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# Moderators' Report

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
in English Literature (9ET04)  
Unit 4: Non-Examination Assessment

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## **9ET0\_04 Non-examination Assessment Report to Centres 1706**

Non-examination assessment is assessed via two texts. There are no prescribed texts but centres must select complete texts which may be drawn from poetry, drama, prose or literary non-fiction. Candidates must select different texts from those studied in Components 1, 2 and 3.

The selected texts may be linked by theme, movement, author or period. Literary study of both texts should be enhanced by study of the links and connections between them, different interpretations and the contexts in which they were written and received.

Centres are able to use the published guidance on text selection and the 'Coursework Advisory Service' to request support for text choices and task design.

Overall, moderators reported a mixture of 'typical' and interesting and unusual combinations.

An aim of this unit is to encourage wider, independent reading so it was disappointing to see some centres, including those with very able candidates, opting to teach two texts and then offer the candidates a very limited range of titles to choose from for their assignment. Some very scholarly and well-argued pieces were produced by this process but where a number of pieces all say very similar things and supply very similar bibliographies the intention of the component is somewhat lost.

Some centres suggested one text for study by a teaching group and recommended two or three other texts that could be paired with it so that candidates had some choice; this seemed to allow candidates to successfully meet the assessment objectives as more able candidates went for challenging texts and titles while centres were able to guide less-able candidates in their choices here. Sometimes it appeared that a centre had suggested one text and allowed free choice thereafter; some seemingly unlikely combinations here worked well ('Persuasion' and 'Amadeus', 'Lolita' and 'The Picture of Dorian Gray') but there were others where candidates struggled ('The Handmaid's Tale' and 'King Lear', 'Emma' and 'Great Expectations') and would have benefitted from more guidance in their choice of task.

Overall around half of the submissions gave candidates free choice of texts, titles and critical research. This component, as mentioned, was designed to foster an independence of approach and the development of each candidate's own critical position. The benefits in engagement and personal critical development when choice was optimised could be seen in some of the strongest responses, such as the evaluation of the shadows

behind the glowing reputations of Kurtz and Jay Gatsby; the exploration of Gothic passions in 'Dracula' and 'Wuthering Heights'; or the discussion of cultural heritage and identity in 'Roots' and 'Americanah'.

The two most commonly chosen themes were dystopian societies and the American Dream. The American Dream had not been very popular for coursework in the legacy specification but its frequent appearance can be clearly linked to accessibility of 'The Great Gatsby', which had been a popular examination text and was one of the most commonly used single texts. One moderator noted:

"A common partner was 'Death of a Salesman' and 'The Glass Menagerie', although 'American Psycho' or 'The Catcher in the Rye' were also used. Dystopias were always popular on the legacy specification and the previously well-thumbed '1984' and 'Brave New World' were joined by 'The Man in the High Castle', 'Fahrenheit 451' and 'The Handmaid's Tale'".

'The Handmaid's Tale' was also used by candidates exploring aspects of the female experience in a variety of cultures. It was paired with 'The World's Wife', 'The Color Purple', 'Beloved' and 'The Bloody Chamber'. It also appeared with Gothic texts, such as 'Wuthering Heights', 'Frankenstein' or 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. The impact of oppression of the female on mental health was a frequent selection, using 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Bell Jar'. 'The Kite Runner', another popular examination text on the legacy specification was another popular text for 9ET0 04, often being yoked to 'Atonement'. Aspects of war and the colonial and post-colonial experience were examined by some candidates, with 'Birdsong' and 'Heart of Darkness' the most popular texts for those themes.

Three-quarters of the texts selected were novels or novellas. Drama texts made up around 20% and a few poetry texts were used of which, only Blake's songs and Owen's poems were used by more than one candidate. In relation to the choice of poetry texts, one moderator noted:

"Candidates rarely used the opportunities provided to comment on AO2 although a fluent and evaluative exploration of the contrasts in the depiction of nature in 'The Prelude' and 'Rapture' was a pleasure to read."

