

November 2015 subject reports

English A: Literature

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 17	18 – 32	33 – 44	45 – 56	57 – 69	70 – 80	81 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 15	16 – 27	28 – 41	42 – 54	55 – 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

There was a wide range of works submitted. Among the most popular poets taught were Seamus Heaney, Wilfred Owen, Carol Ann Duffy and Bruce Dawe. John Donne, John Keats, Plath, Harwood and Hardy were among the others. In drama, Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* featured the most. In prose fiction, *The Great Gatsby* continued to dominate, closely followed by *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *The God of Small Things* to

name a few. Martin Luther King's speeches, George Orwell's essays and *Running in the Family* were also quite popular.

Some candidates seemed to find some texts particularly challenging, a problem aggravated by the length of the text given. An example was Donne's 36-line 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.' Teachers might find it beneficial to teach works that are both accessible and still sufficiently challenging to their students.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Most candidates demonstrated adequate knowledge of the poem. The more successful commentaries provided insights into the relationship between the form and content of the poem, revealing for example how the two combine to bring out the meaning of that text. Such commentaries were thus able to engage with the details of the poem and provide a considered and informed response to that text. On the other hand, 'context' seems to have caused some confusion. Many candidates disadvantaged themselves by providing detailed information as a way of introducing the commentary (e.g. the historical and cultural context, the poet's life experiences and so on) for as long as two minutes. On some commentaries, many teachers seemed stuck in the old syllabus which required detailed insights into the link between the passage (poem/extract, in this case) and the rest of the work. Some subsequent questions even dealt entirely with this aspect of 'context.' Teachers are advised to stress that the focus should be the poem itself; where contextual information is needed (e.g. in linking the extract to the rest of the poem), it should be very brief indeed. The wording of assessment criterion A is very instructive in this regard.

Criterion B

There was some improvement in this area. Most candidates showed an awareness of the literary features of the passage, with the weak responses merely explaining their uses while the stronger ones sought to analyse their effects. The more successful analyses demonstrated detailed insights into how and why the poet uses specific stylistic devices in relation to the overall meaning and impact of the poem. Many moderators enthused about the focused and lively manner with which such candidates engaged in such detailed study. Such candidates, they reported, had been taught the art of close textual analysis and given the tools with which to enjoy the experience. However, there were also concerns that the structure of the extracts was ignored by many candidates and that the teacher's subsequent questions often failed to address this omission.

Criterion C

Most commentaries showed varying degrees of organization. Weaker responses simply plunged into attempted analyses of the text, usually focusing on the linear layout of the poem. The average ones signposted their planned structure but sometimes veered from it. In the two cases above, it was not uncommon for candidates to run out of time or at least fail to conclude their responses to the passage. The more successful commentaries mapped their planned structure, grouping their analyses and thoughts, and delivered a coherent and persuasive response. An unfortunate habit that seems to be spreading in some schools is for the candidates to continue with the analysis up to the eighth minute, with the teacher then interrupting with a question like “Your uninterrupted time is up but would you like to conclude your commentary?” Such shortcuts should be avoided since they undermine the purpose of the 2 minutes set aside for the subsequent questions. In addition, some teachers are allowing candidates to deliver their uninterrupted commentaries for longer than eight minutes. This is contrary to the regulations; and it eats into the time for the questions. In any case, it should be emphasized that moderators are not expected to mark any points made after the expiry of the regulation time.

Criterion D

The vast majority of candidates revealed adequate to excellent levels of knowledge and understanding of the work under discussion. Candidates who provided specific and analytical details to the discussion questions usually did well. Still, as has been emphasized in previous subject reports, the success of the candidate on this criterion often hinges on the kind of question asked by the teacher. For example, teachers who went beyond using the exemplar discussion questions from the subject guide and those teachers who readily probed the candidate further with follow-up discussion questions benefitted the candidate immensely. On the other hand, teachers who relied on candidates to produce materials learnt in class or who expected particular sets of answers did not benefit the candidates that much. Finally, some teachers greatly disadvantaged the candidate by asking only one or two questions (e.g. “In what ways is King Lear a tragic figure?” and “Why do you think Shakespeare wrote this play?”).

Criterion E

Many moderators reported that, just like in criterion D, often the candidate’s ability to display independent thinking depended on the teacher’s questions. Thoughtfully-worded questions, enriched by probing follow up questions, tended to spur the candidate into often insightful responses to the work. Usually, such questions were a result of the teacher’s engagement with the quality and development of the candidate’s responses throughout the discussion. Such interaction raised the discussion beyond what a seasoned moderator referred to as ‘a routine

teacher-student interview on a literary work studied in class.’ Also, some moderators were concerned that many candidates were unaware of the conventions of a Shakespearean tragedy. This was usually revealed by responses to questions like “Are you satisfied with the ending of Hamlet?” Many answers tended to simply stress that Hamlet avenges his father’s murder at long last but failed to comment on the restoration of order, which is the actual ending of the play, and why this was important to the Elizabethan audience.

Criterion F

The vast majority of the candidates used a literary-critical register, very often with precision. As a result, this criterion provided the least disagreement between the moderator and the teacher in their assessment of the candidate’s performance. Indeed, moderators observed that there is a fast-growing awareness in schools of the appropriate register and style to adopt. However, they suggest that teacher examine more carefully the difference between the descriptors for a 4 and 5 in a commentary.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- It is very important to consult the relevant materials for this course as regularly as possible. These are the Subject Guide, the Teacher Support Material, the OCC teachers’ forum, the moderator’s feedback, both past and current. Teachers also advised to attend IB -approved teacher workshops.
- Some works require a great deal of student preparation by the teachers. Such works as Birthday Letters by Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath’s Ariel poems, *The Handmaid’s Tale* and poems by John Donne are good examples. Where possible, teachers are encouraged to teach works that are accessible and still sufficiently challenging for the student. Such choices are likely to generate more student enjoyment.
- Teachers are reminded that choosing longer extracts than the 20-30 lines disadvantage the student very much since they have only 8 minutes in which to engage with the extract successfully. Shorter and dense passages like sonnets are acceptable. Unacceptable, of course, is using two short poems as one passage for commentary.
- Fitting the students with close analysis skills and developing these assets through regular practice, including peer assessment, is highly recommended.
- Students need to be taught how to analyze ‘structure’ as a significant feature of the work studied. The study of a literary work without examining this literary strategy is incomplete. Similarly, any commentary that fails to address this feature is unlikely to do very well.
- As emphasized in previous reports, Subsequent Questions are meant to help the student to enrich their commentary in different ways. These include filling a gap (like

not addressing 'structure), clarifying a point left unclear or unsubstantiated and so on. The nature and focus of these questions therefore should be determined by the student's commentary; in other words, they should not be pre-determined. Similarly, they need to be worded in such a way that they are not giving away the teacher's own opinion.

- Students to be most familiar with the conventions of the genre they are studying (e.g. tragedy) and the appropriate terms (e.g. tragic flaw).
- Regular practice with carefully-crafted questions that do not expect particular interpretation or line of thinking is highly recommended.
- Teachers are requested to enter the comments on the 1/LIA form according to each assessment criterion. This not only helps in avoiding giving blanket marks but facilitates smoother moderation.

Further comments

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

The vast majority of schools followed the guidelines and completed their internal assessment on time. Most of the recordings were of good quality though a few schools had failed to first confirm that every sample was audible enough before submitting it for moderation. Schools are reminded that it is possible to ask the IB for permission to replace the inaudible sample without any penalty. In one or two cases, some moderators were concerned that some commentaries sounded like prepared speeches. It is important that all schools comply with the regulation asking that no candidate know the passage or discussion questions in advance.

The uploading of materials seems to have been done very well, with poems uploaded in the upright position and clean copies submitted. Almost all the schools correctly uploaded the individual poem or poem extract for each candidate. However, a few moderators complained of schools having submitted all the poems used as one document contrary to instructions. Almost all the moderators reported that form 1/LIA had been uploaded for each candidate and that most teachers had duly completed these forms. The most helpful comments on these forms were entered according to each criterion; this made the moderation very smooth.

