Principal Moderator Report

Summer 2018

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Language and Literature (9EL0_03)
Unit 3: Investigating and Creating Texts

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Moderator Report For GCE English Language And Literature Coursework 9EL0/03

General comments: as this is the second series of the new qualification, it was encouraging to see how many centres had learned lessons from last year's work and ensured that students were able to produce lively, original work supported by rigorous, analytical commentaries. There were many centres new to the qualification and the overall impression was that all centres had embraced the spirit of the syllabus; many centres used the Coursework Advisory Service for ideas about stimulus texts, themes and tasks to ensure that their candidates were able to meet the requirements of the Assessment Objectives.

Moderators frequently commented on the high quality of much of the work and the ways in which centres had encouraged candidates to use wider reading and research, (including interviews with friends and families), as well as knowledge gained from other A level subjects to inform their writing. Topics inspired by History, Psychology, Philosophy, Modern Foreign Languages, Music and Drama (to name a few) were much in evidence. Most centres encouraged candidates to follow their own ideas and very few centres offered what might best be described as identical submissions, where it was often difficult to distinguish between folders.

Some centres used the topics/themes suggested in the specification, but many candidates offered their own ideas, some of which were variations on a theme. Where a broad topic such as racism was offered, the best responses focused on specific aspects of the subject, such as changing attitudes or the effects on particular groups and individuals.

As with last year, there was a clear connection between the quality and extent of wider reading and the overall achievement of the folder, in both the literary writing and the non-fiction work. Those candidates who had researched generic aspects of journalism and had read a lot were much better served than those who offered 'articles', but had clearly never read any. Similarly, the thematic, structural and stylistic influence of literary wider reading was also evident, and candidates whose reading might be described as ambitious usually did better than those who had taken the easy option of reading a single, undemanding stimulus text. We would not wish to proscribe specific texts, but a good rule of thumb would be to consider what influences the candidate can discuss in the commentary.

Awareness of generic conventions is a key discriminator in both parts of the creative submission. Many candidates were willing to experiment with narrative devices and structural features in their literary writing. These included split narratives, fragmented narratives using epistolary techniques, dramatic monologues, extracts from plays and screenplays, use of non-fiction genres such as journalism and blogs to tell the story. These allowed the candidates to offer detailed and specific commentaries about the shaping of texts at both a lexical and syntactical level and offer developed evaluation of whole text features.

Similarly, the best non-fiction work was rooted in secure understanding of genre, purpose and audience; commentaries on this work often offered subtle, nuanced discussion of the nature of the text and how it had been shaped to meet expectations (and sometimes to subvert them!).

Themes and core texts: again, many centres used the original specification suggestions for themes, but others (the majority), encouraged candidates to develop their own themes, ranging from explorations of identity to society's attitudes towards a variety of issues such as gender and race.

The most popular core fiction text was still *The Kite Runner*, although *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Handmaid's Tale* (not surprisingly), *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were also evident. Some candidates, as last year, used other titles by the authors of their exam texts, so *Death of a Salesman*, *Tender is the Night* and a number of Shakespeare plays were featured. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Collector* and *Regeneration* still continued to be popular, as did texts from 9EL0/01 and 9EL0/02 as long as they are different from those texts studied for the exam and specified on the coursework front sheet.

There was a similar range of non-fiction texts, although some candidates seem to have read a few journalistic articles, rather than complete texts (this approach was sometimes self-penalising as many candidates struggled to deal with the precise requirements of some non-fiction genres). Popular choices included work by Michael Moore, Naomi Wolf and Naomi Klein. *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* and the anthology *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs* all featured in many bibliographies. Collections of Charlie Brooker's work were also popular; some candidates were able to replicate what was often referred to in 9EL0/01 answers as his 'self-deprecatory' and 'sardonic' style, although candidates who thought this was an easy option were often proved wrong.

Pairings of texts: a notable feature of many submissions this year was the thought which had been given to the pairing of the literary and non-literary stimulus texts. This allowed for connections to be made in the commentaries, but also ensured that there was a clear distinction between the two creative pieces. This allowed some of the strongest candidates to show what they could do in different styles, exploring the same theme in startlingly diverse ways. For example, a serious fictional treatment of the stresses placed on young people in schools could be paired with a Brooker-style rant about the dire state of the government's education policy.

The following list is offered as examples of possible pairings of texts. All of these were part of this year's submissions and were very successful. This is merely a guide to how certain centres and candidates approached the stimulus material. It is not intended to be prescriptive; centres and candidates are encouraged to devise their own ideas. In many cases, several candidates from the same centre would use the same pairing but would develop their theme and task individually.