### **Were tasks accessible to candidates from across the ability range?**

In this first year, in a small number of centres, insufficient follow-up work had been done with some candidates to ensure that the wording and focus of their assignment would enable them to cover all the AOs successfully. The result was, in the words of one moderator, some 'rambling and unfocused essays' but these represented a very small minority and on the whole it was most encouraging to see both the

engagement and the scholarly approach with which candidates tackled their subjects, with one moderator noting:

“It was a pleasure and a privilege to read many of these scripts as candidates responded positively to this new specification; the strength of the approach of this unit, building on strong features of the legacy coursework, was evident as almost all of the candidates I sampled readily accepted, or even relished the challenge.”

Many of the pieces confidently presented a personal line of argument, supported by critical understanding and independent reading. Some responses showed evident scholarship and most were interesting to read - with at least some explorative and illuminating points and connections. Connections were the aspect of the assessment criteria that were most often a relative strength, and there were many original, thoughtful, illuminating and insightful links.

Appreciation of contextual influences was rarely merely biographical and often complex, but not always linked back to the texts. When candidates explored how meanings are shaped in literary texts (AO2), character and language were far more often examined than structure or form. Some tasks encouraged the candidate to focus on the characters or the setting as if they were real rather than constructs, and consideration of their qualities as texts were restricted by those tasks. ‘How do...’ titles, unless framed to include the ways in which meanings are shaped (AO2), also encouraged narrative or descriptive textual exemplification.

Consideration of other interpretations varied widely, as did the quality of the research, which was often completed online. Many candidates used their research well to support, and often enhance their argument. Only a few candidates relied primarily on short extracts or blogs for their secondary material; a small number of centres appeared to have supported the candidates with an anthology of extracts and articles which represented good practice when it was a starting point for independent research, rather than the full extent of a candidate’s engagement with different interpretations.

Most material was relevant and helped to develop the candidates' critical examination of the texts chosen - many candidates were able to consider and evaluate other interpretations, adding to the strength and sophistication of their line of argument.

### **Examples of both good and poor choices of texts and titles**

Most candidates had chosen texts that engaged their interest, and selected titles that enabled them to meet the assessment criteria at an appropriate level. One moderator noted:

“It is a testament to the freedom offered by this unit that 169 different texts were chosen by the 432 candidates I sampled, including ‘The Prelude’, ‘Dancing at Lughnasa’, ‘Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas’ and ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’.”

Some candidates lacked the confidence to fully embrace the freedom on offer, and several centres offered the support of a shared text or texts, examined collectively, with a choice of independent text or texts; this blend of supported and independent study usually worked very well in developing the capacity to demonstrate independent critical understanding. Such an approach enabled one candidate to produce a fluent and assured critical evaluation of the presentation of the female in Butterworth’s ‘Jerusalem’ (the shared text) and Armitage’s version of ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’. The balanced approach was recommended for consideration in the feedback to the centres that used only common texts and, in several cases, common titles. This could perceptibly inhibit the capacity for demonstrating independent study and could also affect personal engagement with the texts. This was much more prevalent than in the legacy specification, where it was observed occasionally. This may be caused by the change from three texts to two, centres new to Pearson or a product of caution about the new specification. In the cases, where a greater degree of choice would have been desirable, a comment to this effect was included in the report to centre.

Moderators reported few examples of work on ‘unsuitable texts’ and this is a difficult area to comment on. Texts chosen need to enable candidates to meet all of the assessment objectives and this is the overriding factor rather than whether they have literary merit or have won literary awards, for example. One team member reported seeing one work in translation (Maupassant’s Short Stories), which is a rubric infringement. Sometimes centres had paired a novel with a collection of poetry and this sometimes led to the candidates only focussing on one or two poems. One centre had allowed two candidates to compare single poems, in one case both by Wilfred Owen. One centre had also used a single poem for comparison with ‘The Great Gatsby’.

