups can do the same question though it is often better for individual students to do individual titles depending on the aspects of the literature that interests them.

D. These guidelines are contained in the books I mentioned above.

Coursework is a compulsory part of this specification, but I am sure you will soon prefer it to the formal examinations, particularly as it leaves 40% of the assessment directly under your control.

14) Please can you tell me if this is a suitable subject for the Exploration study: Exploration of the influence of Medieval comic conventions upon Shakespearean comedy.

Main text - 'The Comedy of Errors'; Secondary text - 'Mankind'.

Summary:

Realising that there are many elements of 'Errors' that are not 'comical' as we understand that term today, my students would be looking at the Shakespearean notion of Comedy compared to today's, and, briefly, how comic conventions had developed in literature throughout time up to the Medieval period. They would then focus on the influence of Medieval comic convention (using 'Mankind' as the example text) upon Shakespearean comedy (using 'Errors' as the example text) in order to understand why it is known as 'The COMEDY of Errors'.

Is this suitable, or do they have to explore the treatment of plot/character/theme within the plays themselves, rather than exploring genre?

'Mediaeval Comic Conventions' would be a highly appropriate topic for the Explorative Study. However, you need to ensure that there is a clear comparison between the two plays in order for candidates to meet the demands of A03.

15) What do I do about the third text? What can it be?

It can be critical, theoretical, film adaptation or review - any piece of work that connects with either text or both. The intention is to allow students to access A03 which allows them to respond to the views of other readers.

16) I see A03 is worth 36 marks - That's a lot - what have they got to do?

Students must make comparisons between the two texts and they must take the views of other readers and discuss them.

17) I have heard that YouTube is a useful source for live drama performances

Most certainly - there are lots of short scenes from major plays. The quality varies and they make ideal material for engaging students as critics.

18) How do I make sure my students do good creative critical work

Be explicit about the task: where it will be read or heard and by whom - it helps to cite the precise publication or radio programme and the audience.

19) I am using the Example 3 coursework title from the specification (page 21) with my students. Instead of the texts used, I'm using Othello and Hamlet to explore the representation of women. The question states that 'critical reviews of performances are analysed'. During their response, should my students study the two plays they've read, study the question set and refer to critic's views on this topic or are they being asked to study the play, give their own views on character, comment on other literary criticism of the play AND analyse reviews of performances?

No - the key thing here to access A03 and A04 for your students. A03 requires them to compare the plays and to engage with the views of the other readers'. A04 requires an awareness of context (social, historical etc). As long as the task addresses these elements, all is well. Performances do not have to be studied. A question might be: 'Using your understanding of critical views on these plays, compare the ways in which Shakespeare represents women in Othello and Hamlet'.

17) I have a question regarding the creative critical response for Explorations in Drama. Firstly, as a centre we are planning on setting the students the task of reviewing film versions of "Hamlet", either focusing on one production or comparing and contrasting particular scenes in two productions. Does this sound like an acceptable task which will enable them to meet the assessment criteria?

Secondly, in terms of the 12 marks for A04, should students focus on how successfully the directors translate the play into the context of film? Or are they meant to show awareness of historical context? Should they also show awareness of how the films were received when they first came out?

1. You need to allow students to engage critically with the play, so the task should give them some sort of 'hook' - e.g. watch a production of Hamlet, read a review by another critic and then write a letter/ another review, either agreeing or arguing with.

2. Note the different criteria for this A0 on Extended Study and Creative Critical Response. Content in ES = social/historical Context in CCR = critical context/how plays are received etc.

18) I am delivering AS Literature for I have two questions:

A. It says in the material that students need to take a 'clean copy' of books into the exam for poetry and prose. Can there be any type of annotation in the books at all or no writing whatsoever?

B. In the poetry section for Unit 1 the poems are broken down into themes of land, home and work. Can I give them poems from all three areas or are we supposed to focus on only one, for example, only poems to do with 'home'?

These are basic questions but I am the only person delivering AS Literature for our organisation so want to get this right.

A. There is to be absolutely no annotation in copies of set texts being used as clean copies in open text examinations.

B. You are absolutely free to study as many themes as you feel your candidates can cope with in the poetry texts

19) I am currently teaching the 'Here to Eternity' collection of poems ('Home' section). Do I need to use critical essays/ analysis of the poems to show the pupils alternative interpretations? Or is it sufficient to have alternative interpretations from other class members from discussions? It is not very clear in the AOs. I have been to several libraries and there is very little, or no, information/ criticisms on the poems in the 'Home' section. For many of the poems there is no information online or in the libraries. Therefore if I am required to teach them critical interpretations where do I get this material from?

Although I think it can be very useful as well as educational to show candidates an interpretation of a poem by a "professional" critic the specification certainly does not demand or require this and it is perfectly in accordance with the syllabus to generate varying interpretations from the ideas put forward by your own students in class. It makes for better discussions too, but I am sure you do not need me to tell you this.

Critical works in book form are one source of professional critical readings and there is of course absolutely masses of stuff on the internet.

20) What should we bear in mind when we teach the paired texts for Unit 3?

Remember that you should cover the requirements of preparing your students to answer on two texts although you should study three. If you then cover the requirements of the specification by teaching both genres and at least part 1990 text in the light of the AOs' requirements your method of teaching should be appropriate to the needs of yours students in your preferred method of delivery.