

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations



OCR GCSE ENGLISH (1900)

OCR GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE (1901)

TEACHER SUPPORT: COURSEWORK GUIDANCE

CONTENTS

1 Introduction	3
2 Feedback on Coursework: English Unit 2434	4
3 Feedback on Coursework: English Literature Units 2443 and 2447	7
4 Coursework Overview	9
5 Task Setting	13
6 Helping Candidates with their Work	19
7 Marking, Standardising and Moderating the Coursework	20
8 Frequently Asked Questions	22

1 INTRODUCTION

This guide is an aid to colleagues who may be deliberating over certain aspects of coursework, or may be a little unsure of the standards that they need to apply in the final assessment of the coursework folder. It will answer many of the questions that centres find themselves unsure about, and need reassurance on.

The content is based on observations made by moderators of coursework and on direct questions from centres.

This coursework guide provides just that ...guidance! It shares comments from the Principal Moderators about the problems faced by centres. It also gives guidance on task setting, making suggestions on how tasks can be structured to target assessment objectives across the whole range of marks. It is expected that teachers will welcome some of the ideas, perhaps even use some of them in their own teaching, and openly reject others.

If you are a new teacher and find yourself teaching coursework for the first time, then hopefully there are parts of the guide that will give you the confidence to set appropriate tasks and make final assessments that will be marked within the recognised standards set by OCR.

2 FEEDBACK ON COURSEWORK FOR GCSE ENGLISH – UNIT 2434

It is always pleasing when moderating coursework to see the diligence and conscientious approach of the vast majority of centres in applying the assessment criteria.

In the majority of cases the coursework assessment forms are filled in accurately, and detailed teacher comments are extremely helpful, especially where there is evidence that Band criteria have been referred to. The most common problem is that centres do not always show the breakdown of marks for the writing piece (i.e. separate marks for AO3s (i) and (ii) and AO3 (iii) giving a total mark out of 20.) Where centres have done this it makes the moderation process much easier.

2.1 Reading

AO3.2 (iv) and (v) prove to be the biggest differentiators. AO3.2(iv) – selecting material and making cross references – is something only the most able students achieve.

2.1.1 RESPONSE TO SHAKESPEARE

The majority of centres choose *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*, but a few centres are more ambitious and chose *Much Ado*, *Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*.

Most candidates clearly demonstrate an understanding of plot, themes and character and the more able students also comment on language and its dramatic effect. What is lacking in some of the work of students in the higher bands is any reference to 'Shakespeare's stagecraft and appeal to audience', in other words acknowledging Shakespeare as 'theatre'. This is often only touched upon.

Several centres favour an empathic response for this task, and this often does not allow candidates to meet the criteria for analytical and interpretative skills, particularly in Bands 1 and 2.

Centres often set tasks relating to analysis of set scenes or 'who was most to blame', and this leads inevitably to some narrative responses and a failure to make detailed cross references to underlying themes or developments in the whole play.

However there are many more examples of some challenging and exciting tasks, and all centres must take credit for trying to raise the achievement of their students and for making the coursework unit on Shakespeare interesting and demanding.

2.1.2 RESPONSE TO POETRY

AO3.2 (v) is the greatest differentiator. Candidates are often very adept at identifying structural and presentational devices but cannot always go on to show the effects upon the reader.

Most favoured tasks are often either a comparison of Blake's *London* and Wordsworth's *Westminster Bridge* or comparing *The Charge of the Light Brigade* with *Dulce et Decorum est*.

Several centres choose poems from the free OCR *Opening Lines* anthology.

Some tasks require candidates to respond to too many poems, and this often leads to a superficial response. The best tasks are those that invite candidates to respond to poems through tasks that specifically address the criteria.

Generally, as with the response to Shakespeare, centres work very hard to introduce candidates to a variety of challenging and interesting poems, and the detailed responses of many candidates is a credit to the emphasis centres have placed upon this unit.

2.2 Writing

It is encouraging to see the diversity of creative responses, and centres are to be complimented for the wide range of tasks that are set. Many candidates clearly spend a great deal of time on this piece, resulting in some superb imaginative writing.

