

May 2016 subject reports

English A: Literature TZ2

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 17	18 – 32	33 – 43	44 – 56	57 – 68	69 – 80	81 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 15	16 – 29	30 – 41	42 – 54	55 – 66	67 – 78	79 – 100

Higher level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 21	22 – 25	26 – 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

A wide range of works was represented, with most of them suiting the nature of the assessment. For the commentary, the most popular authors included Sylvia Plath, Carol Ann Duffy, Wilfred Owen, Seamus Heaney, John Donne, John Keats, Langston Hughes, William Blake, T.S. Eliot and Ted Hughes. The less frequently chosen authors included W.B. Yeats, Auden, Giovanni, Coleridge, Dickinson, Dawe, Walcott, Stevens, Lorna Crozier and Frost. For the discussion, the most popular plays were by Shakespeare, especially Hamlet, Othello, Lear, The Merchant of Venice and Macbeth. Other plays used included The Crucible and A Streetcar Named Desire. In prose fiction, popular choices included Running in the Family, In Cold Blood, The Great

Gatsby, Things Fall Apart, The Handmaid's Tale, Wuthering Heights, Heart of Darkness and Pride and Prejudice. The Awakening, The Age of Innocence, The Dubliners and As I Lay Dying were also represented. The most popular non-fiction choices were works by Martin Luther King, Didion, Orwell, Angelou and O'Brien.

The works with which most candidates seemed to struggle were by T. S. Eliot, Blake, Stevens, Conrad, Wilde and Faulkner. In addition, Wilfred Owen's "Greater Love" was a challenge for candidates.

Some poems or extracts were far too long – or far too short – for candidates to analyze successfully in the eight minutes. Once again, centers are reminded of the 20-30 line requirement, as stated in the Subject Guide.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A:

As in the past, candidates who demonstrated a genuine sense of engagement with the poem as a literary text performed very well. They explored the content and form of the piece, showing how the two contribute to its meaning (s). They avoided the temptation to see the poem as a springboard to talk about matters of biographical, cultural or social context; and they avoided the temptation to lapse into paraphrase and description in place of analysis and interpretation. As one moderator reports, 'candidates who gave a convincing overview of the poem from the outset and proceeded to elaborate on this overview, examining the text and subtext of the piece normally conveyed their knowledge and understanding more convincingly.' However, many candidates continue to deliver pre-learned biographical introductions; these are always unhelpful. Moderators are also concerned that although 'context' is no longer discretely rewarded, teachers' subsequent questions continue to focus on this aspect instead of the poem itself.

Criterion B:

Candidates who showed a clear awareness of the poet's techniques and their effect in shaping and giving meaning to the poem or extract tended to do very well. Overall, however, this remains the most problematic criterion with moderators and teachers disagreeing sharply in their marking. Some candidates tended to see the demands of the criterion as best served through reference to as many literary features as possible. As one senior moderator put it, "Selecting the few that generate the most impact, or play the most significant role, and wrestling with them in some detail, is a key way in which the sense of independent critical response can be generated." In addition, many moderators observed that too often candidates relied on paraphrase coupled with reader response, rather than a clear awareness of techniques and their effects. In some cases, the teacher's subsequent questions failed to focus the candidate on missing details in the analysis. In other cases, some candidates damaged their cause by making judgments that were vague, unsupported or speculative, as exemplified by statements like "this helps the reader to visualise the scene" and "the colour red is usually associated with passion."

Criterion C

There was a wide range in the organizational quality of the commentary. Excellent analyses demonstrated careful arrangement of points or ideas, with candidates progressing through each point with carefully integrated textual evidence to support their interpretations. Such candidates had very effective introductions in which they announced the intended focus of the analysis and they brought the commentary to a meaningful end through a concluding statement, however brief. This independent control of material was further evidenced in the 'body' of the analysis in which candidates produced a deliberate and persuasive response to the poem. However, many commentaries tended to rely on the kind of linear approach that easily invited paraphrase and 'explanation' in place of analysis and interpretation. To paraphrase one senior moderator's report, candidates who organized their ideas around 3-4 broad concepts and who stuck to them were the ones who typically scored higher marks in this criterion.

Criterion D

Most candidates demonstrated adequate knowledge of the work. They knew the plot and characters and discussed them at length; however, many did not explore the implications of the work. As a result, they lost marks for not showing enough 'understanding' of the text. Responses which showed a good understanding of the conventions of the work tended to do well. Still, very often, the quality of the candidate's response very much depended on the kind of questions asked by the teacher. For example, candidates who were simply confined to 'interviews' about the work did not score high marks. Similarly, weak responses were elicited by vague and unhelpful questions like 'What can you tell me about this work?' or equally inappropriate questions, like 'Who was your favorite character?' or 'Which character would you like to hang out (sic) with?' or 'How enthusiastic were you about the beginning of the play?' and so on. In some cases, candidates merely reproduced taught material as prompted by questions like "In class we discussed the underlying reasons why Myrtle (in *The Great Gatsby*) feels compelled to buy a dog. What are those reasons?" Answers to such questions hardly showed the candidate's insights into the work.

Criterion E

Once again, candidate performance in this criterion very much depended on the teacher's questions. Candidates who were engaged in a dynamic and spontaneous discussion about the work as a literary artefact, with the teachers asking pertinent and probing questions performed very well. Their answers were often independent, thoughtful and lively. As one moderator observes, it was unfortunate that teachers' questions often led candidates' responses into "territory that is speculative (e.g. 'What would have happened if Okonkwo had not accidentally killed his kinsman in *Things Fall Apart*?'), unhelpfully personal or subjective or irrelevant (e.g. 'As a person of color, how do you respond to Othello's tribulations in this play?')." Even weaker responses were those that talked about the characters in the works as if they were real people.

Criterion F

Most of the performances ranged from adequate to excellent. The most successful were candidates who expressed themselves clearly, cogently and fluently. However, many candidates seemed unaware that they were sitting an examination, which by definition is a

formal undertaking. Consequently, the quality of their expression was dampened by the ubiquitous use of 'like' and equivalent fillers. Again, some teachers seemed unaware of the appropriate register. In such cases, candidates lost marks needlessly.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is important for teachers to be most familiar with all the clerical and administrative regulations for the oral examination. Similarly, schools which continue to ignore the moderators' feedback in previous sessions as well as recommendations in the annual subject reports disadvantage their next batch of candidates. For example, no candidate should have to be handicapped by the teacher's continued use of poems that are either too long or too short. In the light of this, teachers are strongly urged not only to consult support materials available: the Subject Guide, Teacher Support Material and the current Handbook of Procedures. Also useful is attending workshops, consulting various published course books and the online curriculum forums.

As stressed in previous subject reports, teaching close analysis of short texts including poems throughout the diploma course has immense benefits for the student. Special emphasis needs to be placed on examining the different literary features of the text, how they collectively contribute to the meaning of the text and its effects on the reader. To quote one moderator, "Students should be encouraged to delve into elements of the poem that for them are the most significant, not to see them as a formulaic walk through a series of pre-determined check list of points – nor to think they have to cover everything." Equally important is practising doing the oral commentary, with the teacher crafting suitable guiding questions for each text. In the latter case, one question should address the content of the text (e.g. theme) and the other some aspect of the language (e.g. a stylistic feature). For some teachers, it is also useful to remember that pre-set subsequent questions hardly ever help the candidate's commentary. Please note that the Subject Guide requires the candidate to speak for 8 minutes, at which point the teacher should step in - even if the analysis is incomplete - and ask the subsequent questions. Moderators are instructed to take no account of any points made after the 10 minutes have elapsed, however strong.

It is important to distinguish between an interview and a discussion. Whereas it is acceptable to use some of the questions suggested in the subject guide and TSM, using them mechanically tends to limit the candidate's ability to display their own insights into the work. Teachers who are always alert and interested in the response, asking pertinent follow-up questions, enable the candidate to reveal their strengths. To quote one moderator, "Understanding how to make the discussion work for the benefit of the student is particularly important. Questions should be appropriate, responses nurtured carefully and ideally developed, new topics brought up when a particular line of enquiry has been more or less exhausted." Questions which focus on the ways in which people, events, settings and themes are presented in the work and which encourage students to make reference to the literary elements of the text help to produce quality responses. It is therefore important to avoid questions that invite speculation, generalization or simply memorized taught detail. Also, teachers are advised to refrain from asking whether a student was 'satisfied' with the ending of a work; instead, the teacher could ask about the extent to which things are resolved at the end so as to gauge the nature of the student's understanding of the work. Further, it is never a good idea to lead students into discussion about politics or

race relations. As one veteran moderator says, "Doing so removes focus from the text and encourages comments for which no marks can be awarded."