- *Frankenstein* (Shelley)/*Necropolis: London and its Dead* (Arnold)

- *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde)/*Grayson Perry: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl* (Jones)

- *The Color Purple* (Walker)/*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

- *Six Stories and an Essay* (Levy)/*A Beginner's Guide to Acting English* (Khorsandi)

- *A Clockwork Orange* (Burgess/*The Profession of Violence* (Pearson)

- *The Yellow Birds* (Powers)/*Hardtack and Coffee; The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Billings)

- *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini)/*Freedom at Midnight* (Collins and Lapierre)/ *Gunning for God* (Lennox)

- *Life of Pi* (Martel)/*The Motorcycle Diaries* (Guevara)

- *Nausea* (Sartre)/*Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Kaufmann)

- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell)/*The Blair Years* (Campbell)/*Hack Attack: How the Truth Caught up with Rupert Murdoch* (Davies)

- *Flood* (Baxter)/*Hydro-politics* (Ohlsson)

- *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Highsmith)/*The Psychopath Test* (Ronson)

- *Maurice* (Forster)/*Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (Winterson)

- *The Help* (Stockett)/ Nickel and Dimed (Ehrenreich)

- *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Perkins)/*Once in a House on Fire* (Ashworth)

- *Going to Meet the Man* (Baldwin)/*Through the Pain Barrier* (Dworkin)

- *Howards End* (Forster)/*Into the Wild* (Krakauer).

Tasks

Fiction
As already mentioned, this year's submissions were characterised by a range of forms and styles. Candidates were prepared to attempt ambitious narratives. The best of these had been scrupulously edited and proof-read; those which stayed within the word count tended to fare better than those who ignored the maxim that less can sometimes be more. Some candidates did indulge in purple prose and felt that every noun required at least one modifier and every verb needed an adverb. These were in the minority. Some brave souls attempted parodies of, amongst others, Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde. It was also evident that the best submissions were those where the candidate had made their own decisions about form, structure and theme.

Non-fiction
The best work in this section was notable for the range of styles attempted and the obvious influence of stimulus texts as style guides. Favourite genres tended to be journalistic, but there was a range of styles attempted in this broad area. The best work was well within the suggested word count and, like the literary work, had been carefully edited and proofread. Candidates who had conducted interviews and wider research were able to re-shape the material through, for example, reported speech and precis. Biography and autobiography were also popular, although in the case of some of the former, it was hard to see either the purpose or how the material had been reshaped. Candidates who offered travelogues based on personal experience were often successful; World Challenge, field trips and other school visits were a rich source of material. Bill Bryson was often cited as an influence, but an account of a family holiday in the style of Paul Theroux stood out as being especially successful.

Most centres seem to have got the message about the nature of non-fiction work, so first-hand experience of war zones and natural disasters were few and far between. However, accounts of arranged marriages and being affected by the Manchester bombing of 2017, based on interviews and other research, were examples of how to reflect on the modern world in an authentic and moving manner.

Commentaries
Although not worth as many marks as the creative work, many centres had used the commentary writing to supplement candidates' exam preparation in terms of close textual analysis and integrating contextual discussion. Again, the best commentaries were all well within the word count and avoided explanation and observation, focusing on evaluating the effect of linguistic and literary choices. Discussion of the influence of stimulus texts was also a key discriminator and some excellent examples of this are offered elsewhere in this report.

Last year we stated:

'Weak commentaries often described the content of work or quoted at length without developed analysis at either word, sentence or whole text level. Conclusions about particular choices were often limited to superficial references about making the work easy to relate or making the reader want to read on.'
These observations still apply to candidates in the lower levels.

Bibliographies

These are required in the specification and are an opportunity for the moderator to gauge the extent and quality of the wider reading and research. They should include references to primary texts, as well as web sites, articles, films. There was often a correlation between the quality of the bibliographies (and the care with which they were presented) and the overall achievement.

Presentation of work

On the whole, this was of a very high standard and made the moderation process very straightforward. A few centres still persist in submitting work which could generously be described as careless. As a rule of thumb, it should be immediately clear to the moderator what they are reading, for example through the use of basic headings and explanations.

The Non-examination (NEA) Authentification sheet is a good place to clarify genre, purpose and audience. Many centres submit fully word-processed versions of the authentication sheets, personalised by the candidate and including a single sentence synopsis of content and theme.