The most successful pieces across the range are often ambitious in terms of narrative, voice and structure. Such tasks are often those that enable candidates to write a complete short story, often in a particular genre.

Autobiographical pieces can be successful, but more often limit candidates' ability to structure work in anything other than a straight chronological way. Some centres submit drama scripts which, although very interesting, are often not fulfilling the assessment criteria for paragraphing.

Many centres choose an empathic response to a literature-based task. The most common is 'Eva Smith's diary' from *An Inspector Calls*. The danger of these responses is that the 'imagined situation' is not always 'convincing or imaginative', and it is often difficult to separate the Reading criteria from the Writing criteria. A poor understanding of the text could still lead to a successful piece of writing, but students are rarely credited for this. Teachers' response to such coursework invariably includes a critical comment on the Reading, which has no relationship with the Writing criteria.

Some pieces of writing demonstrate excessive length, abrupt and rushed endings and a certain degree of implausibility. By far the best examples of successful tasks are those that are short, focused and crafted. Excessive length rarely helps candidates.

Overall, teachers are to be congratulated for their hard work and conscientious application of the assessment criteria, and this reflects the experience and expertise that is available in a large number of centres. The range of exciting tasks and detailed responses to coursework are a credit to the hard work of both candidates and teachers. Many teachers are still placing a great deal of emphasis on written coursework even though it now only counts for 20 per cent of the total mark, and this reflects the conscientious attitude to this component of the course. Teachers' detailed annotated comments and support on individual pieces of work reflect the large amount of time that is invested to raise the achievement of all students through the course work component.

3 FEEDBACK ON COURSEWORK FOR GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE – UNITS 2443 AND 2447

Where best practice is manifest teachers use reference to the assessment objectives to help frame questions, and their comments on candidates' work specifically acknowledge the band descriptors.

As yet few centres are experimenting with non-fiction, an innovation in the specification that might usefully be developed. As a rule of thumb it might be considered that a non-fiction text should be comparable in scale to a fiction one or to those set in the exam. Analysis of media texts should be left to the GCSE English examination (unit 2431).

Centres serve their candidates best when as much as information as possible is given to the moderator, especially in writing out task titles in full. Where simply the text name appears moderators are left wondering whether the task was really that vague. Occasionally, output suggests that maybe it was.

Another concern that has arisen on a wider scale is where significant numbers of candidates in a centre produce very similar essays. Obviously at this stage in their critical careers students need support and some guidelines as to structure and content, but too often it is clear that extensive notes had been written on the board for students to follow or they had cut and pasted from the same sources. Possibly this is the result of some teachers feeling insecure but the result can easily be a scaling down of marks because of failure to produce 'evidence of original thought'. Even one teacher being over prescriptive can have an adverse effect on the whole centre's results and heads of department are urged to provide training for colleagues who do this.

Many centres are able to use the four assessment objectives to construct well-focused tasks and elicit answers that show personal appreciation of texts and a holistic response, blending the four features into a balanced and integrated whole. High grades are not earned simply by identifying or making statements about separate ingredients; this can be illustrated by reference to AO2 and AO4.

AO2

One of the most saddening features of poetry responses over recent years has been the slide into mere device spotting. Candidates are better informed than ever before about oxymoron and can spot them anywhere and pick at them like a Ted Hughes thrush with a snail. Such a skill may be extremely useful in pub quizzes but in a literary response must 'contribute to the meaning of a text' and 'alternative interpretations'. Before over-rewarding such recognitions teachers would be advised to read the General Qualities in the Marking Criteria carefully to see what a successful candidate has to do with the observation.

AO4

The key word in this Assessment Objective is 'relate'. Thus candidates should not use a Wilkie Collins short story as a conduit for arriving at the grand conclusion that there were no telephones in those days and people travelled in carts. Nor should they present bibliographies and grandiose summaries of writers' careers culled from study notes. Crudely put: if social, cultural or historical information does not in some way illuminate the understanding or appreciation of the text, omit it. 'A *Christmas Carol*: Christmas entertainment or a social commentary on the time?' Notice how a task like this is requiring comment rather than description and in good hands would lead to an analysis of how Dickens presents the period.