Further comments

Happily, the vast majority of schools adhered to the regulations and thus ensured a smooth moderation of the sample. However, some schools continue to use two short poems for the commentary instead of one; others continue to disregard the rule about the duration of each part of the oral examination, much to the disadvantage of the candidate. Although the majority of schools did an excellent job, others neglected to ensure that the recordings had been fully uploaded and that every sample was audible throughout. This slowed the moderation process considerably. Similarly, schools are reminded to upload a clean copy of the poem or extract for each candidate separately. Forms 1/LIA should be completed fully, with the teacher's comments reflecting the candidate's performance on each criterion. Cavalier comments like 'Fantastic job!' and 'Very impressive!' undermine the spirit of the moderation, which is to ensure that the external examiner understands the teacher's assessment of the different areas of the oral.

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 4	5 – 8	9 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Almost all the works chosen for commentary were suitable. Amongst the poets, Duffy, Frost, Heaney, Owen and Plath were most popular, but Hughes, Keats, Larkin, Blake, Eliot, and others, also were chosen. Teachers wishing to study Blake with their students might consider looking beyond *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which though certainly amongst Blake's more approachable works, leave some candidates at a loss for how to develop full commentaries. At the other extreme, *The Waste Land* is hardly the most accessible of Eliot's poems. Although students demonstrate some sense of the context of the poem and some of its concerns, most are ultimately overwhelmed by the complexity of the text. Students are also undone by less obviously difficult poems when they assume these are little more than coded autobiographical revelations, and that it is sufficient to decode the appropriate details of the poet's life. This happens most often with Plath's poems, but Heaney and Owen are sometimes also subjected to this treatment. The task of discussing how the text works, independent of who wrote it, is then neglected.

Shakespeare continues to dominate drama selections. The plays studied most often remain *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, but some schools opt for *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado*

About Nothing, Anthony and Cleopatra, The Tempest, Twelfth Night and the Henry plays. The obvious extracts from Shakespeare plays are nearly always selected, while interesting, less obvious possibilities are often overlooked. A few schools have studied plays by Tennessee Williams, Mamet or Albee.

Prose was less often chosen. Mostly fiction, selections included *The Great Gatsby, 1984, The Bluest Eye, Pride and Prejudice*, stories by Poe and *The Scarlet Letter*. Some non-fiction was used, such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and essays by Orwell.

Several moderators noted that the range of work offered this year seemed narrower because of the smaller variety of extracts used within schools. It is important that schools follow guidelines (to be found in both the Subject Guide and the Handbook of Procedures) for determining the required number of different extracts to be prepared for candidates, and that they ensure all Part 2 works are used equally.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

The majority of candidates demonstrated some degree of understanding of the text, generally either by moving through it line by line (particularly in the case of Shakespeare and much lyric poetry), or identifying a series of literary features as a way of explaining that the presence of the feature or its use demonstrates something about the text. ("There are many breaks in the text, which shows Hamlet's confused state.") Many commentaries offered a combination of quotation, paraphrase and interpretation, a combination which sometimes suggested some degree of confusion of purpose and method.

The strongest candidates offered an interpretation of the extract that accounted for all essential details and that investigated nuances of meaning. They consistently derived their arguments from the text itself, rather than attempting to impose meaning on it, as weaker candidates often did. Better commentaries conveyed a sense of meaning as something that they could demonstrate as developing in the course of the extract, and they showed how the parts fit into and contributed to the whole.

More students with poems or Shakespeare extracts recognised the need to cite specific textual detail in support of their readings than did those with prose extracts, where paraphrase and generalisation were more common.

Criterion B

To demonstrate a genuine appreciation of a writer's choices, a candidate needs to do more than list the literary devices at work in an extract. Whether or not such a listing is replete with technical terminology, it remains merely a listing. Candidates certainly should be able to identify such features as a speaker's or a narrator's voice, structure, word choice, imagery, pattern, repetition and contrast, but they need also to be able to articulate which choices are most significant in the particular extract, and to demonstrate why this is the case. Few commentaries convey a sense of how meaning is being created and shaped by the writer. Fewer still show a recognition of multiple meanings, or of how ambiguity contributes to meaning and effect. Links

between a stylistic device and meaning, when attempted, are often arbitrary. Many students become obsessed with identifying techniques, and they focus very little on what is at work in the extract as a result of these techniques. Few candidates seem aware of the crucial role of the speaker's point of view, both in prose and poetry, in determining meaning. The best commentaries, in contrast, demonstrate not only understanding and analytical ability, but also display a genuine appreciation of what the author has accomplished in the extract. Such commentaries confirm that students can indeed be guided to analyse texts closely.

Criterion C

Increasing numbers of candidates are offering an outline at the start of their commentaries. This is helpful when the plan makes sense, and when the candidate actually follows the plan. Plans composed of seemingly arbitrarily selected items - "I'm going to talk about Macbeth's state of mind, images of disease, and alliteration" – do not represent effective organisation, unless the candidate is able to link the different items and to show why these are of primary importance. Students who organised their presentations around the discussion of three or four literary features had varying results, depending on the logic of the choices. This approach often led to substantial portions of the extract remaining untreated.

Stronger candidates provide a clear thesis and used this as a basis for organising their points, while still taking care to treat all significant details in the extract. The weakest candidates offer only very general comments, randomly selecting details to address, or ignoring details completely, in favour of unsubstantiated generalisations. Most candidates fall between these extremes. Candidates fare better on this criterion because most of the commentaries are focused, if not always fully planned. Some candidates evidently feel that mentioning what is happening in the poem or passage constitutes a plan. A few students offer inordinately long introductions before turning to an analysis of the extract. The tendency of the majority of candidates to use a line-by-line approach in their commentaries, although not always the most effective approach, at least provides a structure, and may force some analysis of particular sections. It can create problems, however, when candidates assume that individual lines are necessarily independent units of thought.

Some students are incorrectly allowed to continue beyond eight minutes – some beyond nine – before they are stopped and subsequent questions are put to them. Inevitably, this leads either to an insufficient subsequent question period, or to an overlong recording.

Criterion D

Using appropriate and effective language consistently appears to be the least difficult requirement for candidates. The vast majority of candidates are able to reach at least the 3 level in Criterion D, and there are many more above average marks in Language than in any other criterion. Even those who, to judge by their pronunciation, have been studying in English for a relatively brief time, can usually manage satisfactory marks for this criterion. Fewer candidates now slip into inappropriate levels of language, except in cases of vague colloquial expressions and/or dead metaphors they use in everyday speech ("When Hamlet tries to reach out to his mother . . .").

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

These recommendations have been made before, as the work of candidates continues to show many of the same strengths and weaknesses from year to year. Candidates should be encouraged to look carefully at the text in front of them, rather than simply trying to recall what they have been taught about it (or worse, seen on internet review sites). For poems, this means considering the complete experience of the poem, and not merely individual images or particular figures of speech and other stylistic choices. The author's choices must be examined in the context of how they contribute to the overall meaning or experience of the poem. Students should examine how the speaker's voice and point of view are developed as part of the creative act that is the writing of the poem, and not simply equate poet with speaker, or biographical details with meaning. Prose extracts, too, should not be approached as mere vehicles for the conveyance of information. Rather, they must be examined in the same detail as poems: a focus on narrative voice is absolutely crucial, as well as a consideration of how structure, diction and syntax contribute to overall meaning.

At the same time, the extensive use of critical studies of the texts is probably unhelpful, as it discourages students from having, developing and articulating their own responses to the works they are studying. Students need to be aware that the study of literature is not a matter of learning what statements are to be parroted back about a text, but rather learning how to articulate and defend their own readings, whether or not these correspond to those of published studies.

Teachers and schools new to the IB are particularly urged to familiarise themselves with Teacher Support Material and to attend workshops, where they will have the opportunity to listen to examples of best practice, and to hear explanations for why these constitute best practice, while other samples do not.

