

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H472

For first teaching in 2015

H472/01 Autumn 2021 series

Introduction

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



Reports for the November 2021 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate responses.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions 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, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 1 series overview

Examiners expressed considerable praise for candidates who had studied for this component throughout the restrictions of the pandemic, and who had then decided to go on and sit the paper in the special autumn series after the experience of receiving teacher-assessed grades in the summer.

Scripts seen in this series reflected the fact that this was indeed an atypical period for the component. It was unusual to see scripts at the most extreme ends of the marking range. A large number of the scripts seen had a notably unexpected or unique quality to them, often with a large amount of strong personal response (which is generally something to be admired). This idiosyncratic approach sometimes worked well if candidates addressed the chosen questions directly, and if they remembered the particular requirements of each Section/Part of the paper (such as the specific Assessment Objectives being targeted).

Some candidates were able to respond flexibly to the specific requirements of the questions set. Some answers were rather unplanned and generalised. This approach rarely helped candidates. Compared to a 'normal' series for the paper, there was less use of either fashionably recent, or antiquated, literary terminology. This was welcome as the excessive presence of those terms can sometimes be less-than-helpful. Candidates generally made effective use of the time available. Nearly every candidate answered all three parts of the paper. The tendency of candidates to write very long answers (including in the 2020 autumn series) was not often repeated this year. Usually this helped the effect of the responses. The presentation and accuracy of most work was encouraging. This was especially the case with typed work, where a tendency towards inaccuracy had been perceived in earlier series.

There were fewer references in this series to current events (as had been quite common in 2020) such as Black Lives Matter, the global COVID-19 pandemic, or even the climate crisis. This was, perhaps, surprising - but these references were in no sense expected or required, of course. All the comments made in this report should be read in the context of the fact that the entry for this component was very small indeed in comparison with annual summer norms (and, indeed, numbers were down substantially even on the small entry cohort for 2020).

Candidates are likely to perform well on this paper if they keep in mind the dominant Assessment Objective for each part:

AO2 [linguistic analysis] in Section 1(a)

AO5 [different interpretations] in Section 2(b)

AO3 [the significance and influence of contexts] in Section 2.

They will also succeed if they bear in mind the importance of coherent, accurate expression (AO1 – which applies in all three parts of the paper).

Reminder: Component structure

H472/01 (Drama and Poetry pre-1900) is one of the components which make up OCR's A Level in English Literature. The examination requires candidates to write about a Shakespeare play of their choice (from a set list of six texts) firstly commenting on a 'context' passage and secondly responding to an essay question. In the second half of the examination candidates choose one of six questions and write an essay comparing two texts (one drama and one poetry) from a selection of ten works – in all – written before 1900. This is a closed text examination. The structure of this component – as well as that for H472/02 (Comparative and Contextual study) - remained the same for this special autumn series of the qualification (although NEA did not feature in the assessment for this series).

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Answered the questions directly.• Paid attention to the requirements of the Assessment Objectives for each question.• Made careful and appropriate question choices.• Used the time available effectively.• Were able to think flexibly in the examination.• Used quotation effectively.• Offered some personal response rather than just pre-prepared material.• Wrote with reasonable care and accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offloaded large amounts of pre-prepared material.• Often did not take into account specific Assessment Objective requirements in each part of the paper.• Resorted to lengthy narration of plot.• 'Twisted' a question to write on a preferred topic.• Allowed complex technical vocabulary to overwhelm the answers.• Paid little attention to the appearance, legibility and technical accuracy of their answers.

Section 1, Part (a)

Reminder: Shakespeare extract setting

It is worth reminding centres once again of [OCR's stated policy to select passages for consideration in Part \(a\) from the Alexander text of Shakespeare's works](#). This will have implications for the choice of edition (which is never an insignificant matter when preparing to study these plays) made for use in the classroom. It is important that candidates – and teachers – should be prepared for any passage in the set edition of the play to come up in the exam. Occasionally there is a tangible sense of disappointment from a candidate that a 'promised' or anticipated passage has not materialised in the paper, or that the passage chosen for the paper had not been expected or predicted. For quite a large number of candidates this was the weakest part of the paper.

Some impressive responses were seen to Part (a) Shakespeare questions. A significant number of candidates tackled this part of the paper effectively. A small number of candidates had, perhaps, not revisited their chosen set text again since work on it in the classroom many months earlier. This reasoning is speculative (and did not affect assessment) but it might explain the fact that a significant minority of candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with the set passage from their chosen text. There was some impressive discussion of dramatic – as well as literary – effects in this part of the paper, and it is always impressive to note candidates making an attempt to recognise that the text they have been studying is, in effect, a script which comes alive in performance. A long-standing trend by less successful responses in this part of the paper is to comment inaccurately on "Shakespeare's use" of exclamation marks – and other (sometimes) editorially imposed punctuation effects. Some candidates still express confusion with key 'technical' terms such as 'poetry', 'prose' and 'blank verse' (with the expression 'free verse' sometimes also being used erroneously). Lack of clarity about plot events in the chosen play sometimes presented difficulties in the work of some candidates.

