2009 English

Higher – Critical Essay

Finalised Marking Instructions

The Marking Procedure

1 Judging against the Performance Criteria

Each essay should first be read to establish whether it achieves success in all the Performance Criteria below, including relevance and the standards for technical accuracy (see 2 below).

Understanding
As appropriate to task, the response demonstrates secure understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the *text(s).

Analysis
The response explains accurately and in detail ways in which relevant aspects of structure/style/ language contribute to meaning/effect/impact.

Evaluation
The response reveals clear engagement with the *text(s) or aspects of the text(s) and stated or implied evaluation of effectiveness, substantiated by detailed and relevant evidence from the *text(s).

Expression
Structure, style and language, including use of appropriate critical terminology, are deployed to communicate meaning clearly and develop a line of thought which is sustainedly relevant to purpose; spelling, grammar and punctuation are sufficiently accurate.

*The term "text" encompasses printed, audio or film/video text(s) which may be literary (fiction or non-fiction) or may relate to aspects of media or language.

2 Confirming Technical Accuracy

An essay which does not satisfy the requirement for "sufficient" technical accuracy cannot pass. If, however, technical accuracy is deemed "sufficient", then there are no penalties or deductions for such errors.

The definition of "sufficiently accurate" is the same as that given below for "consistently accurate", but with an allowance made for examination conditions, ie time pressure and no opportunity to redraft.

Consistently accurate (in line with Core Skills statement)
Few errors will be present. Paragraphs, sentences and punctuation are accurate and organised so that the writing can be clearly and readily understood. Spelling errors (particularly of high frequency words) are infrequent.

3 Assigning a Category and Mark

Each essay should then be assigned to the appropriate Category as outlined in the Broad Descriptors, supported by reference to the Detailed Descriptors.

(a) Broad Descriptors

Essays which **pass** (ie meet the minimum requirements of the Performance Criteria) should be assigned to one of four categories as follows:

Category	Mark(s)	Broad descriptor
I	25	Outstanding
II	21 **or** 23	Very sound
III	17 **or** 19	Comfortably achieves the Performance Criteria
IV	13 **or** 15	Just succeeds in achieving the Performance Criteria

Essays which **fail** to meet the minimum requirements of one or more than one Performance Criterion should be assigned to one of two categories as follows:

Category	Mark(s)	Broad descriptor
V	11 **or** 9	Fails to achieve one or more than one Performance Criterion and/or to achieve sufficient technical accuracy, or is simply too thin
VI*	7 **or** 5**	Serious shortcomings

In Categories II – VI, the choice of which mark to award should be determined by the level of certainty with which the response has been assigned to the Category.

* Essays in this Category will be extremely rare. It should be used only in cases of significant misunderstanding of a text, extreme thinness, or serious weaknesses in expression and/or technical accuracy.

** Marks below 5 could, in exceptional circumstances, be awarded – for example to a response of extreme brevity, perhaps just a few lines.

(b) Detailed descriptors

Category I (25 marks): A sophisticated response which, allowing for the pressures of examination conditions and the limited time available, is outstanding in nearly every respect. Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) are sound. The question is addressed fully and convincingly in such a way as to show insight into the text(s) as a whole, and selection of evidence to support the argument is extensive and skilful. The essay is effectively structured as a genuine response to the question. As appropriate to the task and the text(s), the candidate demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the literary and/or linguistic techniques being exploited. There is a committed evaluative stance with respect to the text(s) and the task, although this is not necessarily explicit. Expression is controlled and fluent.

Dealing with longer texts, the response ranges effectively over the whole text where appropriate, selects effectively, and while focusing on the demands of the question, never loses sight of the text as a whole; dealing with shorter texts, the response uses a text which clearly allows the requirements of the question to be met fully, avoids "blanket coverage" and mechanistic, unfocused "analysis", and shows a pleasing understanding of the text as a whole.

Category II (21 or 23 marks): A very sound response which, allowing for the pressures of examination conditions and the limited time available, is secure in most respects. Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) are sound. The question is addressed fully in such a way as to show some insight into the text(s) as a whole, and selection of evidence to support the argument is extensive. The essay is soundly structured as a genuine response to the question. As appropriate to the task and the text(s), the candidate demonstrates a sound awareness of the literary and/or linguistic techniques being exploited. There is a clear evaluative stance with respect to the text(s) and the task, although this is not necessarily explicit. Expression is controlled.