As has been noted repeatedly, candidates need to have had regular practice in oral commentary throughout the course if they are to do well in the Internal Assessment. Oral commentary can be usefully practised in all parts of the course; it does not have to be limited to Part 2 texts.

Further comments

Most schools are following prescribed procedures for the Oral Commentary. A few reminders, however, bear repeating:

- Teachers should note feedback from previous years' moderation and ensure that suggestions are being followed and previous deviations from correct procedure are not repeated;
- Extracts produced by typing or OCR should be checked carefully. Many are sent with uncorrected errors. Please do not assume that any text downloaded from the internet is error-free either. Photographed (as opposed to scanned or photocopied) pages are often difficult to read;
- Schools should have the courtesy to ensure that scanned files are saved with the text upright on all pages;

- All extracts should be line-numbered (beginning at 1), and should be free of notes or indications of act and scene numbers;
- Teachers' comments on the 1/LIA are most helpful if they address the different criteria separately;
- The extract length should generally be 20-30 lines. There are exceptions to the lower limit. Shorter extracts (particularly denser poems, such as sonnets) may be perfectly appropriate. More important than length is suitability. The extract should offer the candidate significant aspects of content as well as technique to treat;
- The upper limit of 30 lines, however, should not be exceeded (certainly not by more than a line or two). The rule is not an arbitrary one. Candidates repeatedly demonstrate that it is almost impossible for them to treat longer extracts in sufficient depth in the eight minutes allotted to the commentary;
- Some schools continue to have difficulty ensuring that the commentary is limited to eight minutes, and that the entire recording does not exceed ten minutes. Teachers should keep in mind that at least two minutes of subsequent questions are expected, and that moderators will not listen to anything said after ten minutes;
- Good Guiding and Subsequent Questions are very helpful to candidates without being too directive. Teachers must avoid Guiding Questions that suggest a certain approach or interpretation, because in such cases students can receive no credit for taking up the suggestion. A question such as "What mood is created in this passage?" is preferable to "How does the writer create tension in this passage?" which offers far too much guidance, because it tells the candidate how the extract is to be read;
- Subsequent Questions are most helpful if they return the candidate to a point that would benefit from clarification, further elaboration, a specific example, etc. Subsequent questions preceded by the teacher's own commentary, and efforts to evoke responses that the teacher may have expected but the candidate has not made, are seldom if ever helpful to the candidate.

Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 20	21 – 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

In this first year of combined assessment for Standard and Higher Level, examiners noted a pleasing range of texts studied, with centres increasingly responding to the need for the Reflective Statement to address matters of the work's and the writer's culture and context and for the Assignment itself to have a literary focus. Some centres are still submitting assignments on cultural or sociological topics. There are, in addition, centres submitting work based on the old Subject Guide (which was examined for the last time in 2012: these often head the work

“World Literature English A1”) or where the teacher’s understanding of the requirements is confused. Teachers are urged to make full use of the range of materials available to support them in this: the *Subject Guide*, the criteria, previous reports and the Teacher Support Material, including a film of sample Interactive Orals _ all on the Online Curriculum Centre, where there is also a very useful Forum. Examiners find it very disappointing when they have to give low marks to a candidate simply because of the teacher’s failure to make good use of the resources listed above: that this has been reported in all recent Subject Reports only exacerbates the feelings of frustration.

Key areas of concern remain, as in previous sessions, levels of achievement in Criteria A and C: where examiners often comment that teachers’ failings in interpreting the requirements correctly result in underachievement for their candidates.

Text choice is one of the elements behind a successful Written Assignment. Choosing a work simply because it is short, when it may present real challenges to some students, is a continuing problem, as is the use of dense and demanding works which may be a teacher’s favourite. It is clear that candidates write better on texts with which they can engage and feel they really understand. When using a selection of poems or short stories centres should remember that the work is the whole collection and that some sort of nod must be made towards this if there is to be a good mark in Criterion B. There were few infringements of the requirement that texts be selected from the Prescribed Literature in Translation List; in an ideal world there would be none.

With all this said, some work was of an extremely high calibre and persuasively argued: examiners continue to be impressed by the best work that the candidates produce.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Fulfilling the requirements of the reflective statement

Very few candidates failed to upload a Reflective Statement, but sometimes those that were uploaded were not on the text chosen for the Assignment. Candidates who fully understand the nature of the requirement here write with engagement and sensitivity about the specifics of matters discussed in the Oral, confirming the value of the exercise. A number of candidates lost a mark by exceeding the word limit of 400. Clearly some centres are still conducting inappropriate interactive orals, making it impossible to do well here: responses which focus entirely on the work studied and do not bring in anything from beyond it are missing the point: their attention is drawn to the Special Supplement on the Interactive Oral and the Reflective Statement provided at the end of the May 2015 Written Assignment Report for Higher Level. Examiners do not want to know how well individual members spoke or how good their use of power-point was, they want to know how the discovery of details about the time and place in which the work was written, and perhaps something about the author, have an impact on a reading of the work itself. Generalised statements such as “women were oppressed in those days” are unlikely to be useful, unless there is something a bit more factual to illustrate them. Some are very under-informed, even when there is help very close to hand. For example, the graphic novel *Persepolis* has a very enlightening introduction relevant to the Reflective Statement – but few candidates give any indication that they have read it. Sometimes

inaccurate details have been presented in the Oral: teachers should intervene when information is simply wrong. Too much personal reflection on student's own life/circumstances does not generally show understanding of the culture/context of the work. Most candidates are now writing the question stated on p30 of the *Subject Guide*, "How was your understanding of cultural and contextual consideration of the work developed through the interactive oral?" as a heading to the Reflective Statement: this is a useful focusing device. Many examiners note the wastage of valuable words on introductory and concluding paragraphs: an efficient Reflective Statement will identify two or three relevant points of detail about the culture and context of the work and show how knowing this makes a difference to a reading of the work in some way. Candidates who find themselves repeating a good deal of the material from their Reflective Statements in the Assignment have probably got one or the other wrong.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

Knowledge of the works was in the majority of cases adequate, with most marks falling into the 3-4 range. To show real insight the candidate needs to be able to arrive at some conclusion from the body of evidence assembled, to consider "what all this adds up to". Candidates should read through the story or the plot or the superficial meaning of the words to what the work actually means. The work should ideally have been read and re-read, with candidates familiar with their texts on a range of levels of meaning. Some candidates offer quotations but do not contextualize them and thus the point being made loses much of its impact. Summary and narrative rather than analysis remains a hallmark of the weaker submissions. Accuracy of detail is important, too: the Written Assignment is a honed piece of writing and basic factual errors about characters, events and places do not bode well here.

Criterion C: Appreciation of the writer's choices

This remains the criterion for which many appear under-prepared; candidates need more guidance in selecting a topic which invites a high level of achievement in C. Supervised writing prompts are the foundation stone to this. If the topic is focused on "how" something is achieved rather than "what" happens then it appears that the essay will work. Candidates need to demonstrate that they are in some way conscious of the existence of a writer at work, making stylistic choices relevant to the genre. There should be ample brief quotation from the text and a discussion of its features, geared of course towards the chosen topic: quotation used merely to underpin narrative is not of much use here. On the point of genre, far too many candidates write with limited awareness of it. A play will be discussed as though a novel, for example, with focus only on what happens and not how the dramatist has presented it. Particular weakness in this respect is evident in assignments on graphic novels: few candidates discuss anything beyond dialogue in speech bubbles and possibly the voice over, leaving most other features of the genre undisturbed. Always remember that it is the author who makes the choices, not the character.

Criterion D: Organisation and development

The majority of candidates at least offer a clear, if basic, sense of structuring. Lengthy quotation can interrupt the flow of an argument: candidates should select the briefest quotation possible, clearly identifying the key words which create the effect under discussion, and try to incorporate those quotations more seamlessly into the grammar of their own sentences.

The best candidates lay out a clear line of thesis in an introduction and then use that to signpost the way each successive point contributes to the argument, arriving at a conclusion which draws all lines of thinking together neatly.

As in Criterion A, it was disappointing to see far too many candidates exceeding the 1500 word limit. Careful checking and editing should make it easy to lose unnecessary words – thereby often improving the chance of a high mark in Criterion E at the same time.

