

May 2017 subject reports

English A Literature Time Zone 1

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 17	18 – 32	33 – 44	45 – 56	57 – 68	69 – 79	80 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 15	16 – 28	29 – 42	43 – 55	56 – 67	68 – 79	80 – 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

As usual, there was a very wide range of works. For the commentary, poems by known authors like Duffy, Heaney, Frost, Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Plath, Keats, Owen, Donne, and Atwood dominated. Others included selections from Eavan Boland, Theodore Roethke, Wallace Stevens, Eliot, Cummings, and Coleridge. The most popular fictional works used in the discussion included texts by Conrad, Shakespeare, the Bronte sisters, Hawthorne, Ondaatje, Alice Munro, Fitzgerald, Morrison, and Capote. Non-fiction texts included speeches by Martin Luther King and essays by Dillard, Woolf, Baldwin, and Foster Wallace.

Most of these works were suitable but T.S. Eliot and Cummings, in addition to very short poems by Dickinson, were mostly difficult.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A was generally handled well, especially by candidates who made specific and frequent references to the poem in support of their ideas. It was pleasing to note that many teachers had successfully discouraged students from dwelling on long and often irrelevant biographical details about the poet. Similarly, most successful commentaries were those that focused on the text itself. Candidates who concentrated on analyzing the extract but still linked it to the rest of the poem fared well too. Unfortunately, many teachers still insist on relating the poem to others by the same author yet this is no longer required by the criterion. The weakest performances either paraphrased the poem or made some speculative comments on it or used the poem to moralize about life today.

On Criterion B, candidates who concentrated on closely analyzing the use and effects of the poet's techniques in relation to the meaning of the poem did well. Such candidates treated the poem as a literary experience, responding to the features of the text in an interesting and personal manner. The more average commentaries analyzed the poet's choices and their contribution to the meaning of the poem but hardly offered personal insights into it. Weak candidates merely identified the techniques without analyzing their effects. Weaker commentaries simply paraphrased the poem and/or explained the poet's techniques.

On Criterion C, candidates who presented a coherent and deliberately organized analysis of the poem obtained very high marks. Some candidates' knowledge of literary terms was also very impressive. However, some teachers were very generous: they awarded high marks to commentaries that had an introduction and pertinent conclusion without paying due regard to the 'body' and focus of the commentary.

Criterion D was often handled well. Responses that showed intimate knowledge of the form and content of the work did well. Those which went further to provide insights into the work, appreciating the conventions of the genre and substantiating every point with specific examples from the work were even more successful. As stressed in last year's report, the teacher's questions play an important role here. Questions which are specific and open, with follow-up questions to the candidate's responses, help to raise the quality of the candidate's performance. However, many teachers did not treat the exercise as a discussion. They posed a question, let the student speak on in a monologue and - without engaging the candidate on their response - proceeded to the next question. Such interview-like sessions do little to enhance the quality of the candidate's response. Many teachers also tended to interject a lot, completing the candidate's answers and in some cases even advancing their own views on the work.

Criterion E is also greatly dependent on the teacher's questions. Teachers who had designed open-ended questions, requiring not just taught material but personal interpretation of the work as a literary text, contributed much to the quality of the candidate's answers (i.e. if the candidate knew and understood the work). Unfortunately, some questions even seemed to encourage speculation. Others treated the characters in works of fiction as these were real people.

Many candidates performed well on Criterion F, meeting the requirements of the assessment as a formal undertaking. However, many moderators observed that candidates (and even teachers) from some IB regions did not show enough awareness of this fact. They therefore used language informally (e.g. using many slang, fillers like “kinda of” and “like” very many times), sometimes excessively.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is important that students learn and understand the conventions of the genres they are studying. Secondly, candidates need to be taught how to analyze a poem closely, engage with its construction, and appreciate the effects of the poet’s techniques. Practicing such skills regularly is equally necessary. Further, and to quote one senior examiner, “another area to work on is to teach students to construct an effective argument around the core issues in the poem, while, at the same time, avoiding assertions that are not supported by the text.”

Similarly, teachers are urged to particularly consult the Subject Guide, the Teacher Support Material (TSM) and the Handbook of Procedures regularly. Doing so will ensure adhering to all the requirements for the oral examination. These include – but are not limited to - selecting suitable poems of appropriate lengths (20 - 30 lines), providing one or two guiding questions, conducting the exam in quiet surroundings, and asking helpful questions and observing the time limits for each of the parts of the oral exam.

It is also important for teachers to distinguish between an interview and a discussion. Q and A styles diminish the candidate’s chances of scoring high marks in the discussion. Questions like ‘What can you tell me about this work?’ or ‘Do you have anything to add?’ do not help the candidate at all in presenting an analytical and meaningful response. Questions, like ‘What would Willy Loman (in *Death of a Salesman*) feel in Trump’s America today?’ are hardly justified; nor do they enrich the candidate’s response.

Careful attention should also be paid to register. Teachers need to set good examples to their students in such formal settings as the oral examination.

Further comments

Most schools complied with the instructions. The exceptions included schools that either uploaded form 1/LIA (itself no longer required) instead of the poem or submitted inaudible recordings or the wrong poem or did all the above. Others still had candidates announce their school and individual registration and session numbers – which are no longer required.

Whereas majority of the poems/extracts were of the acceptable 20-30 lines, there were some much longer ones. Conversely, some poems were too short. In both cases, candidates were disadvantaged by this irregularity. Most of the candidates were asked subsequent questions, usually very helpful ones. In addition, most of the schools observed the timings of the two sections of the oral examination. In the discussion, most teachers had prepared lists of questions and used them to varying degrees of effectiveness.

Some moderators complained that some schools are still conducting the oral examination under inappropriate conditions: noise in the background, loud school announcements, the teacher's note-taking and so forth.