For example, a top-level candidate included this as a helpful guide for the moderator: 'A speech by a student for a school's Celebration of Achievement, asking whether money can buy happiness'. This might be regarded as good practice. Can a student summarise in a single sentence what they are writing, for whom and why?

Most centres no longer submit journalistic work in columns, although specific styles ,such as scripts should adhere to genre conventions. Different fonts can be an effective way of differentiating different narrative voices.

Work should be printed single-sided, double-spaced, in a font such as Times New Roman or Arial, font size 12. It should be held together by a treasury tag. Candidate and centre numbers and names should be checked and each piece of work should have a word count. A number of centres included a check list for their students and this ensured that these folders were fully in line with specification requirements.

Administration

The overwhelming majority of centres sent their work in plenty of time to meet the 15 May deadline, with all the requested folders, including the highest and lowest, plus EDIs, authentication sheets completed accurately, with work arranged in uniform order, collated with treasury tags.

Some did not.

Assessment

One of the most striking features of this series was the quality and accuracy of centre assessment. There was inevitably both under- and over-rewarding of work and this was most prevalent in the commentaries, where observational, explanatory and descriptive accounts of the content were sometimes given very high marks. The criteria for Level 5 require an evaluative approach, with sophisticated structure, discussion of nuances and an appropriate register and style. For creative work to achieve Level 5, it must be accurate and assured, with an individual voice suited to audience and function. However, there is no reason why outstanding work, which does not need to be perfect, cannot be awarded full marks. n the whole, centres did seem willing to use the full mark range, although responses below Level 2 were few and far between.

The purpose of annotation is to justify the awarding of marks and to allow moderators to see how decisions have been reached by centres. Where possible, two markers should read and annotate scripts, although in some centres this is not practical. The best annotations address the candidate's personal achievements and reflect the character and style of each submission. They should be individual rather than merely copying level descriptors from the marking criteria. Achievement in relation to specific AOs should be highlighted and supported by comments on the nature of the work. Some centres provide separate marking grids and there were many examples of such good practice. However, the quality of summative comments on the work can be very helpful in confirming the centre's judgements.

Exemplars

The following are offered as examples of some of the strengths and weaknesses of submissions from this series.

Exemplar A

This is the opening of a dystopian piece, inspired by *Brave New World*:

'For as long as anyone could remember the People's Party had been the "shepherd of the people"- or so their slogan ran. To every question, they had an answer. To all problems, they had a solution.

Whenever catastrophe came howling, the Party excelled at identifying the root of the dysfunction. Diagnosis came quickly and was always to the same tune. "Wreckers" they called them, hated by all, the malignant tissue buried deep within the tissue of society. Recession, poverty, famine. All the work of the wicked Wreckers. Purgation followed close behind. The crowds would gather, a throbbing swarm of insects drawn by the scent of putrid rage, to which the Party would deliver those deemed responsible like a bone to rabid dogs. It would be over quickly, not for the Wreckers themselves whose fate was one of torment at the hands, fists, various garden utensils and other makeshift weaponry of the crowd……After the Purgation, they would disperse, return to their homes and - having had their fill of routine cathartic sadism – continue life as normal under the People's Party, the Shepherd of their anger.

On a bright fresh morning in Fulton Street, Avery Turner was tending his front garden. His lavatera had grown far too quickly and was now obscuring all light for his rose garden. It would have to go, he thought, reaching for his shovel …'

Comments: the writing here is controlled and the candidate has used multiple influences to shape the material. The shifting perspectives are well handled and the juxtaposition of horror and the mundanity of ordinary life is effective in establishing world of the story. The whole piece was awarded a mark in Level 5.

Exemplar B
This is the opening of a first-person narrative:

'It wasn't a good day but I suppose none of them are. Waking up to the sound of silence every morning was almost as deafening as a toddler's screech. In that respect I'm lucky: no family to look after; no one to let me down; free to do what I want, when I want. It felt like freedom. I climbed out of my king-sized bed, the memory foam mattress not having much to remember except my dead stillness. Wiping my ever-aging face I slipped into my velvet dressing gown, the Prada logo shimmered, reflecting the painfully white sunlight that dotted the horizon.

I dragged myself downstairs, tediously completing my morning rituals identical to every other for the past twenty years. It felt like Groundhog Day. I was in a cycle… just moving through the steps of life, like a broken cog in a broken system.'

Comments: the writing is not as controlled as in the previous example but there is a clear attempt to establish a narrative voice and the use of cliché is intended as a deliberate part of the character's idiolect. The whole piece was awarded a mark in Level 4.