Criterion E: Language

Most candidates write reasonably well. Areas of weakness include the use of an inappropriate register, whether lax and informal or overblown and purple; insecure grasp of the correct punctuation of complex sentences, with the colon and semi-colon making far too few appearances; and careless or perhaps even non-existent checking or proof-reading.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Examiners cannot emphasize strongly enough the need for all teachers to be fully aware of the requirements for this component, referring to the resources listed above. Good teamwork within departments, supporting new or inexperienced colleagues, is also essential.

Further comments

The comments made above imply much that is not being well done at the moment. However, the examiners would like to leave teachers with a more positive thought. Most candidates, regardless of the quality of achievement and the mark awarded, submit Written Assignments which truly underscore the value of the exercise: in our international context, the opportunity to read and, more importantly appreciate, literature from other cultures is a valuable – indeed indispensable – component of a well-rounded education fit for globally-minded learners.

Higher level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 8	9 – 11	12 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 20

General comments

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Some schools need to recognise that the craft of commenting on prose needs to be taught as explicitly as that of commenting upon poetry. It still may be that some centres specifically prepare candidates only for either the prose or the poem, which is educationally reductive and a shame.

Many candidates need to have a better grasp of the specific qualities and features of the two genres on this paper. Knowing the name of the device is no substitute for exploring and appreciating its effect. Considerations of form and structure are sometimes marginalised or entirely ignored, in both prose and poetry. Despite the inevitable pressure of a two hour examination, precise and detailed close reading is what this exercise is all about. For more precise comment on this see the section below under 'Literary Features'.

As ever, many candidates drifted away from analysis and into narration of content. Also (as ever), there is frequent assumption that the writer and persona were the same.

The vast majority of candidates were able to make some sense of their chosen text, but not all were able to make coherent sense of it as a whole. It must be born in mind that coverage of the whole passage is to be expected.

There is fuller comment on deficiencies in the commentaries under the criteria review below.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Most candidates appeared to know how to structure a commentary and to have at least some idea of possible ways in which language, structure, technique and style can shape meaning; most also adopted an appropriate register and wrote with at least reasonable accuracy and fluency.

Once again this session, more candidates seemed to grasp the importance of supporting specific points with close reference to the text.

Fewer commentaries this session were mechanical, treating stylistic features and the meaning of the passage/poem as if they were different entities, and this is good. Also, more candidates seem able to use an organizational pattern that does not echo the time flow of the extract; while a linear reading can work well, such an approach means that the extract is controlling the candidate rather than the other way round. Most candidates were able to identify the main concerns of the text, the better commentaries displaying impressive insight and perceptiveness.

There are also good signs that candidates are being encouraged to be confident if they see more than one possible way of reading a text. Plurality is at the heart of reader-response and, rather than shying away from suggesting variant readings because they might fix on the 'wrong'

one, some candidates are rightly seeing this as an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to see into possibilities.

Among the stronger candidates there was some very good close reading and consideration of the ways in which the writer's choice of language and imagery evoke a particular effect for the reader. Most were well-prepared in the art of feature-spotting, attempting to discuss literary features (if not always showing how these contributed to meaning). With a few candidates there was an excellent blending of textual analysis and evaluative comment. Most candidates at least attempted analysis as opposed to simply paraphrasing or summarising. Overall, examiners have reported increased session-on-session awareness of the writer's choices, with even the weaker candidates showing some grasp.

In general, candidates demonstrated good and coherent organization of ideas. Few wrote too-brief commentaries.

Generally the standard of writing was good - both in the organisation of points made and in the use of language. Examiners have noted over the past three May sessions that fewer candidates were very weak in these respects than in previous years, and usually syntax was adequate and communication clear even in answers where there were technical writing lapses. This is encouraging.

There is fuller comment on the positive aspects in the commentaries under the criteria review below.

A Review under criteria headings:

A. Understanding and Interpretation

Some candidates did not sufficiently substantiate their interpretation with textual details. In the poem there was some tendency to make assertions about the poet and society or the poet's sense of identity.

Most candidates proposed coherent interpretations of the text and avoided plot narration.

Most commentaries were relevant and attempted engagement with the prose/poem. The best demonstrated detailed close readings and well supported comments, showing good, perceptive understanding and detailed analysis.

On the other hand, a lack of close reading of the whole passage was evident in many scripts with, as a result, candidates either misunderstanding, unconvincing readings, or overlooking of parts of both the poem and, especially, the prose. Examination of detail is essential if more than a superficial understanding is to be grasped. Candidates who did not read in depth struggled with nuances and subtext, making the kind of unsupported assertions which dominated a good number of answers and frequently impeded understanding.

There is increasing evidence of candidates gaining a greater confidence in putting forward a personal response in their commentaries which is rooted in the text, and thus scoring more highly under this criteria.

As ever, weaker candidates resorted to re-telling or describing the content of the poem/passage. In a few instances, students fixed upon a formulaic interpretation that they were attempting to force the passage to fit.

B. Literary Features

Many listed literary features without textual analysis or appreciation.

Most at least referred to the literary devices. There was a tendency among weaker candidates to list devices although there were also some perceptive responses. Overall, examiners report that students have a wide knowledge of literary terms but do not always know what to do once they have recognized a device in the way of justifying its usefulness and effect.

Many scripts demonstrated systematic, well integrated analysis of the effects of the literary features, with candidates in some centres in command of literary terms and able clearly to identify features and discuss their effects.

However, time and again examiners noted that candidates identified features, but could not move beyond general assertion and into analysis of their effects. Spotting literary devices and conventions, or quoting from the passage, is not in itself analysis. Candidates need to remember that any aspect of form is there because it has a function, and the moment that they begin to comment on the effect of a device is the moment that their analysis begins to become effective and score higher marks. The best candidates presented a sense of how form and meaning work together.

Commentaries on the poem often scored only modestly under Criterion B because candidates failed to consider the poem as a poem, bearing in mind its form. A frequent examiner comment at the end of a commentary was words to the effect that there was 'little sense of the text as a poem.'

With regard to the prose, not all candidates appreciate that the writer's presentation of a character, and relationship between characters, is a part of literary technique.

There still seems to be a difficulty for candidates in differentiating between tone, atmosphere or mood.

Rather pointlessness comments such as "The writer uses diction" or 'the writer uses punctuation" were too often seen.

C. Presentation

Organisation of commentaries continues to improve, and this is having a beneficial impact on the scoring for Criterion C. References and quotations are better integrated, but there is still room for improvement. In nearly all commentaries there is now evidence that candidates had planned, something that there is plenty of time to do in a single question, two-hour examination. It does not matter if the plan is later modified, but an initial structure gives security and a sense of direction as the commentary progresses. The resulting commentaries were usually well structured with an introduction, link sentences between paragraphs, logical development and clear conclusions.

Just as the discussion of meaning should arise from a careful reading of the entire poem or passage, so too should the organisation of the commentary arise from the demands of the passage. There is continuing evidence that fewer candidates are using a previously taught or prepared pattern/template, which is encouraging. However, it is clear that a few centres are still teaching a rigid 'one size fits all' approach.

More than one examiner commented that although most candidates showed a reasonable structure and some concern for coherence, development of an argument was sometimes more problematic.

D. Use of Language

Use of language seems to have improved, but some were still using an informal register. On the whole candidates seemed quite well versed in the language of literary analysis and, whatever their powers of expression, were aware of the appropriately formal register for writing a piece of literary commentary. On the other hand, poor syntax and imprecise word choice were seen in weaker commentaries. Some misused basic literary terminology such as symbol, allusion, personification, theme, simile (so often spelt 'similie') or metaphor.

I lost count to the times candidates paired 'one' and 'their', as in 'The poem is about how one must discover their style'.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Prose

The passage proved to be a very good discriminator between candidates of varying ability. There were some excellent readings of the passage as speaking to a sense of a haunting, frozen time in the aftermath of war. One examiner commented that, while she experienced answers at all levels on the poetry, the answers on the prose tended to be either mediocre or very good, with little in between.

Some candidates made an immediate assumed association of interrogation with torture, and wrote their commentary on that basis, nowhere citing any evidence from the passage that torture was taking place. On the other hand, most candidates ignored the title of the passage until they were some way into their essays, and launched instead into a discussion of setting. Most were able to write reasonably convincingly on this, identifying the different settings in the passage, but relatively few were able to comment effectively on the relationship between these. Stronger candidates started by commenting on the opening sentence and the narrator's subsequent retelling of the episode in the present tense.