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

The range of poets seen followed the pattern of previous sessions, with Duffy, Bishop, Yeats, Dickinson, Owen and Heaney the most popular choices. Plath was less popular this time, but along with Wright, Hughes and Frost, was tackled by a minority of centres. Romantic poets, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, were occasionally offered. The choice of poem for discussion is crucial – some poems were simply too short to offer sufficient material or challenge. At the other extreme were the complete Duffy poems such as *The Diet*, which were too long to be reasonably discussed in 8 minutes. Candidates should also be careful not to treat some more accessible poems as a biographical puzzle to be pieced together, rather than as work of conscious art by a poet. This danger was seen most often in commentaries on Plath, Owen and Heaney.

Most of the drama extracts were from Shakespeare's tragedies, though a few centres did offer *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Tempest*. Extracts chosen were generally appropriate, if perhaps predictable, though each of the plays offers highly charged dramatic encounters, which might encourage candidates to consider the dramatic effects in more detail. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller were also chosen by a few centres.

Prose passages were very much in the minority. Orwell and Dillard were popular choices with a very few centres choosing Achebe, Dickens, Austen and Capote. More unusual choices in this session were Martin Luther King's speeches, often handled well by candidates, Edward Said's *Out of Place* and Cormack McCarthy's *The Road*.

Centres are reminded that the number of extracts to be chosen is laid down in the guidelines (to be found in both the Language A: Literature guide and the Handbook of Procedures) for determining the different extracts to be prepared for candidates. Centres should also ensure all Part 2 works are used equally.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Most candidates had reasonable knowledge of the text and often some understanding of the significance of the chosen extract. Biographical, historical or social context is rarely a helpful starting point for the commentary and some candidates spend up to 5 minutes on this sort of preamble before turning to the actual extract before them. Weaker commentaries were characterised by paraphrase and generalisation, though often lively and engaged. Other candidates developed this approach somewhat by judicious reference to the passage, but rarely offered an interpretation of the meaning or the concerns.

Better candidates started from a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of the passage and used this as the framework around which the exploration of the methods and their effects was constructed, enabling them to develop a cogent and at times complex interpretation of the work.

Criterion B

Candidates were often able to list literary features and give examples of them from their extract. Much less common was the ability to analyse the effects of these features or to consider why the writer might have chosen them. Nearly all commentaries would be improved by some recognition of the stylistic devices appropriate to the work's genre – the poetic form of a sonnet and the fluctuating rhythms for example – and crucially offer an exploration of the possible effects of these devices. Candidates tackling Shakespeare for example would do well to consider the dramatic effects of the passage in front of them on an audience in a theatre. Too often analysis of style was limited to points about language and imagery, with little apparent awareness of the importance of identifying the narrative voice in prose passages or in a poem. The best commentaries were able to blend the analysis of style into their interpretation of the meaning and significance of the passage, moving into the wider text briefly and appropriately as a means of illuminating their points on the actual passage. Most impressive of all were those few commentaries which developed beyond this approach into seeing multiple possibilities of meaning across a range of possible viewers.

Criterion C

Many commentaries adopted a linear approach to structuring the commentary, though a minority chose stylistic features or thematic concerns, as a suitable framework. These alternative approaches however need careful handling as often large parts of the passage are not discussed in sufficient detail or more commonly the links between what can appear to be somewhat arbitrary choices are not fully realised. More successful commentaries often start from a central thesis or proposition about the passage, linked if appropriate to the wider text, which expounds what the candidate sees as the central significance of the passage.

Nearly all commentaries do remain focussed on the task and the passage at least for some of the commentary and many candidates are able to integrate textual references appropriately. Teachers should be prepared to intervene at about the 8 minute point in order to allow sufficient time for the subsequent questioning.

Criterion D

Nearly all candidates use a more or less appropriate register and are able to express their ideas clearly and coherently, in usually accurate language. Weaker commentaries in this regard tend to be couched in a too casual, often rather colloquial, tone, but these are rare. Better commentaries are often quite precise in the choice of language and use nuanced, complex patterns of expression through which to develop the interpretation and the analysis.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Many of the recommendations previously offered are still apposite, on the evidence of this session, in terms of how well candidates understand the nature of the task, a critical commentary on a work of literature, and how prepared they are in terms of the candidate's experience of oral work. Regular practice at preparing and delivering a commentary seems essential in order to help more anxious candidates deal with the inevitable nerves.

Candidates do need to be able to recognise some of the limitations and the opportunities derived from the genre itself and be comfortable with discussing for example, poetic form, dramatic effects and narrative structure and voice, when looking at poetry, drama and prose. This is in addition to the work obviously already undertaken on features such as language, figures of speech and characterisation.

Candidates also need to have a clear structure in mind before starting their commentary and a structure which is linked to the purpose of the commentary, which in turn should derive from the perceived significance of the given passage. Regular practice in achieving this in the preparation/reading time again seems an essential step in developing these necessary skills.

Finally, some candidates do need more guidance on choosing appropriate and meaningful contexts to include within the commentary. An accurate and detailed summary of Owen's war service is of little value to the candidate when compared to establishing a strong thesis and developed interpretation of the particular poem in front of them.

Further comments

Centres should ensure the practical side of the examination is right. A few candidates still are interrupted by tannoys, mobile phones or human intrusion, with a consequent loss of concentration and focus.

Passages should be line numbered, free from typos and clearly set out on the page.

Guiding questions should adhere to the guidelines set out in the guidance and should be open and clear and designed to support the candidate's preparation.

All candidates must be asked subsequent questions and these should be aimed at the gaps in the candidate's coverage of the passage, rather than pre-determined. Candidates should be interrupted if necessary to allow time for these questions.

Higher and standard level 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

Key areas of concern remain the levels of achievement in criteria A and C.

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. Candidates write best 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 very good mark in Criterion B.