Hamlet was, once again, by far the most popular text choice in this section of the paper. A substantial number of responses to the questions on *The Tempest* were also seen. *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night* were considerably less popular texts. Only a very few responses to *Coriolanus* and *Richard III* were seen.

Section 1, Part (b)

Reminder: Connections across the Shakespeare section

Candidates – and teachers – should bear in mind the fact that there will always be some sort of link or connection between the content of the set passage in Part (a) and the Part (b) essay question on the same Shakespeare play. The rubric of the paper requires candidates to answer on the same play in both parts. Many candidates are now familiar with the fact that their approach to this part of the paper can be quite different to that for the Shakespeare context question (with the need for a structured, developing argument in the case of the (b) essay).

Some very impressive responses were also seen to Part (b) Shakespeare questions. As ever, it was impressive to note that many candidates engaged with a wide range of critical and performance material in this part of the paper (often in a lively, personal way). Some candidates were keen to write about very recent stage productions of *Hamlet*, for example. Candidates are reminded that 'personal response' can cover a very wide range of approaches, and there is certainly no expectation that a long list of named critics and/or specific performances should feature in every answer. Some less successful answers to this part of the paper relied on pre-prepared material (such as standardised character sketches) which did not always tally with the specific terms of the question being answered. It can be helpful for candidates to take a firm view in response to the ideas being prompted in the question, although a

variety of approaches to the task can be possible. There should be a sense in this part of the Shakespeare tasks, though, that a developing response is being structured (whereas the response to the context passage might be more exploratory). Listing and narrating rarely provided entirely successful approaches.

As with the Part (a) responses to this Section – and considering the need to respond appropriately to the rubric of the paper - *Hamlet* was, once again, by far the most popular text choice. A substantial number of responses to the questions on *The Tempest* were also seen. *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night* were considerably less popular. Only a very few responses to *Coriolanus* and *Richard III* were seen.

Section 2

Planning is key

Candidates are advised to think ahead and plan in order to make the best question choice for their combination of texts (although examiners certainly have no preconceived notions about this). It is not unusual to find candidates in this section of the paper writing a lengthy amount which is then crossed-out before another question is attempted. Candidates should remember that half the marks for the paper are available for awarding in this section, and an appropriate amount of time should be dedicated to it.

Once again it was evident that the selection of questions provided enabled candidates to write about every possible combination of set texts available - and from a number of different angles. Generalisations about context (for example, “the Victorians” or “all women in this period”) are fortunately now comparatively rare. Contextual information used in this section of the paper is always likely to be more effective when it is applied specifically. There was also plenty of room for personal opinion (often presented effectively) and the very best answers often made judicious use of sophisticated techniques of comparison. Fewer very long answers to this part of the paper were seen in this series. Answers to this section of the paper do not always need to be immaculately structured: there is room for speculation, imaginative pondering, and alternative views.

There continues to be a hierarchy of popularity when it comes to the texts on the set lists, and this was all the more apparent during this series in which there were very few candidates indeed. Chaucer, Webster, Rossetti and Ibsen were again very popular choices. There were notably fewer responses this series to *Paradise Lost*. Some questions were much more popular than others. ‘Connections’ and ‘doubt and confusion’ tended to be popular (and often productive) choices.

Candidates' use of language

Hints and tips

- ‘Think more; write less!’ can be a good maxim to follow. Candidates are not expected to write as much as they possibly can in the time available.
- Time spent reading, planning and checking is always well spent.
- The accuracy and legibility of an answer can make a substantial difference. Candidates who type their answers would be well advised to check their work for ‘typos’ and other errors.
- Candidates should aim to move beyond formulaic approaches to essay structure (‘PEE’, etc.) in order to liberate the expression of ideas.
- Candidates should aim to use appropriate, recognised literary language in their analysis.
- Candidates should take care when writing about the effects of punctuation in Shakespeare context passages.

Guidance on using this paper as a mock: key teaching and learning points and comments on improving performance

- Holistic marking: responses are given a mark as a whole by examiners, rather than a separate mark for each Assessment Objective.
- Assessment Objective weightings indicate the focus of the response, and the knowledge and understanding used to drive forward and support the argument.
- The 'best-fit' approach for defining the level is used in the assessment, and then the mark is refined within the level according to how well the relevant Assessment Objectives have been addressed.
- The key factor considered by examiners is: how well has the question been answered? Candidates should not 'twist' questions away from those set in order to address a preferred topic.
- Examiners are encouraged to be positive and optimistic in their judgement, and to be aware of any personal bias when making mark decisions.
- Students can be engaged by encouraging them to address their set texts from the interpretative and critical perspectives of important contemporary movements and issues.
- Creative approaches to teaching - and responding to - the texts and questions should be embraced.

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