



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Literature (4ET1)
Paper 3: Modern Drama and Literary Heritage
Texts

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Introduction

Candidates produced two coursework assignments, the titles of which were self-generated or devised by their teachers.

Assignment A (Modern Drama): This was based on a modern drama text chosen from the set list in the specification. Two Assessment Objectives were equally targeted:

AO1: Candidates demonstrate a close knowledge of the text and maintain an informed, critical personal engagement (15 marks)

AO2: Candidates analyse language, form and structure used by the writer to create meanings and effects (15 marks).

Assignment B (Literary Heritage): This was based on a Literary Heritage text chosen from the set list in the specification.

Candidates were assessed on AO1 and AO2 (10+10 marks)

Candidates were also expected to show an understanding of the relationships between texts and their contexts for AO4 (10 marks).

The guidance for length of assignments was 600 to 1000 words for each one. Centres can choose their own titles for the assignments but the list of set texts is selected by Pearson and is the same as the text list for the alternative examination unit 4ETI 02. The mark scheme and Assessment Objectives are also the same as for 4ETI 02. Titles set for the exam alternative may be used by centres for their coursework, but centres are encouraged to differentiate both titles and choice of text to suit individual ability and interest. The standard set for the coursework unit where candidates have much more time to consider, plan and draft their responses, is much higher than the standard set for the exam alternative where candidates only have 45 minutes to produce their response. It is expected that candidates will be able to satisfy the assessment criteria and Assessment Objectives in much greater depth in the coursework.

Administrative

The Learner Work Transfer system appeared to be working well for both centres and moderators, and it was good to have the additional option of centres being able to add work to their sample without the moderator having to return all the folders. This function saved a significant amount of time for all concerned.

Most centres had uploaded their sample promptly but there were still some issues. These included:

- centres using the old Candidate Authentication front sheet (without the AI statement). A copy of this document is available on the Pearson website
- scanning documents separately rather than combining the Authentication Sheet and coursework in one folder. This made it very cumbersome for the moderators to manage
- mis-scanning of pages, for example upside down or in the wrong order.

Whilst the majority of centres entered the correct marks, there were some marks on candidate's work that did not correspond to those on the Pearson system. However, these anomalies were dealt with quickly and in most cases, the centre in question actioned the error.

Popularity of texts and tasks set

Far and away the most popular texts were *An Inspector Calls* and *A View from the Bridge* for Assignment A and *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* for Assignment B. Also seen were *Kindertransport*, *Merchant of Venice*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Pride and Prejudice*. There was even a flurry of *Great Expectations* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

Candidates of all abilities seem to have engaged very positively with their chosen texts. One moderated stated that they 'saw some extremely accomplished work during the moderation process with some centres using titles of work to challenge candidates and invite very assured responses'. Most centres tried to match their titles to their candidates' proclivities and abilities, but some centres did not, often opting for one question or task for all candidates. For example, one centre used kingship to focus candidates writing on *Macbeth*. Whilst this did lead to some very original and well-researched answers, which was fine for most of the candidates who were working at L5 and beyond, the one or two candidates who were within a L2/3 were a little disadvantaged by the complexity of these titles and would have benefited from something more straightforward and accessible.

Examples of some effective titles seen this series:

- 'None serve with him but constrained things whose hearts are absent too.' Explore how Shakespeare presents the devastating consequences of regicide in *Macbeth* to present his ideal vision of kingship.
- How does Shakespeare illustrate the contrast between the virtuous rule of Duncan and Macbeth's usurpation?
- Assess how far Shakespeare delves into the idea that a good King requires a balance of duplicity and benevolence in *Macbeth*.
- In what ways does Priestley explore the embodiment of capitalist virtues through Arthur Birling?
- How do members of the Birling family epitomize the seven deadly sins?
- How is Arthur Birling presented as the main antagonist in *An Inspector Calls*?
- How far does *Romeo and Juliet* support Petrarch's views on love?
- 'Nature seems dead'. To what extent is this true of the world of *Macbeth*?
- In what ways does Shakespeare present order and disorder in *Macbeth*?
- How is Magwitch used as a vehicle to comment on nineteenth century justice?
- What is the impact of trauma on Evelyn in *Kindertransport*?