Sometimes tasks are over-eager to emphasise an aspect of a text at the expense of all others. Stagecraft is such a feature. Again this should be woven into the pattern of a total response to the text. Rather too often director's notes on a brief scene are boiled down to disconnected ideas on costume and movements with no cognisance of text. Sometimes too a candidate's perception of the play is mediated entirely by film or there is no evidence of having read more than brief extracts. Reviews of drama in performance are potentially effective if handled skilfully and the theatrical spectacle is related to close reading, otherwise they can become trite and a mere parade of superficial reactions. Questions should encourage candidates to consider Shakespeare as theatre – often by asking how tension is created or how an audience might be made to feel: "There is much suffering in *Romeo and Juliet* yet for a variety of reasons the audience never feels sad or despairing." Discuss this view of the play.'

Candidates must be carefully taught the art of comparison. There are many examples of comparisons sustained at the levels of meaning, style and context, with finely balanced movement from one text to another. Such answers are usually stimulated by the phrasing of the task and a judicious pairing of poems or short stories. Sometimes candidates are befuddled into shallow statements about texts simply because they are asked to handle too many. There are also occasionally totally arbitrary sets of poems that appear to have no common factors whatsoever. When asked to compare such an A with such a B the wise candidate might simply answer 'Why?'. These bewildered candidates understandably clutch with relief at the fact that they both contain oxymoron! In the pre-1914 option using one post-1914 poem is contrary to the spirit rather than the letter of the GCSE English Literature specification. First World War poetry, of course, is post-1914. However, if the candidate concentrates on the more modern text too much to the exclusion of the other they are likely to be penalised. Wordsworth and Blake on London remain favourites, especially as these two poems give ample opportunity to explore language, form and structure as well as context. However, other pairs are always refreshing, such as Hardy's *Ruined Maid* and Rossetti's *Cousin Kate*.

Many successful answers are provoked by the challenge of studying genres. The detective story or gothic are particularly popular. There are a few effective creative responses, but it must be stressed that only the very favoured candidate manage this. Only the finest and most sensitive of detectives performs an able investigation of the guilty parties in *Porphyra's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*. It is, however, inadvisable to enter more than one creative response.

Jekyll and Hyde remains a useful text offering a lot of opportunity for the good candidate to engage with context, genre, language, atmosphere and concepts. It is always encouraging to see a harmony between task-setter and candidate, the former focusing the latter, the latter clearly understanding what is required by the former.

4 COURSEWORK OVERVIEW

4.1 English

It is very important that teachers have an overview of the minimum coursework requirements.

WRITING

- **Item 1: Writing to explore, imagine, entertain.**

READING IN THE ENGLISH LITERARY HERITAGE:

- **Item 2: study of a play by Shakespeare.**
- **Item 3: study of poetry by a major writer with a well-established critical reputation (published either before OR after 1914).**

Pre-1914 writing **must** be taken from the National Curriculum list of major writers. These include the following: Matthew Arnold; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; William Blake; Emily Bronte; Robert Browning; Robert Burns; Lord Byron; Geoffrey Chaucer; John Clare; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; John Donne; John Dryden; Thomas Gray; George Herbert; Robert Herrick; Gerard Manley Hopkins; John Keats; Andrew Marvell; John Milton; Alexander Pope; Christina Rossetti; Shakespeare sonnets; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Edmund Spenser; Alfred Lord Tennyson; Henry Vaughan; William Wordsworth and Sir Thomas Wyatt). The complete list of national Curriculum writers can be found at www.nc.uk.net.

4.2 English Literature

SCHEME A: PRE-1914 TEXTS

Candidates are required to submit three items of coursework, demonstrating study of **any three** from:

- **Drama published before 1914**
- **Poetry published before 1914**
- **Prose published before 1914**
- **Literary Non-Fiction published before 1914.**

OR

SCHEME B: POST-1914 TEXTS

Candidates are required to submit three items of coursework, demonstrating study of **any three** from:

- **Drama published after 1914**
- **Prose published after 1914**
- **Poetry published after 1914**
- **Literary Non-Fiction published after 1914.**

The National Curriculum guidelines suggest the following for study of literary non-fiction:

Personal record & viewpoint on society

Peter Ackroyd; James Baldwin; John Berger; James Boswell; Vera Brittain; Lord Byron; William Corbett; Gerald Durrell; Robert Graves; Samuel Johnson; Laurie Lee; Samuel Pepys; Flora Thompson; Beatrice Webb; Dorothy Wordsworth.

