



Examiners' Report Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Literature
Non-Examination Assessment (9ET0/04)

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational, and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2024

Publications Code 9ET0_04_2406_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2024

Thank you to all centres for another successful series for the NEA/coursework component of A Level English Literature. The specification has been running for a number of years and so nearly all centres are aware of the demands of the component. This was the third year of electronic submissions, and most centres were able to upload requested samples promptly and carry out the necessary administration.

Text choices:

Approximately half the centres allowed students **free choice of text**. For more able candidates, this is a good opportunity to encourage freedom of research and an individual approach; for less able candidates the task can be overwhelming. The role of the centre is crucial here, not only in assisting the students in choosing an appropriate combination of texts and task (the CAS necessarily only has a limited role), but in providing adequate guidance throughout the process to enable students to meet the AOs at a high level. Whilst the obvious differentiator is AO2, some centres could have provided more guidance on AO3 (many candidates tend to make well-meaning generalisations particularly about historical or sociological factors) and, particularly, AO5. There is a range of high-quality critical material available online, and too often candidates made use of study guides or attempted generic or speculative critical interpretations.

The next most popular option **was teaching a 'core text' plus a selection of others**. In a few cases the quality of candidates' work was notably higher with the core text, suggesting that more guidance was needed with the chosen text. However, for most centres, it appeared that the students had been provided with sensible guidance not only regarding the choice of text, but appropriate resources for AO3 and AO5, and support in studying the text as a whole.

A large number of centres continued to teach both texts, although in nearly all cases (when there is more than one teaching set) this was decided by the teacher rather than imposed centrally by the Head of Department. This approach is perfectly permissible, and may be more appropriate for some centres or cohorts; scope for pursuit of individual interests was provided for through allowing different choices of assignment title.

Overall, all the above approaches had their own advantages and disadvantages, and centres should continue to use their professional judgement to determine which is appropriate for their context.

The most common texts seen were: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *1984*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Color Purple*, *The Bell Jar* and *Catcher in the Rye*.

Some interesting and unusual pairings can be found under 'Question setting', and moderators commented on what a pleasure it was to see such a wide range of texts studied by centres and candidates.

Some texts were less appropriate. Only a handful of rubric infringements were seen (texts in translation), but most moderators saw examples of candidates choosing a text that limited their opportunities to meet the assessment objectives at a higher level.

Centres have access to the Coursework Advisory Service, with queries responded to by the Pearson subject team, but are under no obligation to seek approval of texts or titles. The CAS may 'advise against' but does not forbid texts unless there are clear rubric infringements (eg texts in translation). A suggested task phrasing is available in a guidance document alongside examples of text pairings, and individual texts. There are also many exemplar folders available for centres to access.

Question setting:

Moderators noted that the success of a candidate's argument often depended heavily on the appropriateness of the assignment set by the centre. Questions focusing on the presentation of a theme were more likely to elicit closer engagement with writers' craft than tasks which focus on how characters interact. There were quite a few tasks this series which focused on the oppression of women (especially in the context of toxic masculinity), mental health issues, loss of identity, and gender fluidity. As in previous series, this led to a tendency towards assertion rather than analysis. Mental health issues tended to lead candidates into psychological theory rather than literary criticism, particularly so when treating such texts as *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Bell Jar*. In assignments where the studied text had an autobiographical component, there was more tendency to forget the writer at work and talk about characters as people.

Many centres incorporated a critical quotation into their assignment wording, inviting the candidate to structure their argument in light of this view. A precise, focused quotation can be helpful; a problem arose, however, was when it was too long and diffuse, or lacked a single focus. This was a common issue in the assignment titles themselves: questions with multiple elements often prevented the candidate from focusing their argument, whilst other assignments seemed to invite the student to illustrate and explain a predetermined conclusion, rather than really to create their own argument (eg "use the family to create trauma for the protagonists").

Many centres chose question formulations that explicitly flagged the AOs: for example, "Taking into account your wider reading and the importance of contextual factors, compare how the writers present [...] in [...]".

Some interesting and unusual pairings of texts and task noted by moderators include the below. It was particularly good to see how 'established' A Level texts were so often interpreted in a new light thanks to the judicious choices made by centres and candidates.

