



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

**English Language and Literature B ELLB2
(Specification 2725)**

Unit 2: Themes in Language and Literature

Report on the Examination

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The best submissions were, as usual, from students who fully understood the requirements for the two coursework tasks and whose writing skills were sufficiently well developed to enable them to structure interesting and engaging pieces for both tasks. The most impressive work came from centres where students showed real mastery of the set texts and had been encouraged to think for themselves in the selection of extracts for Part A. This, linked to good writing skills, resulted in detailed, perceptive and insightful explorations of the similarities and differences between the two chosen extracts. Students producing the most creditworthy creative writing showed a willingness to be innovative in devising new scenarios in which to present themes and ideas from the source text(s). Challenging approaches were linked to good understanding of the chosen genre. There was much good evidence of highly professional practice in preparing students for the coursework and in managing internal assessment and standardisation. A number of centres have developed in-house arrangements for recording the *Evidence of Planning*. This approach had clear benefits for students and is certainly helpful to the moderation process.

Centre marks were generally accurate for work which fell in the two top bands. Moderators did not encounter more than a handful of cases where very good work had been undervalued by the centre. Teachers showed very good judgement in acknowledging excellent work (Band 6) and work which, though less accomplished, demonstrated good understanding of the set texts and showed at least a sound knowledge of critical analysis (Band 5). Many 'middle band' responses were rightly rewarded for successfully linking ideas to the set theme and in keeping a clear focus on the extracts. What characterises these Band 4 responses is often the imbalance between discussion of theme and exploration of writers' methods.

Weaknesses in assessment started to emerge in the evaluation of the lower bands. While there was little difficulty in most centres in establishing a fair rank order, there was often a failure to discriminate effectively and fairly between submissions which were excellent and very good by comparison with those weaker submissions which were two or more bands below the better folders. There was a distinct tendency in annotation to 'talk up' the strengths of weaker folders and to ignore the weaknesses and omissions. It is not productive to attempt to reward isolated comments in a response that has little structure and no coherent discussion. It was often the case that very mediocre work was awarded a mark at the top of Band 4 or into Band 5 while excellent work was awarded only a few marks more in Band 6. This is the area – accurate identification of Band 2 and Band 3 qualities - which gave rise to most of differences between the moderator and the centre. The concept of 'a balance of strengths and weaknesses' in Part A is not fully understood in some centres and many very poorly presented creative pieces are unacceptably over-rewarded.

As far as can be ascertained, the levels of difficulty were the same for each of the pairings and each set theme, though some centres encouraged their students to refocus the theme of *Questionable Motives* so that it related to the authors (Shelley/Frankenstein). Others considered *Memorable Characters (Carroll/Rowling)* in relation to other themes such as villainy, power or gender. There is no reason why a wider interpretation should not be undertaken. In some cases this worked well but some weaker students spent far too much time considering Capote's motives in ways that did not link easily to the chosen extracts. A more serious divergence from the spirit of the unit is the failure of some students to offer any comparison of the ways in which the theme is presented. Some students do not appear to understand the principles of studying paired texts as distinct from studying two set books. Apart from the very best work, the consideration of how language and style change over time was the weakest aspect of the whole submission and for many students, if there were no archaic words, there was nothing to say about the texts. Students should be encouraged to look at the topic more broadly. Discussion of changes in genre and taste can legitimately be included.

Despite issues around the accuracy of marking or weaknesses in students' approaches which are dealt with in the individual feedback to centres, the majority of centres are on message with what the unit is designed to teach and test. Nevertheless, a surprising minority of centres are not working within the spirit of the coursework unit, in that an increasing number submitted folders in which all or at least the majority of their students' Part A pieces relied heavily on a few chosen extracts. This suggests a very narrow approach to the texts and even some element of directed choice which the rubric does not permit. As to Part B, preparation in some centres appears to have been very cursory. Students had limited understanding of what a creative approach might be. It was common to find a number of students from the same centre submitting creative tasks which were identical in conception and inclined towards the mundane. There was a worrying amount of poor work showing only the most superficial grasp of the potential in the two tasks both by students and by supervising teachers. It was particularly noticeable that instances of rubric infringements and misunderstandings by centres are more prevalent now than at the start of this unit. For this reason, some paragraphs outlining good practice, taken from the Principal Moderator's Report 2009, are repeated at the end of this report to assist teachers who may have recently taken responsibility for the unit. In addition, centres are reminded that they are required to base their standards on the exemplar standardisation material supplied on-line by the board. Good management of information within the word limit proved a useful discriminator.