Travel writing

Jan Morris; Freya Stark; Laurens Van der Post.

Reportage

James Cameron; Winston Churchill; Alistair Cooke; Dilys Powell.

Natural world

David Attenborough; Rachel Carson; Charles Darwin; Steve Jones.

4.3 AO3 Comparison

Most centres choose to assess this strand by comparing poems, but this does not have to be the case.

The specification states that this assessment objective might be related to a specific genre (e.g. comparison of two poems; exploration of the social context of a novel) or may be explored across genres (e.g. exploration of the relationships between a poem and a short story; discussion of the pastoral tradition in a play and a poem).

As with all coursework tasks you would have to be careful that the comparative element was suitable for the range of marks you would expect to award. More able candidates might need a task that was analytical while less able candidates might explore a more general comparison.

Comparisons might be made on an area of study, and could include thematic ideas such as 'conflict' or 'growing up', or they could refer to specific aspects of the text such as the use of language.

Many centres choose to make comparisons between two poems or between two short stories. Where more than two poems are chosen (e.g. four or five poems) this often detracts from the actual skill of comparison.

If comparing poems the following varied approaches give some general hints to candidates that might be helpful.

ROUTE 1

- Start off by looking at the overall similarities and differences between the chosen poems.
- Look at the poems in detail, dealing with all aspects of underlying themes, language and style that may be interesting.
- Write in detail about similarities and differences between the poems, and indicate your own personal preference and why.

ROUTE 2

- Look at both of the poems at the same time and make comparisons about aspects of language, style and underlying themes as you go along. Each paragraph might look at a specific area of comparison, e.g. use of language, imagery, underlying themes, attitudes to love or war, etc.

ROUTE 3

- Start in the same way as Route 1, then look at one poem in detail. After that look at the second poem in detail, and refer back constantly to the first poem picking out any similarities and differences.
- Finish off with a concluding paragraph about which poem is the most effective and why you liked it.

4.3.1 THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN COMPARING POEMS

It might be helpful to suggest to candidates that they need to be selective in the points of comparison that they make. The following aspects might help them develop ideas. Simply spotting linguistic devices such as metaphors, similes, alliteration, etc. will not earn them any marks if they cannot write about the effectiveness of these devices.

The following might be starting points for comparison.

Theme

Are there any underlying themes in the poems, and are they similar or different?

Mood

Are the poets deliberately creating a specific mood, and is this similar or different?

Setting/Period

Are the poems set in similar periods of time or places, and is this effective in your understanding of the poem?

Type

Are the poems of a similar type? Are they both sonnets; ballads; narrative poems?

Language

What kind of language do the poets use? Are there any images, metaphors or similes which support underlying themes? Are the poems telling a story?

Attitudes

Do the poets demonstrate similar or different attitudes to a subject, e.g. love, war, marriage, death, growing up.

Structure

How are the poems set out? Are there any similarities in layout? Do the stanzas have any significance in the overall understanding of the poems?

Voice

Is a particular 'character' or voice speaking in each poem? Who is being spoken to? Why?

5 TASK SETTING

5.1 Writing to explore, imagine, entertain

The writing task represents 50 per cent of the total mark for the GCSE English coursework folder. There are two clearly identifiable marks which are summarised in AO3s (i) and (ii) and AO3 (iii).

The most successful tasks are those that enable the students to write a complete short story. Some tasks do not always allow candidates the chance to meet all the assessment criteria, e.g. an opening for a story, or re-creative responses such as 'Eva Smith's diary'. The best pieces are short, focused and crafted. Excessive length rarely helps candidates.

Some suggestions for this unit might include:

- an original piece of fiction
- a parody of a genre or a style, e.g. Mills and Boon or detective stories
- a totally imaginative piece such as a dream or an unreal experience.