The Great Gatsby with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* / *The Spire* / *The Glass Menagerie* / *Posh* (Laura Wade)

Mrs Dalloway/ *The God of Small Things* (presentation of socially constructed identity);

Death of a Salesman / *Enron*,(Lucy Prebble) (modern definitions of tragedy);

The Bell Jar/ *Feminine Gospels* or *The Edible Woman*

The Color Purple/ Atonement (power of writing)

Orlando/ The Life & Loves of a She-Devil (presentation of transformation)

Slaughterhouse V/ The Catcher in the Rye – portrayal of alienated protagonists

Heart of Darkness / Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats -presentation of colonialism

Dracula / Carmilla – vampirism as metaphor for sexual deviancy

The Kite Runner/ Point No Point (Sujata Bhatt) – portrayal of displacement

The Color Purple/ Iola Leroy, (Frances E Harper) – oppression of Black community

Girl, Woman, Other / Homegoing (Yaa Gyasi) presentation of Black female identity

Gone Too Far / Barbershop Chronicles – presentation of Black identity

Invisible Man / A Raisin in the Sun – African-American identity

The Handmaid's Tale paired with either *Gather My Daughters* or *Silence Can Be Deafening* - presentation of female suffering in oppressive environment

Julius Caesar / The Secret History – deception and manipulation

The Testaments / Normal People – societal power

10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in This Strange World / His Bloody Project - vulnerability and victimisation

Infinite Jest / End Zone – presentation of sporting success

Collected poems of WH Auden and a range of Hemingway novels

The Picture of Dorian Gray / Goodbye to Berlin

Atonement / The Duchess of Malfi

The Snapper / Juno and the Paycock – a range of tasks.

Regeneration / Collected poems of Siegfried Sassoon – female experiences of war.

Candidate achievement within the Assessment Objectives:

AO1 – AO3

For this first mark grid, candidates were able to write clearly and coherently, articulating their ideas with frequent reference to their chosen texts, analysing them as literary constructs, and demonstrating an appreciation of the influence of contextual factors.

Many moderators commented that the standard of **AO1** appears to have deteriorated a little this year, though this was not necessarily always acknowledged by centres. Several moderators commented on the lack of proof-reading that had taken place. Lapses in expression – for example, colloquialisms or using the first person – were most common in candidates who scored Level 3 or below throughout the NEA, but were disappointing to note in some awarded Level 4 or above. It is important to note that, for Level 4 and above, candidates are challenged to produce a controlled argument with cohesive transitions and fluently embedded textual examples. Some were let down by introductions which were far too long, or appeared to communicate a foregone conclusion rather than opening up avenues for exploration; others plunged into detailed discussion immediately without having taken the time to set up an argument. Another error was a failure to quote frequently from their texts (which necessarily impacted on AO2 and AO3).

AO2 was, in general, analysed effectively by candidates and assessed fairly by centres. Candidates strongly preferred to analyse language; matters of form and structure were discussed comparatively rarely. Whilst, as noted, it was pleasing to see candidates studying poetry or plays, many did not see plays as drama or poetry as poetry, ignoring the potential to analyse form, structure, and genre.

For **AO3**, candidates enjoyed applying a variety of contexts to inform their understanding of their chosen texts. The best essays not only evaluated the importance of these contexts, but had made precise references often supported by quotations from wider reading and research. Many candidates, however, did not support their contextual assertions with evidence, and the lack of citations or evidence of wider reading in their bibliography made it unclear how they were able to support their claims. For the popular dystopian texts, particularly *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, candidates working at Level 3 often had their achievement limited by an approach that focused on discussing events and concepts rather than crafting. AO2 was occasionally forgotten about, whilst AO3 relied on attempting to match features of a writer's dystopian vision to historical events.

AO4 – AO5

AO4 was very often a strength, and it was clear from nearly all centres that they had approached this as a comparative unit, and assignments had been planned from the outset with this in mind. Higher-achieving responses demonstrated the ability to adopt a fully integrated comparative approach from the outset, though many candidates still preferred to consider each text in turn in alternating paragraphs or to compare the texts in broad terms in the opening and closing paragraphs and discuss them individually in the body of the essay. In several centres, there was sometimes an imbalance in candidates' treatment of texts with more discussion of one (often the taught text) than the other.

