

GCSE

English/English

Language/English Literature

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Report on Moderation

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By the time this report is published several centres will have already attended launch meetings for the new specifications, teaching for which begins in September 2015. Controlled assessment will end in 2016. Some will not regret its passing but the moderating team continue to report positively on the work of candidates produced during their course of study at a time chosen by the centre and on tasks which have been tailored to the needs of their students.

Following last year's meetings, moderators have reported general improvement in the way candidates' work is annotated. The considerable majority of centres have a consistent and rigorous approach to annotation. Annotation is used to explain the award of a final mark and is clearly and realistically based upon band criteria. Moderators still find examples of single word marginalia such as 'language' and 'context' which is of very little help but it is much less a feature of marking than it used to be. Where there seems to be very thorough but occasionally unsupportable annotation it often concerns centre's use of the term 'analysis'. There are sometimes examples of 'language analysis' appearing in the margin next to sections of a candidate's response where a quotation has been used. Quoting Capulet's angry words directed at Juliet and observing that they show his fury at her disobedience, is not analysis of language; it is explanation, arguably a very obvious 'interpretation' of a textual detail. For there to be 'analysis of language' the candidate would need to identify significant words and phrases and explore their effects; there would be some engagement with the way the words were structured.

Thoughtful task-setting is a feature of the most effective work in centres. Candidates need to approach tasks in ways that enable them to address all relevant assessment criteria if they are to achieve the kinds of marks their potential suggests. This is most obviously true in the case of tasks based on reading skills. In English (ENG03), for example, there are four strands to the mark scheme: candidates need to demonstrate their understanding of meaning; of 'writers' ideas'; of the writers' use of language/structure; and of the significance of the contexts. The objectives which are sometimes neglected in, for example, ENG03 and English Literature unit 3 – writers' use of language/structure and the significance of the contexts – are not optional aspects of the mark scheme: candidates must engage with each of the strands. There is a less obvious distinction between the strand based on comprehension of meaning and the one based on 'writers' ideas'. A way to consider the latter might be to explore 'attitudes' and 'perspectives': students can demonstrate their understanding that Lennie in 'Of Mice and Men' is portrayed as large, strong and dangerous but they also need to consider why Steinbeck might have portrayed him in a particular way, what they can infer about the writer's attitude towards the character. In English Language (ENL03) the spoken language study mark scheme has only three strands and effective tasks are those which explicitly draw candidates' attention to all three. There has been a lot of writing about the spoken language of television chefs in which candidates seem to have been unaware of the need to explore 'public attitudes towards varieties of spoken language'; writing about the way audiences react to Jamie Oliver or Nigella Lawson does not address the criterion unless the candidates' comments are focused on the way audiences react to spoken language.

Many centres have used candidate notes pages to remind their candidates of key assessment criteria, a better use of notes than is often seen. It is perfectly acceptable for centres to be explicit about the criteria to be assessed. It is acceptable to add to basic stems: 'In your response make sure you write about:' and then to list a student-friendly version of the strands in the mark scheme. Advice from previous years about the importance of monitoring candidates' notes still applies. If moderators find candidates' notes which are clearly a pre-prepared draft so that the candidate simply joins up the dots, they will refer the folder to the Awarding Body because what they are reading has effectively been written outside 'controlled' conditions.

Where moderators find it difficult to confirm centre marks it is usually the case that they find inadequate coverage of a particular strand of the mark scheme to support the centre's marks. It is often the case that some candidates have either ignored or found challenging a particular strand. Moderators sometimes find virtually every candidate in a centre failing to address one of the strands because they seemed to have been unaware of its existence or importance. When centres are devising tasks and exploring ways of preparing candidates it is very important to keep an eye on the mark scheme and to make sure that each strand is considered. It is particularly important to devise differentiated approaches. Moderators have reported this year, as in previous series, that some very able candidates are not being helped by some over-scaffolded approaches. The band 5 descriptor for reading in all the units refers to 'imaginatively selected textual detail'. If a top set approach a task based on response to a literary text by working through a set of 'given' textual references it is very difficult to see how they have been helped to meet the criterion. At the lower end of the mark range some candidates struggle because they seem to have been expected to use the same task and title as those in bands 4 and 5. An approach in which the response is chunked into sections relating to assessment objectives might be of more use for candidates trying to move out of band 1.

Many candidates meet different assessment objectives at different levels in a single response. Sometimes they seem significantly less well-prepared to meet a particular strand of the mark scheme. Some candidates with very good reading skills, able to properly analyse writers' use of language and structure and explore ideas in some depth and detail, seem to be less able to engage with the significance of the contexts. One moderator reported:

'Context in Shakespeare is best addressed when the context is performance and audience appeal. Bolted-on pseudo facts and generalisations such as "Women didn't count in those (17th/19th century) days" show little sense that the times referred to were notable for the gender of the ruling monarch. This year there were widespread claims that audiences would have been "shocked" by, variously, thumb-biting, secret marriage and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and by regicide, wifely dominance and ghosts in *Macbeth*. Such claims were often followed by reference to a modern audience's acceptance of such things, both of which may be clear in understanding, but less easy to describe as assured or sophisticated.'