Dealing with longer texts, the response ranges over the whole text where appropriate, selects sensibly, and while focusing on the demands of the question, never loses sight of the text as a whole; dealing with shorter texts, the response uses a text which clearly allows the requirements of the question to be met, avoids "blanket coverage" and mechanistic, unfocused "analysis", and shows a sound understanding of the text as a whole.

Category III (17 or 19 marks): A response which, allowing for the pressures of examination conditions and the limited time available, is secure in a number of respects. Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) are on the whole sound. The question is addressed adequately in such a way as to show understanding of the text as a whole, and selection of evidence to support the argument is appropriate to the task. The essay is structured in such a way as to meet the requirements of the question. As appropriate to the task and the text(s), the candidate shows an awareness of the literary and/or linguistic techniques being exploited. There is some evaluative stance with respect to the text(s) and the task, although this is not necessarily explicit. Expression is satisfactory.

Dealing with longer texts, the response makes some attempt to range over the whole text where appropriate, makes some selection of relevant evidence, and while focusing on the demands of the question, retains some sense of the text as a whole; dealing with shorter texts, the response uses a text which meets the requirements of the question, avoids excessive "blanket coverage" and mechanistic, unfocused "analysis", and shows an understanding of the text as a whole.

Category IV (13 or 15 marks): A response which, allowing for the pressures of examination conditions and the limited time available, just manages to meet the minimum standard to achieve the Performance Criteria. Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) are adequate. The question is addressed sufficiently in such a way as to show reasonable understanding of the text as a whole, and there is some evidence to support the argument. There is some evidence that the essay is structured in such a way as to meet the requirements of most of the question. As appropriate to the task and the text(s), the candidate shows some awareness of the literary and/or linguistic techniques being exploited. There is some evaluative stance with respect to the text(s) and the task, although this is not necessarily explicit. Expression is adequate.

Dealing with longer texts, the response retains some sense of the text as a whole; dealing with shorter texts, the response uses a text which meets the requirements of the question, avoids excessive use of mechanistic, unfocused "analysis", and shows some understanding of the text as a whole.

Category V (11 or 9 marks): A response will fall into this Category for a variety of reasons: it fails to achieve sufficient technical accuracy; or knowledge and understanding of the text are not deployed as a response relevant to the task; or any analysis attempted is undiscriminating and/or unfocused; or the answer is simply too thin.

Some general guidelines

- Assessment must be holistic. It is not possible to see an essay in "subsets" such as Relevance, Analysis, Evaluation, etc. In every essay there will be strengths and weaknesses; assessment should focus as far as possible on the strengths, penalising weaknesses only when they significantly detract from the overall achievement.

- Categories are not grades. Assumptions about final grades or association of final grades (such as A, B or C) with particular categories should not influence the assessment.

- Markers are reminded that all Critical Essay questions require candidates to select from their knowledge of a text in order to shape a response to a specific question. Thus, obviously "prepared" answers which entirely fail to focus on the question cannot pass. Similarly, blanket coverage (especially of a poem) which merely touches on the question is very unlikely to do well. Markers should reward good selection and genuine efforts to address the chosen question.

- The term "longer texts" should be taken to mean novels, most novellas, full-length plays, and particularly long poems; "shorter texts" should be taken to mean short stories, one-act plays, and most poems.

- The use of critical terminology is not an end in itself. The candidate's explanation and appreciation of how a writer exploits literary/linguistic features is of more value than simply naming them.

- "Evaluation" need not be explicit. Indeed, in examination conditions, faced with unseen questions, the level of a candidate's engagement with the question will be as telling as any superficial praise lavished on the text.

- Quality of expression should not be confused with "Technical Accuracy", which is limited to matters of spelling, punctuation and grammar. An essay characterised by clumsy expression is likely to be self-penalising, but should not be failed for this alone.

- Where a question contains a twofold instruction, assessment should take a sensible view of the extent to which "both parts of the question" have been answered. Sophisticated responses will often tackle both parts concurrently, or give much more weight to the more demanding element. Weaker answers will often concentrate on the more straightforward element, perhaps to the near-exclusion of the remainder; such responses cannot score high marks, but may still pass.

