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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
In English Literature (9ET0\_04)  
Component 04: Non-Examination Assessment

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## **General comments**

Thank you to all centres for their submissions for the 2019 series of non-examination assessment (NEA)/coursework. There was widespread evidence of good practice amongst teachers and students in the summer 2019 submission. This report will highlight areas of good practice as well as identify areas that prevented students from achieving their full potential.

As this is the third series of the new qualification, it was encouraging to see how many centres had taken on board feedback provided in the reports given by the moderating team from previous series. Some excellent folders were submitted this year. Moderators commented that it was refreshing to see so much original and scholarly work that clearly reflected the commitment and sheer hard work of students. Many students had tackled challenging texts and found original and interesting things to say about them. It was pleasing to see that students had been encouraged to read widely, including interpretations that could be applied to their texts. They also included their own personal interpretations of their texts. Many students used interpretations of texts by different readers in a sophisticated way to illuminate their own argument.

Most centres continue to use the free resources available from Pearson, such as exemplar material and the Coursework Advisory Service when assessing work for this component. It was also rewarding to note that many centres had clearly followed the advice given in last year's report, or given via the English Subject Advisor and/or at face-to-face meetings, to emphasise to students the importance of developing their own tasks. However, unfortunately, some isolated centres or centres new to Pearson did not appear to have taken advantage of the available resources and free training, and therefore faced significant difficulties, both in preparing their students appropriately, and in assessing their work accurately.

## **Text choices and themes**

There are no prescribed texts for this component, but centres can receive advice from Pearson on their choices. Overall, moderators reported a mixture of 'typical' scenarios and interesting and unusual combinations.

An aim of this component is to encourage wider, independent reading, so it is positive to see centres opting to offer students a broad range of texts to choose from or to see students making their own choices with guidance and support from available resources. Giving students free choice of texts, titles and critical research is designed to foster an independence of approach and the development of each student's own critical position. The benefits in engagement and personal critical development when personal choice was optimised was evident in some of the strongest responses. Moderators noted that most students had chosen texts that engaged their interest, and selected titles that enabled them to meet the assessment criteria at an appropriate level.

Some students can lack the confidence to fully embrace the freedom on offer, and a number of centres offered the support of a shared text or texts, examined collectively, with a choice of independent text or texts; this blend of supported and independent study again tended to work well in developing the capacity to demonstrate independent critical understanding. Such an approach enabled one student to produce a fluent and assured critical evaluation of negatively viewed protagonists in *Things Fall Apart* and *Lolita* and another to produce an assured and highly sophisticated evaluation of the ways Huxley and Orwell raised issues of control in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

However, a few centres set the same two texts for students along with a limited range of tasks. This resulted in some very similar responses that did not effectively demonstrate independent research and thinking skills as effectively as possible. In some of these centres the same sources appeared on bibliographies, so the students had also read the same secondary sources, which further limits an independent approach. These were, however, in a minority. Where texts were the same for students in a cohort, a range of task titles often allowed for more independent study to be demonstrated.

Moderators noted some popular texts choices that were successfully explored, as in previous series, and some interesting combinations and alternatives.

Some popular texts included *The Great Gatsby*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Color Purple*, *Brave New World*, *The Bell Jar*, *A Handmaid's Tale*, *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Rebecca*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Lolita*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Homecoming*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Tempest*, *All my Sons*, *Translations*, *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Some more unusual choices included *The Collector*, *Boston Strong*, *LA Confidential*, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Notes On A Scandal*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Giovanni's Room*, *Orlando*, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

Interesting combinations included:

- *The Road* with *Slaughterhouse-five*
- *The Woman in White* with *Cloud Atlas*
- *Mrs Dalloway* with *The Buddha of Suburbia*
- *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* and *A Spool of Blue Thread*.

There were few examples of rubric infringements this series – centres are reminded that texts in translation are not allowed for this component.

Some of the themes noted were:

- presentation of women in society
- deception
- trauma
- presentation of terrorism
- concept of revenge
- supernatural events influencing social behaviour
- corruption of humanity
- experience of confinement
- dystopian societies
- the role of the victim

- gender roles
- nature of identity
- how war determines a character's fate
- oppression as symptom of colonisation
- social taboos
- LGBT experiences.