The vast majority of schools kept to the times allocated for each part of the oral examination (8:2 minutes for the oral commentary and 10 minutes for the discussion). Similarly, many schools used poems that were 20-30 lines long (sonnets are the exception). Unfortunately, some schools have not caught up to this requirement. Again, expecting candidates to do a detailed and persuasive close analysis of longer poems like Plath's 'Daddy' is asking for the impossible.

Most encouraging also was that many schools read the moderators feedback and heed their recommendations.

A few schools are using more than one teacher to conduct the oral examination. Schools should please note that this is not allowed as it puts the candidate under unnecessary pressure, to say the least.

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

There was a fairly wide range of works submitted. As usual, the plays used were largely Shakespeare's tragedies- mainly *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. The most frequently used poets were Bruce Dawe, Wilfred Owen, Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy, John Keats and John Donne. *The Great Gatsby*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The River Between* were among the most popular novels. Some candidates seemed to find some texts particularly challenging, a problem aggravated by the length of the text given. An example was Donne's 36-line *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. Teachers might find it beneficial to teach works that are both accessible and still sufficiently challenging to their students.

Candidate performance against each criterion

As has been emphasized in previous subject reports, candidates are expected to provide a close analysis of the passage; so the focus of the commentary should be that text.

Criterion A

Most candidates demonstrated adequate knowledge of the work. The more successful commentaries provided insights into the relationship between the form and content of the passage, revealing for example how the two combine to bring out the meaning of that text. Such commentaries were thus able to engage with the details of the passage and provide a considered and informed response to that text. On the other hand, 'context' seems to have caused some confusion. Many candidates disadvantaged themselves by providing extraneous and detailed information as a way of introducing the passage and commentary (e.g. the historical and cultural context, the author's biography and so on) for as long as two minutes or more. Teachers are advised to stress that the focus should be the passage itself; where

contextual information is needed (e.g. in linking the extract to the rest of the work), it should be very brief. The wording of assessment criterion A is very instructive in this regard.

Criterion B

There was noticeable improvement in this area. Most candidates showed an awareness of the literary features of the passage, with the weak responses merely explaining their uses while the stronger ones sought to analyze their effects. The more successful analyses demonstrated detailed insights into how and why the author uses specific stylistic devices in relation to the overall meaning and impact of the passage. In plays, usually Shakespeare's, such candidates even showed a keen awareness of the impact on or response of the audience. It was therefore a delight to hear some candidates analyze the use and effects of such elements as language (e.g. prose and verse in some extracts from Shakespeare's plays), characters and their relationships, the setting of the extract and its significance, the treatment of theme and different structural strategies in the passage. Many moderators enthused about the engaged and lively manner with which such candidates engaged in such detailed study. Such candidates, they reported, had been taught the art of close textual analysis and given the tools with which to enjoy the experience. However, there were also concerns that the structure of the extracts was ignored by many candidates and that the teacher's subsequent questions often failed to address this omission.

Criterion C

Most commentaries showed varying degrees of organization. Weaker responses simply plunged into attempted analyses of the text, usually focusing on the linear layout of the passage. The average ones signposted their planned structure but sometimes veered from it. In the two cases above, it was not uncommon for candidates to run out of time or at least fail to conclude their responses to the passage. The more successful commentaries mapped their planned structure, grouping their analyses and thoughts, and delivered a coherent and persuasive response. An unfortunate habit that seems to be spreading in some centres is for the candidates to continue with the analysis up to the 8th minute, with the teacher then interrupting with a question like "Your uninterrupted time is up but would you like to conclude your commentary?" Such shortcuts should be avoided since they undermine the purpose of the 2 minutes set aside for the subsequent questions. In addition, some teachers are allowing candidates to deliver their uninterrupted commentaries for longer than eight minutes. This is contrary to the regulations; and it eats into the time for the questions.

Criterion D

The vast majority of the candidates used a literary-critical register, very often with precision. As a result, this criterion provided the least disagreement between the moderator and the teacher in their assessment of the candidate's performance. Indeed, moderators observed that there is a fast-growing awareness in centres of the appropriate register and style to adopt. However, they suggest that teachers examine more carefully the difference between the descriptors for a 4 and 5 in a commentary.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- It is very important to consult the relevant materials for this course as regularly as possible. These are the Subject Guide, the Teacher Support Material, the OCC teachers' forum, the moderator's feedback, both past and current. Teachers are also advised to attend IB teacher workshops.
- Some works require a great deal of student preparation by the teachers. Such works as *Birthday Letters* by Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath's Ariel poems, *The Handmaid's Tale* and poems by John Donne are good examples. Where possible, teachers are encouraged to teach works that are accessible and still sufficiently challenging for the student. Such choices are likely to generate more student enjoyment.
- Teachers are reminded that choosing longer extracts than the 20-30 lines disadvantage the candidate very much since they have only 8 minutes in which to engage with the extract successfully. Shorter and dense passages like sonnets are acceptable. Unacceptable, of course, is using two short poems as one passage for commentary.
- Fitting the students with close analysis skills and developing these assets through regular practice, including peer assessment, is highly recommended.
- Students need to be taught how to analyze 'structure' as a significant feature of the work studied. The study of a literary work without examining this literary strategy is incomplete. Similarly, any commentary that fails to address this feature is unlikely to do very well.
- As emphasized in previous reports, Subsequent Questions are meant to help the candidate to enrich their commentary in different ways. These include filling a gap (like not addressing 'structure, clarifying a point left unclear or unsubstantiated and so on). The nature and focus of these questions therefore should be determined by the candidate's commentary; in other words, they should not be pre-determined. Similarly, they need to be worded in such a way that they are not giving away the teacher's own opinion.
- Teachers are requested to use the structure and content of the assessment criteria when entering their comments on Form 1/LIA.

Further comments

Almost all the centres were reported to have followed the guidelines and to have completed their internal assessment on time. Similarly, centres seem to be conducting the orals in compliance with the regulations. However, there are still some concerns about background noise, including phones ringing and people entering the examination room unaware that an examination is in progress.

In addition, some teachers seem unaware that only complete marks should be entered on the form (1/LIA): "Only whole numbers should be recorded; partial marks, that is fractions and decimals, are not acceptable" (page 53, Subject Guide for 2015).

Some centres used overlong passages, much to the disadvantage of the candidates.

Support is needed for centres which fail to address issues raised in previous feedback reports. Such issues include failing to use the IB assessment criteria to justify the marks awarded on the 1/LIA form.

Higher 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

In this session, many suitable texts were the subject of study, and there was only an occasional instance of works not on the PLT. Schools have been attentive in this respect and on the whole, when students have been offered appropriate prompts for the Supervised Writing, they have chosen valid and viable topics for their Written Assignments. There were also fewer attempts to write about matters which at this level are either too complex or extraneous to the close reading and analysis that this component requires. Problems still exist where schools have not understood the goal of the Interactive Oral or the Reflective Statement.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A. The Reflective Statement

In some instances this element was not uploaded nor was the word limit observed. Schools should understand that the object of this exercise is to report from the Interactive Oral information about the candidate's developed understanding of the culture and context of the text, and not the text itself.

It may be worth scrutinizing the discussion of the Interactive Oral and the Reflective Statement that can be found in the May 2015 Subject Report on the OCC. Perhaps reviewing it would help that minority of teachers and students who are still focusing on the text or discussing thematic matters related to it, or in some instances providing an abstract of the Written Assignment. There are still cases where the candidate is inappropriately commenting on the performance of peers in the Interactive Oral. In the hope of providing further guidance, some examples of success and the lack thereof can be found under the final heading, **Recommendations for future candidates**, at the end of this November report.

B. Knowledge and Understanding

As has been true in the past, candidates seem fairly well acquainted with their texts and often candidates selected pertinent material to support and develop their chosen essay topic. One of the greatest weaknesses in this area was the failure to define a scope that was reasonable

to develop in the given space and candidates were therefore unable to control their material in a way that demonstrated understanding. The other failure, one that is diminished when teachers have provided good Supervised Writing prompts, is the candidate's attempt to probe some ethical or political issue without the depth it requires; such topics are really not appropriate to this task, where the literary construction of the text should be foregrounded.