English (ENG03/NENG03)

There is a lot of use of 'Romeo and Juliet' or 'Macbeth', 'Of Mice and Men' and, unsurprisingly considering the year, war poetry as the three texts for section A, 'Understanding Creative Texts'. Where centres have not used 'Of Mice and Men' as the prose text and have, instead, used a literary heritage text such as 'Silas Marner', they have often used familiar poems from previous Anthologies (such as 'Nothing's Changed', 'Vultures', 'Blessing') to fulfill the requirements for a text from a different culture. One moderator reported on some superb work seen from an inner-city, multi-cultural centre in which candidates responded to a thoughtfully compiled set of Abolitionist poems. There was some ambitious work produced in response to 'The Kite Runner'.

In the most effective centres tasks have been carefully shaped to ensure candidates address all strands of the mark scheme. The mark scheme for 'Understanding Creative Texts' is not holistic, each individual response must be assessed to demonstrate how effectively each strand has been addressed; if a candidate writes 'clearly and consistently' about meaning, ideas and the writer's use of language and structure but fails to engage with the criterion about the significance of the context, the candidate's mark for that response cannot be at the top of band 3. Where moderators are in disagreement with centre marks it is most often the case that they find it difficult to support the mark because of the strands concerning the writers' use of language and the significance of the context. In the case of the writers' use of language the mark scheme for band 3 is headlined 'clear and consistent': candidates have more than an hour to respond to the literary text and one flash of engagement with the writer's use of language in a particular text does not amount to 'consistent'. Candidates tend to meet this criterion most effectively when they are writing about poetry and need to be encouraged to write about language and structure in all three responses. Moderators quite often report annotations referring to 'language' next to sections of candidates' responses in which they have used quotation. Explaining the meaning of a quotation seems, in some centres, to be seen as evidence of engaging with a writer's use of language and this can lead to over-rewarding.

Candidates' approaches to the 'significance of' the context are not really suggesting improvement in the way this strand of the mark scheme is being addressed. A focus on the 'historical' context remains a feature of many candidate responses and it often leads to quite limited focus on 'significance'. The best practice is to begin with the text and move out. Candidates responding to, say, Act 3 Scene 5 of 'Romeo and Juliet' could be advised to think about cultural as well as historical attitudes towards ideas of arranged marriages. That would be better than tacking on a section about Shakespeare's theatre and making sweeping generalisations. Candidates could also be cautioned against assuming some expertise about the contexts of a text: some candidates grossly over-simplify, largely because they are faithfully reporting a single source they have heard or read.

The task based on 'emotions' was popular and usually worked well. Where it was not effective it tended to be because candidates wrote about characters as though they were real people rather than constructs, an approach that invariably means the candidate loses focus on the writer's ideas and the writer's use of language and structure.

Candidates' writing was often better and more reliably assessed than their responses to literary texts. There were some engaging, thoughtful responses to the task based upon the letter a character from a literary text chose not to send; Curley's wife's letter to her mother when it became more than an outline of events in the novella often produced very effective and affecting writing. Candidates also wrote particularly well about 'an important time' in their life, especially when they moved beyond a simple chronological structure. There was ample evidence that many young people still enjoy the opportunity to write a story and there were many engaging concise narratives.

Writing tended to be best when candidates had some autonomy; when every candidate in a centre is writing about the same film or advert often using a centre-prepared resource, the writing can be very stilted.

English Language (ENL03/NENL03)

'Of Mice and Men' is, by a long way, the text used by most centres but moderators reported an increasing range of texts including 'Lord of the Flies', 'Pride and Prejudice', 'The Crucible', 'The Woman in Black', 'An Inspector Calls' and 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. The choice of text will obviously be determined to a large extent by the centre's selection from the set texts for English Literature.

Moderators felt that candidates were more clearly engaging with the strands of the mark scheme, especially the one concerning 'writers' ideas'. In the most effective centres candidates have been well prepared to focus on the writer, to not treat characters as people, to select and comment on textual details rather than re-telling the plot.

In the responses to the writing tasks the task based on the theme of community produced a range of interesting approaches with some especially thought-provoking, superbly crafted 'rite of passage' narratives. Writing about adverts was very mixed but moderators had no doubt that the best writing seemed to emerge from centres where candidates had been given free choice about which advert they would write about. By contrast, when every candidate wrote about, typically, the 'Go Compare' advert it tended to lead to very formulaic responses. Writing in controlled assessment should be seen as good preparation for writing in the unit 1 examination where candidates have to independently create and structure their response to a common task. Giving choice of content as preparation for this is worth consideration. The re-creative tasks worked best when candidates were fully aware of the flexibility they had and were least effective when candidates seemed to misunderstand the premise of the task and seemed to think their main purpose was to faithfully re-tell the story of the poem or write a monologue in which a character re-told the events of a text.

