



General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

**LITA4 Extended Essay and
Shakespeare Study**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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General

LITA4 EXTENDED ESSAY AND SHAKESPEARE STUDY

With just over 500 candidates were entered for this first January examination, the moderating team saw a range of work across all four bands, from excellent work which was awarded full marks (70/70) to folders which would undoubtedly have scored more highly had candidates been able to give their work further time for reflection, revision and redrafting. One moderator noted the pleasing variety and matching of texts seen here, and felt that the unit appeared to have been a liberating experience for centres and students; 'centres seemed to have experienced no difficulty in switching from two to three texts and the notion of wider reading has been accepted.' Much of the very best work appeared to have been the result of individually negotiated tasks. This engaging commitment by students and teachers to the selection of texts and topics enabled candidates at all levels to produce interesting and often original work. It is heartening for moderators to find a variety of tasks and texts across a centre's submission, as the centre's work then reflects a range of individual ideas, opinions, interests and analyses.

By extension, some candidates struggled when the centre set only one generic title for all. There is a manifest need to differentiate tasks in this unit, especially when all students write about the same three texts, in order to address individual students' needs and abilities. Moderators found a few less able candidates struggling with challenging tasks which may have suited their more able peers but did them no favours at all. One moderator likened this process to forcing all participants in the qualifying rounds of the Olympic diving competition to attempt the same high tariff dive regardless of their level of skill, when several would have done better with a more straightforward dive better suited to their capabilities. Another noted the danger of an approach which was so rigid that all students in a centre used the same framework and quotations to illustrate the points being made. Indeed, the level of teacher scaffolding required to enable weaker students to access certain very challenging tasks often left them with little choice but to follow a heavily signposted 'party line' laid down by the centre which made it hard to give much credit for the second part of AO3.

Tasks need a sharp and manageable focus that will enable candidates to demonstrate detailed, close reading within the 3000 word limit printed in the specification. Although moderators were gratified to report that the vast majority of folders appeared to be the right length or within 5% of the word limit, there were a very few folders which exceeded this by a frankly outrageous 20% or so. To allow this is almost inevitably self-penalising, as over-long essays are often weaker than those within the word limit, but even when an exceptionally able candidate proves capable of sustaining an excellent performance throughout an essay which substantially exceeds the word limit, to reward them for doing so is no less unfair to other candidates than it would be to allow them to remain in the examination hall for an extra half an hour after all their peers have handed in their papers. The bottom line is that all students - including those awarded 70/70 - must be within or very close to the word limit, and their work should demonstrate those organisational skills which will undoubtedly help them to prepare for the demands of the LITA3 examination, in which being able to compare texts sharply and concisely will be an invaluable asset. In general, it was pleasing to see that students coped well with word limit and the need to move tactfully and economically between texts. Moreover it is possible to see the word limit as a positive advantage; as one moderator put it, 'there was relatively little describing as opposed to analysing texts seen this time - there's just no room for it.!'

ADDRESSING THE ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

This unit covers all the Assessment Objectives with equal weighting being given to AO1, AO2 and AO3 and a lesser weighting to AO4. In terms of the AOs, many centres recognised that candidates' work may well be placed in different mark bands across the four AOs, and flagged this up accordingly.

With regard to AO1, weaknesses in written expression should not be ignored. Since this is coursework, it is expected that candidates will take the opportunity to check and redraft their work; where this is not the case, it must be reflected in the final mark. At each stage, there needs to be a clear sense that the candidate is aware of the authors at work. The most successful use of quotations is brief but frequent, enlivened by analytical comments that do not merely paraphrase the plot but explore the form, structure and language used by the writers. Some candidates quote to prove their points, relaying the plot and/or narrative of their chosen texts via the use of chunky "hanging" quotation which did not move into analysis or evaluation of writers' techniques; the **point-evidence-explanation** paragraph structure drilled into most students at GCSE is not entirely redundant here. Some weaker students quoted dutifully, but paraphrased or 'translated' the quotation as though the moderator might not be able to understand it without their help. On the other hand, the most able candidates produced outstandingly well written academic essays which uses sophisticated terminology but remained clear, cohesive and confident. Appropriate discourse markers helped to create the sense of an overarching argument and the three texts were systematically and relatively equally treated. They developed effective points on one text before bringing in another and saw no need to refer to all three texts into every paragraph.