C. Appreciation of the Writer's Choices

Here lies the heart of this task, and again when teachers have provided appropriate Supervised Writing prompts students often take the cue and try to explore how the writers have shaped and presented their works. Weaknesses lie in the approach of spotting literary 'devices' without going on to show the way they are used to provide a particular impact on the larger work. At other times, quotations are merely used as part of a narrative or descriptive approach, or with limited connection to the argument. Generic distinctions are part of recognizing the operation of the writer, and some essays contained nothing to indicate that, for example, dramatic texts function differently to novels, or that not all literary works are simply 'books.'

D. Organisation and Development

Many Written Assignments met this challenge either adequately or quite well. While there are different cultural approaches to the structuring of an essay, a reader should be able to discern the position taken about the topic fairly early and then be able to see how the argument develops. Evidence is needed to support assertions and this should occur not just intermittently, but consistently. It is not sufficient to simply cite a page number where actual textual support needs to be embedded.

A number of candidates seemed to be deflected from their original intention and shifted or lost their focus as they went along. Word counts need to be carefully attended to in both pieces of writing; there seemed to be a lack of careful editing in some cases. The Written Assignment is one assessment which allows for careful re-visiting and refining; some candidates could have added to their marks with greater attention to the matters of structure and development.

E. Language

Language was generally clear with at least an adequate degree of accuracy. Some candidates adopted a laboured, over-wrought, quasi-academic style, one that did not fit very well with the level of their analysis and often interfered with the clarity of their delivery. 'Contradict' and 'as such' appeared in the essays when candidates seemed to mean 'contrast' by the first and 'therefore' by the second. As always, careful personal proofreading is needed and is not always apparent; students often profit from reading their work aloud as many good writers do.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The following may help future candidates achieve greater success. It is possibly useful to pose the question: 'What are characteristics and examples of stronger (18-25) submissions and what characterize weaker and less satisfactory (11-15) performances?' Some summaries of actual submissions might help to answer these questions.

First, the characteristics of successful Reflective Statements and Written Assignments can be seen in the following examples. Note that in both components the submissions are aptly connected to the criteria and actualize the demand that the focus of the Written Assignment needs to be a literary one.

(Example A) The Written Assignment topic is the purpose and effect of contrast in Tranströmer's poetry.

Three poems are used and linked together as the candidate foregrounds how the technique of contrast is used to explore the treatment of the human and natural world as well as the revelation of Tranströmer's spiritual outlook. In the Reflective Statement, the candidate makes clear a personal angle, how the Interactive Oral 'extended my understanding' through its address of the climate and geography of Sweden, the poet's childhood experiences there and his training as a psychologist. Three poems deliver a more ample sense of the poet's work, although such a sense can be offered even with very close study of one poem, but making cogent connections to others.

(Example B) A second Written Assignment focuses on the way Durrenmatt used the split scene in Act 2 of *The Visit* to develop both character and plot, as well as to evoke unease in the audience.

The essay rightly treats the material as a dramatic production, and sets the play into the context of some techniques of German expressionism. The Reflective Statement notes the political context of the 50's as well as the role of women in that period. Both German expressionism as an artistic movement and the influence of the Greek theatre on the play round out the sense of the context of both the construction of the play and its influences to better ground the student's sense of the play's provenance and literary tradition. The argument of the essay keeps a steady focus on the way the split scene works dramatically within the context of expressionism and its effects.

Second, some of the flaws preventing students from submissions that will garner strong marks can be seen in the following examples.

(A) In choosing ‘catastrophic imagery in *Medea*,’ the candidate clearly has chosen an apt topic for the Written Assignment, and does very well in showing a strong sense of the play and identification of the imagery therein. However, both in structure and expression the candidate undermines her own success. Language is often overwrought, obscuring the delivery of the argument, and the way the material is organized is flawed as well. A 3 in each of these criteria, as well as a distinct failure in the Reflective Statement (since its entire address is of the play itself rather than either context or culture, except glancingly) keeps this promising offering from higher marks.

(B) The Reflective Statement on Camus’ *The Outsider* begins: ‘In the Interactive Oral many aspects of the novel were discussed’ and indeed, along with a closing question in which the candidate makes a generic reflection about human nature, the entire RS is about the text and no credit can be given for Criterion A. In the Written Assignment, the narrative perspective is an appropriate topic, but the candidate does not explore either the way the perspective is constructed or its effects. Instead the essay is primarily descriptive of what Meursault sees or feels or how the reader might respond.

(C) A relevant feature of the Reflective Statement for an essay about doors and walls in *Woman at Point Zero* is the practice of female genital mutilation, but the limitation of an address of context and culture to this one feature, repetitively discussed for 363 words, weakens this RS. The essay itself identifies instances of doors and walls in the novel, but the candidate appears to be so driven by a determination to include as many literary ‘devices’ as possible that the thread of the argument is unclear and the delivery diffuse. Assertions are sometimes unsupported and inferences are too broad and vague. The line of argument is lost in the many techniques that have been spotted, in spite of the fact that the candidate has a quite adequate sense of Firdaus’ plight.

It is clear that teachers should not only provide students with the relevant assessment criteria, but should help them understand exactly what they demand. They should also play an active role in the Interactive Oral, preventing some of the clear misunderstanding and misinformation that students deliver in their Reflective Statements.

Further comments

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

From the November 2015 session all written assignments and cover sheets were electronically uploaded. Candidate names, session numbers and centre names should not appear anywhere on the actual reflective statement or assignment. The most recent version of the LWA cover sheet must be used. Word counts for the reflective statement and written assignment are given on the cover sheet, although it is helpful if the word counts also appear on the reflective statement and written assignment. There is no need for candidates to include a title page. It is useful if candidates copy the question that the reflective statement must address. The title of the written assignment must be given. The reflective statement and written assignment are uploaded as one document, with the former preceding the latter. The candidate must clearly indicate which edition of the work has been used (in a bibliography, works cited or in a footnote).

It is pleasing to report that in this session examiners only had to apply marking penalties infrequently. A reflective statement over 400 words will have one mark deducted and a written assignment over 1500 words will lose two marks. There were no reports of examiners having to limit the Criterion B mark to a maximum of three because the Part 1 work was not selected from the Prescribed Literature in Translation list (PLT).

There are still firm favourites in terms of the works selected for Part 1, but there were also some more unusual choices this session. Kadare's *Broken April* and Claudel's *Brodeck's Report* often generated successful reflective statements and written assignments. Centres who choose poetry in Part 1 often have candidates who do very well in this assessment. When submitting a written assignment on poetry, it is helpful to examiners if the actual poems being written about are added as an appendix.

What was perhaps most significant in this session was the significant number of strong candidate responses that deserved marks towards the top of each mark band. In general, these centres tended to demonstrate clearer understanding of the demands of the interactive oral, leading to more effective reflective statements that genuinely connected to the elements of culture and context that underpin the content of the literary work. Candidates who chose a significant literary element as the focus for their written assignment normally did well in Criteria B and C; this also implies that teachers are devising suitable prompts for the supervised writing. A clear and effectively developed argument that conveys a sense of the candidate really trying to prove a point allowed more written assignments to focus on the 'persuasive' element in Criterion D and thus garner the top mark. Many of these submissions were well written and cogently argued.

All examiners commented on the fact that many of these assessments were a pleasure to read and enjoyable to mark, a testament to the effective teaching and learning that is taking place in so many centres.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: reflective statements must answer the question ‘How was your understanding of cultural and contextual considerations of the work developed through the interactive oral?’ Although in some centres there is still room for improvement here, many centres are clearly delivering effective interactive orals and candidates are writing reflective statements that actually answer the question. The greatest weaknesses remain:

- Focusing exclusively on the content of the work, with no or little attention paid to the particular culture and context that need to be understood in order to better comprehend the work itself
- Summarising how the interactive oral was delivered (who said what), without focusing enough on culture and context
- Factual inaccuracy in terms of points made; the teacher must intervene during the interactive oral if candidates are being given incorrect information.