Students submitted assignments on a wide range of suitable texts and topics. While most had at least some focus on literary aspects of their chosen work too many did not. The old familiar works by Ibsen, Camus and Garcia Marquez appeared frequently with works like *Brodeck's Report*, *Kafka on the Shore* and *Paradise of the Blind* among others, adding some diversity and energy to this year's entry. Examiners noted a lot of essays hovering around 1200 words: these were often limited in their critical analysis and depth of investigation.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

There was some evidence that candidates' (or rather, perhaps, their teachers') understanding of this is improving. However, too many simply discussed the text, characterisation or symbolism - or asserted directly that their understanding had been increased by the orals without showing how this was so. Some used the Reflective Statement as an abstract or preamble to the essay itself. Teachers should be prepared to intervene to prevent ideas such as 'Ibsen came from Norway where everyone was unhappily married' and 'Everyone in the West believes all Iranians are terrorists' from flourishing. Most candidates kept within the word limit for the RS. Most seemed to have drafted their statements immediately after the orals, but some had clearly drafted them considerably later with focus only on the contextual idea most relevant to the chosen essay topic; it was not always easy to assess the extent to which understanding had developed. Some candidates barely touched on cultural and contextual elements in the Reflective Statement while demonstrating a clear grasp of these in the essay, where they attract no marks. Introductory and concluding comments waste words. Candidates should try to make three distinct points, show their significance and then move on.

Criterion B.

There was generally adequate knowledge and understanding of the texts, but few candidates showed any real insight in an over-arching interpretation of what all the detail amassed added up to. It was evident that some candidates had not really understood such works as *The Outsider*. Perhaps teachers are just determined or otherwise constrained to carry on with teaching the same works when only a few of the top candidates in the group are likely to grasp them well enough to write well about them.

Most candidates supplied some textual support in their essays. When such support is given completely free of any context from within the text then its usefulness is limited. Examiners reported incorrect interpretations or dubious claims made on the basis of inaccurate detail: the Written Assignment is a honed piece of writing and basic errors about characters, events and places do not impress.

Topic choices were not always appropriate. A focus comparing some aspect of a text with the writer's background/experience is not helpful and leads to the inclusion of much material that belongs in the RS.

Criterion C:

When students have been appropriately directed, they can write well about literary features in their selected works, but some failed to mention techniques in any way; candidates need more guidance in selecting a topic which invites a high level of achievement in C. Many who wrote on graphic novels neglected to consider the visual features of their chosen work and few discussed anything beyond dialogue in speech bubbles and possibly the voice over, leaving most other features of the genre undisturbed. There were studies of Ibsen's works that focused almost entirely on how the play divulges social and 'Victorian' mores rather than its dramatic features. Gender studies pervade other texts, such as *Blood Wedding*. Structure was rarely considered, voice even less often; character, plot and diction were more frequently discussed. Two fashionable terms this session were 'foil' (only sometimes correctly understood) and 'juxtaposition', often used to mean 'contrast'.

Criterion D:

Far too many candidates exceeded the 1500 word limit. Careful editing should make it easy to lose unnecessary words – thereby often improving the chance of a high mark in Criterion E, thanks to a generally crisper style. Some candidates failed to include a title. Sometimes the scope of the assignment was made clear in the introduction, but in a handful of cases it was not. The organization and development of the essay hinges on the choice and precision of the chosen direction or title of the essay. A good essay has a clear line of argument: many might have begun with appropriate references to the work, but the literary focus, sense of direction and development of ideas were not always sustained. Another common fault was the use of brief quotations with no indication of their context and it was unclear whether the citation supported the point at issue. Lengthy quotation can interrupt the flow of an argument: candidates should select the briefest quotation possible, identifying the key words which create the effect under discussion, and try to incorporate those quotations more seamlessly into the structure of their own sentences.

Criterion E:

While the language used in most assignments was reasonably clear, there was evidence that editing programs are not very frequently used by students. These can improve the presentation and readability of ideas and, if nothing more, spelling. Some students write well, some have not had the training to do so and some lack the drive to work at the presentation of their ideas in clear and conventional English. Examiners recognize that some are struggling to write in an unfamiliar language, entered in Language A English through factors beyond their or their teachers' control. Basic failings such as the use of contractions and avoidable errors such as the misspelling of characters' names or referring to a play as a novel are easily corrected and should be. Use of a chatty, inappropriate register was too often noted by examiners.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Name, centre, candidate and session number should not appear on the essays but word counts are a requirement. The cover sheet completed by candidates is not seen by the examiner, so titles and words counts **MUST** appear on the work itself.

Teachers should read Subject Reports, from the current year and also some previous ones, to see the recurrence of the same problems and perhaps make some changes in their practice. There is so much information on the OCC for this very purpose that it is always disappointing to see it so obviously underused or overlooked.

This is intended to be a polished piece: teach the relevant skills. These include making precise and detailed references to the text; placing textual references and quotations in their context and embedding them effectively; the inclusion of meaningful analysis of techniques, and taking care with the accuracy, paragraphing and register of their written English. All such skills will feed into the quality of attainment in other components.

Provide guidance on writing the Reflective Statement and the Written Assignment guided by the assessment criteria. Students need some clear direction about the suitability of essay topics which can be covered in detail within the prescribed word limit. They need to know what analysis is and why it is important.

Devise Supervised Writing prompts which direct students to critical analysis of the literary aspect of the texts, avoiding topics which are simply "A Critical Analysis of x text".

Teach the conventions relevant to the different genres more explicitly. Ensure that literary features, and their names, are understood, not just deployed. A question/title which includes the author's name is more likely to direct a student's thoughts towards criterion C.

Remind students that unless they have an extremely succinct style writing the minimum recommended number of words in the essay will not be in their best interests if they want a good mark.

Further comments

Make the candidates aware of the penalties for exceeding the word limit.

Make the candidates aware of the key words and the expectations in each criterion.

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 Higher Level English Literature Paper TZ 1 presented two texts which were accessible but that had a degree of subtlety that allowed stronger candidates to shine. Unusually in this session there was a fairly even split between poetry and prose.