The concept of writing to entertain relates to the engagement of the reader's attention: entertainment can be achieved by the imaginative use of ideas or the use of events that can be readily recognised from the reader's own experience; by the candidate's choice of expression and vocabulary; by the provision of characterisation, setting and devices of plot (such as an unexpected and well controlled ending); by the choice of a narrative voice; by the creation of the original rather than the stereotyped. Candidates may also use various types of humour, or better still, wit, but this is often hard come by and is not the primary intention of the word 'entertain'.

5.2 Task setting for successful coursework

Moderators see many examples of tasks that have clearly produced successful work, but they also see examples of the opposite.

- Are some tasks intrinsically good while others are bad?
- Is it a matter of how tasks are set up?
- Are there students who will make a success of ANY task, while others will fail, no matter how good the task and how well set up?
- Should specific Assessment Objectives be targeted when setting tasks?

Clearly it is important to plan the whole folder in advance so that the tasks set will support the students in demonstrating the full range of Assessment Objectives for both English and English Literature.

It might be helpful to think about the following criteria which are essentially the five features that consistently differentiate lower achieving folders from the very best:

1. Evidence of a detailed knowledge of the text as demonstrated through well selected and sometimes less obvious references used to support argument.
2. Integration within the argument of comments about language, style and form and how these affect the reader's response.
3. An appreciation of genres and how their conventions and structures generate effect.
4. Argument informed by an understanding of how social, cultural and historical contexts contribute to the response to the text, and evidence of this knowledge being integrated into the argument.
5. Comparative study maintaining a balance of texts in the discussion, with texts being cross-referred throughout.

5.2.1 TASK SETTING: SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

In GCSE English Literature, the social, cultural and historical context stands alone as an Assessment Objective; it is an AO that candidates often do not meet.

AO4 states: 'relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions'.

The key word here is 'relate', which really means that if social, cultural or historical information does not in some way illuminate the understanding or appreciation of a text, then omit it!

Bibliographies and grandiose summaries of writers' careers, culled from study notes, do not help us understand or 'relate' to the text.

Many candidates will as a matter of course include reference to social, historical and cultural contexts in their work. The specification requires that at Band 4 candidates should be able to 'comment' on these contexts and at Band 2 should demonstrate 'understanding'.

The section that follows makes it quite clear that there is no intention that this element should interfere with the integrity of the task. The point here is that the actions and attitudes of characters in a play or book are frequently affected by conventions of behaviour, social conditions and historical fact and that these will be explained in the course of teaching. Only in rare cases would you need to go far outside your everyday knowledge in answering the question 'but why did she behave like that? If it had been me I would have...'. There is also the matter of the social, historical context that affects our appreciation of the setting of a book. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one. Candidates would need to be able to place Henchard and Farfrae in their contexts and to appreciate the force of such customs as the skimmy ride.

5.2.2 SHOWING EVIDENCE OF THE REQUIREMENTS

There is no specific request on the coursework Cover Sheet for centres to indicate where various requirements have been met. A moderator should be able to identify them in reading the coursework. However, it is important that the wording of the task should show the candidates what is required of them. References to areas of social, historical and cultural understanding can be implicit in the task itself or specified in the second sentence of a task, or as one or more of a set of prompts indicating what candidates must include in their responses.

5.2.3 TASK SETTING: VARYING THE FOCUS

Tasks vary in the exactness of their focus and the amount of direction that they give to candidates.

Type A:

These are very open. For example, 'What are your impressions of Malvolio?'

Tasks such as these give room for original, individual responses, and the teacher will decide the extent to which they will provide the candidates with ideas or give them opportunities to develop their own. Of course, with open tasks such as these the teacher has less control over the aspects of the texts which candidates will deal with. This task is perfectly acceptable, but the candidate is given no guidance and is not aware of the assessment objectives that should be met in the final response, and what they will be given credit for.

The more able candidates may well fulfil the assessment criteria adequately but the less able, without guidance, will merely resort to re-telling the plot, mentioning Malvolio and submitting a largely narrative response.

Type B:

One way of ensuring that candidates have equal opportunities to achieve in terms of the assessment objectives is to set tasks with prompts, each of which has to be addressed. These are similar to the ones in the examination and in KS3 SAT's. For example:

What are your impressions of Malvolio?

