



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
In English Language and Literature
Paper 2: Varieties in Language and Literature
(8EL0/02)

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2024

Publications Code 8EL0_02_ER_2406

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2024

Overview of Section A:

Once again, the majority of candidates elected to pursue the "Society and the Individual" thematic strand, but there was a notable increase in entries for the "Encounters" strand. Many fewer opted for "Love and Loss" and "Crossing Boundaries". Question 1 on *The Great Gatsby* was the most popular textual choice.

In general, 2024 candidates were able to organise their responses more purposefully than those who presented for examination in previous, more covid-afflicted series. Mid- and upper-level answers tended to start by analysing the passage in depth, and then picked out two or three substantial key moments for comparison from elsewhere in their text. Quite a number, however, chose to begin with the wider novel before zooming in to the extract. Sometimes this worked well, but given the challenges this exam presents in terms of time management, several did not get to the extract with sufficient time to probe its linguistic and literary features.

Indeed, whatever the approach taken, a significant minority of candidates were unable to successfully negotiate all the demands of the task: the extract, the wider novel, contextual factors, and discussion of the writer's craft. To do all this in the limited time available is of course demanding, but too many candidates appeared somewhat unprepared for the tasks set. The most common error encountered by markers of this paper was partial or total neglect of the question asked. Instead of a direct answer, using the terms of the question, a number of candidates produced what appeared to be a pre-prepared, general response e.g. writing on class/wealth in *The Great Gatsby* when the question very clearly, and specifically, asked them to consider how "characters' behaviour is influenced by others". Centres are advised to prepare their candidates to be flexible in their knowledge of the text, and to ensure the precise demands of the question are addressed.

Candidates' knowledge of their chosen texts varied greatly. Frustratingly, many candidates did not fully engage with the extract and, moreover, often missed opportunities to perform a literary and linguistic analysis. This series also saw more paraphrasing of plot events, which is no substitute for thoroughgoing analysis of well contextualised language and literary features. Full AO1 reward depends upon the relevant deployment of both literary *and* linguistic terms. This is not however achieved by mere 'feature spotting'; what works best is a well-chosen range of AO1 terminology together with a clear AO2 understanding of how and why the author uses it in their text to achieve specific effects.

Comments from markers on Section A:

"In terms of coverage of AOs – centres should focus on AO1, ensuring pupils can access the question and use subject specific terminology. In this exam season, it really was the hallmark of a more successful response."

"For Q3, I saw several thoughtful links to the context of the 1960s- sexual politics, peace movement, civil rights etc. – which illuminated many of the responses to *A Single Man*. The 'power' question allowed students to explore status, sexuality, gender and hierarchy well, often with thoughtful attention to the power of clothing in asserting power. The extract was a very engaging one for this particular question, and high achieving students recognised the varying levels of power within the situation of the lecture hall."

"For Q5, the 'perspectives on Italy' focus allowed students to explore a range of ideas: a key focus was the conflict between nature and the constraints of British Victorian/Edwardian social class. Many students used the characters in the extract to compare British and Italian identities and expectations. Interesting comments too on myth, art, romance. A range of contexts regarding Forster's life worked best only when it genuinely illuminated the text. The shift from Victorian to Edwardian values, and the focus on class and gender made interesting contextual links."

"Most *Wuthering Heights* students focused on the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff. The responses which made connections with the cyclical structure of the novel were most successful. While some answers offered valuable context about class, status, the gothic, Byronic heroes, religion, etc, many more did not attend fully to AO3."

"The extract for *Wide Sargasso Sea* [Q7] allowed students to explore Antionette's relationship with her mother, stepfather and how Rochester sees her. Some insightful close analysis of Rhys's language and how it revealed Rochester's prejudice, was seen. Some illuminating context was explored too, regarding creole, racism and the abolition of slavery. The best answers tackled the subtleties and complexities in the context."

Overview of Section B:

The average candidate performance on Section B was marginally superior to that on Section A. The focus on writing a single essay without the need to navigate between the extract and the wider text, as in Section A, probably accounts for this difference.

In this series, candidates used a range of approaches to answer the question and relevant material was selected by most to support the points made. Candidates do, however, need to be mindful that AOs 1, 2 and 3 are still assessed on this question and that their responses need to be consistently analytical as well as utilising relevant content from the text. Candidates handled contextual information well and were often able to integrate this into their answer to support the arguments being made.

In general, candidates would benefit from a greater appreciation of the genre of the text they have studied. Many candidates do not consider staging or form when discussing plays and poetry, or the narrative voice(s) of novels. It is important that the medium the writer chose is considered when responding to the question set. At times candidates commented on the rhyme schemes of individual poems but this tended to be descriptive rather than analytical.

Markers reported a few occasions when candidates seemed to think that the questions on the paper were comparative – most often, this occurred in Section B answers.

On some questions, particularly Q9, some scores were suppressed because the answer was unable to draw upon the full range of the text to respond to the question. This was very apparent when it came to the analysis of *Othello*, with many candidates only using the opening scenes to answer the question, often leading to somewhat limited responses when it came to 'identity'.

Generally speaking, most candidates produced contextual knowledge that was appropriate, and in some cases, very impressive. However, centres should be reminded that biographical context alone rarely leads to a deeper interpretation of the writer's text, or gives meaningful insight into its production. For example, Fitzgerald needing more money to be accepted by Zelda Fitzgerald didn't really add anything to the understanding or interpretation of how society moulds individual/group identity in the text. The application of context was notably underdeveloped, or entirely absent, in many responses to *Wuthering Heights*.

Better responses were able to recognise metaphor and symbolism, or how an event in the text operates at a whole text structural level. There were some impressive applications of poetic structure in responses to *The Whitsun Weddings*. Discussion around symbolism was particularly good for *The Bloody Chamber*.

Comments from markers on Section B:

"In terms of coverage of AOs - centres should focus on AO1, ensuring pupils can access the question and use subject specific terminology. In this exam season, it really was the marker of a more successful response."

"Students who wrote about *Enduring Love* [Q10] struggled to make meaningful context links. Some valiant efforts commented on McEwan's criticism of religion. Many chose to focus on the breakdown of Joe and Clarissa's relationships due to his initial lies to her. Responses may have benefited from closer scrutiny of narrative viewpoint."

"Angela Carter's short stories [Q11] were approached in a variety of successful ways, and the question on 'changes in behaviour' gave students a range of opportunities to explore gender and sexual politics in stories; many students commented on the 1970s and second wave feminism, and many discussed fairy tale allusions. 'The Snow Child' and the title story were the most popular choices."

"Q12: The 'shift in power' question focus invited illuminating responses exploring gender and sexuality in Christina Rossetti's poetry. Also, many students gave thoughtful consideration of Heaney's use of metaphor and symbolism, the best responses made strong contextual links to colonialism. The best answers balanced the contextual insights with poetic devices and engaged with the social commentary suggested by Heaney and Rossetti."

