

Access to Scripts case study: Oasis Academy South Bank

Robust analysis of scripts helps refine teaching practices to boost attainment and motivate students

Interview by Ben Armstrong

Name	Oasis Academy South Bank
OFSTED	Outstanding
Location	London
Cohort	GCSE Cohort size: 70

Background

Oasis Academy South Bank is an academy for pupils aged between 11 and 18. It is part of the Oasis MAT, which includes 52 academies across the UK, 14 of which are in London or the South East. The school opened in September 2013 and is rated Outstanding by Ofsted. David Barnes, Head of Humanities and National Curriculum Lead for History across the Oasis MAT, discusses how he, and his experienced team of history teachers, use the [Access to Scripts](#) service for improving the teaching at the Oasis Academy South Bank and across the Oasis MAT, but also how the Access to Scripts service is an excellent way to motivate students and give them self-confidence.

Scripts help teachers to understand student performance after results day

Once results day has passed, we quickly identify three groups of students whose scripts we wish to access. We use the Results Plus service to make three lists of students who received low, middle and high band grades. We download their scripts from the Access to Scripts service to create sets of examples which exemplify student performance in the three bands. In addition, we also access the scripts of any students whose results surprised us. This includes students who have notably under or overperformed compared to expectation, or students who were awarded 0 marks for a question, especially a higher tariff question. Overall, we generally download about 50% of the cohort's scripts. In addition, we download the scripts of any students who stay on at the academy to study History at A Level. Since we are a relatively new school, we have not yet had an A Level cohort complete the course, but we intend to access these scripts once the first cohort receives their results.

Going through these papers is essential for understanding the results that the cohort received. Looking at the scripts as a set enables us to identify the patterns and trends in answers, both in terms of how the students performed but also how our teaching had affected

the way that students answered the questions. Additionally, looking at the scripts of individual students is valuable. For example, it is important to understand why a student did much better or worse than expected. In particular, where a student received 0 marks it is important to know whether this was due to a missed question, misunderstanding the language of the question, a wrong approach or simply not having the necessary knowledge. This gives meaning to a disappointing mark and enhances the data available through Results Plus.

An interesting effect is that being able to access the scripts has changed our approach to requesting re-marks. Because we have been able to see how students performed, we have been able to make better decisions about whether or not to request re-marks by seeing how the students performed, and consequently, we now request re-marking for fewer candidate scripts. Since centres only pay for re-marks if a mark is unchanged, we have been able to ensure that we can identify the scripts with the best grounds for a re-mark, and avoid requesting a re-mark on scripts unlikely to have an improved mark.

Scripts are ideal for professional development and to improve teaching practice

A prime use for the scripts is to improve our teaching. We can see, for example, where students approached questions with the methodology that we had taught, and where they had not. This includes students with higher and lower grades. By seeing where our approaches helped, and where alternative approaches proved useful, we can assess the methodologies that we are teaching our students. We can also see areas where language caused a difficulty for students. For example, in the 2019 exams the word papacy was a challenge for some of our students. Although we had taught it, as it is an example of technical language for the topic, not all students were confident with it, so we now see the need to reinforce that word in the classroom. We also realised that on the longer answers, stronger candidates used better academic vocabulary. This led us to develop resources to provide students with a range of terms they can use, for example teaching the difference between 'ignited' and 'encouraged' when talking about causes and consequences. When analysing the content of the answers, we realised that we needed to redevelop our planning to teach the Mormon migration in the American West topic.

Having identified strengths and weaknesses in both methodology and content, we are better able to focus our efforts in making improvements with future cohorts. This is true within the history department at Southbank, but as part of a large MAT, we have termly conferences between the member academies. Being able to combine the observations from scripts we have accessed with those of the other academies extends our analysis of where we can improve as well as supporting a wider sharing of best practice. This leads to us approaching curriculum and resource planning in a much more focused and productive way.

Past exam scripts make excellent model answers for classroom teaching

As well as affecting curriculum planning, there is a direct benefit from using the scripts in the classroom. Therefore, we often seek the permission of past students to use their answers as models. Students are invariably pleased that their answers will be used and agree to this.

We find that using these scripts as model answers is more effective than using model answers written by adults. Although there is a value to model answers in textbooks or written by teachers, they never fully match the answers written by 16-year old students under exam conditions. Therefore, when we use genuine past scripts in the classroom as model answers,

I find that the response from students is positive. What is also useful is that we can access the answers of students who performed at different levels, both to compare the difference between answers but also to show scripts that are appropriate models for students of differing abilities. Sometimes we use the answers as a model for students to deconstruct prior to writing their own answers, or sometimes we present three answers and ask students to rank them.

Using past scripts is a motivation and encouragement for both GCSE and A Level students

One challenge that teachers can face at GCSE can be motivating some students, often those who are less able and who may feel intimidated by the written work or who expect to fail and so choose to not answer exam questions. Past scripts can be a tool to address this. For example, we had the script of a student who had been in a lower ability history set, but through hard work and revision had performed very well, achieving a full three grades above expectation. Although they had not written extremely long answers, they had focused on answering the questions effectively. Being able to show a real script like this to students who lack self-confidence has been really useful in helping them to see that achieving their potential is manageable.

Another group of students who benefit are the students who choose to continue onto A Level. Some want to see their GCSE scripts out of curiosity. Generally, these students find it satisfying to know that they did well on certain questions; even where they lost marks, I generally find that by seeing their mistakes, the response is relief to not have uncertainty over how they performed. But more useful than this is using the scripts with sixth form students who doubt their ability. It is common with History A Level students, who generally did well at GCSE, that their early marks at A Level dip, and they often have to face the frustration and disappointment of low marks as they adapt their GCSE style to the greater demands of A Level. It is at this point that we sometimes show students their past GCSE scripts. We remind them of how hard they worked, how they revised and followed the methodologies they were taught, and how well they performed at the end. This has been useful in giving students a boost of self-confidence with their studies.

Do you have any advice on how teachers can be proactive about using the Access to Scripts service?

Although it takes a little time to select and download the scripts, the benefits are worth it. Time to use the service needs to be planned. Take the opportunity soon after results day to get the scripts that you want, and find time as a department to go through them, finding the answers that are useful to your department. Also, make arrangements early. It might be that the exams officer is less available in the period after results day to give access to the service, so making arrangements with the exams officer earlier in the year could be a wise idea.

The verdict – the Access to Scripts service is incredibly useful to history teachers

Overall, I would recommend history departments to make good use of this service. It is valuable for making the data from Results Plus even more useful and informing practical improvements to planning and teaching. It is an excellent way to obtain model answers for use in the classroom, and it is an effective way of motivating students to reach their potential.