Many candidates commented on the narrator, but there was a certain amount of confusion, despite the use of first person pronouns in the text, over whether this was a first or third person narrative. Stronger students characterised the narrative voice as having the unemotional and detached quality of a third person narrative, commenting that this could be construed as fitting an interrogator trained to observe objectively.

Most candidates offered at least reasonable comments on the description of the village and villagers, most picking up on the use of violent/militaristic diction and imagery. Only a handful of candidates offered a convincing explanation of why 'the insignia were the first to go'. The burning of the insignia was more often than not taken to mean that this was done for warmth; the more perceptive realised that not much warmth would come from such tiny things, and saw that destroying indications of military allegiance was the more likely reason. Generally, having picked up on violent/militaristic diction and imagery, candidates jumped straight into stating that the passage was about the ravages of either war or nature, which then made the interrogation difficult to incorporate in their interpretation. Stronger candidates were less absolute in their comments and alert to the developing narrative.

The mention of 'green', 'yellow' and 'blue' in the third paragraph led a number of candidates to construct elaborate, generally unsubstantiated arguments about the use of colour in the passage. Stronger candidates commented on the way that not only the colour of the forester's clothes but the 'blue ice' of his eyes linked him to the cold and hostile environment outside.

Many picked up on the image of the window and made some sense of it, although scarcely any commented on the view it afforded. Most similarly commented on the description of the houses 'facing away, as if just caught in the act'. 'Gothic' proved similarly problematic with many candidates interpreting it as 'dark' and only a very few offering any sensible comments. 'Elf' was also often interpreted in the light of contemporary popular culture and many candidates appeared to have difficulty picturing anything but a jolly if mischievous figure clad in green.

Almost all candidates picked up on the contrast between the 'little man' and the 'officer', but many saw it as reinforcing an idea that the forester was a frail starving victim of war and the officer, and interrogators, well-fed and prosperous intruders and soldiers.

Most made something of the penultimate paragraph, although those who propounded theories of colour dwelt at length on the contrast between black and white, while only a very few really explored the auditory and visual imagery of the snowflakes.

Most grasped something of the final paragraph, although a number interpreted it uncritically as evidence of the forester's blamelessness and status as victim. The strongest candidates linked the closing image of the 'frozen' lake back to the beginning of the passage and commented on the ongoing frustration and hostility faced by the interrogators.

Perhaps because they found it difficult to grasp the meaning of their chosen text as a whole, some candidates opted to structure their commentaries around literary features, which compounded the sense of a piecemeal understanding and responses which lacked coherence.

Poem

Most candidates were able to identify to varying extents the situation in the poem, but few had from the start of their answers a really secure grasp of the poem as a whole. Many were able to offer at least adequate comments on the structure of the poem, particularly the varying lengths of the sections, although a fair number had a shaky command of literary terms. Many commented to at least reasonable effect on the use of repetition, personification, dialogue and imagery.

The simplicity of the language used in the poem clearly made it accessible, but it also caused difficulties, prompting candidates to construct interpretations based on the connotation of obviously familiar words, taking these words out of their context in the poem. Many candidates were quick to impose a meaning on the word 'mask' in particular and to assert that this is what it meant in the poem regardless of the evidence, without letting the meaning arise from a close reading of the text. This led to some skewed interpretations with an emphasis, for instance, on hiding, concealment, pretence and falseness. Coupled with a similar interpretation of the various types of mask, this led in turn to some unconvincing interpretations. By contrast, stronger candidates looked at the internal evidence in the poem and were able to consider the developing meaning as it progressed, commenting on the contrasting use of 'masks' and 'face', for instance, and exploring the apparent contradictions and ambiguities in the second half of the poem (eg of the poet's face being a mask). They were similarly alert to the somewhat disturbing note of the final two lines and quite prepared to explore this and relate it to the poem as a whole. Most tackled with varying degrees of success the stars and ants simile.

A good indicator of a lack of close reading was when candidates wrote that the poet is 'trying on masks' before rejecting them. He does not try them on - the 'poem' merely suggests that he does. For some reason quite a few candidates seemed to think that 'What kind of mask' (line 3) is a rhetorical question. The masks were often seen as various social, rather than poetic, conventions. A good discriminator was how far candidates perceived that the masks represented various poetic conventions, and the way that the poem progressed towards personal poetic expression.

All but a very few understood the progression of the different sections of the poem, but not many were able to comment persuasively on the development of ideas in the final two stanzas, and many discussed the motif of the masks without committing themselves to an interpretation of their meaning. Many read the conversation between the poem and the poet as an internal one in the poet's mind - a projection of the poet's inner conflict.

Some commentaries became bogged down with the poet being true to himself, finding his identity and fitting in with society, while focusing less closely on the text. The ending caused some confusion and many avoided commenting on it. A good number of candidates felt that it is society (the voice of the poem) who pressurises that poet in his struggle to achieve individualism, and that the poem is about the individual versus society.

The poem was often seen as a struggle for identity (partly true) without seeing that it is about achieving personal poetic expression.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should be encouraged to:

- read their chosen text closely to the end before deciding on an interpretation and to let any interpretation they put forward arise naturally from detailed textual analysis and avoid basing it hurriedly on the connotations of a few select words. They should be reminded of the importance of coherence, both in their interpretation and the

construction of their commentary. They need to be taught to apply (and spell) literary terms correctly, but they also need to be taught how to use basic grammatical terms:

- be bold readers, looking at what is there and trying to make something of it. If it appears difficult, have a go. Recognise ambiguity, and appreciate that there does not have to be a conclusive answer. Candidates tend to fare better who, rather than shooting for an absolute interpretation, recognise a possible plurality of approach with words such as 'it is possible that...' or 'one way of reading this is that...'. If you can come up with more than one possible interpretation, so much the better. Provided that readings are supported by textual reference then they are acceptable. Which means...
- ...avoid unsubstantiated claims or generalisations, putting emphasis on interpretation rooted in and supported by textual evidence;
- ensure that they first understand the passage on the literal level before moving on to the figurative. Many wild misreadings are prevented by careful attention to what is actually occurring in a passage;
- go beyond identifying stylistic devices, considering their effects, and understand that it is not enough to list literary devices. It is necessary to show how the author uses them to shape meaning. Plenty of close reading practice is essential;
- prepare as thoroughly for the prose and its conventions as for the poetry.
- carefully study the Descriptors and their demands in preparation for the examination, and realize that all aspects covered by the criteria are important;
- develop an overview of the passage before starting to write; read (re-reading time is never wasted) – think – plan;
- read with care every line of the passage. Both options on Paper 1 are fairly short, and candidates who miss an important image or detail end up writing a weaker commentary. Absorb the whole passage before writing anything - the commentary must treat the entire passage or the entire poem;
- avoid vague, general, waffley introductions - begin with an argument which is based on an analysis of the passage. Candidates who entered the commentary on a high level tended to stay on a high level;
- put down the pen and re-read the first paragraph after writing it. Is it a good overview of what the passage is saying and the means by which it is said?
- address the form of the passage - that is, the prose as a piece of prose and the poem as a poem;
- ensure that they understand the meaning of the words 'theme' and 'tone', both of which are frequently misused. Not every idea is a 'theme';
- always support comments by reference to the text, citing the line numbers when quoting anything of substance from the text;
- learn how to integrate quotations, and how to cite verse - if quoting more than one line of continuous verse, insert slash marks at the end of lines to indicate an awareness of the verse form;
- if the gender of a narrator/persona is unclear, decide on the gender and stick to it, using the appropriate gender pronoun thereafter and thus avoiding the inappropriate use of 'their' and 'themselves' as a singular;
- write legibly - that which cannot be read, cannot be credited. This includes dotting 'i's and crossing 't's. Try deciphering the word 'inimical' when the dots are missing - the dots on the 'i's are there for a reason;
- frequently practise writing commentaries under timed conditions (obvious, but too often

one doubts that this is happening), focusing on how to analyse the effects of literary features rather than merely identifying them. A variety of text types should be covered so that candidates can identify different types of structure;

- Share relevant sections of this Subject Report (an excellent teaching tool) with their teachers;
- understand that the term 'stanza' refers to a regular section of poetry of a fixed number of lines, and not to irregular sections which may be referred to as 'verse paragraphs' or, indeed 'sections';
- ensure that interpretations are substantiated by close reading of the text.
- aim for coherence and development in their commentaries with smooth transitions between paragraphs;
- use a suitable register and take care with syntax (i.e. avoid run on sentences and fragments).