Given the restricted word count, it is best if candidates do not write an introductory or concluding paragraph. Candidates who cover two or three relevant elements of culture and context are usually comfortably placed to be rewarded with the full three marks in this criterion.

Criterion B: all examiners reported that the majority of candidates knew the works well and marks below three were relatively unusual. The strongest performances focused on a precisely defined topic and presented enough compelling textual evidence to support the claims being made. In some cases candidates should be encouraged to select the most relevant parts of a quotation, since lengthy quotations are not often effective. All textual evidence needs a brief contextualization in terms of plot in order to function well. As with the reflective statement, factual inaccuracy will have a negative impact on the mark awarded.

Criterion C: most examiners reported that this criterion was perhaps better handled than in previous examination sessions. The key to success here remains the original choice of topic. This must be literary in nature and address the writer’s choices. When candidates conduct their critical analysis demonstrating awareness that the work has been consciously constructed through the choices made by an author, then they are likely to do well. Weaker performances are usually identified by topics that are not literary in nature and/or that only treat the writer’s choices implicitly. All examiners indicate that the best responses attempt to integrate critical discussion of the work and the author’s choices in a fairly seamless manner; the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ are blended together effectively. Those candidates who seem to treat these elements separately, often having a paragraph on ‘literary features’, are clearly less likely to do well.

Criterion D: the significant amount of time dedicated to this assessment and the guided process that leads to the production of both written components suggest that many candidates should do well here. They have time to construct their arguments carefully, ensure that the argument develops logically and can seek advice from teachers on how to both integrate and modify

quotations successfully. When candidates receive marks below a three in this criterion, it is likely due to having a word count below 1200 or because the written assignment wanders off topic. Having read the introduction, it should be clear what the focus of the analysis will be. In an assignment of this length long and repetitive conclusions are unlikely to be considered effective. Coherently connected paragraphs with a strong sense of a developing and convincing argument are needed to be able to reward candidates with marks of four and five in this criterion.

Criterion E: although many candidates do well here, the greatest weaknesses remain inappropriate register/use of colloquialism, weak punctuation and poor proofreading. The conditions in which these assignments are produced mean that candidates have no excuses for a number of these errors. Contractions are not appropriate in formal academic writing. If candidates wish to use more sophisticated punctuation, the semi-colon being a key example, it is imperative that they understand the rules governing its use. It is usually dangerous to seek to improve diction artificially by using a thesaurus, if there is no countercheck on how individual words may be contextually inappropriate or result in awkward collocations. Unfortunately there are still some candidates whose written work is difficult to follow and this inevitably means that a mark of less than 3 will be given here. On the other hand, there are those who write with such sophistication, clarity and concision that their written assignments are a pleasure to read.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers are encouraged to access the Teacher Support Material on the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC) and to share some of the material with candidates. A short screen cast, called 'English A: Literature Written Assignment examiner guidance', is now available on the English A: Literature home page of the OCC; although developed for examiners, it contains valuable advice for the teaching of this component, particularly the conduct of the interactive orals and the writing of reflective statements. In addition, the points below are worth bearing in mind:

- Teachers and candidates must be aware of the required focus for the interactive oral and the reflective statement
- Devise supervised writing prompts with a suitably literary focus
- Encourage candidates to develop independent approaches to their topics
- Ensure that the topic has a suitably narrow focus
- Make candidates aware of the word limits for both the written assignment and the reflective statement
- Remind candidates of the importance of substantiating claims made through the use of precise examples and analysis based on appreciation of the writer's choices
- Review the nature of introductions and conclusions so that these become both more effective and appropriate
- Help candidates to understand that there needs to be a coherent and convincing line of argument (aided by appropriate transitions/connecting phrases)
- Teach the integration and modification of quotations
- Develop a common understanding in class of appropriate register in formal written work
- Encourage candidates to check their work carefully before final submission

The above points are identical to previous recommendations since there has been no significant shift in what needs to be done to produce better reflective statements and written assignments.

Higher level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 9	10 – 11	12 – 14	15 – 16	17 - 20

General comments

Peter Elbow, in his *Writing Without Teachers*, says: "The deepest dependency is not of students upon teachers, but of teachers upon students." In many ways, evidence of such a seemingly contradictory statement was in great evidence with this session's commentary. Very clearly, the majority of students have a strong grasp of the requirements of the commentary and can be reasonably successful with the assessment task. But this same understanding of the task

seemed also to lead students more toward papers that *sound like* commentary as much as engage in authentic and independent conversation with the texts. Students, in such circumstances, seem so intent on producing a commentary that they think we want to read that their own reading can be sacrificed in the process.

Arguably, close and independent analysis of an unseen text represents one of the more difficult challenges for students. Certainly there are a number of candidates who are clearly engaged with the work, even demonstrating genuine interest and enthusiasm in their engagements with these new texts. This November session included many good to excellent commentaries overall and evidence that there is clearly attention being given to literary devices within texts as well as structuring an overall commentary response. Further, the very great majority of candidates revealed little trouble in at least gleaning a reasonable level of literal understanding with both the prose and the poetry options and most appear both comfortable and confident in moving beyond literal events to engage the texts toward further ends. Though, as the paragraph above suggests, there remains evidence that students are approaching unseen texts with ready-made recipes, there are also very many candidates who are clearly approaching the task with open minds and an agility that the assessment task most truly aims to encourage (and to which we, as teachers, must continue to push).

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

As has been the case for many sessions, sustained close reading *as literature* is sometimes a struggle. Candidates often tend to focus on personal and/or limited associations with isolated terms or phrases and develop entirely new constructs that are out of context from literary purpose and literary intention. These tend to result in “over-readings,” finding far more than, if reinserted, would be sustained by original texts.

There continue to be issues with appropriate integration of a consideration of literary features. Literary features were noted by the very great majority of candidates who have clearly been taught to look for them. Unfortunately, they were often noting these devices as more of an aside that as an integrated component of a sophisticated reading. This would create a kind of “disconnect” between an interpretation of the text and an awareness of the use of many literary devices. At its weakest, this resulted in a listing or noting of devices only, the result of which is something masquerading as analysis only.

By extension, it is important to treat significant features only. Candidates can spend too much time and energy on marginal devices that really do not have much significance. Examiners are always forgiving and accepting of features that candidates highlight but spending time and energy discussing questionable devices does take candidates away from richer readings with

a more effectively integrated appreciation of features. This tendency suggests, once more, that candidates can be searching out features as an add-on or “at all costs” rather than as part of the analytical work required with commentary.

Candidates also continue to struggle with some organizing principles. Several examiners commented on the need for stronger introductions and conclusions that were clearly related to the texts (rather than generic and vague filler that could be used with virtually any work) as well as the need for developing a coherent and logical argument. Even in sometimes good commentaries, a challenge for candidates is to have all points unified toward a singular purpose. Isolated paragraphs could offer a sense of cohesiveness as a stand-alone point but this would only be one of a series of stand-alone cohesive points. What is still sometimes missing is a developing/developed argument that is clear and sustained throughout the entire commentary work.

Related to the above is the problem of using literary features as the organizing principal for structuring responses (again, over the idea of a developed line of argument). It can be helpful for candidates to have approaches in mind for structuring responses but when commentaries are organized around identifying literary features, work tends to be mechanistic and misses the more authentically engaged readings asked of candidates in this assessment task. In such cases, for instance, a candidate may well have spent a paragraph on setting, another on character, a third on action, etc. but still failed to provide a compelling interpretation or evidence of a developed argument. With the current rubrics, organization is focusing on cohesive, unified and convincing lines of reasoning or argument. While there are plenty of commentaries that feature a recognizable paragraphing structure, the strongest works demonstrate an argument that develops and strengthens rather than more simply offer clearly siloed units of material.

Unsupported assertion and not considering the significance of points, however, is the big challenge encountered over and over. This tends to result in more simple narration, summary and paraphrase which should be avoided.

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

Candidates, on the whole, demonstrated a sound ability to uncover the basic scenarios or plots and to trace the course of any “action” whether physical, intellectual or emotional. The willingness to slowly read and uncover effect in both the prose and poem were strongly demonstrated by most. This basic understanding, then, became the springboard for more interesting and nuanced interpretations.