The most common themes were similar to those of 2018: the American Dream, dystopian societies, aspects of the female experience in a variety of cultures, the Gothic and mental health, post-colonialism.

Texts used for the theme of the American Dream included *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *American Psycho*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *On The Road*, *Ethan Frome* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

Texts used on the theme of dystopia included *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Brave New World*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Road*. It is a credit to centres using any texts that are also prescribed texts for the prose examination, that they had indicated that they were not using these texts for this examination.

The Gothic theme proved to be less popular than previously, with some previously common texts not chosen and a smaller proportion choosing *Wuthering Heights*, *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *The Castle of Otranto*.

*Things Fall Apart* was a commonly chosen text, reflecting the greater popularity of post-colonial texts, with *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Purple Hibiscus*, *Burmese Days* and *A Passage to India*.

The impact of oppression of the female on mental health continued to attract using *The Bell Jar* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *The Catcher in the Rye* – both less popular than in previous years – were studied in an exploration of similar issues regarding male mental health.

The female experience in a variety of cultures was again popular with *The Color Purple*, *The Bluest Eye*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *Sula*, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, *The God of Small Things* and *Americanah* all being used.

As in previous years the majority of the texts selected were novels or novellas, although a particularly strong example was seen using modern drama pairings with Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* to explore issues of identity, gender, and race. The variety of texts and tasks within some individual centres was admirable.

## Assignment setting

The quality of the task set is crucial in determining how successfully students can address the five Assessment Objectives (AOs) for this component.

Even though several centres ticked the box to indicate using the Coursework Advisory Service, the titles used did not always direct to all Assessment Objectives. Task titles that focus solely on AO2, for example 'How does Miller present the theme of...?' did not always lead to critical material or contextual material being covered. Students often chose a critical statement or quotation from which to develop their argument. While not a requirement, this could help the development of critical evaluation where students could use this as evidence of support for or contradiction of their own personal viewpoint.

In order to support AO4 and AO5 development students should be encouraged to consider AO5 broadly as alternative interpretations and readings of texts alongside their own critical positions. Some students did not refer to any critical interpretations, i.e. published critical material discussing their text. A disappointing number relied on internet 'student guide' sources. These are excellent sources to support initial learning and understanding of a text. However, they rarely feature critical material (for example, offering a discrete perspective or opinion on the text). It is therefore difficult to engage with them in a way that meets the criteria for AO5.

Some centres helpfully incorporated a reminder to students to keep AO3 and AO5 in mind in the formulation of their tasks, though this occasionally had the result of foregrounding these areas to the detriment of AO2.

Choice of theme had a mixed impact – most themes were entirely suitable, but some were too broad or vague, meaning students sometimes struggled to focus their argument. Others, conversely, could be too focused and specific, meaning that some students felt constrained by their topic and were unable to offer alternative perspectives. It is a credit to centres that teachers clearly knew what worked for their students. There were some cases where a title initially appeared slightly unhelpful, but the student clearly thrived on this approach.

Assignment setting often shed new light on well-known combinations of texts or provided a pleasing critical focus – for example, the 'crisis of masculinity' in *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman*, or comparing two texts linked to the American Dream with a focus on the female experience.

## Assignment marking and internal standardisation

It is pleasing to report evidence of much purposeful, effective and enthusiastic engagement with texts and tasks as students met the demands of this component. It is also pleasing to report that most centres applied the standard accurately. The marginal annotation and summative comments of most centres showed familiarity with the AOs.

As in previous series, it was noticeable that marks were more often agreed where a centre had carefully annotated through pertinent marginal comments and detailed summative comments, and where there was clear evidence of

thoughtful internal moderation. Internal moderation should have follow a clear rationale and provide explanations if marks are changed. There was a correlation of moderators being unable to agree the marks, when the sample was presented with very little annotation and only brief summative comments given, which meant more of a 'marking' exercise for the moderators, who were looking to be able to agree the centre's marks. The annotation by some centres was very helpful, when teachers had identified where AOs were met, and provided helpful commentary to support the level awarded. Most centres identified AOs, but some did not indicate a level or supporting comments. Some centres provided a commentary on the essays, or on the authentication sheet (which is editable), which was good practice.

As ever, best practice is where centres offer detailed summative comments at the end of essays with clear reference to how students had addressed the two sets of AOs. These comments should be in line with the assessment criteria grid descriptors, determining the 'best fit' for achievement within each set of AOs. This is much more likely to produce a precise, accurate judgement of the students' work than generalised front cover overviews (even when the language of the descriptors was repeated) or block-highlighted copies of mark grids which were sometimes appended to folders.

### **Assessment Objectives (AOs)**

As mentioned above, the most accurate marking was seen where centres used the three divisions within the levels-based mark scheme to find 'best-fit' in terms of overall marks for the two sets of AOs.

### **AO1–AO3**

Overall, the AOs were appropriately awarded for AO1 to AO3. In the best responses centres had rewarded sophisticated expression and conscious crafting and development of an argument (AO1). Many students were confident in presenting a personal line of argument, supported by critical understanding and independent reading. Some responses showed evident scholarship, and most were interesting to read – often with explorative and illuminating points and connections.

Where AO1 was over-rewarded this generally was due to a lack of proof-reading, for example titles not referenced correctly, lack of apostrophes, lack of capital letters for characters' names and lengthy unwieldy paragraphs, even on Level 5 folders.

For AO1 and AO2 most students were able to use common technical terms appropriately, and some had engaged at a very sophisticated level with writers' lexical choices and syntactical structure. In weaker responses, there was a tendency toward rather colloquial, informal expression that did not seem to justify the marks sometimes awarded in the top two levels. AO2 was sometimes rewarded for sophistication, when it was limited to word-level analysis – some centres studying two drama texts even looked more at word-level analysis as opposed to the dramatists' craft. Generic conventions were handled well and exploration or analysis of the writer's craft has maintained the improvement from the second year across the folders seen: characters were rarely seen as

'people' this year and there was appropriate consideration of aspects of structure/form and language by most students when looking at the writer's craft.

This year, the exploration and analysis of the impact of contextual factors (AO3) reflected the improvement from 2018 and was, in some cases, an overall strength. Moderators noted it was pleasing to see a range of contexts often being accessed (historical, literary, biographical and political/social). In these cases, folders were often of a higher standard and took an integrated approach to discussing these contexts. AO3, contexts, was often well handled by students of all abilities in terms of the context of writer, contemporary reader and receivership, but even some Level 5 folders omitted discussion of readers and receivership through time. The dystopian texts continue to allow students to access relevant modern socio-political contexts (such as discussion of Trump, laws pertaining to surveillance, and continued gender inequality) and these were often used in engaging and successful ways.

### **AO4 and AO5**

This year, the identification or analysis of connections reflected an improvement from 2018 – connections were again a relative strength of many of the responses. Most students were able to offer a reasonably balanced discussion of their texts for AO4, and this usually took the form of alternating paragraphs on each text, generally opened with discursive links, with an attempt to draw the discussion together in the conclusion. An integrated approach was most successful, and a minimum of centres awarded top-level folders with an imbalance of textual coverage or texts dealt with as separate entities.

AO5 was often 'sophisticated' where students provided detailed and wide-ranging awareness of alternative interpretations, including independent reading and literary theory. Moderators reported that consideration of different interpretations and critical views were a relative strength in several centres, and that there has been sustained improvement in the use of other readings. A minimum of centres seemed to have given their students a bank of critical material that was then used by all. This resulted in critical material being explained, rather than developed and evaluated, in a sophisticated way. In a small number of centres, other readings were used to discuss aspects of the topics other than the text (social constructionism, post-colonialism, sexual identity or contextual issues beyond text) and these did not support arguments made about the text itself.

Good advice to centres would be to keep in mind the difference between 'clear, detailed', 'discriminating, controlled' and 'critical and evaluative' for Levels 3, 4 and 5.