Exemplar C
This is the opening of a TED talk exploring attitudes to mental illness:

'Hello and welcome. Today we will be exploring the somewhat taboo subject of mental illness and its links to violence, specifically Multiple Personality Disorder. But we'll come to that later. First and foremost, let's start with some basic facts.

The Google definition of dissociative disorder is a "condition that involves disruptions or breakdowns of memory, awareness, identity or perception."

It's an unusual condition- it even changes your handwriting, according to medical professionals- and it's even stranger to have. When you hear people talk about an "out of body experience" it's pretty much that—you're not sure who you really are and spend what feels like a minute staring at a wall for what is- in reality- over an hour.'

Comments: this is a good example of a popular choice for non-fiction tasks this year. The direct address to the audience and the secure tonal shifts placed the whole piece comfortably within Level 4.

Exemplar D
This an extract from a travelogue inspired by a family holiday:

'The Black and Red. The Russian roulette. Eros and Thanatos rule the land of Las Vegas.

Death and Desire always travel together. On my journey to "Sin City", travelling through Death Valley, I was engulfed by a terminal feeling. Whether it was the loss of the stars at night (not bright enough to beat the lights of Caesar's Palace), or the vultures picking away at a buffalo's carcass, I don't know, but the feeling followed us everywhere.

Every bump or shake of our Toyota hybrid brought to mind why this sandy purgatory was nicknamed Death Valley and why a camel might have been the better option.

But then…

It couldn't be?

Literally hundreds of miles from the nearest habitation, rising from the sand like the Second Coming: THE Golden Arches. One symbol which can recognised by a British two-year-old and a North Korean ninety-year-old. Whether it's food, drink or heart disease you're after, McDonald's has got you covered.'.

Comments: the mix of registers, the hyperbole and the control of tone ensured that the whole piece was placed in Level 5.

Exemplar E
These are examples of the generalised comments which prevent commentaries from achieving high level marks:

- *In my fiction story, I wrote in first person as I felt this would be the perfect way to connect to the readers more.*

- *Using the third person perspective I was able to delve into each character's thoughts and fears.*

- *I wrote in an article format because it was a way of using my own opinionative language and vital information would be added.*

- *My article is led by headings which describe what each column is about. This will summarise what each column is about and will make the information easier to find for the audience, so content is easier to pull from the text.*

- *In both pieces of writing, the authors both make a lot of religious references and talk about God and prayers. This is important as in both texts, someone close to home is what causes both authors to make religious references again."*

- *I used rhetorical questions, "we are killing our home off, for what?" This helps the audience to think about the situation.*

Comments: although taken out of context, these are typical of the vagueness which characterises Level 2 responses.

Exemplar F
This is a selection of comments where the candidates have synthesised the requirements of different AOs and been able to adopt an integrated approach to analysis.

- *My story uses intertextuality to reveal the main themes, as Hosseini does in The Kite Runner. He alludes to popular films such as The Magnificent Seven. I have referred to Frankenstein…. which focuses on the 19th century fear of science moving too rapidly and of a rational society that forgets the consequences of technology.*

- *My article uses a cyclical structure through the extended use of song lyrics at the beginning and at the end. They give a sense of informality but each lyric resonates with a tone of protest.*

- *Rhetorical questions such as "Where does the problem come from?" act as thought-provoking sub-headings and gently lead the reader to an acceptance of my viewpoint.*

- *At the close of the piece I use the cliché "Vegas got under my skin"; the idiom allowed me to highlight my true enjoyment, juxtaposing with the previous paragraphs of Brysonesque moaning.*

- *I also employed the lexical field of grey in adjectives such as "ashen", "drab", and "leaden" which represent the gradual fading of the narrator's individualism and contrast with the "richly coloured streets" described at the start.*

- *The mocking tone of "Trumped", mirroring that consistently found in Brooker's writing, is established in the headline; the lead paragraph uses topical puns, twisting Trump and May's campaign slogans to ridicule them – "making American satire great again", "Brexit bashing going strong and stable."*

Comments: what these all have in common is a deft use of terminology always at the service of the discussion. Context and the influence of stimulus texts is integrated and quotations are kept short. All are taken from commentaries which were placed in Level 5.

Conclusions

The majority of comments from moderators referred to how enjoyable it was to read work from candidates who had entered into the spirit of the qualification and produced entertaining, engaging and often very moving work, supported by thoughtful evaluation of the shaping of these texts.

It is to be hoped that centres will be able to develop this even further in future, maintaining a balance between creativity and analysis and ensuring that candidates express themselves with an eye always on genre, purpose and audience.