



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary
In English Literature (8ET0)
Paper 2: Prose

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Introduction

The 8ET0_02 component requires candidates to study in depth two prose texts from their chosen theme area, at least one of which must have been written pre-1900. The most popular theme areas on the paper were, in order, Science and Society, The Supernatural, and Women in Society. Far fewer responses were seen on Colonisation and its Aftermath and Childhood, and none at all on Crime and Detection, so this report will have less to say about these.

The majority of centres had prepared candidates effectively for the requirements of the examination. Overall, examiners enjoyed reading candidates' responses, many of which were relevant and demonstrated attention to the Assessment Objectives. Some candidates proved able to approach questions with individuality and creativity, considering their chosen texts from a wide variety of angles, providing relevant and imaginative readings of the texts, rooted in the question with well-chosen textual evidence. A number of candidate responses, however, were incomplete and/or did not fully address the Assessment Objectives. These factors should be considered, and candidates should be provided with opportunities for timed writing practice throughout their courses of study in order to ensure both that responses are completed and that the requirements of the assessment are all met.

Addressing the Assessment Objectives

A01

Attention to the specifics of the task set is a very important factor when determining the quality of a script. While practising past paper questions is an effective way to revise and prepare for the examination, candidates are advised against simply reproducing learned responses or sections of pre-prepared material. Candidates need to use and adapt their knowledge of the texts they have studied to respond explicitly to the task set. It was evident that some candidates sought to adapt questions, using them as the basis to write on topics they had been hoping to address rather than clearly and relevantly engaging with the question. This is not an advisable strategy. Secure knowledge of the texts studied will enable candidates to respond with confidence to whatever question is posed.

It was encouraging to see that many candidates had taken some time to plan their responses. Where candidates had planned effectively, responses were well targeted, organised and supported by appropriate reference to both set texts and contexts. It was also evident where candidates had planned to write in developed ways about the connections between texts. Effective planning enabled candidates to communicate ideas, responses and knowledge in an appropriately critical fashion. The best answers commenced with strong and relevant thesis statements, defining what candidates understood to be the key focuses of the question, and went on to develop structured, comparative arguments illustrated by frequent and efficient reference to the texts, including short, embedded quotations.

Mid-level responses tended to cover all the Assessment Objectives in largely clear and relevant fashion. However, attention to the terms of the task and to the Assessment Objectives tended to be uneven. The structure of such mid-level responses was usually effective, although arguments

were not always consistently developed, and would often have benefitted from more targeted reference to the texts.

Scripts attaining Level 2 or below provided less relevant content and often displayed a lack of organisation of ideas. References to the texts tended either to be absent or lengthy and untargeted. There was also a tendency, at this level, for candidates to offer description or narrative overview rather than engaging with the task. There was a general listing of points of argument rather than an exploration of ideas.

A02

Examiners noted that many candidate responses would have benefited from paying greater attention to literary analysis of the ways in which meanings are shaped. Examiners observed that the best candidates were able to identify, exemplify and discuss the impact of a range of methods employed. This included the ability to talk about genre, textual structures, narrative methods, style, and the appearance across the texts of patterns of language. Stronger responses were marked by their tendency to comment on how meaning was shaped across the whole text. Less successful responses rarely moved beyond word-level analysis and a rather narrow focus on one or two specific episodes without a broader and more holistic sense of the texts. They also tended to show little or no awareness of writers' craft and limited understanding that characters are fictional constructs. When such issues were touched upon, there was a tendency for this to be rather generic, without deeper exploration and without direct correlation to the question. It is recommended that centres consider how candidates can be prepared more effectively to respond to this element of the assessment.

A03

The best responses made highly relevant application of contextual material, using this to extend and develop the central arguments made by the candidates. In such cases, there was a developed sense of how the texts and the ideas contained in them reflected a variety of contextualising factors, both of production and of reception. The use of contextual material in mid-level responses was not always closely connected to argument and tended to appear as additional information rather than contributing to understanding about the potential meanings of the texts. Contextual material sometimes took the form of general assertions rather than providing meaningful links. Examiners also noted the frequent appearance of inaccurate historical periods attached to texts (e.g. the incorrect identification of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* as novels set in the Victorian era). The use of contextual material at the lower levels tended either to be omitted or to appear as bolted on information with little or no explicit relevance to the task.