Students appear to have benefited from the tight structure imposed by the rubric. Any tendency to digress from the brief or to labour the point is reined in. A number of supervising teachers commented upon submissions which were overlong or too short and some centres explained how they had responded to this in their evaluation. Centres are thanked for this rigorous implementation of the rubric governing word limits. The most recent version of the *Candidate Record Form* (CRF) requires centres to record accurate information on word counts.

Extracts from the Principal Moderator's Report Summer 2009 **Annotation and accuracy in the award of marks**

In awarding marks for Part A, centres rightly gave credit in the top band to students whose work was excellent but supervising teachers were reluctant to identify weaknesses in less skilful work. There was a tendency for centres to over-reward work which dealt well with themes and character at the expense of features of crafting and narrative technique. High marks were given to analyses that were over-general, offered limited focus on the set theme and were cursory in their discussion of linguistic and literary features. Internal assessment tended to focus on strengths and did not always successfully identify a balance of strengths and weakness. Significant omissions and instances of superficiality were not always recognised in submissions where students had written fluently but with a relatively narrow agenda. Centres which had rigorous internal standardisation arrangements, with internal moderation sheets on which colleagues exchanged views in a series of jottings, were less prone to this leniency. It was noticeable that scripts which were annotated with evaluative comments were much more accurately assessed than those which carried random comments, generally of a descriptive kind. Some centres offered only summary comments on the *Candidate Record Form* which did not reference precise sections of the work. The least effective type of annotation is that which labels paragraphs according to AO's with no supporting comment or evidence. Such annotation is limited in usefulness and is insufficient to explain the award of marks. The following criteria might be helpful to centres in assessing the appropriateness of their annotation practice.

The most effective annotation:

- *comments appropriately on the unique features of each individual submission*
- *highlights effective analysis of chosen extracts*
- *is not unduly reliant on the wording from the mark band descriptors*
- *offers judgements that are perceptive and evaluative*

- *identifies both strengths and weaknesses*
- *uses the marking criteria*
- *matches the marks awarded.*

Word limits

Photocopies of chosen extracts

A surprisingly high number of students still did not submit photocopies of their chosen extracts with START and FINISH clearly marked. In some cases, this was a naïve oversight but further investigation often revealed that students had made use of excessively long sections of the texts or had edited the text out of all recognition. It also raised questions as to how internal assessment was undertaken. Teachers' annotation occasionally made reference to 'good use of chosen extracts' which could not be supported from a reading of the student's work. Centres need to be aware that it is part of the moderator's standard practice to cross-check between students' writing and the extracts to confirm that the work is substantially relevant to the chosen extracts. From January 2010, students must include photocopies of the extracts they have chosen, with START and FINISH clearly marked. Photocopies are better suited for the purpose of moderation than word-processed copies because they also supply the moderator with page references and allow the moderator to check that there has been no undue editing.

Evidence of Planning (the student's brief handwritten declaration that introduces the two tasks) is not assessed but allows the candidate to explain to the reader how the tasks are being approached. This gives the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate that the work is genuinely his or her own and supports the statement on the *Candidate Record Form*. Several centres provided other robust evidence of their anti-plagiarism policies.

An example of good practice for Part A might be along the lines of "I decided that an important element in the fantasy of both books was each writer's use of animals and after experimenting with a number of extracts, I reduced my search to mythical animals." It was occasionally unclear what the candidate was hoping to achieve in Part B. Where the text type for Part B could not be determined, it was difficult for the moderator to assess the appropriateness of the mark awarded, especially where the work was not annotated.

Administration

As with everything new, there are inevitable teething troubles. Supervising teachers who had followed the instructions in the specification and had taken advantage of AQA training sessions and the advice available from coursework advisors were in a strong position to guide their students effectively. Minor problems were relatively easy to resolve and centres are thanked for the prompt response to moderators' requests for further documentation and additional information.

Administration is easier if centres avoid the excessive use of **plastic pockets** from which students' work has to be removed in order to read it. The work of each candidate should be securely stapled or tagged.

Several centres had not fully appreciated that **drafts are not required**. Drafts can occasionally be a cause of confusion where the final pieces are not clearly identified. There is no specific credit for evidence of the drafting process.

Overall, the standard of neatness and clarity, especially the clear word-processing, made the task of moderation much easier. In a few instances, students chose an unreasonably small point size, perhaps to disguise excessive length. **Point 12 must be the minimum**. In academic writing, the overuse of boldening, which makes continuous prose particularly hard to read, should be discouraged.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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