Candidates should be encouraged not to:

- say that the writer 'uses diction'. How else could they write? And understand that an analysis of diction consists of more than merely identifying the words used;
- refer to any unrhymed poetry as 'blank verse'. Only unrhymed iambic pentameter is blank verse;
- decide which task they are going to do (prose or verse) before the examination.
- guess or try to impose a "meaning" which cannot be evidenced with precise reference to details in the passage;
- paraphrase - it is not the same as interpretation, and repetition of content is a waste of time;
- quote without commenting on the effect of what they have just quoted (quotation is not in itself analysis);
- speculate upon the aim of the writer (an intentional fallacy – we cannot be sure of a writer's intentions - we can only know what a narrator/persona or characters think/say/do);
- use the passage as a springboard onto personal or general philosophical reflection - the commentary is a close reading exercise in literary analysis and appreciation, not a sociological exploration;
- make the obvious comment that 'This passage uses punctuation'. It is surprising how often candidates make such comments. On rare occasions only particular uses of punctuation may be deemed to be a literary device and worthy of comment;
- use the informal abbreviation 'quote' as a noun in formal writing. The noun is 'quotation'.
- write that enjambment/rhyme/etc. help the poem 'flow', which is almost meaningless;
- use 'symbolic of' when 'suggests' is meant;
- use 'incredibly' unless 'beyond belief' really is meant;
- say 'an example would be' for 'an example is';
- avoid the cliché 'showcasing' when describing a writer's method;
- Make assertions which are not underwritten by close analysis of the text.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 8	9 – 11	12 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 20

General comments

The general consensus from examiners was that the paper was accessible, and the majority of candidates engaged with both the prose and poem.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

A major difficulty was the second part of the poem, lines 18-29. Discussion of this was often minimal and coherent readings of the poem in its entirety were relatively few. Candidates offered tentative explanations of “a wild orb of redness”, for example, without seeing that the poet’s imagination had been influenced by what he had seen in the tyre shop.

Where the prose was concerned, there was a reluctance to draw inferences about characters from their actions. For example, Ruth’s practicality in preparing herself to collect wood was not acknowledged; nor her realisation that both she and Oliver could be lost in the dark forest with no house lights to act as a beacon.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Candidates were able to recognise a considerable range of literary features and in many cases were able to show how they worked. This was particularly true of the auditory imagery in the prose extract.

Candidates knew how to shape an essay, with an introduction, either outlining key ideas or as a statement of intent with a succession of linked paragraphs (“however”/ “furthermore”/“thirdly”/“ finally”) and with a summative conclusion. This ability enables candidates to score well on Criterion C.

The level of language was generally good, with the exception of the use of the possessive apostrophe and the correct punctuation of “however”. There were very few candidates whose level of English was not clear or idiomatic.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Poem

Strengths included the recognition of the Tyre Shop Man as a source of inspiration. Candidates showed understanding of the way the poet drew out and extended the similarities between himself and the Tyre Shop Man. Part 1 of the poem was often well done.

Weaknesses: Candidates interpreted the relationship of the writer and the Tyre Shop Man as obsessional – “the writer stalked him”.

Sometimes interpretations were overextended or imposed. For example, the poem was a plea for environmental common sense; that the Tyre Shop Man was a source of environmental pollution; that we should try and understand the working man and his place in society better.

The second part of the poem was often glossed over. Odd snatches were commented on, such as the “gum trees in the park” being a source of material for tyres, but cohesive readings, such as the way the mundane images in the tyre shop found their way into the natural imagery of the sun and moon, and the cycle of the day being completed, were rare.

Literary features needed closer analysis. Candidates noted the images associated with the tyre man but did not see him as physically shambling; nor did they see the “shop’s cavernous dark” as being a secret place of mysteries, comparable to the poet’s imagination.

Prose

Strengths: Candidates often wrote well on the creation of atmosphere in the extract, clearly understanding the link between this and the use of “screech”, “howling” and “thrashing”, for example, and the use of wind, rain and darkness. Many saw the symbolic importance of the Crow as an ill-omen. The affection for the cat was clearly recognised, especially when Oliver went out in worsening conditions to look for him.

Weaknesses : The relationship of Ruth and Oliver was frequently given as brother and sister, which has some validity. They were sometimes referred to as parentless children, when common sense might have told candidates that this was unlikely. Candidates were often hard on Ruth, seeing her as emotionally cold when in fact the evidence is to the contrary, as borne out by line 10.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Continue to teach analysis of the writer's choices. Recognition of these is not enough on its own to score well on Criterion ;.
- Continue to teach close reading so that candidates do not make inappropriate interpretations;
- Candidates should be mindful of time and plan accordingly; this would avoid hurried final sentences when a summative paragraph is clearly preferable;

- The mnemonic KISS is useful – keep it simple and straightforward.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 25

General comments

There were no great surprises in the performance of this session's candidates in Higher Level Paper 2, so some of the comments on candidates' strengths and weaknesses will seem quite familiar from recent years. Drama continues to be the most popular genre, followed by novel and short story, while poetry continues to grow in popularity, and there were too few responses on non-fictional prose to enable comment on the last section of the paper.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Attention to genre and grasp of the conventions of the chosen genre remain a challenge for many candidates. This was perhaps less so in responses on poetry, but in many answers on both drama and prose fiction, it would be difficult to determine simply from the nature of the discussion whether a candidate was exploring a play or a novel. Both were often treated as simply a narrative, and there were several instances in which the candidate appeared to be writing about, not the play or novel as such, but rather a particular film version. A frequent shortcoming in knowledge and understanding is perhaps related to this. Although most candidates showed an adequate knowledge of their texts, at least at this simple narrative level, what seemed to stand out this year was an unwillingness (or inability) to focus on detail. This was particularly noticeable with prose fiction, and to a lesser extent drama. There were many responses in these two genres where references to the text were consisted largely of paraphrase of the plot; and there were even some with quite sophisticated handling of ideas which failed to support arguments with detailed textual reference.

Many candidates still fail to read questions carefully, or offer a pre-packaged essay which they attempt to fit to the question. This was particularly evident in responses to question 1, many of which, instead of comparing the words and deeds of individual characters, made comparisons between different characters in the same play, or even across two plays. While revisiting key stylistic or thematic elements provides a sense of security for many, it too often becomes the crux of the essay with the question awkwardly massaged around it. This is easily illustrated in this example of an approach that is not all that uncommon: "Both *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman* have the theme of abandonment and we see this in the elements of music as the protagonists try to forget their past (the flute for Willy and the Varsouviana polka

for Blanche). These elements can correspond or contradict the characters as the play develops.”

While most candidates were able to offer a reasonably coherent argument, too many introductions contented themselves with simply restating the question in other terms, rather than clearly defining their approach to it in relation to the two or more texts chosen. Conclusions in many cases had nothing fresh to say, but simply restated the overall thesis in general terms.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

There was for the most part a reasonable balance in the treatment of two texts. Fewer students are trying to cover three or four texts and thus there is opportunity, and space, for greater detail and development. It was only where candidates discussed three or four texts that a considerable imbalance sometimes appeared. There also seemed to be greater evidence of planning before students launched into their response, despite the shortcomings in introductions and conclusions noted above. Many examiners reported, once again, on the deliberate attempts to compare the chosen texts, and there were many instances of texts carefully chosen (or, in answers on poetry, individual poems chosen by the candidate) to enable a fruitful comparison. Merging two or more texts to fit one question is, of course, a sophisticated and difficult task, and some were only able to manage what were in effect two essays each on a separate text, loosely linked by a few connecting sentences or in a concluding paragraph, though completely separate treatments with no attempt of any sort to compare were rare. Few candidates this session had such an imperfect control of language as seriously to interfere with communication, though once again many candidates with an adequate level of language could, one feels, have scored higher in criterion E with just a little more deliberate attention to register and expression.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

1. This was the most popular drama question, and as indicated above, it was misread by a distressingly large number of candidates. Most of those who did read the question correctly pointed out that a contradiction between a character's words and deeds often signals deliberate deception for selfish ends, or self-deception. There were thoughtful responses that illustrated in great detail, and with attention to presentation, the disparity between the words and deeds of Blanche or Willy or Dysart, for example, and how such self-deception became the catalyst for their ultimate downfall or enlightenment.
2. Responses to this question suggest that too few candidates have been led to think seriously about the nature of comedy. Many, however, did suggest that their plays, in addition to provoking laughter, stimulated critical thought on human behavior or social mores, and introduced the concepts of irony and satire. Few attempted to show what was distinctively comic about the material they pointed to, apart from simply asserting that it was so, or saying that 'it makes the audience laugh'.
3. There were some weak answers to this question which seemed unclear as to exactly what the question was asking, and so proceeded simply to recount plot and then conclude that the playwright 'dispels the illusion'. Most candidates, however, grasped

its significance, and were able to specify conventions of speech (soliloquy or asides) set (non-realistic) and staging (uses of lighting and music) – to name only the most frequently mentioned - which remind the audience they are watching a play. The 'effects achieved' were less confidently treated, though there were some sophisticated responses, including ones showing familiarity with the concept of alienation.