Most candidates did convey an ability to construct a response and convey ideas with appropriate language. Candidates were clearly competent and comfortable with writing about literature using an appropriate register and a sense of organization and logic. Many examiners commented on the high level of both language and writing in general.

Candidates also demonstrated awareness of commentary as an assessment task. There was a sense of familiarity with approaching the assignment and attempting to develop a response suitably appropriate in detailed focus.

As already mentioned, most candidates were able to glean a reasonable level of overall understanding of both the prose passage and the poem. There seemed to be quite strong engagement with both options and students did well exploring the texts and even trying to extend their thinking. Though occasionally problematic with regard to integration, literary devices are overtly considered by the great majority of candidates.

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

Prose commentary: Most candidates who selected the prose passage were able to glean the basic scenario involving a young person traveling through parts of Europe. There was a reasonable ability to notice and speak to contradictory elements such as place versus a kind of homelessness, interiority versus exteriority and happiness versus melancholy. The literal travel and movement, though sometimes imprecise in understanding exact location, was followed by most.

The very many details in the passage offered many opportunities for candidates to explore features that were frequently handled at least adequately. The dense imagery—of places and moods—certainly afforded plenty of material for students to analyse.

Many candidates, though, struggled to interpret much beyond the more literal elements of the passage and/or imagery. While there was a clear general awareness of the situation and even some extension around—primarily—possible relationship issues with the mother, many candidates seemed not quite to know what to make of the larger piece. Tone may have been the most confusing factor with students not sure whether to read the protagonist as truly happy, truly sad or even ironic from a more distant—and older—point of view.

These uncertainties were rarely issues in-and-of themselves but became such as candidates attempted to provide a more certain interpretation that might neatly package the passage into a clear whole. Candidates could be forgiven for reading/understanding some ambiguity in the piece (of purpose if not of more literal elements) but seemed far more wary of admitting as

such. The result could be a dutiful recitation of elements as they occurred chronologically but rather flat interpretations. More than with the poem, candidates working with the prose piece engaged in translation-like exercises with repetition of stylistic elements but little extended consideration. With the passage offering seemingly little obvious “moral,” purpose many candidates appeared unknowing with expectation of approach.

Perhaps ironically, then, this same lack of apparent purpose could give rise to some excellent responses. Where candidates seemed forced into a degree of patience with their reading, interesting ideas emerged. Strong ideas around the relationship with the mother, the transience of the journey mirroring that of maturation and certainty (this is not to say that some more pedestrian simplifications of a “journey through life” or elaborate back stories to the relationship with the mother were not also evident but the difference tended to be one of adamancy of purpose) and a more broad appreciation of duality/contrast were just some of the approaches that proved very successful. A very few candidates argued for a slight degree of self-mockery that recognized at once a poseur and an authentic adolescent. In all of these cases, such readings were clearly the result of an openness to possibility rather than a rushed race to *the* meaning. Often, such were imperfect readings but clearly engaged in grappling with the authentic interpretive issues revealed by the text. Strange moments such as turning away from more comfortable streets to an embrace of more depressed environs or the apparently growing happiness in moments of greater isolation offered little that was directly clear but fertile ground for student exploration. Again, for those candidates willing to explore even in the face of such uncertainty, there was often very good work that arose.

Finally, many candidates played with the title but to varying success. While examiners were open to a wide range of interpretations, there were quite a number of candidates arguing for rather extraordinary connections to the specific passage. While titles can be important, it may be that candidates are trying to read too much into them on occasion (at least with the prose selection).

Poetry commentary: The poem seemed to be very accessible to students on the surface and the majority of candidates who selected the poem were able to achieve adequate understanding on the whole. The literal scenario of sleepwalkers was generally clear and the great majority intuited with some ease a spirit of optimism in the risk/trust/faith/bravery suggested through the metaphor of the sleepwalkers. There were some frequent misreadings of specific moments (in particular, many candidates could confuse the apparent value of stairs over window and door over mirror) but these tended to not interfere with the general overall quality of understanding.

In a contrast to the prose passage where many candidates seemed not to know what the passage “was getting at,” the poem seemed to offer a more familiar line of clear reasoning.

Strangely, though, this could also present challenges to candidates who could quickly find their analyses exhausted. These candidates seemed to treat the poem as rather self-evident and struggled to move beyond faith and treat some of the more subtle or stranger aspects to be found.

Once more, stronger candidates would consider contrasts such as black hearts, absorbing darkness, the slightly violent imagery of black fists or stupefying nourishment not for their easy fit into the apparently larger celebration but for their strangeness in contributing to it. The best commentaries were not the quickest to simplification but rather those that more patiently considered less obvious complexity existing just under the surface.

Perhaps not surprising in a relatively straight-forward poem was a tendency to treat prosaically. Though the structure is clearly poetic, many candidates want to “read” as a prose work and speak of narrator and narrative with little distinction of genre. Several examiners noted the tendency where the “story” of the poem proved accessible.

An easy distinguishing characteristic among the quality of response was in recognizing the shift to a plural point of view. The majority of candidates selecting the poem did recognize that the poem moved to a more general consideration from a more targeted affirmation.

Candidates were, on the whole, very ready to attempt treatment of a variety of features in the poem including structure, contrast, repetition and imagery. As suggested in the general points above, the true demarcation of success was whether this treatment was fluently integrated into the larger reading/argument or whether it appeared as tacked on or an aside. Some assertions could feel a little stretched or forced but examiners remain open to a wide range of viable notions. However, even when treatment was not always excellent, there was evidence that candidates were trying to engage the poem authentically.

As is often the case with paper 1, some candidates did err in developing entirely new narratives (or poems) based on isolated images or diction. This year, “faith” could lead candidates to an exploration of their own religion and/or attitudes on the subject far afield from the poem at hand. Further, some claims of rather hyperbolic response (such as feeling fear or shock) can also detract from a response. While some personal connection can prove fruitful for candidates, such associations need to be managed within the context of the aims of the assessment task as a more analytic exercise.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Commentary is meant to be an authentic engagement with literature that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their intellectual agility with reading texts.

Being taught to produce products that *sound like* commentary or literary criticism is rarely effective.

- Better commentaries always make sense and convey interpretations of the works that are heart-felt rather than forced. In some cases, this can be enhanced by focusing initially on the literal events/plot aspects and then searching for those strange moments before jumping immediately to more figurative intentions.
- Assist students in “relaxing” about producing *the meaning* of a text. Candidates can seem to stifle their own reading in an effort to produce a product they feel is expected of them when the goal of paper 1 is to encourage independent reading and engagement of works.
- The best advice for teachers to help facilitate these skills is to expose students to a wide variety of texts and to work with more authentic experiences in working through unknown texts independently.
- Good commentaries incorporate a consideration of literary features as part of their larger reading/interpretation rather than as additional, supplementary material or as the organizing principal for a response. Good commentaries include personal voice. Structure is something we all teach, but candidates should be encouraged to explore independently.
- Terms and phrases should be meaningful to candidates. The use of features like tone, symbol and motif, especially, need to be treated precisely. Candidates need to understand what it actually means to “symbolize” or “be a theme” and this needs to be demonstrated in commentary. Further, if a candidate chooses to argue for “chiasmus” or “blank verse,” they should reveal genuine understanding; terminology alone is not worthy of reward.
- Fluent, good quality writing does make a difference. Even candidates who were not able to extend the quality of their analysis were, with at least some level of general understanding, able to earn solid marks overall with good work in both organization and the use of language.
- Purpose/effect/significance always needs to be considered.
- Analysis needs to be precise. Support needs careful and considered elaboration. Even ideas assumed to be self-evident should not be treated as such and need to be “proven” with specific textual referencing and elaborate explanation as to both how and why it is used.
- Larger interpretations need to be supported by the larger text. Candidates should be encouraged to “plug their interpretations back into the text” in order to verify that they are still reasonable and not merely associative. An interpretation based on a single word, line or element/aspect will likely not reinsert very easily and might then be re-

examined. Avoid considering possibilities of what might have been or what might later be (i.e. avoid hypothetical considerations outside of the context of the work).