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

Generally speaking there were few difficulties in terms of understanding the nature of the task. There was, however, some misreading of both texts. Detailed analysis of features continues to be a problem for some candidates.

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

The majority of candidates understood the nature of the task and many responded well to the texts on offer and, in many cases, there was clear evidence of planning.

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

Prose

The majority of candidates grasped the rivalry between the two ex friends and there was some useful discussion of characterization and setting as well as diction.

Some candidates produced largely descriptive accounts and a few candidates imposed largely unsupportable readings in which Paulina and Sadie were two sides of the same character or that Sadie (or Paulina) was actually dead.

There was a preponderance of black and white readings in which candidates regarded one character as good and the other as evil.

Poetry

Candidates were generally able to discuss the graphic visual imagery, the tone and diction of the poem, and several candidates commented on the more subtle elements, such as the auditory imagery and the tonal shifts in the poem.

Rather a lot of candidates got tangled up in a discussion of the word 'Great'. There *may* be some mileage in this, but given that 'The Great War' was the term used when the author was growing up, this did seem a rather blind alley.

Some candidates decided that the poem was definitely an anti-war poem. Actually, the poem seems a lot more ambiguous.

Some candidates also misread the point that the author was born four years after the war he describes so clearly and argued that he fought in it or, rather tenuously, that he was killed in the war and was re-born four years later.

There was, disappointingly, little reference to the idea of a cultural memory and little focus on the 'sepia November'.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

There are many schools to whom these do not apply, but:

- Candidates should be discouraged from searching for some higher 'message'. This generally detracts.
- Candidates need further practice in actually analyzing the features rather than simply spotting them. Further practice in structuring answers would also help.
- Candidates need to be reminded of the need to read carefully and plan. Calm and collected candidates who do spend this time productively generally do better.
- Candidates should be encouraged to think carefully about the tone(s) of the texts. There was quite a lot of one sided or black and white reading in this session.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Mark range: 0 – 2 3 – 5 6 – 9 10 – 11 12 – 14 15 – 16 17 – 20

General comments

On the whole, the majority of commentaries, both prose and poetry, were weak to average, with marks ranging between 8 and 13. Also, the standard of the prose commentaries seemed lower than the poetry. Generally, there were very few high-scoring commentaries, with perhaps more weak responses than in previous years.

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

Weaker candidates tended to offer introductions that failed to establish a basic understanding of the passage or a general overview of what will follow in the body of the commentary. Most of these lacked cohesion between points or paragraphs. Many of these candidates fell into narration or explanation of the events, rather than analysis or interpretation. They might name literary features, but completely fail to comment on their effects or how they shape meaning. Some made vague generalizations without providing any direct referencing to the passage. Some of these completely ignored one, or both, of the guiding questions, or, conversely, divided the essay into two parts, each one dealing with a guiding question, with no cohesion between the two parts, and completely at the expense of any other features in the passage that were worthy of discussion. Some of the very poor commentaries showed frequent expression, punctuation and grammar lapses which made it difficult to follow their argument. It appeared in some cases that English was not the candidate's best language.

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

Stronger candidates offered clearly focused introductions followed by carefully structured paragraphs, and a logical sequence of points, linked together with cohesive devices. These often gave carefully thought-through interpretations supported by precise and well-integrated references. They addressed the guiding questions and incorporated them seamlessly into the overall structure of the essay. These candidates understood the need for detailed analysis of stylistic features and how these impact meaning. They generally had an excellent command of the language and used appropriately formal register.

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

Criterion A: Understanding and interpretation

Question 1 Prose

Generally, candidates who scored highly in this criterion understood the different strands of the situation and offered insightful interpretation which was fully supported by relevant references. Low-scoring candidates tended to narrate or explain events or failed to show a basic understanding of the situation.

Many of the better candidates responded well to the guiding questions, understood the situation, and considered the roles of both the general and the narrator. Most had something to say about the general, but some found it more difficult to comment on the narrator. Many candidates were able to discuss sympathies for the general, though fewer focused on sympathies for the citizens. Only the very good candidates addressed the concept of changing sympathies, however, and how these were guided. The fact that question (b) focused on two seemingly separate features, how stylistic choices “guide your sympathies” and “create drama”, may have resulted in some candidates attempting to cover too much, since they had much to write in a relatively short time.

The weaker candidates tended to ignore the narrator’s role. Many considered the general to be “innocent”, missing the fact that he was head of the secret police. Some very weak candidates completely misunderstood who the premier was and thought the general made the speech. Very few candidates attempted to interpret the use of the mirror at the end of the passage.

Question 2 Poetry

The better candidates understood the basic premise of the poem, the reflective narrative stance and the adult’s sometimes nostalgic, sometimes more complex reflections on the past. The separation of and sense of distance between adult and child was also understood. The preoccupations of the child were generally handled well, but candidates tended to have a clearer idea of these than of the preoccupations of the adult. Many candidates made up a back story for the adult which was not supported by the poem, such as pressure of work or family life. It was common for candidates to oversimplify the mood, considering the child as merely very happy and the adult as unhappy.

Weaker candidates tended to view the situation as a desire to return to childhood, despite lines 19 and 20 suggesting otherwise. Many misinterpreted lines 22 and 23 as being the adult’s preoccupation, rather than the child’s. Lines 23 and 24 were also often misunderstood as being the adult’s actions. Indeed, even the better candidates tended to misinterpret these lines. Many candidates were fooled by the “to” of the title into deciding the poem must be a letter.

Criterion B: Appreciation of writer's choices

Prose

Stronger gave detailed analysis of how stylistic features achieved their effects, while the poorer candidates simply named literary devices without offering any analysis, or did not focus on them at all.

The stronger candidates gave detailed comments on the use of imagery, for example, the setting, the images of violence, and the general's uniform and appearance, and these comments were closely tied to overall meaning. They commented on the allusion to the "furies", the image of the "dainty slipper" flying through the air, the household items used as weapons, and the use of martial vocabulary. They also offered convincing comments on the use of first person narrative. However, even strong candidates struggled to analyse the effect of the lack of quotation marks for direct speech or to offer a plausible interpretation for it.