4. This was the most popular poetry question, perhaps because it is the most open (in the sense of potentially covering the widest range of poetic material), and was generally well answered. The relatively few unsuccessful answers were those which were unable to recognize contrasts or parallels within the poems themselves, and substituted (for example) a contrast between poems, or between what was there in the poem and the reader's normal expectations.
5. There were some good answers to this question, although many, similar to responses to the May 2015 question on the use and effect of symbolism, showed a loose grasp of the central concepts, using the concept 'metaphor' in particular to apply to any figurative language or any implied meaning. There were many responses which compared widely different poets (Donne and a contemporary such as Carol Ann Duffy was a frequent choice), though only the best of such were able to show what was distinctive about the two poets' uses of metaphor or simile. Comparatively few responded fully to the instruction to 'discuss the role of these figures of speech in promoting single or multiple interpretations'.
6. This question, unlike 4 and 5 which could be answered with most poems, clearly limits itself to those in which a sense of 'the passing of time' is actually present; and many responses were weakened by discussing one or more poems which were suited to this question, and others which were not. Those using Heaney or Duffy (two very popular choices), for example, could find plenty to say about 'Death of a Naturalist' or 'In Mrs Tilscher's Class', but then would struggle if they chose 'The Grabaulle Man' or 'War Photographer'. Stronger papers often focused our attention on a more specific aspect (e.g. 'stolen time,' 'the ravishes of time on memory,' 'time as a currency to reflection,' 'a future of endless promises'...), and some exceptional responses emerged in studies of Donne and Larkin and Hardy.
7. The few misinterpretations of this question saw candidates comparing the different geographical or temporal settings across different texts (similar to the misreading of question 1 though thankfully infrequent). There were some excellent answers comparing the linear development of a novel such as Jane Eyre, with its successive movements from one location and time period to another, with the more complex shifts in time and location in such novels as Slaughterhouse 5 or The God of Small Things. Many used flashbacks to an earlier temporal setting in The Great Gatsby or The Handmaid's Tale, though only the better ones took the trouble to show how flashbacks were incorporated into the narrative.
8. This was another question which limits the texts to which it can be easily applied. So some struggled with The Great Gatsby (often recruiting the Valley of Ashes as part of nature) or The Handmaid's Tale, but there were some fine responses using Heart of Darkness or Thomas Hardy. Some widened the definition of the question to include human nature, which of course is acceptable if this understanding of the question is clearly indicated.
9. This was the least well done of the prose fiction questions, since many candidates did not grasp the nature of an intermediary as one who links two or more characters. Such

candidates often homed in on a single phrase, 'understand the nature of the characters' to begin a general discussion of particular characters, perhaps in relation to another character, thought of as the intermediary; or a particular character (like Nick in *The Great Gatsby* or Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*) was discussed as an intermediary between characters and the reader. Among those who did correctly grasp the question there were some interesting choices, such as the response which discussed the role of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* in clarifying the characters of Jane and Rochester, both to the reader and to themselves, and compared her with Myrtle in *The Great Gatsby* as revelatory of the relationship between Tom and Daisy.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Guidance for the teaching of future candidates can be presented under two headings: firstly, the kind of preparation necessary in the months leading up to the examination, and secondly, the strategy which the candidate should adopt in the examination room. There is much in this advice which may seem familiar, but no apology need be offered for the repetition of points which recur one session after another.

First of all, it is essential that candidates are provided with the tools to make a sensible choice of question and a sensible choice of texts to answer it with. This means teaching all four texts in comparable detail, and (in the case of short stories or poetry) teaching a sufficient number of stories or poems. In several questions on this session's paper, some candidates were able to demonstrate its relevance to one text (or one poem) they chose, but not to others: this was particularly the case with questions 2 (the purpose of comedy), 6 (the passing of time) and 8 (the presentation of nature). Too many responses are hamstrung by a choice of text or texts inappropriate to the question, and one suspects that some students enter the examination room only able to answer with confidence on two (or perhaps three) of their four texts, or a too limited range of poems or stories. It should be impressed on candidates that not all of the three questions may be appropriate to all four of their texts, so they should enter the examination room with an open mind concerning choice of question and choice of texts based on a sound knowledge of all their texts.

The main areas which need emphasis in teaching are already implicit in what has been said above: these are attention to the conventions of the chosen genre, attention to the details of the texts studied, and practice in careful and thorough reading of examination questions. The first two of these may be given prominence in all sections of the syllabus, not only in study of the part 3 texts; and it is open to schools to use the study of texts in part 4 of the syllabus to focus on some of the skills which will be required in Paper 2, and above all to emphasise that the close study of textual detail is as much a requirement for Paper 2 as it is in the detailed study for Part 2 of the syllabus or in their preparation for Paper 1.

The literary study of a particular genre will entail some specialist vocabulary, some of which will appear on the examination paper (comedy, dramatic illusion, metaphor and simile, and intermediary characters being examples from this paper). It is important that students be not only offered an appropriate vocabulary for their chosen genre, but that time is spent ensuring that the relevant terms are grasped. A number of responses to question 3 in particular used the

term dramatic illusion, or related terms such as breaking the fourth wall, without showing any real understanding of them.

With respect to the detail of the texts studied, it is obvious that it is easier to know by heart more of a poetry text (consisting of the 15 to 20 poems as specified by the PLA) than of a full length play or novel. But this should not prevent students being asked to dwell on particular details of a longer text in the same way that they will be asked to dwell upon a short poem. It is simply the selection of those passages which most repay close attention which is at issue, and this is an issue in which the students' input can be sought, by asking them to identify and analyse the one or more passages in a play or novel which most help to foreground a particular feature which has been previously identified and discussed. While brief, isolated quotations or references will always have a place in paper 2 responses, the very best responses usually include one or more explorations of a more extended scene, episode or extract.

Practice in careful and thorough reading of examination questions can be linked to practice in writing introductions which, instead of just repeating the question, actually engage with it and formulate a thesis which indicates the line of argument to be followed. Draft introductions can be scrutinized in relation to the various demands of the question. What different things does the question ask me to do (it is often two things, such as 'compare *the techniques used* and *the effects achieved*'), and does this introduction make some reference to both or all of these? Have I made clear the different ways in which these two (or more) texts relate to the question?

In the examination room, candidates should be aware that the first half hour of the examination will be the most critical in determining their eventual performance, and should be approached deliberately, without haste, as follows:

- a careful consideration of the three available questions should lead to a decision as to which best fits the texts studied, and then which two (or possibly three) of the four texts most lend themselves to fruitful comparison in the light of the question chosen;
- the question chosen should then be scrutinized (and marked up in whatever way the student has learned) to ensure that all of its requirements are responded to;
- while many candidates may wish to make notes at this stage to assist in their planning, it is still the case that some candidates spend time writing down several pages of notes. It is doubtful whether this will increase the quality of the finished product, not least because it is likely to close down the openness of response, the ability to shift direction as new ideas or examples occur in the process of writing;
- the introduction should be written carefully, with real attention to the quality of writing, and candidates should be willing to read over their introduction to ensure that it says something definite about the question and the texts; that the quality of language is the best possible; and that any unnecessary sentences – such as a mere repetition of the question in other words – are crossed out.

Given due care in the first stage of writing, the candidate should then be able to proceed confidently at a greater pace.