In your answer you should consider:

- his position in Olivia's household;
- his puritanical ways;
- what he does and the ways others treat him;
- the language that he uses.

Despite the fact that we have now arrived at a type of task which is quite closed in the sense that we are directing the candidate's response, this task perhaps gives them a fairer chance to achieve in terms of:

- The study of the use of language (AO2);
- Relating the text to social and cultural contexts (AO3) and their effects on the character and on the play itself (AO1).

5.2.4 TASK SETTING IN RELATION TO SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL AND LITERARY TRADITIONS

Task: What are your impressions of Malvolio?

Using the above task set on *Twelfth Night*, candidates would be able to:

- show an understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts in a way which enhances the appreciation of the text;
- show an understanding that is an element of the task and not the task itself.

At Band 2 candidates might show understanding of the social hierarchy of the Elizabethan house – hence Malvolio's over reaching himself. There would be an understanding of the feelings of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew towards him. There would be an understanding of Malvolio's puritanism and how this affects his views and actions. This understanding would be used to demonstrate the more serious themes in the play, the relationships between the characters, and the reasons for the way that Malvolio is treated.

At Band 4 candidates would be able to comment on the fact that Malvolio behaves unconventionally, i.e. that Olivia is above him and that his love for her is inappropriate, that his clothes are unsuitable and that he should not be ordering Sir Toby around.

At Band 7 candidates should show an awareness of the period when the play was written. They should be aware that Malvolio looks and sounds silly and that he is different from the others; they would know what his job is and that he thinks that Olivia fancies him when she does not.

5.2.5 EXAMPLES OF TASKS WHICH ALLOW CANDIDATES TO MEET ALL ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF MARKS

Macbeth

What does *Macbeth* have to say about the importance of order in society and nature?

How does Lady Macbeth change during the course of the play? Discuss with particular reference to Act 1 Scene 5 and Act 5 Scene 1.

Paying particular attention to Shakespeare's use of dramatic devices, compare the murder scenes of Duncan, Banquo and the Macduff family.

Much Ado About Nothing

In *Much Ado About Nothing* it has been argued that, 'to understand the behaviour of the characters we need to understand their concepts of humour. Humour is the main theme of the play'. How far do you agree with this?

In *Much Ado About Nothing* Shakespeare presents us with two very different romantic lovers in Claudio and Benedict. Who do the audience prefer and why?

Romeo and Juliet

Violence and conflict are central to *Romeo and Juliet*. Explore Shakespeare's presentation of this theme with reference to at least three scenes in the play.

Discuss how Shakespeare creates a tense and violent atmosphere in *Romeo and Juliet*. How do you respond to the end of the play?

How does Shakespeare prepare the audience for the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt?

Prose

Dickens often uses settings to reflect the characters that he places in them. Examine this way of writing by focusing on at least three characters in *Great Expectations*.

With reference to *The Signalman* and *The Red Room* discuss how the writers have made use of the Gothic horror genre and say what effect this type of writing is intended to have on the reader.

What elements of *The Signalman* reflect Dickens's skill as a short story writer?

Consider:

- setting;
- characterisation;
- genre.

Poetry

Compare and contrast *Porphyria's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*, commenting on their content, style and form. How successful is Browning in revealing his characters through the medium of the dramatic monologue?

Compare Browning's portrayal of the men and their relationships in *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover*.

Compare the poets' attitudes to London in *A London Drawing Room* by George Eliot and *Upon Westminster Bridge* by Wordsworth.

5.2.6 EXAMPLES OF TASKS WHICH ARE NOT HELPFUL TO CANDIDATES, AND DO NOT ALLOW ALL ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES TO BE MET OR ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF MARKS

A character study of Macbeth in Act One.

A newspaper article on the deaths of Duncan and Banquo.

Macbeth!

Lady Macbeth's letter to Macbeth shortly before her death.

Evaluate the extent to which Macbeth is responsible for his own downfall.

To what extent is Friar Lawrence responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

Who is to blame for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet?

Eva Smith's diary.

What impressions would an audience form of Lady Macbeth in Act One?