Weaker candidates tended to include references without offering any analysis or appreciation of their effects. Sometimes a comment would be included that suggested an understanding of what the reference meant but not how the language was used.

Poetry

The stronger candidates were able to give detailed analysis of the childhood imagery/movement and its effect and how it contrasted with the adult narrator's current perspective. Some very good candidates picked up on some of the more ominous connotations associated with some of these. There was also some successful analysis of the structure of the poem which developed how it affected meaning. Some of the better candidates also focused on the use of the pronouns "I", "you" and "we", offering insightful analysis of their effects.

Some of the weaker candidates tended to use basic literary terms incorrectly, for example, even simple terms like "metaphor" or "personification." Others struggled to make something of a poem that, to them, had no "rhythm or rhyme", missing the para-rhyme and rhyme that was contained in the poem.

Criterion C: Organisation

Poetry and Prose

The majority of candidates were able to structure their commentaries effectively using paragraphing, a logical sequencing of points and appropriate linking devices. These candidates gave an introduction that offered a clear overview of their overall understanding of the situation in both the poem and the passage. Such introductions, followed by carefully structured paragraphs helped to guide them through the rest of their response. Indeed. There were fewer candidates this year whose commentaries did not exhibit a basic structure in terms of paragraphing and organization. However, several candidates failed to conclude, and left the commentary open-ended without conclusions, or even stopped in mid-sentence. Presumably, this was often the result of the candidate running out of time. Fewer candidates this year organized their essays in an a) b) structure, although those that did lose marks. While many

candidates were able to integrate their quotes effectively, there were still a surprising number who did not. A few of the weaker candidates included quotes that were far too long, sometimes taking up a whole paragraph.

Criterion D: Language

Poetry and Prose

Those candidates whose command of the language was excellent clearly had the advantage here. They were able to write fluently and accurately, using a range of appropriate vocabulary. However, a surprising number of candidates made basic mistakes in grammar and sentence syntax. This often detracted from the clarity of their argument, or even completely obscured meaning. However, fewer candidates this year used inappropriate register. At the same time, handwriting is becoming increasingly more difficult to read and this tends to disadvantage the candidate, as what cannot be read, cannot be marked.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The importance of analyzing stylistic features and their effects needs to be stressed. Too many candidates consider that simply identifying them is enough. In addition, candidates need to be reminded that they should incorporate answers to the guiding questions into a formal essay structure, and not simply answer the two questions in two separate parts. Of course, they also need to be reminded that responding to the guiding questions is compulsory, and not optional.

It may be useful to teach candidates how important it is to plan their essays before they start to write. They need to understand how important a clear and focused introduction is, how there needs to be cohesion between points and paragraphs, and that finishing without a conclusion will lose marks in criterion C.

Candidates also should to be taught how to read and annotate their texts. They need to read the passage at least twice to establish their understanding of it. The misreading of certain lines or the overall situation means that careful reading is not always taking place.

They also need instruction as to how to integrate their quotes into the body of their commentary. Too often they clearly do not know how to do this.

They should also be encouraged to focus only on the texts themselves rather than inventing back stories as the weaker ones are prone to do.

Finally, they need to be taught the difference between narrating and analyzing.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 11	12 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 18	19 – 25

General comments

While there are separate criteria for the marking of paper 2, the exercise as a whole is really looking for—quite broadly—candidate engagement with both works of literature and with the underlying concerns of the discipline. It was clear to many examiners that during this session candidates were well prepared for the task at hand and had spent valuable class time working with texts. What seems to distinguish the better papers, though, is an engagement at the most basic level of the study of literature—reading and responding to the works. All teachers of literature have had the frustration of having students pay attention in class, participate in discussion and look at secondary sources, but then read incompletely. The general impression of many examiners is that nothing can replace the understanding, flexibility and base of knowledge that comes from simply reading. With that in mind, the best papers were those that clearly dealt with the question at hand rather than forcing a canned response, that reflected on the construction of a work, and that seemed eager to share a reading experience. Examiners found many of the responses to be fresh, independent and knowledgeable. It is worth repeating from the November subject report that it is “very impressive to consider that the work in front of us is produced by a 17 to 19 -year-old student in a two hour window of time. Under pressure.”

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

There are two areas of the examination which still appear difficult to candidates: responding to the question and showing an appreciation of conventions of the genre. There is an attempt in paper 2 to design questions that will ask candidates to think in fresh ways about the works they have studied. Questions are different from year to year not to “trick” candidates but to ask candidates to balance what they themselves have experienced in the works they have studied, what they have learned in class and what they have experienced over the years through reading and responding to literature. Too many candidates enter the examination attempting to force canned responses to the questions or trying to mold what they have “learned” about a text to a question that is asking, most likely, something else. Though we have always said that we look for detail in good responses, the use of memorized, often irrelevant, quotations does not help in giving an impression of understanding or of authentic response to a question. In relation to literary conventions, it is probably enough to say that it is an element of response that always needs a reminder. First, it is important to always be attentive to how a text is constructed but it is equally important to consider, over time, how novels work, how poetry functions, etc. While it has been suggested that students who have an opportunity to see dramatic productions (as an example) have an advantage when responding to drama questions, this should only lead us to consider how important it is to think about the “how” in relation to all of the works and how that construction makes a difference. Similar to the use of quotations, the use of terminology itself does not demonstrate an understanding of these conventions. Candidates often use terms without clear understanding or take the meaning of certain elements (a symbol, imagery, the point-of-view in a novel) for granted without support, elaboration or discussion.

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

In general, candidates are well prepared for the overall demands of the paper and are clearly familiar with the format, the expectations and the marking criteria. In fact, this familiarity is sometimes a disservice when candidates offer brief “evaluation” or list “conventions.” Importantly, though, it is clear to examiners that students know what they are expected to do and have had practice in writing essay responses. Many candidates know and understand the works they have studied and have considered a wide variety of possible responses to those works. The best essays read like a conversation or argument around an interesting question in relation to genuinely interesting works. This suggests that students have spent time reading and have had an opportunity to engage and discuss in class. In addition, the examiners found that most papers were readable and followed at least a basic structure.

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

1. This was a popular question and many candidates were able to write broadly about the uses of speech. Better responses tended to deal with the subtleties of the question, either considering what very particular moments of speaking revealed (or concealed, or inadvertently revealed) or considering the nature of who “characters are” in relation to their speaking. Weaker answers tended to use general examples or were tempted into spending too much time on other techniques that reveal character.

2. While this question invited, in some ways, plot summary, many candidates were able to make clear connections between presented events in a work. Some responses did dwell only at the level of summary. Others, however, showed clearly how playwrights make connections between moments in works or build tension from one event to the other, incorporating elements such as music or flashback in a work like *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Other candidates went on to show how a work like *Arcadia* might seem at first to be “a loose series of brilliant fireworks” but was actually a carefully constructed “chain reaction”.

3. Some examiners noted that this question seems to imply that candidates must deal with amusing or entertaining moments in works that are more generally serious. Candidates were given leeway, though, to use any type of work to consider the effects of amusement or entertainment. Candidates were also given wide-berth in their definitions of “entertaining.” Weaker responses tended to take entertainment for granted or suggested that moments were “amusing” without any kind of rationale or discussion. Others never pushed to the second part of the question that asked to consider the effects.

4. This was a popular question under poetry. Successful responses were those that could point directly to specific examples of economy, whether in language, line length, or overall length. Candidates explored both long and short poems and discussed elements ranging from symbols to allusions as means of “getting a lot said in a small space.”

5. While this question allowed many candidates to discuss a variety of images in the poems they had studied, the question also demanded some argument as to how these images were,

to whatever extent, more important than sound. This second demand of the question proved difficult for some candidates.

6. This question was not chosen by many candidates. Some resorted to a broad discussion of nature imagery that could easily stray from the question. There were interesting responses that delved into issues of imitation and transformation.

7. This was a very popular question and was approached successfully using a wide range of works and characters. Examiners allowed for a wide variety of interpretations of villains and did not look for a strict, literary definition of anti-hero. That being said, strong papers had strongly implied or explicit rationales for their choice of characters and focused clearly on presentation and effect.

8. In relation to this question, the “competition” could be taken at a variety of levels. Many candidates chose to focus on the conflict between characters but many also took a broader stance and successfully considered how works manage to present ideas (through multiple narratives, key symbols, varying points of view) that are somehow in conflict.

9. This was a popular and relatively straightforward question that did, though, demand some engagement with the phrase “seemingly insignificant detail.” Candidates who simply discussed insignificant details that are unimportant or dwelled on quite significant details without any kind of argument or justification tended to be less successful.

10. There were few responses to this question, but the key distinguisher here seemed to be whether or not a candidate was able to get to how the foreign or unfamiliar elements were conveyed as opposed to simply listing these elements.

11. Similarly, though there few responses to this question, examiners noted that weaker papers listed the “important events” in the works without grappling with how the significance was “made clear to the reader” or, as some candidates did, dealing with the positioning of the authors.

12. Again, there were very few responses to this question, but the key was in looking at “the means by which authors seek to promote” as opposed to discussing the ideas themselves.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Examiners made a number of recommendations:

- Be careful of formulae for organization. Of course we have a desire to give candidates something to hold on to in order to ensure that “the basics” are met, or to give them the most important keys to the exam. Some candidates clearly follow formulae (particular elements in an introduction, particular parts to a thesis statement, particular features to cover in a body) and are very successful. Just as often, however, a formula can act as a restraint, as a further hurdle to worry about in an exam as opposed to a helpful scaffold.
- While quotations are often an indication of strong preparation and strong knowledge of

the works, they are often mishandled. Quotations are best when somehow remembered naturally—from moments that interest the candidates, from notes taken in class, from re-reading or noticing when studying. Too many candidates seem to have memorized a disembodied list of quotations and seem determined to use them regardless of the question at hand. This produces the opposite effect of demonstrating strong understanding.

- Candidates need practice working through exam questions so that they are used to picking them apart and really looking for what is being asked.
- Over-practice with exam questions can be problematic. Frequently writing long responses to questions may lead to candidates bringing “prepared” answers in their minds rather than really focusing on the question.
- In the G2s teachers sometimes remark that their students “weren’t prepared” (or were) to answer a particular question. In a sense, candidates should be ready to answer any question, from the sublime to the ridiculous. A flexible knowledge of the work and deep engagement with it will allow students to answer almost any question.
- Students can become prepared for the nature of exam questions by on occasional broadening discussion to problems of the discipline. What are actual scholars writing about at conferences? What is the current debate around critique as opposed to reading for “affect”? How are digital humanities changing the nature of critical reading and literary scholarship?
- We should always keep in mind that we aren’t really studying a particular work in order to just “know” it, rather we are studying the way texts work, the way a genre works, and the acts of reading, writing and responding and how we approach these tasks in our discipline.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 20	21 – 25

General comments

This was a successful paper in many respects and the majority of candidates found questions suited to the texts they had prepared, utilising those questions to demonstrate their understanding very effectively. This examination session saw an increase in the number of candidates taking the paper and so it is worthwhile to restate some of the basic principles of Paper 2 criteria.

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

One of the best ways that a candidate can demonstrate knowledge and understanding (Criterion A) is by making use of specific examples. Examiners are still surprised that some candidates can write at length without quotation and with only minimal reference to the text. As an example, many candidates can tell us that Biff Loman informs his father that there are many workers such as themselves and that they are not worth much. Why is it then so very difficult to draw on the phrase 'dime a dozen'? In this case, if a quotation could have been delivered, it might have moved into the additional points that this is a punchy, alliterative phrase that characterises both Biff and Willy, thereby earning the candidate additional credit under Criterion C. Examiners do understand that the exact words might not always come readily to mind but we do welcome at least an attempt at placement of examples. Instead of telling us that Cecily and Gwendolen are 'always' trying to put each other down, why not add that this is shown very effectively when they share afternoon tea? Indicating which part of a text a candidate has in mind when formulating each point is important. In addition to specific detailed examples, it is also beneficial to a response if there is some breadth and range in the thinking. An unreliable narrator is not the only aspect of '*The Great Gatsby*' which is worthy of note; nor is the class conflict in '*A Streetcar Named Desire*' the only theme being explored. NB: Texts must be chosen from the Prescribed List of Authors and be of the genre relevant to the question.

Well-considered question selection is very important for success under Criterion B. It is vital that candidates understand the demands of the question they select. The main body of the response should be centred on considering the implications of the prompt, as they relate to the chosen texts. This process of consideration should be the driving force of the response and the majority of high scoring answers show evidence of careful planning. Ideally, comparison and/or contrast should emerge quite naturally if the candidate is thinking of issues raised by the question and using both their texts as supporting material for the discussion. Comparison falls out less readily in a response that is organised around typical conventions of the genre in a formulaic, prepared response.

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

When assessing performance under Criterion C examiners are looking to see awareness that these works have authors and that we are not looking at the activities of real people in real life. This aspect is always problematic for candidates who give a narrative recount of their texts, supplemented by personal response to the life situations presented. Such responses show little awareness of authorial design. On the other hand, candidates who are very familiar with the literary conventions of their genre and its specialist terminology are sometimes less successful in balancing their knowledge with a critical response to the prompt. More important than naming conventions is the *development relevant to the question*. It is not enough to identify a point where the fourth wall is broken; it is more important to think about why that device was employed at that point and what effect was created, using the analysis to support the ideas generated by the prompt.

Regarding Criterion D most candidates have a set piece paragraph on, for example, unreliable narrators, setting, or imagery. To earn credit, this knowledge must be made pertinent to the argument and not shoehorned in, regardless of applicability. Conventions of essay writing, particularly the use of an introductory paragraph and a concluding paragraph should be observed and these structural devices should be employed in a meaningful way. The introduction should confirm the candidates' understanding of the question, signalling the approach to be taken; the conclusion should make a summative statement, drawing together the threads of the argument. A long response is not always a strong response and repetition is to be avoided. Candidates who write, 'as I said earlier' and 'as we will see later' need to make each point once and then move on.

Appropriate language has been an issue for this paper but examiners did see further improvement under Criterion E in choice of register and terminology. Instances of casual, conversational style are becoming less frequent and therefore stand out more prominently. Colloquial expressions are problematic because such expressions are imprecise and invariably fail to clarify the point the candidate is attempting to make. Hamlet's soliloquy cannot be summed up as the message 'not to sweat the small stuff'. Very few candidates have language skills so poor that language is rarely clear but it is worth noting that sometimes candidates with quite sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structures can deliver language which is only sometimes clear and their points are only partially delivered. Errors in ambitious language use from candidates who are overreaching can pull criterion E marks down as much as basic errors in more simple structures. Some candidates might be better advised to work on a more straightforward style of writing to ensure clarity.

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

Drama: Q1.

This question asked how and to what extent speech was employed as a tool of characterisation. This was extremely popular and ample material could be found in all texts. However, many candidates seemed to miss the 'to what extent' element and wanted to nail their colours firmly to the 'speech' mast, not taking the opportunity for a more holistic approach by comparing use of speech to other elements such as actions, use of props, costuming, association with light and sound effects. Candidates who scored well under Criterion B often lost marks on Criterion C. Certainly, Stanley reveals himself through brutal language but as a fairly inarticulate character, he also shows himself through outbursts of violent actions. Blanche has much to say about herself but there are also significant costume changes. A few candidates took a surprisingly narrow view of speech and confined themselves to examining just the content and the information delivered. The best responses were strongly alive to the nuances of speech and the creation of the mood around a character through tone, diction and imagery.

Q2.

This question asked for comparative examination of the ways in which two playwrights had constructed a chain reaction in the events making up the drama. This was an extremely popular but sometimes ill-considered choice. Candidates seemed very knowledgeable on the subject

of catalysts, no doubt from a past paper. Often, although a trigger factor might be discussed at length, there was very little on subsequent events and even less on the connecting links between them. Many responses degenerated into narrative. Questions can never be answered by plot summary and if candidates find they are re-telling the story, it should ring an alarm and prompt a change of direction. This question required close examination of connections, perhaps charting the process of concealment and revelation that builds tension and illuminates competing views of life. When handled successfully, candidates were able to track a clear set of reactions to situations that developed an audience's understanding of characters and the issues they confront.

Q3

The phrase 'regardless of subject matter' indicated awareness that some works studied would have subject matter not obviously 'amusing', so that exploration of the tension between serious, even troubling material, and an audience's enjoyment in viewing a play was one way into the question for candidates who had studied a work which was not overtly comedic. Candidates who were heavily conventions-orientated did less well here, often only asserting that the play was entertaining because it used stage directions, props and lighting. Such responses sometimes digressed into consideration of how interest was maintained, which was not quite the focus. Likewise, candidates who were heavily theme-orientated did less well. To argue that the grotesque drunken antics in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* are chiefly amusing because we are invited to think about American-Soviet relations is really missing much of Albee's dexterity in audience manipulation. It did appear that, under examination conditions, many candidates had forgotten that they had ever found their texts entertaining, although there were notable exceptions; the addition of the 'no-neck monsters' to Maggie's marital troubles and Mozart's giggle provided useful material. In terms of supporting conventions, many candidates explored how use of dramatic irony provided entertainment and there was appreciation of visual effects, such as the apparition of ghosts, notably Banquo at the feast. Candidates studying *Master Harold and the Boys* offered some thoughtful comment on Hally's 'joke' and Sam's pseudo-farcical response of dropping his trousers; a scenario which might have been said to have all the elements of 'amusement' but here used to a much more serious purpose in a tense confrontation. Candidates were expressly directed to consider the 'effects achieved' and most did so, looking at release of tension, character foils, satire to underscore thematic content and the delay or build-up of anticipation, such as with Macbeth's Porter.

