

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary
AS English Literature
Paper 2: Prose (8ET0/02)

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Introduction

For the 8ET0_02 paper, candidates study two prose texts from their chosen theme area. At least one of these texts must have been written pre-1900. The most popular theme areas on the Summer 2025 paper were, in order, Science and Society (328 responses), The Supernatural (87), and Women in Society (37). Far fewer responses were seen on Childhood and Colonisation and its Aftermath, and none at all on Crime and Detection, so this report will report in less detail about these.

Examiners were in agreement that the majority of centres had prepared candidates effectively for the requirements of the examination. Examiners marked a wide range of responses, and many candidates produced answers that were cogent and relevant, appropriately addressing the Assessment Objectives covered in this component. The best responses demonstrated knowledge of the selected texts and an ability to apply this knowledge in a literature essay. Candidates offered original and engaged approaches to questions, considering their chosen texts from a variety of perspectives. Such candidates developed relevant and imaginative readings of the texts, rooted in the tasks set and supported by apt textual evidence drawn from across the set texts covered. Weaker responses, however, were sometimes limited in terms of length and/or were narrative-based. Additionally, some of the weaker responses did not fully address the Assessment Objectives.

Addressing the Assessment Objectives

A01

A common area of weakness in less confident responses was the tendency to move off the set question and write the essay the candidate wanted to write, rather than one required by the question itself. In these cases, it seemed the students had likely prepared an answer and were unable to adequately adapt their knowledge when the question required a different angle of response. Some candidates clearly attempted to adapt previously learned material to the question. This strategy often produced responses lacking in focus. It was also evident that less cohesive responses misapplied textual evidence, again this was likely a consequence of an inability to respond to the question attempted. Further, examiners found it difficult to track the line of reasoning of the candidates who did not construct a clear argument in the response. More preparation that includes detailed essay planning is advised as a possible way to strengthen these areas of weakness.

Stronger candidates however did write detailed, imaginative responses that integrated literary analysis and context and made interesting connections between texts.

Have a look at the following excerpt from a high level response to Question 10:

Victorian fears onto the contemporary reader. Both novels ~~utilise death~~ diverge in purpose and tone but utilise the theme of death at the centre of each of its novels.

Both Morrison and Stoker interrogate death through theiriminal supernatural characters. In 'Beloved' Morrison uses Beloved as a catalyst for destruction who represents both life and death. Morrison writes, "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water.", Beloved is the embodiment of Sethe's dead daughter, materialised through a biblical rebirth. Morrison intentionally parallels the antagonistic character of Beloved to Jesus in order to explore the complexity of Beloved's purpose. From her introduction in chapter 5, Beloved ~~is used as a vehicle~~ progressively ~~is~~ comments the inhabitants of 124. This is physically evident in the three parts of the novel becoming smaller and smaller as Beloved's unnatural presence persists. For example, in the beginning of part 3 Beloved has become

Comment:

Note how the candidate makes a connection between the two selected texts before confidently exploring evidence from the text with analysis of *Beloved*. Quotations from the text are expertly embedded in the response and the candidate addresses the writer's craft while focusing on the question and using appropriate literary terms.

A02

Stronger candidates were adept at exploring the literary techniques used by their selected novelists to develop themes and meaning in the texts. The methods identified and explored included narrative technique, use of settings and descriptive style. The most effective responses identified similarities and differences between their chosen novels and were able to explore across the range of the texts, rather than focus narrowly on short sections. A feature of weaker responses was a tendency to simply identify word classes without extending the analysis to any significant degree. As a consequence weaker responses were less able to develop a sense of the writer's craft or see the texts as literary constructs.

Take a look at the following example from a Q7 response :

In Frankenstein, Victor's upbringing with him feeling like he owned Elizabeth ("till death she was to be mine only"), and his tendencies to judge people purely based on appearance and first assumptions ("M. Krempe was a little squat man, with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance") negatively influenced him and caused his hubris to overtake him and cause his hamartia. Shelley's repeated use of verbs as "desire" and adjectives such as "ardently", are used to foreshadow his hamartia. The fact that his family and friends are all well-read, high-class people, induces in him (and the readers) a sense that he must achieve something great in order to live up to their high standards, and thus attempts to rid the world of death, a noble cause (at least, to him) that starts the butterfly effect that leads to his punishment and demise, which alludes/intertextually references directly to the tale of Prometheus, which is also the subtitle of the book "The Modern Prometheus".

Comment:

In the extract from a Q7 response above, we can see the candidate attempting to identify relevant themes and ideas. The use of literary terms and identification of word classes provide some insight and help to develop the response. The literary terms and identified word classes could be developed to provide more depth and appreciation of the writer's craft.