- Avoid narration.
- Teach students to plan responses. Candidates who seek to write as much as possible and think via their writing are not always successful with their responses. Strong commentaries should convey a clear line of reasoning, argument and development.
- Introductions and conclusions that are meaningful and meaningfully connected to the works are valuable. A ready-made or hyperbolic introduction and simple repetition as conclusion is neither helpful nor helpful in developing an argument.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

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

General comments

Both passages provided a challenge for candidates, the poem appearing to be more demanding than the prose. Generally the standard was good and candidates engaged well with the texts and leading questions. It was noted that many candidates seemed to overlook the role of Alcock when the guiding question asked them to “Comment on the TWO men”.

The poem was about a fearful escape from danger (not specified but with allusions to a war and displacement). It is also about memory and its unreliability – was the experience a dream? – about the ghosts of past casualties, and finally about unremembered histories. These are some of its aspects examiners were looking for and found, often movingly, in the case of able candidates.

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

The poem invited a wide range of interpretations, some of which were pertinent and some not. Examiners agreed that it is not a poem about a dysfunctional family, nor a deteriorating father-son relationship. It is not a poem about life's journey over a blasted terrain full of obstacles, nor a journey towards death and extinction. It is not about soldiers. A significant number of candidates made such interpretations. Only a handful of candidates recognised *terza rima* or

the allusions to Winnie the Pooh (and a safe and imaginative childhood). Similarly, only a few noticed the switch of voice, from “we” in line 18 to “them” in line 21.

Concerning the prose, there was a tendency to under- or over-interpret. For example, some candidates saw the extract as an account of a WW1 exploit, or a bombing mission in which Brown and Alcock variously died, ejected, or were drowned. Perhaps they read the explanatory information hurriedly and misinterpreted the word *bomber* and the date 1919. The use of the present tense was – curiously, perhaps – given little attention. The humour of “Can’t swim, old boy” was missed; whilst there was some appreciation of “chloroform of cold” few seemed to be aware that it is/was an anaesthetic. There were also anachronistic references to “jet engines”. Most candidates recognised the use of the third person narrative voice, but many missed the way it slipped into a kind of interior monologue; the opening sentence, probably a message to base or a log, was also overlooked.

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

In the case of the poem, many candidates were able to give a good, concise overview of the situation in a clear and well written introduction. There were some impressively detailed comments on imagery, rhyme and narrative perspective. Most responses were well developed even if the basic premise was wrong. Candidates were often skilled in the embedding of short, appropriate quotation in their answers. There was also clear evidence that Reader Response theories had been taught as many candidates referred to the writer *positioning* the reader in such a way that certain responses would be achieved.

In the case of the prose, introductions were often well done. There was a real sense of engagement with the airborne journey. Careful reading resulted in detailed appreciation of stylistic features and their effect. Nearly all candidates recognised the tense and dangerous nature of the flight in such weather. Some candidates were able to comment on the lack of panic and the focus on action to remedy problems, despite the apparently terrifying conditions.

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

The poem gave rise to some misinterpretation, some candidates thinking that it was some sort of allegorical presentation of a father/son relationship and moving too far away from the literal journey being described. Some thought the poem described life in the WW1 trenches. Better answers explored the ideas linked with reality, dream and memory. There were some perceptive answers addressing the impact of the last line and its distancing effect. Whilst *terza*

rima was scarcely mentioned, there were nevertheless some good attempts at comment on versification.

Concerning the prose, a number of candidates misinterpreted the context and thought the pilots were on a bombing raid in WW1. This coloured their whole response and consequently lowered their mark for Criterion A. There was some good appreciation of the drama of the situation, the impact of the weather and the attitudes of the pilots to their situation, though some thought that fear was their chief characteristic. Examiners looked for inferences about the pilots' characters, such as their courage, stoicism in the face of physical pain, their pragmatism in the face of danger and their humour, but these were in short supply. However, some noted how the short sentences mimicked the sound of a heartbeat, a nice touch, and the use of auditory imagery.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Examiners are agreed that candidates should take time to read and re-read the question. This should go some way to avoiding misinterpretations. Marks are awarded for a coherent reading of the texts and a sense of overview.
- Careful planning can also mitigate to some extent this same problem.
- Candidates should be able to comment on the effects of structure and rhyme. Mere recognition is not enough.
- Candidates do need to spell literary terms correctly; for example, “simile”, which is constantly mis-spelt.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

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

General comments

A key aspect of Paper 2 in relation to the nature of the assessment is that candidates can specifically prepare for the examination in relation to the most important element of content: the works studied. Candidates are aware that questions will deal with specific generic problems of the discipline and that they will use the texts they have studied to approach these problems. Examiners found that in this session, candidates were clearly aware of both the nature of the

assessment task and the fact that close study of works is not only important, but also essential for success. The most successful candidates clearly know their texts well and seem ready to write about them in relation to almost any literary question. In these papers, the discussion of the texts in relation to subtleties of the question and a detailed awareness of conventions of the genre seems fluent and natural. The best essays, then, stem from authentic engagement with texts on a daily basis and activity in a class that must, it seems, be flexible, authentic and grounded in the most interesting concerns of the study of literature. Preparation, however, is a double-edged sword. Examiners noted there is a form of over-preparation evidenced by what appears to be a reliance on formulaic structures and statements for the essay itself, responses to past exams that are so practiced as to be virtually memorized and re-shaped for the exam, or a reduction of response to literary works to the memorization of standard (if sometimes fascinating or at least “correct”) critical views. These types of responses force ideas into artificial structures that do not necessarily serve a question, avoid the subtleties of a question or take for granted either interpretations or particular comparisons. The candidates who have spent more time pointedly learning techniques, formulae and “answers” often find themselves restricted in the exam, producing strangely tangential or ill-supported arguments. Candidates prepared through constant inquiry into the interpretive problems in texts, on the other hand, have an ability to discuss almost anything about a given work.

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

Though the major issues in relation the exam itself or the approach to the teaching of the program are mentioned above, approaching generic conventions in a way that is well-integrated into a response to the question is still a particular difficulty. Seeing conventions not as a separate concern but as the underlying way in which texts operate or generate thought and feeling can be difficult for some candidates.

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

Overall, there is clearly familiarity with the nature of the exam both in terms of the basic “rules” (which questions to choose, how many texts to use) and in terms of the more subtle aspects (how much to write, the issues to cover, the ways to write about a literary text). There is also evidence of strong work in the classroom and with reading in general. Many candidates come to the exam with clear knowledge of the texts and knowledge of how to write in the discipline.

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

1. While some responses to this question focused a bit too tightly on “stage-centered” questions that were asked in previous sessions such as the use of exits and entrances, a majority of responses looked at the use of movement and space in very productive ways. It was clear that candidates had studied the plays as works that were meant to be performed and were aware of the potential of space in a very wide variety of plays including “Cosi,” “A View from the Bridge,” “Waiting for Godot,” and “The Removalists.”

2. This was a very popular question and candidates responded well to it with detailed discussion both of the ways in which playwrights work and of the subtleties and complexities of the inner lives of the characters. Less successful responses tended to be reductive in relation to the inner-lives (Blanch has an inner life “concerned with death”) or relying too much on a basic technique such as dialogue.

3. Candidates handled this question in diverse appropriate ways. Some candidates chose to focus on plays that clearly have more than one plot line such as “Much Ado about Nothing.” Other candidates chose to focus more on the many stories that become apparent in a play through flashback (“Death of a Salesman”) or the stories that characters themselves tell (“A Streetcar Named Desire”). As long as candidates were clear and consistent with their treatment, they found some useful areas to discuss in the essay. Other candidates had more difficulty looking at the ways in which a play might tell more than one story through, for example, allegory or reference to a broader context (“The Crucible,” or “Master Harold and the Boys”).

4. This was not a very popular question, perhaps simply because many poems do not directly address someone or something. When candidates dealt with well-chosen poems, they tended to be successful. There were some responses that strayed too far in defining “an address to someone or something,” broadening it simply to the subject matter or themes that a poem seems to be “about.” This proved difficult to shape as an answer.

