



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2012**

**English Literature B**

**LITB4**

**(Specification 2745)**

**Unit 4: Further and Independent Reading**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **LITB4: FURTHER AND INDEPENDENT READING**

Much of the work that moderators saw in the January series showed evidence of engagement and independence on the part of students and the vast majority of it was accurately marked by teachers. This is to the credit of all concerned. Clearly schools and colleges are looking for ways to encourage their students to be independent readers and thinkers and this has resulted in work that is fresh and original. Many moderators reported how enjoyable and interesting it was to read such submissions. This report highlights the areas of good practice that all schools and colleges should seek to emulate and also points out some of the issues that tended to lie behind those submissions that were less successful.

### **Assessment and Annotation**

Annotation on work is there to give the teacher an opportunity to explain to the moderator why a particular mark in a particular band has been deemed most appropriate. When it is done well it is extremely effective in supporting the marks awarded by the centre.

Good annotation does all of the following:

- It is addressed to the moderator
- It points out strengths and weaknesses and explains clearly why a particular place in a particular band is the most accurate mark for the work
- If a piece has been judged to be on a borderline between two bands it is clearly explained why the final decision was made to place it in one band and not the other
- Comments are personalised to the work and do not just rely on copying out descriptors from the mark scheme
- There is evidence of internal moderation and where marks have been altered in this process it is explained why this decision has been taken

As has been said before in reports on this unit, simply writing “AO2”, “AO4” etc in the margin, with no indication of how well these objectives have been met, is not helpful and summative comments that are too short and do not really deal with the qualities and pitfalls of the work do not offer much support for the marks awarded by the centre.

Assessment was mostly accurate this series but moderators did report a tendency for some schools and colleges to be overgenerous, particular at the upper end of the mark scheme, with work that would have most appropriately been marked at 27 or 28 often being given 29 or 30. This meant that tolerance became very strained and there was ‘bunching’ at the top end of the range. Teachers are reminded to refer to the national standardising materials, now available all year round on line, and to take care when marking work, especially at the upper end.

### **The Comparative Piece**

This part of the unit requires a comparison to be made between two texts. For the purposes of A level study a ‘text’ is a novel, a play, a collection of short stories or a

collection of poems. Some schools and colleges erroneously thought that it was acceptable to study only one or two fairly short poems for this unit and so they did not meet the specification requirements. Confusion may have arisen as it is possible to study one fairly short poem for the Critical Anthology piece because that is effectively a thirteenth text, when the requirement for A level study is twelve, and so falls outside of the 'rules' regarding length and substance. The two texts for the comparative piece however must be of suitable substance for A level study.

Teachers often ask exactly how many poems or short stories make up a 'text' and there is no hard and fast answer to this as these types of text vary greatly in length and complexity. We rely on the professional discretion of teachers and assume that they have directed their students to study enough poems or short stories to equal the amount of study that would go into a novel or play. Of course it is not necessary for a student to refer in detail to every poem they might have studied in their coursework piece, just as they wouldn't necessarily refer in detail to every part of a novel.

Detailed guidance about task setting has been given in previous reports and again it proved to be the case that those tasks that directed the students to debate or argue a point tended to be the most successful as they fully met the AO3 requirements and gave the students a clear focus and structure for their work. Tasks that were based on comparing themes or characters tended to take the form of a list of features which often did not lead to a conclusion and did not encourage the student to tease out different ideas and meanings.

Many pieces of work were well referenced and there were some impressive bibliographies, which was very good to see. If teachers wish to discuss any of the tasks their students may be about to undertake they should email their coursework advisor.

### **The Critical Anthology Piece**

This part of the unit has always been strong and it was the impression of many moderators that it continues to go from strength to strength. It is often the part of the folder which shows most individuality and originality of thought and many students had clearly enjoyed producing this part of their coursework.

All sections of the anthology are being used by schools and colleges for this piece of work, with the section on aesthetic value and canonical status becoming increasingly popular. As with the comparative piece the most successful tasks had a clear focus and contained a requirement to debate or argue. There were not many tasks which asked students to "Do a feminist criticism of ...." but where they did occur they did not support the students in achieving against the criteria.

It was interesting to see some different styles of writing being submitted for this piece. Some students chose to write articles, which often worked well, especially where the audience and publication context were clearly defined, and some chose speeches, often arguing for or against the relative merits of a text.

## Administration

January 10<sup>th</sup> is a tight deadline, so moderators were pleased when centres kept to deadlines, or in some cases administered work to arrive before Christmas. There were, though, a few centres who clearly struggled to get candidates to submit in time for teachers to do the assessment. In these cases the January option should not be used, as moderators also have very tight deadlines to meet.

Much of the paperwork and posting is now done by examination officers, but it really is helpful if the following happens:

- With 19 or fewer candidates all work plus red and yellow copies of the mark list are sent to the moderator, ideally in rank order
- With 20 candidates or over, the red and yellow copies of the mark list are sent to the moderator, who will ask for a sample. This sample should be sent quickly, and again ideally in rank order of marks
- Some centres are using postal services which require a signature on delivery. In many cases, this leads to considerable delay while packages are collected from sometimes distant sorting offices. Please use 1<sup>st</sup> class post, as required by AQA.

## Conclusion

There was much interesting work seen by moderators this January and, as has been already mentioned, this is to the credit of teachers and students in schools and colleges all over the country. As we go forward into the next series it is important to have the core principles of *further* and *independent* reading fully embedded in the way the unit is delivered. We want to see students, as far as possible, exploring texts and topics that interest them and producing their own original work at the end of their two years of study. Where they have been encouraged to do this, helped and guided by their teachers, their work is fresh, vibrant and invariably more successful.

## Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

## Converting marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by visiting the link below:

[www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion).