



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

**English Language and Literature B    ELLB1F  
(Specification 2725)                            ELLB1T**

**Unit 1: Introduction to Language and Literature  
Study**

***Report on the Examination***

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Many candidates begin their answers to both Questions 1 and 2 by establishing the audience, purpose and genre for the texts about which they are writing. Whilst this is a useful approach to take, it should in most circumstances, and certainly for Question 2, be clear, brief and relevant to the question. Many observations in these areas do stretch an examiner's belief in a candidate's ability. For example, those who claim that 'the audience is anyone interested in soup' (and claims of that ilk) would be better advised not to pursue the matter and to move swiftly on to analysis of the structure and language of the text. Generally speaking those candidates who do better start Question 2 with comparison and some justification of why the texts are suited to the question. Ignoring the question till part way through the essay is not a good idea – partly because it is usually at this stage that it begins to dawn that at least one of the chosen texts may not suit the question focus. Examiners have frequently observed that the opening page of an answer (or in extreme cases, the opening pages) have no connection with the focus of the question because candidates are so conditioned to write exhaustively about audience, purpose and genre before anything else. Even in Question 1, these should be dealt with most succinctly. Many of the candidates doing *Travel* in particular made no reference to the question except in the opening and concluding paragraphs – and quite a few not even then.

There is a tendency amongst weaker candidates to ascribe meaning to surface features that don't have any meaning on their own: the shape of the text on the page, for example, or certain phonological features. It is extremely unlikely, for example, that Angela Topping crafted the shape of her poem to make it look like a butcher's shop window; and, unless there is solid evidence in the text that she did this (like a footnote in her words that says this), to suggest that she might have done is pointless speculation and not mark-worthy.

Similarly, phonological features such as alliteration and assonance and features of versification, such as enjambment and caesura, don't have any effect at all except in conjunction with the meaning-carrying bits of the text – the lexis and the grammar. Don't concoct spurious reasons such as *it makes the poem flow* or *it makes the reader want to read on* as these will not gain any marks. In contrast, those candidates who examine how the line in poetry chops up the sense units to create new emphases, juxtapositions and contrasts that would not be there without this extra patterning will obviously score highly. Which words and phrases are foregrounded by being placed at the end or beginnings of lines? How does the verse rhythm work with the prose rhythm? Sometimes they trip along hand-in-hand, at other times they cut across each other leaving a real dilemma as to how the text should be read aloud. What does the poet gain from this awkwardness? With the exception of crude onomatopoeia, particular consonant or vowel sounds do not have meaning. Sibilance is not necessarily sinister, calling to mind the hissing of a snake, unless the snake is actually there, poised to pounce in the poem. Plosive consonants like the alliterated (unvoiced bilabial) ones in the previous sentence do nothing but draw attention to, emphasise or foreground key words, phrases and hence ideas in the poem. Yes, sometimes the effect does become kind of onomatopoeic, but only because the poet has associated the idea with the sound earlier in the text, so that now, every time he rings that little bell, the idea is called to mind.

Nor is considering punctuation on its own a particularly fruitful line to take because punctuation, by and large, is not optional (although some candidates write as if it is). If the writer hasn't chosen the punctuation, he can scarcely have endowed it with meaning. Punctuation is a clue to the grammar – the writer *does* choose the grammar.

The new anthology on *Food* appeared to have gone down well with candidates and there were virtually no unsuitable choices of texts made for Question 2 (unlike those re-sit candidates who chose to write about the enriching experience of travel in *Thomas the Tank Engine*). The most popular texts were 1, 4, 5 and 6 together with one or both of the Nigella texts running a close second. Both *A Modest Proposal* and *Titus Andronicus* had significant numbers of takers and there were very few texts that were not chosen by candidates. Those who chose texts because they personally found the food disgusting (has no-one ever eaten

Tripes à la Mode de Caen or tripe and onions delicately poached in milk with a hint of nutmeg?) ran the risk of merely asserting that they didn't like the food itself rather than analysing how the writer or speaker constructed the 'disgusting-ness'. *Tripe* was not an easy text to choose for this question because it was very much an objective piece, unlike the self-publicising, self-regarding approach of the restaurant critic of Text 13. Similarly, those re-sit candidates who chose to write about how much a reader would have been educated or enriched by a particular piece of travel writing failed to see that the focus of the question was on the writer's experiences.

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