In order to earn high marks for AO2, candidates need to analyse aspects of all three areas of the triplet – i.e. **form** and **structure** as well as **language**. One moderator noted that 'most students seemed comfortable with close analysis of language but many found it difficult to write as confidently on form and structure, and it was surprising how few considered genre in sufficient detail.' Whether candidates are writing about texts across one, two or all three genres, they must discuss the specific features of poetry, prose and drama and go well beyond singling out minor lexical items. It is hard to understand why more than one candidate chose to spend whole paragraphs analysing *a single word* from a lengthy novel rather than looking at much more relevant, challenging and interesting aspects of narrative form and structure. Indeed some centres over-rewarded their most able candidates with regard to AO2, placing them in Band 4 for 'form, structure and language' when in fact there was virtually nothing on form or structure (i.e. roughly two-thirds of the AO) at all. In order to enhance AO2, centres need to make explicit to students the ways in which different genres of writing present similar themes or subjects, and the key ways in which narratives can be organised. As one moderator commented, 'when candidates persistently refer to the *readers* of a play, it's always a very bad sign.'

In terms of AO3, the best candidates made sustained, interesting and intelligent comparisons and connections across their three texts in terms of narrative structure, genre, critical debate and context. Most made good use of named critics to structure their own argument, although it is quite possible to look at other ways of reading texts – from a Marxist, feminist, dominant or oppositional point of view – without always quoting a secondary source. Whereas simply name-checking a critic and writing 'I agree' is *not* evidence of high quality AO3ii, when a candidate shows an ambitious and conceptualised alertness to the idea of multiple readings with regard to his or her chosen texts, evaluates these readings and uses them to develop new ideas, they have fulfilled all the relevant requirements. It was, mercifully, rare to find essays entirely lacking bibliographies and moreover, when AO3ii was handled well, it undoubtedly enhanced the quality of the candidate's argument (AO1) too. Moderators reported that when candidates entered into

a spirit of debate with the opinions of other readers their work was lively, illuminating and often a pleasure to read, and showed a genuinely conceptualised overview of texts and task.

Contextual factors (AO4) are relatively lightly weighted in this unit, and many candidates chose their contexts carefully and revealed an excellent awareness of the ways in which the contexts of production, reception, culture, society, history, biography, intertextuality and genre can affect texts. One word of warning, however, is appropriate here; while it is understandable for candidates to wish to make intertextual references to other poems, plays and novels they have studied over and above their three main LITA4 texts, this needs to be proportionate; one or two students scattergunned their essays with so many wider reading references and footnotes that it became rather difficult to discern the outlines of the overall comparison of the three core central texts.

TEXT CHOICES

The most popular Shakespeare texts was, perhaps unsurprisingly, *Othello*, but excellent work on *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale* was also seen. All of these plays are excellent choices because they cover so many aspects of the overarching 'Love through the Ages' theme of the LITA3 Reading for Meaning examination. Here, for instance, are representations of the love between:

- husbands and wives
- parents and children
- young lovers
- masters and servants
- female friends
- male friends

These plays also invite us to compare and contrast different types of and contexts for love, such as:

- young love
- mature love
- the other side of love: lust / jealousy / envy
- pure and innocent love
- self-sacrificing love
- brotherly love / companionship
- lost love

Beyond the Shakespeare texts chosen, other worthwhile and interesting choices for study included:

Novels

Pride and Prejudice, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen

Enduring Love and *On Chesil Beach* Ian McEwan

Snow falling on Cedars David Guterson

Rebecca Daphne du Maurier

Plays

The Rover Aphra Behn

Betrayal Harold Pinter

Poetry

Lamia, Isabella and The Eve of St Agnes John Keats
The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale Geoffrey Chaucer
The Miller's Tale Geoffrey Chaucer

Inappropriate poetry texts

The *Coursework Guidance* document for this unit makes it clear that while a collection of poetry is permissible as a second or third text, it must be a cohesive body of work which will bear comparison with a Shakespeare play and another full-length work. However, against all previous advice to the contrary, delivered through teacher support meetings and in the official guidance document mentioned above, one or two centres allowed students to write about a 'lame duck' third text which consisted of only one or two short poems by different authors. If poetry is used, it is far better to choose a collection by one author which enables the students to take an overview at times as opposed to writing about isolated poems as totally separate entities. They need to convey a clear sense of the poetry text as a cohesive body of work as opposed to a seemingly random patchwork add-on. As one very experienced moderator noted, aptly chosen poetry texts have served students well in comparative coursework since the days of the popular 660 specification, but even the most able students are apt to "go through" their chosen poems very thoroughly, framing an often excellent piece of literary appreciation, but forgetting the comparative focus of the essay. As a reminder, the only poetry texts suggested in the official LITA4 *Coursework Guidance* document are as follows:

***Selected Poems* Sylvia Plath**

***Birthday Letters* Ted Hughes**

***Selected Dramatic Monologues* Robert Browning**

***The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* Geoffrey Chaucer**

Thus, while other poetry texts are certainly permissible, they should be equivalent to these. Centres are advised to consult their AQA consortium adviser if in any doubt as to the suitability of specific texts. Moreover, once agreed, centres should not change texts or tasks without contacting their consortium adviser again. One centre had selected the *Selected Poetry of Thomas Hardy* as a third text for some of its candidates with the approval of the consortium adviser, but in the event the students wrote about one or two short poems by different authors. This unauthorised switch had a seriously negative impact upon the work produced.