Less successful titles included:

- 'Write about autism in 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' This is a very difficult task because of the focus and breadth required.
- 'Write about why you don't like *Macbeth*'.
- Justice in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Some centres used old exam papers on which to base their questions (4ET1 02), others appeared to let candidates write their own questions and others differentiated based on ability. This happened with texts too where some centres had different sets of students doing different plays or novels.

It was clear from the responses seen, that the choice of questions or tasks set by centres were often seen as a means to provide candidates with the opportunity to achieve a higher level within the mark scheme. Questions that asked the candidate to consider 'how' or 'in what ways' a writer had presented a theme or character/s led to a more perceptive critical style and personal engagement and helped candidates focus on the language, form and structural ways this was achieved. This was also the case where the question or task had a clear focus which was not too broad and necessitated the candidate to cover a wide range of examples from the text. Candidates were able to avoid producing more descriptive and narrative responses, which would have placed them at the lower end of the mark scheme.

Moderators commented on the wide range of quality seen within the centres they moderated not only in the responses themselves but also in the tasks set. The best responses were those where candidates showed a degree of autonomy when it came to the texts and tasks undertaken and were able to develop their own personal voice within their responses. This close personal approach was often confidently linked to the requirements of the Assessment Objectives for each assignment.

Whilst there was a lot of work, which was extremely well executed, there was also evidence of some narrative responses which did not cover the required Assessment Objectives and had been over-rewarded by centres. The main areas that this was seen was in AO2 and the exploration of language, form and structure, where candidates failed to interrogate the textual evidence and explore the significance of why language, form and structure was effectively used by the writer to establish a scene, convey a message, present a character or develop a theme or focus.

It is recommended that centres use the exemplar material on the Pearson website to help define the standard required at each Level before carrying out their internal moderation process.

Approaches to the assignments

Assessment Objective 1(AO1) –

Demonstrate a close knowledge and understanding of the text.

In many cases this AO was confidently addressed by candidates working at all levels, as they were able to demonstrate their understanding of the text they had studied. The area that did differentiate the ability of candidates and the marks awarded was when it came to writing in a 'critical style'. As mentioned in previous reports, there is a fine line between an answer that is long because it is well-developed and detailed and one that is long because it lacks planning, loses structural cohesion and becomes narrative. Centres should be reminded against submitting over-lengthy assignments which lack a perceptive personal engagement with the task set and try to stay close to the recommended range of 600 – 1000 words for each task.

Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) –

Analyse language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects.

It was noted by many of the moderators that whilst quotations were often well-used to support and clarify points about meaning, there were a number of candidates who did not explore distinct aspects of the quotation at a word, technique or structural level and the effect on the audience / reader. Therefore, it is important that centres choose titles that will allow their candidates to cover the relevant Assessment Objectives sufficiently – ‘how?’, ‘In what ways?’. AO2 is therefore credited when quotations are used, and explanation of what the quote means. At times, there was little or no unravelling of evidence to unearth implicit meaning, to identify specific terminology, to identify tone or to comment on what has not been said. Stage directions should also be very helpful for the director when staging a production. As readers of the drama text, we should all be aware of what the playwright has included in their stage directions. They add so much to mood, atmosphere and tension / drama. Quoting stage directions without adding any comment is not that productive or beneficial when it comes to the analysis of the question or task. Expressions and body language can provide useful advice and meaning to directors in terms of how the action plays out. If the candidate is not seeing the play live, then reading and interpreting these stage directions provides another level of meaning. It was not always clear in some responses seen that the candidates had engaged with them.

Assessment Objective 4 (AO4) –

Comment on the relationship between text and context.

This is only assessed in Assignment B. Moderators felt that generally this was dealt with more successfully, although scripts seen at the lower end of the mark scheme contained bolt-on random historical facts – often in the introduction. Centres increasingly appear to be setting titles which lend themselves to reference on contextual detail which makes perfect sense. There were titles focusing on the relationship between Lord Capulet and Juliet for example, which opened up the discussion of parental and patriarchal societies and the focus on Lady Macbeth enabled candidates to consider what it meant to be a typical Jacobean female.