The most commonly neglected strand of the entire ENL03 mark scheme is the 'public attitudes' to spoken language strand. It is often completely ignored or misunderstood. A task based on the language of television chefs was widely used and in many cases 'public attitudes towards varieties of spoken language' was approached as though reference to 'audience' was public attitudes. Much of what was written about 'audience', however, was focused not on spoken language but on the behaviours of the chefs. This was sometimes construed as 'paralinguistics' – sometimes correctly – but often the focus on audience concerned aspects of the television set and camera angles. Where there was a focus on language it often came down to assertions that Gordon Ramsay swears a lot, Nigella Lawson's language is sexually alluring and Jamie Oliver uses language which young people like. There may be some truth in all these assertions but they need to be developed with accompanying detail for bands 4 and 5.

Centres developing tasks for the spoken language study should make sure that the resources enable candidates to write about public attitudes and analyse data in the depth and detail appropriate to their candidates' potential: if candidates do not understand how they can engage with public attitudes and do not have much data to analyse they will struggle to meet the demands of the mark scheme. Candidates in the most effective centres produced some superbly well focused, remarkably interesting responses, often based upon their own data and their own experience. Some of the best work was based upon candidates' experience of digital communications and upon their awareness of varieties of spoken language and how they are perceived - this would make a valuable contribution to the Key Stage 3 curriculum when the spoken language study disappears from the new specifications. It would be a great pity if the idea of exploring spoken language disappeared.

English Literature Unit 3 (97103)

Moderators have reported improvement in candidate responses that to some extent is a result of better task setting based upon some thoughtful linking of texts. Moderators have seen some excellent results produced by candidates linking 'The Turn of the Screw' with 'Othello' (exploring the characterization of the Governess and Iago); 'The Merchant of Venice' with 'Macbeth' (Shylock and Macbeth); 'Pride and Prejudice' with 'Much Ado About Nothing' (Elizabeth and Darcy with Benedick and Beatrice); 'The Merchant of Venice' with 'Romeo and Juliet' (the relationships of Bassanio and Antonio with Mercutio and Romeo); and 'Lord of the Flies' linked with plays such as 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Othello' and 'Macbeth'.

In a very small number of centres moderators found tasks which were not very effective in guiding candidates towards key assessment criteria. Linking 'Macbeth' and the poetry of Robert Browning may have potential but when it is restricted to a comparison of Lady Macbeth's characterization with the speaker in 'The Laboratory' it is difficult for candidates to respond in very much depth when they are engaging with only one poem from the poetry text. For future submissions, in 2015, centres are advised to look very carefully at the 'strengthened' mark scheme for Unit 3 so that candidates with the potential to meet high band criteria are not restricted. One reason for linking two Shakespeare plays is that potential high band candidates, faced with two challenging texts, have the opportunity to explore ideas and techniques in the required depth and detail: there is greater scope in exploring 'Macbeth' and 'The Merchant of Venice' than 'Macbeth' and 'The Laboratory'.

Some candidates found the strand concerned with linkage/comparison to be challenging. Candidates struggled when they lacked a clear focus on a small number of ideas or key points which they had identified, in the preparation stage, as similar in some respect. The most effective responses emerged when candidates explored a small number of similarities and drew out any differences in approach, technique, development of ideas. Moderators reported that linkage based on an element of style or form often worked well. A focus on the use of soliloquy, for example, could be very effective and very able candidates could show their command of skills by exploring features of language.

English Literature Unit 5 (97105)

Unit 5 responses should be based upon the study of two poetry texts each consisting of at least fifteen poems each and centres should bear this in mind when devising approaches to tasks which will be assessed using the 'strengthened' mark scheme in 2015. The reference to 'whole text' in the new mark scheme does not mean that candidates will be expected to refer to a huge number of poems but titles which direct candidates to four named poems, two from each text, are less likely to help candidates meet criteria of 'sophistication'. If candidates are responding to a task based on, for example, conflict and are exploring writers' ideas about, and attitudes towards war they are more likely to find subtlety and nuance if they consider a wider range of poems than four.

Moderators saw some effective work based on aspects of love and relationships in a variety of poems such as 'Medusa', Sonnet 43', Sister Maude', 'Brothers' and 'Les Grand Seigneurs'. There was some excellent work in response to a task about the relationship between people and place using poems including 'Cold Knap Lake', 'The Blackbird of Glanmore', 'Neighbours' and 'London'. Candidates taking the unit 5 route seem, generally, to have a good focus on the assessment objective concerned with the writers' use of language and structure.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)