6 HELPING CANDIDATES WITH THEIR WORK

A number of centres have significant numbers of candidates producing very similar essays.

Too often it is clear that extensive notes have been written on the board for students to follow or they have cut and pasted from the same sources.

You may give your candidates any assistance that will enable them to complete assignments through their own efforts and learning.

YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO:

- assist with the wording and understanding of assignments; candidates may propose their own assignments or modify those given to them if they wish;
- provide stimulus material and discuss the suitability of material that they find for themselves;
- teach texts and encourage candidates to make their own responses;
- suggest ways of handling texts and planning assignments;
- make general suggestions for improving a draft, such as discussing structure and balance, beginnings and endings and the use of vocabulary.

YOU MUST NOT:

- correct a first draft in detail and allow candidates to make a fair copy. Your advice must not constitute the correction. For example, you may alert the candidate to check for full stops and spelling but may not do the corrections for them yourself.

YOU SHOULD NOT:

- teach a text in so much detail that candidates do not think for themselves but merely try to reproduce what you have told them.

It is important that parents also understand this 'Code of Conduct' and realise that coursework assignments must be the candidate's own work.

7 MARKING, STANDARDISING AND MODERATING THE COURSEWORK

7.1 Marking and annotation

This is an area where there is often misunderstanding. The function of marking and commenting on individual units of coursework is:

- to assess strengths and weaknesses for the benefit of the candidate and to suggest ways forward;
- to remind you of those strengths and weaknesses when you come to assess the folder as a whole;
- to make clear to a moderator why you have given your marks.

Every unit of work in the folder must bear evidence of being read and marked.

You should comment on the work in keeping with departmental policy. The evidence may consist of comments at the end or in the margin. At least some of the errors made in spelling, grammar and punctuation should be indicated and comments should indicate which of the marking criteria are most evident.

Comments such as 'This work is very good' will **not** assist the moderator!

The final summative comment on the cover sheet is an opportunity to give any relevant information to explain your final marks to the moderator, should the folder be requested in the final sample.

Some teachers believe that it is the moderator's job to unravel the thinking behind the marking. In fact the moderator is there for the purpose of agreeing your marks and it is helpful if you can assist by explaining whatever is relevant.

7.2 Internal moderation

Every centre should appoint an internal moderator who will take responsibility for the administration of coursework.

The main responsibility of the internal moderator is to be certain that all folders are submitted in a single, valid rank order.

The internal moderator is responsible for supervising the process by which the centre checks that all teachers mark to produce that rank order.

For example, the internal moderator might sample the marking of all teachers, two teachers might share the moderation, or the whole department could be involved.

7.3 Standardisation in centres

When it is time to moderate the folders at the end of the course it is better that all teachers in the centre already understand the Band criteria and agree to the way in which they should be applied.

From time to time during the course standardisation sessions should take place. The following procedures may be helpful in your department.

- **Use of folders from the previous year.** Re-read folders from the previous year, particularly those marked at the Band 1/2 and Band 3/4 borderlines. Remind yourselves of the quality of work that led to those marks being awarded. Review the current coursework with the previous folders, and see how the marks you have awarded compares.
- **Discussions on unmarked work.** Place a number of unmarked pieces in rank order. The discussion on the quality of the work will reveal whether any member of staff is over or under emphasising any of the assessment criteria, and should enable a more consistent application of standards.

Try to ensure that all staff are using the assessment criteria, and are not just marking to a 'gut reaction' based upon the general concept of what constitutes a particular grade.

8 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What follow are answers to the most common questions that OCR and its Principal Moderators are asked by centres.

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM LENGTH FOR A PIECE OF COURSE WORK?

In the specification there are no guidelines for minimum and maximum length, except that 'Candidates should avoid unnecessary length. Very bulky folders should be discouraged'.

All our experience from previous submissions of coursework suggest that lengthy assignments of considerable quantity do not always mean that the candidate will gain any advantage in the quality of the final mark awarded. Certainly for the imaginative writing piece, a candidate has often demonstrated the full gamut of their writing skills in the first two to three sides of writing and the subsequent 15 sides do not always help their cause.