A03

Stronger responses approached the exploration of context in admirably informed and original ways. Biographical context was the most popular mode of applying this Assessment Objective and examiners encountered a variety of ways of integrating discussion of how the author's life could inform interpretation of the text. Less strong candidates tended to make quite simplistic links between biography and text. Many of the novels and the questions gave candidates the opportunity to explore how political context help form a text's meaning and interpretation. Again, as can be expected, examiner's encountered a wide range in terms of the quality of this approach to context. It was also gratifying to mark responses that made effective use of literary context.

Take a look at the excerpt below from a Question 9 response. At this point, the candidate is writing about *Beloved*:

Morrison in 'Beloved' ~~enters~~ explores the raw, all-consuming nature of motherhood and its ~~present~~ influence on the dynamics of a familial household. The character of Sethe is presented to defy the cultural expectations of African American women at the time of its writing, with women merely seen as the primary 'holders' of a male's* children ~~and~~ and intended legacy. This is evident as Baby Suggs ~~struggles~~ struggles and fails to remember the names of all of her eight children, starting with a sense of guilt and regret that "All I can ~~remember~~ remember" of her "first born" is "how she loved the burned bottom of bread." By presenting the historical context behind traditional 'motherhood' and its lack of compassion unknown to society now, Morrison is able to emphasise even further Sethe's dedication and dependency towards her children, as she "worked hard to remember as close to nothing was safe." ~~This~~ Furthermore, ~~this dynamic~~ Sethe's reluctance ~~and~~ to let any more of her children "~~feed~~" ^{Hee} from the house of 124 can be evidently seen in her control of Denver, who is not able to enter womanhood and the community ~~world~~ within until Sethe accepts her role as a mother.

Comment

Note how the candidate employs the contextual reference to help further the response on family relationships. The use of context is consistent rather than discriminating.

Here is an example of a more succinct integration of context in a Q8 response:

...While Atwood perhaps intended to reveal the realities of moral weakness and absence of judicial values among humanity, thus exposing the empty morality of right wing fundamentalists that rose to prominence during the 1980s. Shelly's intentions maybe to condemn the hubristic ideas of enlightenment scientists, while those who are condemned as 'lesser' possess a larger capacity for morality and justice, forgotten by the idealised scientific materialism of the period.

Comment

Note the use of context to provide insight and further the argument. Context is not merely 'added on', but is integral to the development of ideas. The use of context is moving to the 'discriminating' here.

AO4

Stronger responses made meaningful, interesting and relevant connections between the texts. Examiners encountered a variety of ways of exploring connections in this series. These ways included thematic connections, contextual links, the motivation of characters found in the text and so on. It was a delight to mark the responses of candidates who had evidently thought deeply of ways to connect their chosen texts. Weaker candidates tended to make quite tenuous links or asserted connections rather than working to establish them through analysis of the selected texts. It was quite common to find weaker candidates focusing almost exclusively on one text without developing meaningful links to the other novel.

Take a look at the following example:

within humanity and theocracies alike as a false guide, ~~it~~ perhaps intending to expose and criticise the performative morality extolled by the right-wing ~~let~~ evangelicals and ~~Christians~~ that promoted 'a return to fundamentalist Christian values', crafting an exposure of the evil capabilities of supposed 'divinely ruled' societies. ~~and~~ Therefore, Atwood and Shelley utilize the breakdowns of morality amongst humanity but while Atwood ~~crafts~~ ^{the capacity for} ~~it~~ exposes evil within human nature, Shelley ~~portrays~~ ^{weak} the Creature as a metonym for the weak hubristic values of humanity and Enlightenment scientists such as Walton and Victor.

Comment

Note the way the candidate brings out similarities and identifies possible differences in this extract from a question 8 response. The connections made between Gilead and Frankenstein are subtle and illuminating, helping to further the argument being developed on the presentation of weakness in the novels.

The second excerpt from a question 9 response is another example of a candidate making illuminating connections:

...mirrors the passing down of trauma from the slavery. Denver was born free yet she carries the emotional baggage and trauma her mother, Sethe, passes down to her through generational trauma. ~~The~~ The "blood" symbolises Denver's inability to escape from the legacy of slavery as an African American woman despite the Civil War now being set after the Civil War. This mirrors Morrison's own life as she was a prominent figure during the Civil Rights movement showing that years later African Americans still are not truly free from the shackles of slavery. Therefore the subversion of motherhood ~~present~~ ~~and~~ conveys the generational trauma felt by survivors of the atrocities of slavery. Similarly, in 'Dracula' ~~the~~ the theme of motherhood is also subverted in order to communicate Stoker's views on the social change seen in the Victorian era. However, Morrison's and Stoker's intentions differ. Stoker uses the two female characters of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker to present Victorian women in the novel. Lucy Westenra presents the sexual freedom ^{experienced} ~~felt~~ by the New Woman through her ability to choose her suitor. Whereas, Mina presents the increased education experienced by the New Woman. During the Victorian era, the idea of the New Woman went against traditional Victorian values which Stoker ~~felt~~ ~~inspired~~ ~~Lucy~~ is the first victim of Dracula's domination.