### **Word counts and bibliography**

Many centres encouraged students to include word counts, which is good practice. The advisory word limit was adhered to by the vast majority of centres. This word count is 'advisory' and as such centres should not cite this as a reason for a student losing marks. However, it is worth reiterating that this component is an excellent opportunity for students to practise for the assignments many of them will be writing as an undergraduate. As University word limits are often



enforced strictly, sticking to the advisory word count for this assessment is good practice.

There were, however, a number of centres where no word counts were supplied at all, and centres should be advised that where folders are below 2,500 words students are potentially unable to develop their arguments in the depth and detail required to meet the AOs at the upper levels. Longer folders were also an issue in some cases – where folders were 1000 to 1500 words over the suggested limit this tended to affect the cogency of the argument being presented.

Bibliographies, a specification requirement, were usually supplied by students, but there was considerable variation in the format adopted and the range of background material referenced. Centres should remind students to include the publication details of their primary texts in the list of sources, and should give guidance on how to set out the bibliography according to academic conventions.

In developing study skills generally, centres might find it helpful to offer some guidance on how to use footnotes in an academic essay (and not to 'save words'!) since it was often difficult to see where students' own responses to texts were differentiated from those of other readers in their essays.

## **Administration**

As with the previous series, most submissions arrived punctually, in good order and containing all the necessary constituent parts. However, there were some submissions with administrative issues.

Ideally, folders should be organised as follows: completed NEA authentication sheet (including Texts Coverage Check), completed non-examination assessment piece. The recommended way of keeping folders together is via treasury tags.

The submission to the moderator must include the following:

- the sample of students' work indicated by ticks against student names on Edexcel Online (each student's work with the authentication sheet attached to the front using a treasury tag). If any student has been withdrawn or if they have an incomplete submission, a replacement folder along with a covering note for the moderator. Please check the number of folders is matched to the size of your cohort
- in addition to the sample, the work of the highest and lowest-scoring students (unless either were already in the sample)
- a print-out of the marks entered for the whole cohort from Edexcel Online.
- a note to the moderator if you are the only assessor in a centre to explain that there will not be evidence of internal moderation on the sample submitted
- centres are not required to submit a 'centre authentication sheet' signed by all teachers assessing NEA. The only authentication sheets required are those for each individual student.

While errors of addition, missing signatures or other administrative inaccuracies were by no means widespread this series, where they did occur, they were likely to cause delays to the moderation process.

### **Some useful advice to centres is**

Always ensure before instructing students on their NEA to consult the JCQ document 'Instructions for conducting non-examination assessments (new GCE and GCSE specifications)'<sup>1</sup>. This has vital advice on, for example, task taking (including advice and guidance allowed to be given by teachers, including drafting), assessment of work and internal moderation.

- Request students use at least font 12 and double-space their work.
- Samples must be secured together with treasury tags and without plastic wallets, folders etc.
- Use the latest NEA authentication sheet and ensure that all student numbers and teacher/student signatures are appropriately completed before dispatch to the moderator.
- Ensure folders are correctly assembled; students should number their pages to ensure essays are correctly collated.
- Text coverage checks need to be completed by all students, so the moderator can ensure the correct number and combination of texts have been covered for the qualification.
- Centre-assessors should ensure that marks for each set of AOs as well as the overall total out of 60 (ensuring correct adding-up of the two sets of AOs) are entered on the front cover.
- Check the essay title on the NEA authentication sheet matches the task actually undertaken by the student.
- Some centres helpfully prefaced their students' folders with a centre-designed mark sheet with boxes for marks and comments on each set of AOs as well as a section for completion by another teacher to confirm internal standardisation had been carried out.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the majority of centres, teachers and students provided moderators with evidence of a wide variety of interesting, exciting and illuminating work.

Thank you to all those involved in making this moderation series successful, rewarding and enjoyable. I wish you a very successful 2019/20 academic year and the team look forward to reading the submissions from your students next summer.

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<sup>1</sup> This is available at <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments/instructions-for-conducting-non-examination-assessments>

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