



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

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

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Publications Code 9EL0_03_2306_ER

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General comments

It is pleasing to report that centres have once again risen to the challenge of coursework and that candidates again have engaged with the spirit of the specification with energy and enthusiasm. Moderators reported how enjoyable the work was to read; personal investment in the production of both creative pieces and the commentary was a recurrent theme of moderator reports throughout the series.

The new LWA portal caused fewer problems than last year, and 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 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.

Most centres have taken on board the advice from previous reports and exemplar material that has been available and have submitted superb and often very moving creative work, both literary and non-fiction. Most centres gave their candidates a free choice of topics and genres; comments from moderators suggest that this is a particularly effective way to improve engagement and achievement. Some centres used core stimulus texts, then encouraged impressive wider reading and genre research.

Lots of 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 ban texts, but we do encourage wider reading; candidates who used ambitious literary and non-fiction stimulus texts did 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.

Once again, candidates, have used knowledge and skills from other A-level subjects, including History, Psychology, 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. They observed what they regarded as a lack of personal 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. Some 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 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. There were some play scripts and screenplays this year, although most wrote 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. Candidates who offered Young Adult texts as stimulus were often unable to say anything interesting about the influence of these texts and whether the influence was thematic or stylistic. One moderator reported having seen *Diary of Wimpy Kid* in a bibliography, which suggested the centre had not read last year’s report.

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, extracts from plays and screenplays, 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 still popular but topics such as coercion, sexism and body shaming also featured. Gender politics and Identity were among this year's most popular themes. Unlike last year, there was little exploration of Covid and Lockdown. However, dystopian themes were particularly prominent and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* were even more popular than usual as prose starting points. There were successful explorations of literal and metaphorical journeys and a willingness to experiment with form and content. Candidates were often ambitious in terms of literary experiment and used interesting literary strategies such as multiple narrators and epistolary forms, although, once again, not everyone was clear about their understanding of the term "epistolary."

By far the most popular fiction text was *The Kite Runner*, but it was pleasing to see other texts. A few candidates offered two fiction texts as their stimulus, and moderators commented on folders which used single 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.

Bill Bryson continued to be a much-referenced non-fiction source although the success of imitating him was often limited. Travel writing was, inevitably, more popular than last year and many candidates wrote travelogues. The most successful were those which reflected on family holidays or school trips. Charlie Brooker maintained his popularity as a starting point but very few candidates were able to emulate an appropriate comic or satirical voice.

Other popular texts (in no particular order) included; *Where the Crawdads Sing*; *12 Years a Slave*; *American Psycho*; *In Cold Blood*; *A Little Life*; *Native Son*; *Rebecca*; *Empire of the Sun*; *Life of Pi*; *Fight Club*; *The Color Purple*; *The Bloody Chamber*.

Pairings of texts

Oscar Wilde and Grayson Perry again proved a popular combination. Another popular pairing from previous series which continued to work well was *The Handmaid's Tale* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Other successful pairings included *The Song of Achilles/ How to Fall in Love with Anyone*. *The Virgin Suicides/ The Female Eunuch*. *East is East/ A Beginner's Guide to Acting English*.

Tasks

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 should avoid too much (or any) dialogue and the most successful narratives used reported speech and other strategies to convey character. There were still candidates who 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. We continue to 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.) There are still all-purpose "articles" with no evidence that candidates really understood what they were writing, for whom or, indeed, why. Bibliographies suggested 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 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.

Moderators observed that too many folders at this level contained basic proof-reading 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. 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. 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 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

Generally, this was of a high standard and made the moderation process straightforward. Far 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 still complained 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 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.

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 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 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

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.