Centres are reminded that works studied must be complete texts (for poetry or short stories this means a published collection or anthology) and centres should avoid (although these are not ‘banned’) texts studied at GCSE. This is due to their relative level of demand, the risk of narrowing the curriculum, and the text’s ability to offer sufficient depth for advanced level study.

This is a new non-examination assessment component, and, although centres had access to exemplars, initial assessment was likely to be more challenging than in the final years of the legacy specification, during

which many centres had become familiar with the methodology and had both experience and evidence from previous cohorts to assist them.

It is, therefore, pleasing to report that the majority of centres applied the standard accurately, and the marginal annotation and summative comments of the majority of centres showed familiarity with the Assessment Objectives.

The quality of assessment and its accuracy were generally high, as shown in the degree of agreement with the moderator mark in the first year of the specification. Most assessors used detailed marginal comments, linked to assessment criteria and provided detailed summative reports. A relatively small number used insufficient annotation and only one centre, provided no comments at all.

Detailed internal moderation, essential for a new specification, was not universal. The quality ranged from a centre that had a separate page where moderators could record their views in the pursuit of an agreed mark or a centre where each folder was triple marked, to centres where there was no evidence of moderation at all. When internal moderation occurred (in the clear majority of centres), the moderated mark was likely to be closer to the finally awarded mark than the original mark. There were only two or three occasions where the internal moderator took insufficient account of the accurate comments of the original assessor.

The annotation on some centres' work was very helpful, and teachers had identified where assessment objectives were met, and provided helpful commentary to support the level awarded. Most centres identified assessment objectives, but few indicated a level and provided supporting comments. Some centres provided a commentary on essays, usually at the back of the work, sometimes on the candidate's front cover. Please see the administrative guidance at the end of this report.

On the whole, the assessment objectives were appropriately addressed. A minority of centres had problems with AO1, and where this was apparent, it tended to show across the entire sample: candidates appeared to struggle with the construction of an argument because they were unable to express themselves clearly. There were some concerns with AO3 as well, as many candidates did not sufficiently research the contexts of their chosen texts. Submissions at the top end of the ability-range not only effectively synthesised textual connections into their argument for AO4 but also showed clear evidence of analysis and evaluation of the ways in which meanings are shaped for AO2 with sophisticated links to the task-title. The significance and influence of the contexts (AO3) in which the literary texts were written and received was integrated well by several candidates, though the overall performance of most would have been

enhanced by more reference to how their consideration of different interpretations had influenced their own critical position (AO5).

Weaker candidates wrote well for AO1 and AO2 but did struggle to link text with context and while most attempted to engage with critical reading and alternative interpretations of texts, this seemed to be tagged onto their argument rather than informing the argument. In addition to this, bibliographies for weaker candidates tended to demonstrate an over-reliance on websites such as Shmoop and York notes. The candidates who achieved marks in the top band had often conducted extensive reading around the texts studied and moderators reported some very sophisticated consideration of critical reading to inform arguments.

Overall, the majority of centres seen provided evidence that they had undertaken prior training with the standardisation materials and most centres applied the new assessment criteria with a degree of security. As mentioned above, a few centres perhaps showed leniency in assessing AO3 and AO5.

Centres should be encouraged to consider the link between good administration and accurate assessment. One centre provided a total mark along with highlighted mark grids, with no subtotals or indication of how the candidates' performed against AO1/2/3 and AO4/5.

A few centres were encouraged to review whether the comments used on marginal annotations and summative comments matched the level of the final mark awarded. Where centres had followed the mark scheme and annotated closely, it was clear to see the reasoning behind the mark awarded and in most cases there was close agreement.

### ***Comments on individual AOs***

#### ***AO1 Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts***

The need to hone skills in academic essay writing was a very common pattern amongst the full ability range, with some centres over-rewarding against AO1 without taking the impact of writing style and security into account. Comma splicing, failing to mark the title of a literary text with inverted commas or italics, and incorrect subject-verb agreement were common errors, along with informal expression and figurative language less appropriate in maintaining an academic style.