Comment

In this excerpt the candidate makes connections between the texts that help develop the argument. The response identifies how both novels reflect the subversion of motherhood, but begins to explore how their respective presentations of this theme will differ.

Childhood

Question 1 & Question 2

There were very few responses to questions set on the Childhood theme this series.

Colonisation and its Aftermath

Question 3 & Question 4

Similarly, there was only a very small number of responses to the questions set on the theme of Colonisation and its Aftermath. Question 3 was on the presentation of the disempowered and question 4 was on the presentation of hostility. The most popular text combination on these questions was Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*.

Crime and Detection

Question 5 & Question 6

There were no responses to questions set on the Crime and Detection theme this series.

Science and Society

Question 7

Science and Society was by some distance the most popular of the themes on the June 2025 paper. Question 7 on the presentation of negative influences generated a wide variety of responses. Examiners encountered an array of contextual material, including both literary and political contexts. The majority of responses were on *Frankenstein* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, although *Never Let Me Go* was also chosen by a number of candidates to pair with *Frankenstein*. Stronger candidates demonstrated impressive contextual knowledge on relevant ideas, from the negative implications of the Enlightenment's quest to master nature (*Frankenstein*) to the use of religion to control society (*Gilead*) and the dangers of technology (*Never Let Me Go*). It

was interesting to see how stronger candidates drew on a range of characters to explore negative influences in *Frankenstein*, not solely focusing on the creature and his creator.

Similarly, answers addressing *Never Let Me Go* and *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrated an impressive capacity to explore different approaches to the concept of 'negative influences'.

Question 8

Question 8 on human weakness was the most popular of the questions in this year's examination. As with Question 7, the majority of responses were on *Frankenstein* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, but examiners did encounter a number of responses pairing *Frankenstein* with *Never Let Me Go*. Less convincing responses were prone to making fairly generalised comments on how weakness was presented in the selected novels. For example, candidates often simply asserted that Victor's action exhibited weakness without producing supporting evidence from the text. However, stronger responses used their knowledge and understanding to explore the presentation of human weakness in a multitude of creative ways.

The following extract is from a question 8 response. At this point in the extract the candidate is writing about *Never Let Me Go*:

Ishiguro presents the weakness of Miss Emily as being unable to overcome her impulsive and socially conditioned ~~the~~ othering of the clones, to their severe detriment. The two-tier hierarchy of clones and ~~so~~ people reflect Ishiguro's own fears surrounding scientific advancement, as he argues CRISPR can "create people technically superior to others". In this way, Ishiguro argues not just society, but also science, provide platforms for human weakness to be amplified as othering and discrimination became systemic. Indeed, the weakness remains inherent to all humans as even Madame looks "as if

Comment

Here the candidate focuses effectively on the question and uses some apposite biographical contextual knowledge to explore the novel's presentation of how science can be used to exploit human weakness.

The Supernatural

Question 9

Question 9 on the presentation of the importance of family relationships elicited a very small number of responses.

Question 10

The presentation of death was the third most popular question on the paper and examiners were generally impressed by the quality of responses seen. The most popular pairing was *Dracula* with *Beloved*. Examiners did mark a small number of *Dorian Gray* and *Beloved* answers. Stronger responses to this question explored the presentation of death in many ways, viewing both its physical and metaphysical manifestations. Some responses were rather general in nature, tending to set out a series of examples of how characters within the texts experience death. Stronger candidates tackled the variety of techniques the novelists used to present death.

The following extract provides an excellent example of a candidate writing about the presentation of death. At this point, they are writing about Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*:

Morrison frequently ~~endeavors~~ conveys a non-linear chain of thought or seeming narrative gaps throughout 'Beloved' as if creating a fragmented stream of consciousness that leaves the reader with the pieces to put together themselves. This is especially experienced in the 'I am Beloved and she is mine' chapter whereby the entirety of the chapter is in a non-linear style as she details her re-birth and simultaneous 'death'. A key narrative gap however is the metaphorical allusion to the middle passage ships with 'sloes on board - 'the men without skin' reached in' and took us up into the sunlight with the dead and shored them in the sea'.

Comment

Note the identification of narrative techniques and the exploration of the impact of these techniques on the reader. There is also integrated and subtle inclusion of context with the reference to the 'middle passage'.

Women in Society

Question 11

Question 11 comparing the ways writers present control was the most popular of the two questions on the theme of Women in Society. *Wuthering Heights* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was the most popular pairing and generated a wide variety of response. Candidates for the most part found the question accessible and were able to develop answers that met the Assessment Objectives. There was evidence of some candidates not being able to balance their response. In some cases, candidates found the Hosseini novel more amenable to the exploration of context.

Question 12

The presentation of desire was tackled by a very small number of candidates. The few marked by examiners did exhibit some interesting approaches to the question of desire in different forms. There were also some interesting approaches to context on this question.