As a very broad rule of thumb, and this is by no means definitive, candidates need to aim to produce an essay of between three to five sides of A4 file paper with average sized handwriting. This might be less when word-processed. Anything longer than five sides may be heading towards 'unnecessary length'. The best candidates are succinct and selective with their ideas.

DO BOTH THE POETRY AND PROSE TASKS HAVE TO BE COMPARISONS?

The specification requires that at least one task should 'explore relationships and comparisons between texts, selecting and evaluating relevant material'. That means that either the poetry task or the prose task should explore some comparison. Most centres choose to compare two or more poems to fulfil this requirement, but there is no reason at all why the prose task might not also explore comparison.

I AM DOING THE PRE-1914 OPTION FOR COURSEWORK. IS IT OKAY TO COMPARE A PRE-1914 POEM WITH A POST-1914 POEM?

Yes, it is okay. Many centres have chosen to compare *The Charge of the Light Brigade* with *Dulce et Decorum est*. The only thing to be aware of is that the candidate might not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of pre-1914 poetry if they have written one paragraph on *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and eight paragraphs with detailed quotes on *Dulce et decorum est*. It is important that there is sufficient emphasis on the pre-1914 poem to demonstrate adequate knowledge and understanding of that text.

CAN THE DRAMA ASSIGNMENT BE BASED ON THE VIDEO OR TV PERFORMANCE, OR DOES IT HAVE TO BE ON THE WRITTEN TEXT?

The written text must play a significant part in the study of drama. Viewing of a video or TV performance may enhance the understanding of 'stagecraft' and 'audience', but it must be linked to the study of the written text, e.g. for assessing different interpretations of certain aspects of the text. A bad example of the use of video would be a task on 'conflict in *Romeo and Juliet*', followed by a detailed outline of the opening garage shoot out in the Leonardo di Caprio film with no reference to any other aspects of the text.

IS IT OKAY TO MARK MY COURSEWORK WITH A GRADE AT THE END, AS THIS IS ALL THE CANDIDATES WANT TO SEE?

The specification requires that we make assessments in Bands. If the teacher wishes to give a candidate an indication of a GCSE grade they might be working towards, then that is a matter for individual or departmental choice. The moderator needs to be able to establish easily how work has been assessed and marked in line with the marking criteria. That means that somewhere on the final submission there needs to be a mark out of 40 for English and a mark out of 45 for English Literature. It is helpful for the moderator to see marks relating to the marking criteria on each piece of work, as this helps demonstrate progression. For the writing piece it is vital that **two** marks are recorded on the individual assignment: one mark for AO3s (i) & (ii) out of 14 and one mark for AO3 (iii) out of 6, giving a total mark out of 20.

IS IT OKAY TO DO AN EMPATHIC TASK FOR THE WRITING PIECE OF THE GCSE ENGLISH COURSEWORK?

There is nothing in the specification that says that this is not acceptable. However you should be aware that empathic tasks can limit the achievement of students if the task is not considered very carefully. The worst examples of empathic tasks are those that are totally unrealistic, e.g. 'Lennie's diary' from *Of Mice and Men*. As he is illiterate he would hardly be able to write a diary! The very fact that you might choose an empathic task makes it difficult for the student to meet the criteria for Band 1 and Band 2 of AO3s (i) & (ii) where 'the imagined situation' must be 'inventive and entirely convincing'. It is very important when setting the task that you look at the assessment criteria for the higher bands and consider how the student might meet them in their writing.

I AM CONCERNED THAT ONE OF MY STUDENTS HAS HANDED IN AN ESSAY THAT HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM THE INTERNET. WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT IT?

It is very clearly for the teacher to judge whether or not the subject matter has been plagiarised or not. This is a matter that **must** be resolved by the centre as it is very difficult for the moderator to intervene. If the teacher can establish that the coursework is not the candidate's own work, then suitable penalties might be applied, e.g. exclude that piece of work and mark the folder as deficient. It is not appropriate to leave the piece in the folder, marked, and then send it to the moderator to 'see what you think'. Because coursework runs over a period of 18 months, teachers have many more opportunities to resolve these problems while the external moderator can only identify the problem and refer it on to OCR or the centre for further explanation.