#### ***AO2 Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts***

A noticeable pattern amongst many centres was a lack of consideration of how meanings are shaped (AO2) with many candidates writing about



characters and events as if they were real people; such folders often made little mention of the writer by name and the techniques being used to achieve the writer's concerns.

### ***A03 Significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received***

Most centres dealt well with A03 and many candidates ensured that this was well-integrated into relevant textual discussion. Candidates writing about mental health (Plath, Gilman, Winterson) were often drawn some distance from the literary text into discussions about psychology and conjecturing about writers' lives. A number of centres were crediting contextual wider reading as A05, rather than focusing on the 'different interpretations' element of this assessment objective.

### ***A04 Connections across literary texts***

The vast majority of candidates did balance A04 effectively giving due weight to each text. A small number failed to integrate the study of their two texts within their essays, which was limiting particularly at the higher levels of A04.

### ***A05 Different interpretations***

A number of centres demonstrated very varied and full bibliographies and students had clearly enjoyed elements of independent research. A number had sourced a range of high quality academic criticism, as well as 'English Review', 'EMC magazines' and high quality reviews and newspaper articles, for example. Application of A05 was very varied across centres. The best centres demonstrated students who were discerning about what they used, both in quality/provenance and quantity. Some centres, who had studied a second Shakespeare play, successfully drew on Edexcel's critical anthologies.

A number of candidates were so concerned to address A05 they let other interpretations overcome any sense of personal argument and related analysis and at times its frequency impeded clarity of writing, affecting A01. The weakest responses listed a range of hyperlinks in the bibliography, many of which reflected their own search engines' web results rather than specific sites or documents correctly referenced. A significant number of students across the ability range were drawing on online study guides along with quotation banks in a gesture towards A05 and such comment was often credited as A05 by centres. In many cases this seemed to replace independent and academic reading of their chosen texts. It also hindered their personal argument and engagement with A02. Interestingly, this occurred most often with popular A level texts such as 'The Great Gatsby', 'The Bloody Chamber', and 'The Color Purple'.

A few well-chosen academic references critically considered in relation to the literary texts and personal analysis is likely to be much more powerful than the former approach. This also suggests that some teachers' initial concerns that less secondary material may be readily available for contemporary texts for AO5, may in fact be *advantageous* for candidates, since a couple of articles from good quality journals or magazines may be of more value than a profusion of blogs and web-references of dubious provenance.

A number of candidates were unsure how to incorporate third party references into their writing, as well as how to lay out bibliographies and this needed further explicit teaching. The application of criticism from particular critical schools worked for a number of candidates who were discerning about what they used and maintained a careful reading of the literary text. Others let this dominate losing sight of the literary text, while weaker candidates tended to make generalisations about Marxism or Feminism without real understanding of their nuances or the related subtleties of context or the literary text.

### **Administrative points**

Centres are reminded of the coursework guidance available on the A level English Literature webpage under '[forms and administration](#)'. An editable version of the 'Non-examination assessment authentication sheet' is available at the same location for those centres who wish to complete this as a Word document.

1. Please ensure the sample shown on Edexcel Online reaches your moderator by 15 May of the year in which your students will be certification.
2. Each candidates work should be annotated to demonstrate how the mark has been awarded. This includes a summative comment on the authentication sheet and annotation on the candidate's script relating to the AOs and indicating the level achieved.
3. The sample must be accompanied by a list of the whole cohort's marks which can be printed from Edexcel Online when all the marks have been entered.
4. Authentication sheets, including the second 'text coverage check' should be completed in full for each candidate. This includes providing a breakdown of how marks have been awarded for particular AOs.
5. In addition to the marked sample, centres must send the script of the highest and lowest achieving candidates in the cohort with their sample.