

Moderators' Report

Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary
A-Level English Literature and Language
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 far fewer issues this year, 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. Most responded quickly when chased by the Results and Resolutions team

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. However, many centres have made the moderation process much easier this year by offering brief indications of genre, purpose and audience at the start of the folder or on the cover sheet. This certainly helps candidates in their Commentaries.

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. As with previous series, there was occasional confusion about what constituted non-fiction, both in the choice of stimulus texts and of creative tasks.

Fewer candidates seem to have used specific interests and insights from other A-level subjects, such as Psychology, Theatre Studies and History. These can provide good starting points and it was pleasing to see a large number using knowledge of mythology and story archetypes as their way into both fiction and non-fiction. Texts such as *A Thousand Ships* and *Pandora's Jar* were used effectively.

Once again, 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 and this was a constant refrain in moderator comments about centres. Some centres successfully use the same stimulus texts but then allow candidates to follow their own research 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. True Crime continues to be a popular topic but the results are usually disappointing, often because there is no clear purpose or audience for the work,

As in previous series, 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 very few scripts/screenplays/monologues. Most candidates offered conventional narrative approaches and there seemed to be fewer unusual or unconventional narrative strategies. Some candidates offered fragmented narratives but misunderstood the term “epistolary.”^

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. There were almost no Young Adult texts as stimulus and moderators were pleased by the range of texts offered.

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, as were Gender Politics and Identity. Covid and Lockdown appeared briefly.

Not surprisingly, dystopian themes were prominent and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* continued to be as popular as ever. The latter was probably the most cited stimulus. *The Kite Runner* was also much used, both for thematic and stylistic/ structural influences.

A few candidates offered two fiction texts as their stimulus and moderators did comment 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 still popular as last year and many candidates wrote travelogues. Usually, the most successful were those which reflected on family holidays or school trips. One or two candidates had, unfortunately, invented journeys. Charlie Brooker continued his non-fiction popularity as a starting point but, once again, few candidates were able to emulate an appropriate comic or satirical voice. However, there were some very successful satirical pieces, supported by impressive wider reading.

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*; *The Poppy War*; *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*; *The Lottery*.

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*. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Bell Jar* were both paired successfully with Kay Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*. A particularly inspiring combination was *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Invisible Women*.

Tasks:

The best work was, as ever, enjoyable to read. Sophisticated writing was often notable for its clarity and fewer candidates seemed to think that dense, unreadable prose was the same as sophisticated writing. 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. Many candidates were politically engaged and clearly exasperated by the state of the world.

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.) More and more centres

did this and it was noticeable that their commentaries were clear and well-structured. There are still 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 read a newspaper. However, the non-fiction part of the submission continued to offer an engaging and moving experience for moderators. They often reported on the effect of what they had read. Some candidates bare their souls and are still able to analyse their writing objectively in their commentaries

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.

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

Many candidates spent 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, Self editing and sticking to word limit are reasonable expectations of AO1.

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. Many candidates have researched widely and included plenty of multi-modal texts.

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. A

few centres offered annotations in different coloured ink to show that more than one moderator was involved. This was commented on favourably by moderators and should be considered good practice.

ASSESSMENT The quality and accuracy of centre assessment has improved every year . 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. Some centres used electronic annotations but this was often combined with tiny font size, making the work difficult to read.

CONCLUSIONS: Most comments from moderators referred to how enjoyable and often moving. 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.