5. This was a popular question and allowed candidates to directly discuss imagery and other techniques of description. Less successful responses—as in all of the poetry questions—tended to broaden “close observation and description” to incorporate almost anything, leading to broad explication or unfocused, if detailed, commentary rather than focused response.

6. While this question was not as popular as the other poetry questions, it elicited some interesting responses that clearly focused on shifts, showing exact moments where tone and subject matter might change and why this might be important or interesting.

7. While this was not a very popular question, it elicited some interesting responses. Candidates were successful when they were very specific about the nature of delay in the works. Some candidates aptly pointed to frame narratives such as “Heart of Darkness” as a form of inherent delay or the ways in which a reader is left wondering in a dystopic work such as “The Handmaid’s Tale.”

8. This was a popular question and candidates were able to approach it in a variety of successful ways. Many candidates looked at the ways in which characters are defined, in the storyworld, by the given culture or setting. While the risk with this approach was assuring that conventions were handled well or that the hand of the author is important portraying the ways in which a setting can affect a character, the angle was still fruitful. Other candidates, legitimately, took this to be a question more suited to discussing the ways in which setting can be used as a tool in characterization. Both approaches were “allowed” by examiners.

9. Success on this question was entirely dependent upon the ability of the candidate to define the terms of the question. Interesting responses clearly delineated scenes, created (explicitly or by implication) clear criteria for “complicated” or “dramatic” and went beyond a statement of “thus impact was heightened” to a more nuanced discussion of the meaning and effect of the scene, especially in relation to the work as a whole.

10. Too few responses to allow general comment in this report.

11. Too few responses to allow general comment in this report.

12. Too few responses to allow general comment in this report.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is clear that familiarity with the texts is strong and that candidates are also used to the conditions of the examination. The most important recommendation, as in past years, is to teach students to be inquiring, risk-taking, independent thinkers who have a flexible knowledge of texts. Students who have found their own way into works as opposed to memorizing lectures, practicing particular responses, or learning accepted critical views, tend to be successful in crafting interesting answers. There is nothing wrong with learning facts or opinions about texts or about hearing an experienced teacher’s point of view. Very strong students are capable of shaping lists of accepted critical approaches or lists of memorized quotations into answers that get at the heart of a question with unique subtleties. Other students, however, struggle to either understand material they have learned or to relate this to the question at hand. Originality and

flexibility comes from, perhaps, the student's own work (in a learning community of course) with a text. This brief list of possible actions might help to make for flexible thinkers:

- Choose a set of works that may contain at least one slightly off-beat, challenging or less-studied text. This may free students from tired criticism.
- Choose a text or two that is new to the teacher. Exploring a work alongside the students can be valuable.
- Base discussion on the problems students themselves find in the texts: what is surprising, confusing, interesting, difficult? What are not only the conventions used, but the conventions challenged?
- Instead of many full-length practice exam papers, allow students to deal with more frequent, smaller problems and write and respond more frequently to texts.
- Allow for targeted mini-lessons for particular grammatical or "conventional" problems such as verb agreement, avoiding run-on sentences, underlining the names of texts or using the last names of authors.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 20	21 – 25

General comments

Many candidates demonstrate strong language skills both in terms of grammar and fluency of expression. In fact, a number of candidates are able to achieve a fairly decent result with this level of expression even if other qualities of the response are less distinguished. Most candidates are quite familiar with the texts used to respond to the questions although some do not always select the most appropriate elements from the works to use in their responses. Many candidates seem to come armed with ideas that they are determined to exhibit in their responses come what may. The price paid is generally in Criterion B: Response to the Question. Few candidates do not seem to make a serious effort to produce a response of quality. There is a general earnestness in the responses that bespeaks a cohort with serious intentions.

Nonetheless, there are a number of areas in which future well-trained and serious candidates may still make an improvement. The comments that follow may seem familiar to those who

have read Subject Reports in the past as the qualities that candidates have difficulty in achieving do not change all that much from year to year.

It is widely recognized among teachers and examiners that the task set for candidates in Paper 2 is no “walk in the park” by any means. Candidates are asked to show a complex integration of knowledge, understanding and skills on a number of levels in order to attain the most desired results. Not all candidates are able to achieve this level, but that should not prevent all candidates from being informed of, and instructed in, performance expectations and the means to achieve them as clearly and completely as possible.

If there is one element to concentrate on that applies to Criteria A, B C, and D, it would be the need to include details in the response. Naturally these details need to be relevant to the chosen question for maximum effect. This point may be reiterated while comments on each criterion are made.

Criterion A: Candidates have spent two years preparing themselves for this component of assessment, as well as the others. In all the components, the need for detailed knowledge and depth of understanding plays a central role. It would appear that many candidates cannot distinguish between a valid and true observation on a work, such as ‘Gatsby is a man of mystery’, and the details that contribute to this idea: the rumours about his background (each rumour is a detail), his non-attendance at his own lavish parties, the image of his standing on the dock with his arms stretched out to the green light. And there are more. A few relevantly chosen illustrations thoroughly and specifically evidenced generally go a lot further in reflecting a candidate’s knowledge and understanding than the attempt to touch on as many general points as possible does. Additionally, even if the question is well addressed, the response may not show knowledge and especially understanding of the texts in terms of their larger impacts. Candidates need to discuss the details moving the analysis out from the immediate effect (likely in direct relation to the question) to those ideas that compose the central ideas of each work. This is one element that makes the task complex, but candidates can be prepared to do this.

Criterion B: Candidates may do well on Criterion A without doing all that well on Criterion B; but seldom can they do poorly on A, if B has been done well. That is, one can show Knowledge and Understanding (A) by fulfilling the requirements of Criterion B, but a solid comparative response to the question will not necessarily be achieved by doing well on Criterion A. This puts Criterion B at the center of the response in some ways. A candidate’s performance should not be doubly rewarded although abundant, relevant details can advance achievement in A, B, C and D while their absence can hold it back. Candidates need to decode the question in order to identify what elements are being asked about. For example, question seven contains two operative elements: delay and narrative tension. If these two elements do not form the heart of the response, and the reader is not reminded that this is happening (although too much

repetition here can become tedious and seem a cover-up if the rest of the response is not up to par), then there is a good chance that the candidate is not producing a relevant response. Candidates may never have addressed the element of 'delay' in class discussions. So much the better in most cases as they will search individually into their knowledge of the texts and perhaps arrive at a response considerably more original than the one practised in class that they may have been hoping to be able to use. Too many responses still display evidence of prepared answers.

Criterion C: In order to gain marks from the upper range of the scale, a candidate cannot rely alone on a solid treatment of the literary terms that may be asked about in the question. Even if those terms are treated well in the response (for which the candidate will be rewarded in Criterion B), it is necessary to take a step or two out from that focus in order to identify which additional literary conventions can be pointed out *in conjunction with* those presented in the question. These conventions do not have to be on the level of specific device (i.e. metonymy, apostrophe, or auditory imagery) although they may be. They may also address the associated effects of authorial control such as suspense, character development, plot advancement, tension, climax and others. Many candidates stop short of fulfilling the requirements of this criterion because although they may name the type of convention (say, alliteration) and give examples ('Marks of weakness, marks of woe'), they do not assign an effect or effects to the convention or the comment may become generic: to engage the audience/reader; to promote the theme (without elaboration); to develop character. The first two parts of the treatment reflect training and awareness, but the third step can considerably advance the strength of the observation by reflecting candidate thought, (often) awareness of larger ideas and originality.