Achievement at **AO5** was mixed. Some candidates engaged successfully with critical theory, which is often a good course of action when there is little material published on the text itself. Attempts at Marxist, Freudian, and feminist readings were sometimes successful, provided that the candidate had precisely defined their chosen critical angle and supported it with nuanced wider reading.

It is important to note that candidates are marked on how they respond to the AO5 material, not the quality of the source material itself. However, some candidates relied on materials such as book reviews or study notes, which only engaged with the texts at a superficial level and were therefore difficult to analyse or evaluate critically.

For candidates relying on critical theory, Lacan, Foucault and his Panopticon Theory, Simone de Beauvoir, Miller's *Tragedy and the Common Man*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and George Orwell's *Essays* all featured to good effect in some high-flying essays. Other reputable sources used to access AO5 included: Gilbert & Gubar, *Showalter*, Marina Warner, *Introduction to The Bloody Chamber* (Atwood), *Running with Tigers* (more on Carter) and Wollstonecraft for feminism, Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind*, Gayatri Spivak *Can the Subaltern Speak?* worked well for candidates discussing colonial and post-colonial texts. Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* and the *Ideology of Pornography* and Orwell's *Politics and the English Language* were used very productively by some able candidates.

Quality of marking and standardisation:

The purpose of centre marking and moderation is to provide evidence, with reference to the assessment objectives and the mark scheme, to support the final mark submitted to Pearson. Nearly all centres acknowledged this, although there were a few examples where feedback was addressed to the candidate or was formative. Centres where marks were most likely to be agreed were able to demonstrate this understanding through extensive annotation, detailed summative comments and clear evidence of internal moderation and standardisation.

Summative comments were often very detailed indeed. The most helpful comments:

- Referred to each assessment objective individually;
- Used vocabulary from the mark scheme to identify levels of achievement (eg discriminating, evaluative), though without simply copying level descriptors;
- Clearly explained the rationale for the overall, holistic mark within the level;
- Identified and explained why candidates were not given a higher mark.

The final point was fairly rare to see, and may appear counter-intuitive given that all marking in this specification should reward what candidates have done rather than penalise them for what they have not achieved. As an example, however, a comment that makes consistent reference to achievement within Level 4 necessarily suggests a numerical mark at the very top of this level (28 to 29 in AO1 – AO3); if the mark given is lower, then the comment therefore is not in line with what has been awarded.

Some summative comments were very brief. Centres which made use of mark grids that were simply shaded in, highlighted, or ticked, were more likely to be out of line with the national standard.

Most centres annotated essays in detail, with helpful comments that pointed out achievement within a particular assessment objective, and the level of achievement. The majority of centres continue to do so by hand; others make use of the comments function on Microsoft Word. The most helpful annotations made direct references to assessment objectives, indicated level of achievement, with reference to the mark scheme, and provided further, brief explanation of how the candidate's argument developed and assimilated the assessment objectives. Please note that, as with the examined components, candidates cannot be credited twice for the same piece of evidence: some centres frequently credited secondary reading as "AO3/AO5".

The vast majority of centres standardised internally; indeed, many essays were 'double marked'. A few made reference to standardisation material from Pearson. Most of the time, moderation was fairly light in touch, with adjustments typically being of +/-1 or 2. For a few centres, there was a sense of professional dialogue as marker opinions varied and an internal moderator/HoD gave a final judgment;

E9 reports to the centres made clear that this was interpreted as an excellent sign of the centre's integrity and professionalism.

Even within centres where marking was not in line with the national standard, marking generally was consistent. Very few centres were identified where one teaching group had been marked inconsistently compared to another. Exceptions within the whole cohort mainly involved lenience/severity at a particular point in the rank order. Another common (but understandable) issue was that the range of achievement in the centre was narrower than the (inter)national picture – leniency at the higher end, severity towards the bottom.