Assignment A: Modern Drama

For responses at a Level 4 and 5, these were often very well focused on effects of form, structure and language with some convincing exploration of dramatic irony in *An Inspector Calls* and Miller’s partial adherence to Aristotelian unities in *A View From The Bridge*. There was also some very sensitive work on the nature of tragedy and hamartia. In *Kindertransport* candidates often wrote well on the non-linear structure and use of characterisation to promote themes. Some candidates are still heavily reliant on contextual material in this Assignment, for which it is obviously not eligible in the mark scheme. Moderators try to reward this as AO1, however it is sometimes a distraction from the main work of knowledge, understanding and analysis that is assessed.

The quality of quotation varied and the extent to which centres insisted on support varied a great deal. There were some situations where candidates wrote entire essays without once referring to a detail of the text which is strange considering candidates have the texts in front of them. At the lower end of the mark range, AO2 is often scantily treated in answers. Some centres seem genuinely unaware of what AO2 is and marginal annotations demonstrated this in more than one centre sample seen. Some responses did not deal with AO2 at all, relying completely on AO1. Some took a functional tour of verbs, nouns, alliteration and such with a smattering of characterisation. The best answers wove AO2 into their discussion, demonstrating genuine appreciation of literary features and their use in the plays.

Assignment B: Literary Heritage

Shakespeare plays were far and away the most commonly seen of the Literary Heritage texts with a great deal of variation seen in terms of AO4 and indeed AO2. One moderator commented on how 'some candidates were teaching [them] something new about *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*', while other candidates relied quite reasonably on Jacobean audience/witchcraft/James 1/Great Chain of Being/Divine Right of Kings for *Macbeth* and fate/roles of women/religion/patriarchy in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Where context was not used properly it was either missing completely or vague, for example, 'In those times women were treated differently' or 'Shakespeare's audiences were naturally superstitious'. While this may be considered to be context it is a bit like Macbeth's explanation to the murderers about what a man is – 'Ay, in the catalogue ye go for context'. Some candidates were not including AO4 at all. When it came to marking, some centres acknowledged the variation in AO4 and applied marks accordingly. Maybe candidates are taught this more for the Literary Heritage, but references to use of soliloquies, iambic pentameter, pathetic fallacy and imagery were in evidence in most submissions at varying levels of achievement. AO1 was pretty secure across most answers but there were some who confined themselves to plot with some unsupported assertion about relationships and events.

The standard and awarding of marks

Some centres are very skilled and experienced at setting, marking and moderating this element of the specification and should be congratulated on the excellent work they have done in preparing their folders. In many cases their coursework annotation was accurate, detailed and informative, enabling the moderator to see exactly where and why a mark had been awarded. Similarly the internal moderation was skilful and transparent.

Most centres are doing their best to mark and internally moderate their coursework fairly with a mind to the agreed standard and close adherence to the mark scheme.

Some centres are trying but do not always have the experience or numbers of staff to accurately mark and moderate. In small centres, there is often one teacher working alone and some of them are inexperienced. In these situations, moderators have done their best to offer advice to these centres and directed centres to exemplar and training materials.

Summary

It is important that the tasks set are sufficiently challenging and related to all the assessment objectives. Assignment A is assessed for AO1 and AO2. Assignment B is assessed for AO1, AO2 and AO4.

It is important that:

- candidates are presented with a range of tasks and questions and are encouraged to choose one that appeals, thus encouraging a sound personal engagement
- all drama texts, for both assignments include discussion of dramaturgy and stagecraft

- when discussing AO4, the relationship of text to context relates fully to the question set. Substantial biographical detail on any of the writers is irrelevant and detracts from the task in hand
- each assignment falls within the recommended 600 – 1000 words. Some responses were over 2500 words long. Quantity does not always mean quality and often narrative or historical detail detracted from the core of the response
- to cover ALL the Assessment Objectives in sufficient depth and detail responses need to be developed and sustained. A well-planned, concise and carefully structured response, within the word limit, can achieve full marks.

Some candidates have started using materials from various critical works and citing these using footnotes or a bibliography at the end as in A level coursework. This is not a requirement of 4ET1 03 and often detracted from the personal engagement and original response asked for in the specification.

All moderators remarked on how rewarding it was to see the strong personal engagement of the candidates with the texts and how they enjoyed reading some of the interesting, thoughtful and sometimes unusual interpretations. The Principal Moderator and the team would like to thank the centres for all their hard work this series and wish them well for the 2025/26 academic year.