- In the Descriptors, terms such as "sound", "adequate", "effective", "sophisticated" and even "some", can never be defined with precision, and their application can be made only after reference to exemplification. Detailed exemplification is given each year to those appointed to mark the examination, and is disseminated to the profession by such means as the Understanding Standards website, Professional Development Workshops, Development Visits.

- Markers should avoid hypothetical comparisons between essays at Higher and those at Intermediate 2. While a bare pass essay at Higher might sometimes compare unfavourably with a pass essay at Intermediate 2, the questions at Intermediate 2 are designed to be more straightforward than at Higher. Comparison, therefore, is not possible and should be resisted.

Supplementary Marking Instructions

Markers are reminded that all Critical Essay questions require candidates to select from their knowledge of a text in order to shape a response to a specific question. Thus, obviously "prepared" answers which entirely fail to focus on the question cannot pass. Similarly, "blanket" coverage (especially of a poem) which merely touches on the question is very unlikely to do well. Markers should reward good selection and genuine efforts to address the chosen question.

It is not necessary to provide detailed instructions for each question, but the following points should be noted:

Section A – Drama

2. Candidates are free to choose features of structure which are not in the list provided in the question.

3. Be reasonably generous to a candidate's definition of "a scene".

4. Although there must be coverage of both, a candidate is not obliged to give equal weight in his/her answer to the values of the society and the values of the central character(s).

Section B – Prose

5. Be sympathetic to overlap of different kinds of "love". It is possible that two types, eg "unrequited" and "betrayed" could be conflated.

9. The "persuasive argument" should be identified and the aspects of style commented on should be shown to be in support of the candidate's line of thought.

10. The term "full-length" suggests a fairly sustained concentration on the life of the subject. A piece of writing, an essay for example, which of its nature deals with an incident in the writer's life would be very unlikely to fulfil the demands of this remit.

11. A wide variety of texts is acceptable for this remit – essays, journalism, travel writing, biography etc. The key aspect has to be the humour.

Section C – Poetry

12. Be prepared to accept that there may be overlap between two or more of the options in the question.

13. The two poems chosen need not be discussed in equal depth. Also, markers should not expect two poems to be dealt with in as much detail as would be appropriate for an answer dealing with one poem only. If in doubt, refer to PA.

15. Accept, within reason, the candidate's interpretation of a "particular stage of life", and note that stages other than those suggested in the question could be chosen.

Section D – Film and TV Drama

The following general advice is offered about the marking of essays from Section D:

Section D of the Critical Essay paper seeks to elicit responses on Film and TV Drama broadly similar to those on Drama, Prose or Poetry. The essay should deal with the text as a whole and should support the line of thought by reference to the impact of techniques appropriate to the genre. Some Film/TV Drama techniques are specific to these genres (eg editing and use of camera), but others are shared with Drama, Prose and Poetry.

The essay should demonstrate awareness that the film or programme makers are working in an audio-visual medium, but need not concentrate heavily (and certainly not exclusively) on highly technical features specific to Film or TV Drama. A useful comparison may be made with the Poetry section, where it is not usually appropriate or necessary for candidates to deal exhaustively with very technical areas of scansion and metre, nor deal exhaustively with single sounds, words, phrases or lines at the expense of demonstrating an appreciation of the text as a whole.

16. The nature of the conflict might spill out into outright violence at times but the focus of the essay should be on the psychological battle.

17. The focus of the essay should be on aspects of mise-en-scène and/or editing.

18. Accept any reasonable definition of "historical period" which is not obviously contemporary.

Section E − Language

The following general advice is offered about the marking of essays in Section E:

The "text" which must be dealt with in a language question is the research which the candidate has undertaken and any secondary language texts which may have been consulted.

Examples taken from the research must be there for you to see.

However, to demonstrate understanding and analysis related to these examples there has to be some ability to generalise from the particular, to classify and comment on the interesting phenomena discovered. It is not enough merely to produce a list of words in, say, Dundonian with their standard English equivalents. This is merely description and without any further development does not demonstrate understanding of any principle underlying the choice of words.

The list of features offered to the candidate in the box at the head of the section provides prompts for the candidates, but is not exclusive. Some appropriate use of technical terminology should be expected.

Explicit evaluation is required by each of the questions, but there may also be evaluation integral to the research itself.

All essays from Section E – Language should be marked and referred to the PA.

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]