Again, with all the above, the precise nature of any inconsistency within centre marking has been made clear within the moderator's individual report to the centre. There were some additional overall issues noted, as above:

- **AO1 – AO3:** some centres were lenient when marking AO1, not taking into account some of the issues raised in the 'candidate achievement' category above such as poor expression, lack of overall cohesion, or other errors. For AO3, some fairly general points were over-rewarded.
- **AO4 – AO5:** AO5, as noted, was occasionally over-marked. Whilst this was mostly due to candidates being over-rewarded for fairly generic material, it was also noted that critical material was credited as 'discriminating' or 'evaluative' purely because of the presence of the quotation, rather than how candidates had responded to it; this was a little surprising given that, in 9ET01, the improvement in AO5 has been noted throughout the life of the specification so far.

Academic presentation: word counts, referencing, and bibliographies

Word counts should be provided for all submissions. Whilst it is true that there is no penalty for exceeding the advisory word count of 2500 – 3000 words, moderators agreed that excessively long responses were often self-penalising. To achieve AO1 at Level 4 and above, candidates need to present a controlled argument, and loss of focus and control was a frequent issue in those responses that significantly exceeded 3000 words.

Referencing and bibliographies were variable in quality, as indeed was the scope and quality of wider reading. Again, as this is not explicitly mentioned in the mark scheme, candidates can, technically, neither be rewarded or penalised in this area. However, a conscientious approach to referencing makes it clearer to the moderator when the candidate is engaging explicitly with the views of others for AO5, or making a more nuanced and precise AO3 point. This is also important, of course, in avoiding inadvertent plagiarism.

Finally, it is assumed that the large majority of candidates will be proceeding to higher education (indeed, from the quality of some essays it is hoped that very many will be choosing to read English at university!). The above requirements will be non-negotiable for their undergraduate courses; centres which have insisted on these will therefore have given their students excellent preparation for the future.

Administration:

In this third year of online submission via the Learner Work Transfer platform, the majority of centres had carefully scanned and collated their candidate submissions, uploaded the requested sample promptly, and included all the necessary administrative material. However, some recurring issues caused delays for moderators, or made their role more difficult.

Urgent issues:

Some administrative errors require the moderator to contact the centre before they can begin the process; this delays the process and wastes time.

Unfortunately, approximately 15% of centres had to be contacted by their moderator to rectify an urgent matter. These included: samples not uploaded to the LWT platform, failure to include highest- and lowest- ranked folders (these are required even if they are not requested in the sample generated by Pearson), individual essays missing, pages missing, lack of authentication forms, or errors in the mark (a disparity between the mark on the scanned copy and that submitted to Pearson, or errors of addition). Whilst, in fairness, most centres responded very swiftly when they were alerted to these, it is hoped that, next series, these mistakes will be seen less frequently.

Other issues:

Some submissions had pages scanned in the wrong order, or that were rotated. A few centres had used some paper material produced in landscape but scanned in as portrait. A frequent, unfortunate issue was that many photocopiers with a scanner function tend to crop off a 0.5 cm margin on each page, which affected many essays where markers wrote up to the very edge of the page. Finally, please note that annotation in pencil often scans in poorly and is difficult to read.

Overall, it would be of significant benefit if *all* centres could take a little extra time to make extra checks to their scanned coursework submissions before uploading them to the LWA portal. As a final reminder, please be aware that a new NEA authentication sheet, making explicit reference to AI use, has now been published, and submissions for future series must use this form; thank you to the many centres who have already been using this.

Conclusion

The NEA unit is perhaps the most revealing insight into the opportunities centres offer to candidates studying English Literature at Advanced Level. The vast majority of centres have been providing interesting and stimulating choices of tasks for candidates, broadening their experiences of English by studying a huge range of texts and genres or reinterpreting the stalwart texts in fresh new ways. Students have been encouraged to pursue their interests and enthusiasms and to articulate their individual arguments, and are being provided with excellent support in their secondary reading. They are encouraged to take pride in their work; centres, correspondingly, work diligently to ensure that their efforts are fairly acknowledged in the marks given. Candidates clearly enjoy this unit, and the transferable skills serve them well not only in the rest of 9ET0 but in the undergraduate studies the majority will be embarking upon over the next year or so. The moderating team wish the candidates the very best for their future endeavours, and look forward to seeing centre submissions for Summer 2025.