A04

Where candidates achieved the higher levels, interesting, pertinent and well-integrated connections between the texts were explored. Moreover, effective links between texts were wide-ranging (e.g. themes, character motivations, narrative methods, and context) and sustained throughout the response. Many scripts were placed in the lower levels for this Assessment Objective, however, reflecting a lack of balanced treatment of the two texts studied. It is not sufficient to use the language of connection, such as 'likewise' or 'contrastingly'; explorations of connections need to be developed and relevant to the argument. Too often candidates relied on comparing events in the two novels rather than exploring ideas in the texts.

Finally, a reminder that A05 is not rewarded for this paper. A number of responses included critical interpretations, sometimes making reference to named critics. While this can be relevant in terms of the context of how texts have been read and received (AO3), candidates did on occasions become quite focused on such readings at the expense of engaging with the other areas for assessment.

Childhood

Question 1

Question focus: Experiences of marriage.

Responses : 2.

Question 2

Question focus: The impact of money on family life.

Responses : 0.

Colonisation and its Aftermath

Question 3

Question focus: The ways characters cope with new environments.

Responses : 6.

Largely looking at the pairing of *Heart of Darkness* with *The Lonely Londoners*, candidates identified a range of ways in which characters in the novels encounter new and alienating experiences. They also considered the ways in which the writers conveyed the conflicts and difficulties arising from such encounters.

Question 4

Question focus: Diverse cultures.

Responses : 6.

Again, largely looking at the pairing of *Heart of Darkness* with *The Lonely Londoners*, candidates dealt with some interesting ideas related to the ways in which the writers provide representations of diverse and in many ways divided cultures. Candidates were able to identify some interesting connecting ideas between the texts.

Crime and Detection

Question 5

Question focus: The challenges of investigating crime.

Responses : 0.

Question 6

Question focus: Characters under pressure.

Responses : 0.

Science and Society

Question 7

Question focus: How characters respond to uncertainty.

Responses : 22.

This question elicited a good range of responses. *Frankenstein* was the predominant pre-1900 text, but there were pairings with both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go*. It is worth noting that several responses were mainly focussed on one text at the expense of discussion of the other. Centres are reminded that candidates need to deal in a broadly balanced way with both texts in this component of assessment.

Question 8

Question focus: Individuals harmed by the societies in which they live.

Responses : 323.

The question worked well for candidates across the ability range. Again, *Frankenstein* was by a large margin the main pre-1900 text choice. Examiners again identified that some responses did not deal with the two selected texts in a balanced way. There were occasions when candidates tended to write as much as possible as they know about their texts rather than retaining a careful focus on the question. Some good, relevant contexts of both production and reception were evident. However, a significant number of students referred to anachronistic contexts, identifying *Frankenstein* as a novel of the Victorian era, and as such found themselves applying incorrect social, cultural and political perspectives. Some responses, often at the lower end, focussed too much on the storylines of the selected novels at the expense of exploring the ways in which novelists shape meanings. There was also evidence of candidates making undeveloped reference – and sometimes incorrect – reference to the formal properties of the novels.

The Supernatural

Question 9

Question focus: The theme of control.

Responses : 65.

Some interesting responses were seen here. Candidates engaged with a variety of ways in which control is manifested in the selected texts (e.g. *Dracula*'s control of others, society controlling its citizens, *Dorian Gray* being controlled by a desire to succeed in society, the control exerted by historical forces). This also led to some interesting and apt consideration of contextual factors.

Question 10

Question focus: The creation of tension around supernatural events.

Responses : 41.

There were some interesting interpretations of the supernatural here. Some good use of literary criticism as a context was seen in these responses, particularly with *Dracula* and *Beloved*, which were the most popular texts.

Women in Society

Question 11

Question focus: Use of setting.

Responses : 46.

Some astute and sensitive readings were in evidence here. Studies of all four novels explored how settings are used to create a range of different effects and the ways in which they relate to the potential meanings and concerns of the texts. It was good to see candidates exploring not just physical settings, but also considering emotional, social, and political settings, amongst others.

Question 12

Question focus: Rejection.

Responses : 39.

This question facilitated responses across all levels. Examiners highlighted that many responses saw candidates reflecting on both the causes and the effects of rejection in the novels. The topic provided a strong basis for connections between characters, situations and contexts in the novels and many candidates developed these effectively.