



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Literature and Language (8EL0)

Component 2: Varieties in Language and
Literature

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Overview of Section A:

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

In general, 2025 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 more broadly about characters in *The Great Gatsby* when the question very clearly, and specifically, asked them to consider how "morality is explored in the novel". 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 some 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."

"Successful students:

- use quotations from the texts themselves, rather than paraphrasing, so that they had the opportunity to discuss the writers' methods and their responses to the contexts.

- Avoided longwinded introductions and conclusions. They answered the question in front of them. They chose 2-3 locations from across the text where the given steer could clearly be 'seen'. When given an extract, the pupils started with the extract in front of them, and then moved onto other areas of the text.

- Unpicked the connotations / symbolism or representation of the writers' methods and did this with some depth; they frequently used analytical verbs to do so. Those that discussed the symbolism of characters / events / the settings tended to do slightly better than those who picked up on an adjective, namely because symbolism tends to allow for a greater depth of exploration.

- Used the writers' contexts in order to develop their interpretations, responding with something like "Perhaps Fitzgerald is critiquing the American Dream when..."

- Q1: Many successful students used the question and extract as an opportunity to explore Fitzgerald's use of Nick as a narrator.

- Q7 and 8: successful students linked the narrative viewpoints and differing perspectives in *Dracula* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* to context of women, colonialism and ideas surrounding 'others'."

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. Pre-prepared responses were obvious to spot and rarely answered the question with any conviction.

Best to be avoided are: lengthy blocks of contextual knowledge but not directly tie this to the interpretation of literary/linguistic features. A lot of the context was accurate, but irrelevant to the question. Longwinded, page long, introductions and conclusions that served little purpose, said less and wasted precious examination time.

In general, candidates' responses benefited from a greater appreciation of the genre of the text they have studied. Many candidates did consider staging, audience and form when discussing plays and poetry, or the narrative voice(s) of novels. More successful students demonstrated an awareness of the medium when responding to the question set. Particularly when considering staging and the different audience responses over time. This was especially successful in the *Othello* when considering attitudes to race and gender through the lens of contemporary and modern audiences.

On some questions, particularly Q9, in the analysis of *Othello*, some candidates only used the opening scenes to answer the question, often leading to somewhat limited responses when it came to 'unacceptable behaviour'. More successful students included discussion of later scenes, referencing Emilia and Othello in the later acts. Less successful responses fail to answer the question or have a pre-prepared set of quotations that did not fit the steer (e.g. Cassio and "reputation, reputation, reputation" without convincingly tying it to the steer). Some students ignored obvious areas of the texts where the steer could be seen. E.g. a lot of pupils failed to mention Iago with the steer of "bad behaviour" and yet he is the antagonist.

Some Q9 responses, considering Larkin's poetry, focused heavily on his life and attitudes and not sufficiently on the poetry itself. A

number of responses to *The Whitsun Weddings* did not acknowledge the question at all. The best responses made thoughtful and well-balanced consideration of context and poetic technique, exploring the subtleties of meaning, returning to the angle of the question.

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. Societal wide attitudes and an awareness of the time periods from which the texts emerged can be a more useful context. For example, how Larkin comments on societal Post-War attitudes to convention, marriage, consumerism in his poetry.

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*. An understanding of the distinction between the poet's persona and the poet made for interesting and nuanced discussions. Explorations around symbolism were particularly good for Christina Rossetti's poetry.

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

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."

"Q11: The best answers engaged with the form of the texts, explored connotations and made meaningful connections to the writers' contexts."

"Q12: The 'bring people together or move them apart' question focus invited illuminating responses exploring power in relationships in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Christina Rossetti's poetry. Also, many

students gave thoughtful consideration of use of metaphor and symbolism, the best responses made strong contextual links to colonialism and Victorian women. The best answers balanced the contextual insights with literary and poetic devices and engaged with the social commentary."