Poetry: Q4

This question invited focus on 'economy of expression' *regardless of the length of the poems* and this phrase should have told candidates that they could choose either short poems or, if these were not in their programme of study, particularly powerful verses, lines, phrases even, within a longer text. For those choosing this question, Emily Dickinson's *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*, Blake's *The Sick Rose*, and also Robert Frost's *The Dust of Snow* proved popular choices. The strongest responses showed detailed knowledge of techniques employed to make these poems so powerful. Some candidates did draw on longer poems, selecting brief but telling images and offering comment. These responses were sometimes more disjointed and lacked cohesion unless the candidate offered some overview, setting the 'economic expression' in context and discussing its importance in the wider work. Structure, criterion D,

could be weak here with poor paragraph connections. Sometimes only the phrase 'Another image is...' was employed, resulting in a list.

Q5

This was by far the most popular question, although somewhat less open-ended than the others. Candidates were asked very specifically, 'to what extent is sight more important than sound' with regard to meaning and effect. This was most often approached through consideration of visual imagery, although discussion of the visual appearance of the words on the page also provided a valid line of investigation. As with Q1, the best answers considered the chosen texts in the round and looked at all elements that contributed to conveyance of meaning and effect. For a poem such as *Havisham*, candidates considered the visual imagery around the subject's appearance that builds up such a strong image of her mental state, with more able candidates noting that to complete the picture, Duffy tells us that Havisham stinks and she allows us to hear her cry, 'Nooooo!'

Q6

The question invited discussion of poetic imitation as a means to add significance to the natural world. It was not a question which lent itself to distortion and although examiners were prepared to accept some very broad interpretations of the 'natural' world, some candidates did stretch this to points beyond the reasonable. A candidate claiming to be writing on 'the natural world that was John Donne's spiritual life' was writing on 'spiritual life' not natural world imitation. Likewise, candidates who had prepared war poetry by Thomas Hardy and Wilfred Owen struggled if they digressed from focus on the natural world in time of war to more generic points. These poets do show how war debases and abuses nature but this was not always present in the examples the candidates chose and general comment on the anti-propaganda message of *Dulce et Decorum Est* was moving quite a distance from the starting point of the prompt. Curiously, almost all these off-task responses contained paragraphs on 'visual imagery' and use of 'economic' but very telling detail, leading examiners to wonder why the options of Q4 and Q5 had not been taken.

Prose: Q7

The key word in this question, inviting comparison of the presentation and function of 'villains or anti-heroes' turned out to be 'or'. 'Villains' are not the same as 'anti-heroes'. Choice was given to widen the scope of the question, as not all works studied have an obvious 'villain'. Some works may have a protagonist of questionable virtue and disappointing capabilities. It was important that candidates did indicate which character type was under consideration and that the terms were not used as if they were interchangeable. Anti-hero was much misunderstood, seen as simply the person that stood in the way of what the hero wanted. The function of characters was often better discussed than their presentation, with most candidates happy to write on the use of a villain as a foil for the hero, performing a role in shaping character development, or providing tension in plot development. Fewer gave consideration to the physical description, although a small detail such as Colonel Joll's dark glasses could prove richly suggestive. Some more able candidates considered how authors can subvert our notions of villainy and heroism by offering a character such as Rochester, who appears to perform

villainous actions (imprisoning his wife while proposing a bigamous marriage) yet he emerges as the preferred choice over St John Rivers.

Q8.

The question asked for discussion of *competing* elements in works of fiction, both presentation and effects. To prompt thought, elements such as 'ideas, hopes and visions' were suggested. This was not the same as asking for an account of the presence of such elements in a work. Weaker candidates misunderstood the fullness of the prompt and, although able to identify some ideas, hopes, visions, they showed little regard for the notion that there might be other competing forces that threatened or conflicted with these. Candidates of dystopian novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *1984* were successful if they could provide balanced discussion comparing what the protagonists hope for as their ideal world with the competing forces of their societies' new world visions. Candidates of post-colonial work likewise found good material but again a balance was needed, not only consideration of Okonkwo's vision for Umuofia and his ideas about masculinity but also some awareness of the competition brought into play by the arrival of the missionaries, and the alternative views within his own people and even his own family.

Q9.

This question proved problematic only when the candidates could not recall sufficient suitable detail or ignored the 'seemingly insignificant' phrasing. Generally, candidates did well on this question as it seemed to lead naturally into discussion of criterion C conventions, such as imagery and foreshadowing. More able candidates took a wide view of what constituted 'significance', not only looking for clues in plot development, such as how mention of Eugene's tea in *Purple Hibiscus* becomes murder by poison but also looking at characterisation, as through seemingly insignificant colour association in *The Great Gatsby*, or the significance of what Jane Eyre chooses to read or to draw. A number of the details selected also functioned as symbols or motifs and held thematic significance, such as Winston's paperweight in *1984* and the broken vase in *Atonement*.

Prose other than fiction:

Very few candidates had studied prose other than fiction works, which was disappointing given the wealth of excellent writing available. Q11 was the exclusive choice. Candidates showed sound knowledge of the content of works by Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr, explaining that these men lived through significant historical events and that their witness testimony was very valuable. Candidates were less secure in discussing the ways in which the impact of such events was conveyed to the reader, merely giving an example and allowing the facts to speak for themselves, without giving suitable consideration to the language choices of the writers.