

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

**ENGLISH
LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE (EMC)**

H474

For first teaching in 2015

H474/04 Summer 2022 series

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Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the NEA component. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the tasks and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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General overview

This report reflects the achievements of students in the NEA component for 2022. It is also an instalment in a series of such reports that have been written since 2017. It might be helpful to read this report in conjunction with those from earlier sessions, as there will be inevitable overlap and reinforcement in the messaging.

In this session, moderators again reported seeing impressive work for both Task 1 and Task 2. As AO4 is weighted in Task 1 it is good to see that students are understanding the requirement to produce an integrated study of their paired texts, foregrounding connections, and comparisons throughout. Moderators reported that there were fewer examples of students exploring texts in isolation from each other, with only overarching connections identified. The more students can view the act of comparison in Task 1 as enabling the discussion of one text to throw light, or confer meaning, on the other the more purposeful their writing will become. For Task 2 the hope is that students will produce original writing that is meaningful to them, creative and ambitious. The most successful work demonstrates a keen understanding of specific forms of writing and speaking and draws on learning from elsewhere in the A Level. It is good to see more students identifying appropriate style models in the introductions to Task 2. Working with a style model can help them gain confidence in shaping and organising their material. As they work through the drafting process they can, of course, manipulate these models for creative effect.

These reports have always sought to encourage and celebrate the use of a diverse range of non-fiction and literary texts in Task 1. This component does not seek to prescribe the types of text that are appropriate for study; we are keen that the pairings of text reflect student interests and enthusiasms and enable exciting discoveries to be made. We really do encourage the selection of as wide a range of Task 1 second texts as possible. Unexpected text choices and pairings can generate new learning for students, teachers, and moderators alike.

A greater range of specification texts have been studied in this session. In the past there have been very few appearances of *What the Chinese Don't Eat*, *The Examined Life*, *Skating to Antarctica* and *Twelve Years a Slave*, yet all featured in 2022. In fact, all the twelve specification texts appeared this year. It is encouraging that the set text list in this specification is enabling new text discoveries to be made.

Similarly, in Task 2 the range of text types being produced has shown signs of increasing. More students are now creating original work that is persuasive or entertaining in purpose. Previous reports have talked about how narrowly informative or instructional writing can sometimes struggle to lift itself clear of the material on which it is based. Persuasive and entertaining purposes do seem to engage students' enthusiasm and commitment, as well as giving them a more defined sense of audience and the contexts of reception.

Task 1 Analytical and comparative writing

Text choices

Most students understood the requirement to either pair two specification texts, or pair one of these with a fiction or non-fiction text from outside of the specification. The other rubric requirement that one of these must have been written post-2000 was met by all students. The year-2000 requirement was created to make sure the study of contemporary non/fiction was given standing in the qualification. As this date now lies significantly before the birth dates of most of the students it is good to see examples of very recently published texts appearing. This creates a sense of freshness in topic, and methods of telling, and it broadens the range of reading across the specification.

The approach of a centre teaching the specification text as 'core' and allowing freedom of choice in the selection of the second text was popular again this year. This works particularly well when teaching seeks to open up the ways in which the specification text can be variously linked to other works. One centre taught Jeanette Winterson's *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*, and each student paired it with a different text and a different question focus. There was an impressive range of companion texts and topics explored, including how the writers' represented family conflict; sexuality; normality and happiness; religious indoctrination; adoption; forgiveness; love, loss, and longing; the place of humour in memoir; memoir versus fiction.

Other centres completely opened up choices of both specification and second texts, with student interest as the driver. This approach foregrounds reading, and openness to how texts might be read, in a positive way. One centre had seven of the specification texts represented among their cohort of twelve students, and twelve different second texts selected, focusing on a range of challenging and thought-provoking topics including representations of mental illness, homelessness, discrimination, and murder.

In some cases, it did seem that the choice of second text, while enabling students to pursue their own interests, did work against them in terms of generating material that rewarded close analytical study. There were, again, many examples of celebrity or sporting autobiographies chosen, such as works by the Kardashians, Ozzie (and Sharon) Osbourne, Peter Crouch, Wayne Rooney, and Jeremy Clarkson; along with several texts which fall into the category (perhaps pejoratively) known as 'misery memoir'. These kind of text choices do make it more challenging for students to explore literary and linguistic effects in a way that generates revealing AO2 discoveries. Ozzie Osbourne, in some examples, was paired with Allie Brosch and the focus was on struggles with mental illness. This is an obvious point of connection between the texts, but it is also quite narrow. It proved to be challenging to make this study – and others like it – a study of language, form, and structure: the subtlety and multimodal impact of Brosch's text not finding equivalence in Osbourne's book. It would be good if these students were challenged to take on more demanding choices for their second text, both for the above reason and as a general principle of the NEA being a space to stimulate wider, and more diverse, reading.

Those students who chose more linguistically rich second texts, tended to fare better in this task. One student's pairing of *Stasiland* with Ian McEwan's *The Innocent* was an example of an interesting and creative pairing, that provided initial challenge as well as a range of possible connections with Funder's work. There is more likely to be potential for analysis in a piece of literary fiction than a ghost-written autobiography. Previous iterations of this report give examples of interesting text and topic choices; this is also expanded on in our Teacher guide for this component which could prove useful suggestions for centres wishing to develop the range of their students learning for this component.

Second text selection

When selecting their second, free-choice text, students should be thinking about not just the thematic but linguistic richness of the text. Texts will need to bear up under linguistic and literary scrutiny.