TASKS

The following selection of excellent, independently chosen and tightly constructed tasks enabled candidates across the ability range to produce the best work of which they were capable:

- Compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare, Ford and Hardy present the destructive nature of jealousy in *Othello*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*.
- Compare and contrast the presentation of destructive individuals in *Othello*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Lolita*.
- Compare and contrast the presentation of women in *Othello*, *Ghosts* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.
- Compare and contrast the presentation of love in *Othello*, *Ghosts* and *The Miller's Tale*.

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- 'Love cannot exist when social barriers are against it.' Compare the presentation of social barriers to love in *Othello*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *On Chesil Beach*.
 - Compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare, Forster and Williams present the dangers of love in *The Winter's Tale*, *A Room with a View* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the darker side of love in *Hamlet*, *Wuthering Heights* and *A View from the Bridge*.
 - Explore the ways Iago's manipulation of Othello is presented in *Othello*. Compare this to the ways Lord Henry manipulates Dorian Gray in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Mrs Danvers manipulates Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the role of women in *The Winter's Tale*, *Othello* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.
 - Marilyn French suggests Desdemona 'accepts her culture's dictum that she must be obedient to males' and is 'self-denying in the extreme'. In the light of this statement, explore the methods the writers use to present women in *Othello*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the various love triangles in *The Winter's Tale*, *Enduring Love* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the darker side of love in *Hamlet*, *Wuthering Heights* and *A View from the Bridge*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of tragic women in *Othello*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Wuthering Heights*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the destructive nature of love and desire in *Othello*, *A Doll's House* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
 - Compare and contrast the methods writers use to present the decline of the central male protagonist in *Othello*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Death of a Salesman*.
 - Compare and contrast the presentation of the darker side of love in *Hamlet*, *Wuthering Heights* and *A View from the Bridge*.

MARKING AND ASSESSMENT

It was good to see that the vast majority of centres had paid close attention to each AO when marking in order to trace variations in their students' performances across the range of skills tested, but had then gone on to take a holistic best-fit approach to decide the final band and mark rather than adopting a harshly numerical approach. This approach was recommended to centres in the AQA's autumn 2009 standardisation materials and worked very well across the whole range of work seen. Following this model (and ensuring that work is clearly annotated following rigorous internal moderation and discussion) was in the best interests of centres and candidates.

Moderators reported that assessments were usually accurate and that the majority of centres had conscientiously cross-marked and moderated their students' work; it is always helpful for the moderator to see the comments of at least two teachers at the end of each essay as evidence that internal moderation has taken place. Moderators sometimes had problems confirming a centre's marks when the summative comment at the end of the essay or on the CRF made general reference to the band descriptors in the mark scheme (or, in one or two cases, simply copied them out) but failed to provide evidence of these by highlighting and annotating the relevant sections in the body of the work itself. **Centres are advised very strongly not to merely list AOs in the margins of a candidate's work without any indication of how far or to what extent the relevant AO has been met.** The best and therefore most accurate marking occurs when teachers identify not only the good features of a candidate's work but also less successful, contentious or erroneous sections. Teachers who undertake a written commentary within the margins of the essay are demonstrating that close attention has been paid to the candidate's work and that every attempt has been made to be rigorous, fair and accurate. Most importantly, perhaps, this commentary, once done, allows the moderator to see how a mark was awarded in the centre. It was excellent to see teachers making explicit reference to the AQA standardising materials which were issued in the autumn of 2009 and stating how far they felt their own candidates' work exceeded or failed to match a particular essay. Where moderators see clear, convincing evidence of a robust internal application of the national standards, the centre's marks are always endorsed.

PRESENTATION OF WORK

The font size and spacing selected by a candidate should not be cramped; a sensible 12 point font such as Times New Roman or Arial with 1.5 or double line spacing is easy to read and allows the teacher marking the folder space in which to conduct the written commentary (mentioned above) in the margins of each candidate's work. As previously stated, the *Coursework Guidance* for this unit gives advice on the presentation of work as well as steerage on task-setting and question construction and readers of this report who have still not read this document are advised to consult it as a matter of urgency. (See the AQA website: www.aqa.org.uk).

SOURCING AND REFERENCING

Candidates should ensure that secondary sources, including internet sites, are acknowledged in their bibliographies and that the accurate word count is always included at the end of each essay. Centres are advised to encourage candidates not to make uncritical use of anonymous and potentially error-prone contributor-sourced web-sites.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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