Here are a few final points raised by several examiners:

- The term 'theme' is frequently misused to mean subject, motif or idea. Students should

- be taught the meaning of the term;
- Individual teachers will be aware of the common language errors of their students, but misspellings of playwright, receive and separate, and the confusion of it's/its and who's/whose are very frequent;
 - Lazy abbreviations such as DOAS for Death of a Salesman or GG for The Great Gatsby are inappropriate in a literary essay which is partly judged on correct language and register. Similarly students should be certain they can spell the titles and authors of the works they have studied, which is still not the case with many who have studied a play by Tennessee Williams;
 - Students should be taught how to provide the needed (though not necessarily lengthy) context for quotations and the ability to use them in building an argument, rather than as singular 'proof' of an assertion.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 25

General comments

Examiners felt that the standard of responses was very good this year.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

In this session, perhaps more than in previous ones, some candidates seemed to have had difficulty in close-reading and understanding the main implications of the questions. Often candidates jumped to quick and inaccurate interpretations of questions (addressed in the section which looks at individual questions) and produced a thesis in response to a question of their own devising, often apparently one reflecting an approach learned in class rather than a direct response to the question at hand. Alternatively, in response to limited understanding of the question, candidates often lapsed into narrative summaries, especially for questions 7 – 9.

A further weakness involved not supplying details. The presence of claims unsupported by detailed evidence limits the extent to which a candidate can be given credit in Criteria A, B and C. For example, cursory mention of literary conventions without some detailed exemplification is not likely to indicate an adequate recognition of the contribution of style beyond what might have been included in the question itself.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Candidates demonstrated an effective organization of works that they also knew and understood at least adequately, and often better than that, including some appreciation of the works' historical, cultural, or social contexts. Candidates also tended to make more thoughtful and relevant points of comparison between salient issues. Candidates generally did a competent job of organizing their essays, including a comparative component. Almost all could identify some conventions, many with some awareness of their significance. Most made some specific references to the texts when developing their arguments while managing their time to give the texts balanced coverage. Most wrote clearly, and used a suitable register; many expressed themselves quite well.

In general the level of language is appropriate to the course although one cannot help but feel sympathy for those candidates whose level of English is not commensurate to the task. However, this sympathy does not affect the mark earned as the course is intended for candidates whose English is at the level of a first language, even if English is not the candidate's first language.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Q1. This question was popular and where the candidates understood the nature of the contradiction/correspondences required was answered well, though only very good candidates went beyond pointing them out to exploring the effects created. Responses that treated contradictions and correspondence between words and words, and between deeds and deeds were also accepted although the question suggested that the response was directed at words in comparison to deeds. A serious misunderstanding of the question often resulted in somewhat general essays about contradictions or correspondence in general and in even less apt responses about 'conflicts' between characters. Although the idea of conflict/contradiction has a familiarity to it that perhaps seemed to promise a greater return to candidates, more effective and focused examples often addressed correspondence in characters, especially in relatively static and less complex ones.

Q2. Although candidates were generally able to identify comic elements in the use of satire and mockery, very few candidates showed 'good' understanding of the more sophisticated purposes and effects of comedy in the texts, often settling for such effects as 'to engage the audience', 'to make the play more relatable' or 'to provide comic relief' with this last one opening the door to possible development had the identity of the element from which relief was being provided been identified and discussed. Some unfortunate candidates struggled with works that were either taught with little attention to comic elements or that provided very little evidence of comedy in themselves. Some good work was reported on 'Waiting for Godot' and 'Dr. Faustus' as well as for some other works when dark humor was brought into the discussion.

Q3. The level of clarity of understanding between 'realism' as a reflection of the believable circumstances of life and 'realism' as a form of dramatic presentation made all the difference

between a successful and a less successful response in terms of understanding the question. Those candidates who had studied expressionism as a form of presentation did quite well on this question while those who went the 'it's not like real life' route did less well. Such often presented plays such as "A Streetcar Named Desire", 'Death of a Salesman', 'View from the Bridge' and 'Waiting for Godot' were generally effectively treated although few candidates went beyond the presentation of theatrical techniques to consider the broader aims/effects of making the audience aware they are watching a play. Although Stoppard plays ought to be well suited to this question, they often seemed beyond the grasp of the candidates. Some questions allow the candidate to take a stance opposite to the one implied in the question. This one does not, so that candidates who chose to treat a play that did not remind the audience they were watching a play was working at a disadvantage with respect to responding relevantly to the question.

Q4. This question 'enabled' the general commentary on a couple of poems because most candidates found elements of 'contrast' and 'parallel' in their texts although an example here and an example there did not always lead to an in-depth knowledge and understanding of any of them. The quality of the responses depended on the specificity/precision of the contrasts/parallels discussed, and the candidate's ability to analyze use and effect, rather than simply identifying comparative elements. Stronger responses were often those that focused on fewer poems, poems in which contrast and/or parallel were organizing elements of the poems themselves.

Q5. This straightforward question provided the opportunity for candidates to show that they had been made aware of the presence and effect of these figures of speech in the works studied. All questions on poetry seemed to tempt candidates to produce a general commentary, and some provided a more potentially fruitful opportunity to do so than others. So the level of success often depended on the overall impact that similes/metaphors had on the poem and the extent to which they provided a link to other supporting devices in each poem. A tendency to identify the figure of speech but then not to address the implications of a particular thing's being compared to or presented as that other particular something, held back both the understanding of the effect of the simile/metaphor (Criterion B) and the understanding of the work (Criterion A). This question was also one that candidates did not read closely and often wrote the entire response ignoring the 'single or multiple interpretations' element altogether.

Q6. This question was a tricky one in that it suited some poems more than others. Candidates didn't always make sensible choices of poems and consequently found themselves in difficulty. Such examples might be poems that recalled an event of the past time but during which no indications of the passing of time were involved. Some candidates seemed to assume that the events or thoughts of a poem must take time to happen and so were in that regard relevant to the question. Actually, depending on the logical skill of the candidate, some of the responses using this approach ended up being relevant to some extent. However, a good number of candidates chose poems that did provide ample opportunity for them to address the question relevantly.

Q7. Whether candidates chose one or both of the options here (time period / geographically distinct area), the question posed relatively few problems in terms of candidates' understanding of the question. Dealing with a range of times and/or places gave candidates the scope to show their knowledge and understanding of the broader aspects of the text(s). This breadth of

choice had a complicating facet to it as the candidates who chose either time period or geographical setting often performed better than those attempting to cover both; it proved difficult to manage a structured and adequately detailed essay if attempting to cover too many different aspects of the question. Weaker candidates could discuss settings in general with some success, but had trouble addressing the effect of differing geographical locations while in other weaker papers, “time period” became past and present, resulting in a basic discussion of plot progression

Q8. 'Nature' is a broad term and the more successful candidates attempted to define this before embarking on the answer. The approach to nature as 'human nature' was also accepted. There were no reported memorable misunderstandings in response to this question. This question suited some texts more than others, but candidates generally chose wisely and found a defensible approach. Weaker responses were those that simply lacked development of the discussion about 'the presentation of nature'.

Q9. This question was often mis-interpreted such that candidates wrote about 'intermediary characters' as those who helped the reader to understand one of the characters more fully or as 'foil' characters or minor characters. The definition of an intermediary character was given in the question, so a misreading of this question really demonstrates the need for close question deconstruction before attempting a response. In spite of this and as with all the questions, even a misreading of the question does not prevent the candidate from demonstrating his/her skills in other ways throughout the response.

Q10-12. There were no comments reported on these questions.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Ensure that candidates read and understand the question in all its components and keep the focus on those elements throughout the response;
- Demonstrate critical, flexible thinking and detailed knowledge of the texts rather than by memorized knowledge ABOUT the texts;
- Place a stronger emphasis on comparison (Criterion B);
- Focus on the integration of detailed textual evidence;
- Teach theme not as single words (love, death, illusion etc.) but as the treatment of that element in each work (the redemptive power of love, the lure of death as escape, the retreat into illusion as a form of protection);
- Pay attention to the messy presentation bits of the language: possessives, spelling, underlining titles, to/two/too, their/there/they're, paragraphing, handwriting;
- Use functional transitions as opposed to 'on the other hand', 'similarly', 'moving on to', 'as I said before', 'on the flip side'...and other such;
- Distinguish between the meaning of 'playwright' and 'play' – the former word used to mean the latter happens with surprising frequency.