Task titles

It is important that the Task 1 titles give students a good steer in their Task 1 analysis by. An example of an effective title seen this year was 'Compare and contrast the ways in which Masters and Jones present educational disadvantage in *Stuart: A Life Backwards* and *Kes* by Barry Hines using linguistic and literary methods.' This clearly foregrounds the weighted AO4, as well as using the key words 'present' and 'literary and linguistic methods' to guard against the approach becoming too sociological. The texts are interestingly linked, being both accessible and having a clear connection in terms of the impacts of education and social exclusion on working class lives. The specific focus on the topic of education shapes the direction of the response. The combination of a non-fiction journalistic account and an iconic 1960s novel - their differences as much as connections – is an interesting starting point for student discovery.

A note on the Assessment Objectives. It might be helpful, at NEA planning stage, to foreground to candidates the range of methods from integrated linguistic and literary study and the terminology they have learned over the course (AO1). Often candidates demonstrate a good understanding of the writer at work and the creation of meaning, but do not always use subject specialist terminology at the appropriate level to evidence their knowledge. It is useful to be reminded that AO1 has three strands: the application of concepts and methods, the fluency of written expression, and the use of terminology. When crediting AO1 achievement it is good to balance these strands holistically in the marking of Task 1. There are clear links between AO1 and AO2 and the best work will identify and label a feature (AO1) before moving on to ascribe meaning to its use (AO2). The best use of relevant contextual information (AO3) is where it is fully integrated into AO4 comparison. The impact of contexts of production and reception in non-fiction and literary texts is always fruitful investigation. Useful AO4 comment can, of course, be about difference as well as connection: some of the most illuminating AO4 comment is about how treatments differ between paired texts.

Task 2 Original non-fiction writing

In Task 2 requires candidates to produce a piece of original writing in a non-fiction form of approximately 1000 – 1200 words. The original writing should be preceded by a 150-word introduction that reveals an understanding of the form chosen and reflects on some of the literary and linguistic techniques used. This introductions, at their best, are spaces in which candidates can outline their intentions for the writing, the non-fiction form chosen and the implications of this for choices of language, form, and structure. It may be that candidates cite particular style models studied here, or identify a particular audience targeted. The purpose of the introduction is to define the function of the piece and to suggest a real-world context in which it could exist, rather than to evaluate the success of the writing or to produce a commentary on it: it is foreword rather than an evaluation. It is a challenge to achieve this in 150 words and is well worth careful drafting as a well-written introduction can really help in defining the purpose and function of the original writing. There are further comments on the production of effective introductions in previous examiner reports for this component.

This A Level gives weight to creative work alongside the analytical. Students get the opportunity to produce original writing both here and in Section B of Paper 3. Moderators are keen to credit ambitious and creative work from students. Task 2 work doesn't need to be perfect to achieve high marks, but it should be attempting the production of challenging work that reflects student interests, as well as knowledge of text types gained through A Level study. The best Task 2 work demonstrates a keen understanding of text conventions and the ways in which these can be manipulated for effect. Some of the texts produced for this element can seem too straightforward to showcase student learning and creativity. It can be difficult, for example, for a film review to do much with the material that hasn't already been done in the background information researched. That is not to say this particular form should be ruled out, rather that there should be some innovation evident. One student did this very effectively in this session with their piece on British films released in 1947, a golden year for gritty British drama (Brighton Rock, Odd Man Out, They Made Me A Fugitive). The piece was written as if for publication in Total Film magazine and focused not only why these might be considered to be good films but also on their innovative methods of production, and what kinds of reading a contemporary audience might bring to them. It was informative, entertaining, and persuasive in purpose. The identification of Total Film magazine as its intended destination allowed the student to tailor the writing precisely in terms of tone and style. It also gave them a very keen sense of audience. This kind of approach is significantly more ambitious, and gives much more potential for high achievement, than a generic film review of a recently released film.

Life Writing continues to be a highly popular form for Task 2. There were many successful pieces submitted this year covering biography, autobiography, portraits, eulogies, memoir, bio-fiction, journals, blogs, and other forms. Students often, self-effacingly, think their own life experiences are not profound or interesting enough to warrant such treatment, but it can be that seemingly ordinary events (family relationships, dealing with loss, moments of self-realisation) can be shaped into pieces that are very moving and effective. It is clear when moderating this work how much students show commitment to these forms. Some will explore difficult and challenging issues in their Life Writing. One student produced a stunning account of the journey to understanding and acceptance of their sexuality: it was poignant, droll, ultimately uplifting, and extremely well-written. It felt like this writing had a purpose beyond the achievement of a high Level 6 mark in their A Level English Language and Literature NEA.

There were many texts produced again this year that drew on students' concerns for social justice, particularly issues related to gender, sexuality, and mental health. These topics are of huge contemporary interest, and it is obviously appropriate for students to tackle them in their original writing. Many of the approaches were informative in purpose with a persuasive element of a plea for better understanding. It is important for this task that such writing has a clear audience and purpose identified. It can be that just describing the piece as a blog can leave it unclear where it would appear or for whom it is intended. Without that keen sense of audience and purpose the writing can lose shape and impact.

Identify audience and purpose

The most successful pieces of original writing had a clear sense of a specific audience and awareness of purpose that drove the work itself. Clarifying this at an early stage in the planning and drafting process is advised for all candidates.

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