Criterion D: Although the presentation/organization is one of the criteria that candidates in general do well on, there are still some suggestions that could improve performance. These points deal with the overall structure of the argument as well as the internal organization of paragraphs. By and large, responses that give some indication of the candidate's having done some planning before writing are more successful on this criterion than those where no planning appears to have been done. However, it also often appears that candidates have spent so much time planning that they are not able to complete the response within the ninety-minute exam period. Here are the points that not only are an indication of a direction in the argument but also contribute to its fulfilment: a clear thesis in the introduction (a thesis which is kept to), working transitions (more said on this shortly) from paragraph to paragraph and a conclusion that brings the elements of the response together in such a way that additional insight is provided at this time of closing. The phrase 'working transitions' distinguishes itself from the sort of transition too often found in responses. For lack of a better name, let us call them 'generic transitions': 'similarly', 'on the other hand', 'in contrast to', 'given this', 'as such', 'interestingly', 'moving on', 'as I said earlier' and more and worse. The problem lies in the

candidate's failing to note specifically the way in which the previous paragraph connects to the next. An effective transition both points back to the central idea of the previous paragraph as well as leads the reader into the point to be made in the one at hand. For example, *While Blanche's world of illusion is marked by romantic, cinematic dreams, Willy's illusionary world is very much a matter of the fulfilment of hopes that were part of the real and supposedly achievable American Dream.* This transition, if accurate, should reiterate the central point of the previous paragraph as well as announce the central claim to be evidenced in the current one. Writing transitions is not something one can count on given the pressures of exam conditions. However, practising this element throughout the course increases the chances of planning an argument with a clear direction and thus composing effective transitions as the candidate works through the argument. Internally each paragraph also has a logical structure. An effective transition (or even a clear lead sentence, as the second part of the example immediately above could act as) should lead immediately into specific examples/details supporting the claim in the lead/transition. The end of the paragraph comments on the conclusion to be drawn from this set of observations in relation to the point of the paragraph and/or the focus of the response, and/or the larger ideas of the work.

One last comment – it is generally more effective to select a limited number of examples from the text (with poetry perhaps requiring more than the other genres) and to treat them in detail than to touch briefly on many points without examining any in much depth.

Criterion E: The performance of candidates in this session is perhaps strongest in this regard. Few papers reflect less than a solid control of the language. Even in cases where the 'content' criteria (A, B and C) are less than sterling, it is not unusual for a candidate to save the day with clear and correct language. Nonetheless, here are some of the housekeeping elements of language that could advance the overall precision:

1. subject-verb agreement; (and this is number one for a reason)
2. it's vs. its;
3. plurals and possessives;
4. commonly misspelled words: (separate, commitment, occurred, etc. ...you will find them regularly, no doubt, in the papers that your candidates compose.
5. For some reason, and for the first time, a surprisingly large number of candidates referred to the plays studied as 'playwrights'.

This is quite a small number of points to focus on, something that in itself reflects the generally high quality of the language of these papers. It is possible that English of the future may not even regard these 'errors' as such. However, for the time being, standard formal English reasserts its requirements.

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

1. Responses that clearly focused on the operative terms of the question ('movement' and 'space') and that provided relevant examples fared well here. Blanche and Stanley provided most examples with explosions of violence noted (the radio/ransacking the trunk) and attention paid to territorial incursion. Exploration of the dance in *Master Harold* featured often, also the drunken scrapping of George and Martha. There was some thoughtful consideration of plays that lack movement as well, with inaction, or small repetitive actions, opening up theme comment on *Godot*. There was one very neat examination of Blanche sweeping past the poker players with a 'don't get up' line matched by Stanley's certainty that no one was getting up. Those that did less well often substituted elements of 'set design' for 'space' that had some relevance to the impact of the play but not through space. For example, the 'angry glow' of the city hovering above Willy's house is a telling detail in the set but not in terms of the space used while the movement of action to the apron during moments of Willy's reverie is something that combines both movement and space. Another common weakness was seen when candidates could not remember any movement instructed by the writer and began speculating what they would have the characters do if they were directors.

2. This question was by far the most popular for drama and was often successfully treated if candidates realized that such plays as 'The Glass Menagerie', 'Death of a Salesman' and 'Dancing at Lughnasa' offer examples of plays where the entire play can be seen as a reflection of a character's inner thoughts. Other effective choices included 'A Streetcar Named Desire' and any of Shakespeare's plays with their frequent use of soliloquy. A tricky point often arose in making the distinction between inner and outward lives as part of characterization in general. Of course the two are often closely connected, but the heart of the question was asking about how those elements of a character's inner life (that is, those elements of character into which other characters were generally not, or only rarely, given insight) were presented and how those elements contributed to a deeper understanding of the works. Some good discussion occurred with reference to the following elements: examining all that must be going on his head when John Proctor tells Elizabeth he likes his soup but the audience see him salting it; Willy's anger at seeing Linda darn stockings. Close focus on just a couple of characters worked best here rather than an attempt to provide thumbnail sketches of all the main players.

3. This question, by and large, was not treated very well. Too often candidates simply told the central plot, in some cases unable to point out what other 'stories' were being analyzed. Instead 'themes' such as old South/New South or capitalism/communism were sometimes the 'other' stories. This question showed that insufficient attention is often paid to minor characters. Those studying *The Importance of Being Earnest* frequently failed to spot the story of Miss

Prism, *Othello* candidates missed the story of Roderigo and those who know a lot about Hally and Sam knew very little about Willie and Hilda. Stronger responses came from *Virginia Woolf* (Nick and Honey's marriage) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Mitch's story). Fortunately this question was not chosen very often so the damage was limited to a relatively few candidates.

4. This was not a popular question; but where candidates did have an address poem in their repertoire, it worked rather well. Good choices included Keats' *Autumn* and *Urn*; Donne's *Valediction*; Plath's, *Daddy*. There was the usual problem with poetry in that having made a selection, a general critical commentary followed without full consideration of what is achieved by this form of writing, such as the particular intimacy, perhaps. Moreover, the discussion sometimes fell quite short in terms of a developed discussion of the way that other poetic devices supported the address. The question was often misread obliquely where 'address' was often interpreted as 'is concerned with' as opposed to 'speak to as if there'. While the verb 'address' might allow this, the noun 'an address' does not. Here is a case where less careful reading led some candidates in a direction away from the question; this did not mean, of course, that the candidate could not achieve solid marks though if the other criteria were well satisfied.

5. This question was the one most frequently chosen, but in some ways a bit of a free-for-all. This is not surprising as it offers a fairly open field for examination. The key term was 'close observation' that, if explored diligently, produced solid results. Although all responses to all questions require details to show good knowledge, this one in particular was pointedly asking for them. A very good response to this question stayed with each poem for some extended discussion showing how all sorts of observable details worked together. One danger here is that some candidates began observing the style of the poet (rhyme, title, diction and other devices) rather than the observable details of the subject being described by the poet. Another less profitable direction was to point out lines as examples of details that reflected the persona's emotions or ideas. These lines could most likely be used to contribute to the effect of the details observed, but they are not observable details in themselves. If the candidate had not, more or less, committed the poem to memory, it was quite a challenge to point out the descriptive details. Poems selected for Q5 were in many ways better options for Q6 shifts in tone. Candidates did not seem to have the necessary detailed knowledge and this question, with the false lure of continuous assertion –'It's all so vivid!' – proved more attractive if also less rewarding.

6. This question was probably handled the most successfully of the three choices for poetry. Where abrupt and dramatic shifts occurred, candidates were confidently ready with the volta. The allowance of 'subtle' changes in subject matter or tone dramatically increased the breadth of a relevant response. This was especially useful when a candidate might be struggling to find a shift but managed to argue that practically any moment of development marked a shift in

focus or distance or something. A good number of candidates in this position may have learned quite a lot about their poems as shifts were found where no such shift had likely ever before been seen. Still, in many cases, the argument could work. Some candidates attempted to address shifts from poem to poem, rather than internally – for example from Blake's 'The Lamb' to 'The Tyger'. Candidates may have shown good knowledge and understanding of both poems, but the question is looking at the internal structure of each poem treated.

7. Candidates who chose this question in general had a stronger control of 'narrative tension' than of 'delay' where there was less skill in pin-pointing exactly where a narrative seems to be taking us in one direction but then halts for further exposition, flashback, or digression to subplot. Several candidates asserted that 'the whole novel' was one great big delay until the end. Some good responses concerned Nick's waiting until half way through Chapter Three to introduce Gatsby to the reader, building up reader anticipation since the name Gatsby is in the title and creating narrative tension and mystery as the rumours surrounding Gatsby grow ever more varied and exotic. Good analysis was also offered on *The Road* with the delayed discovery of the human larder and on *Atonement* with the delay of the letter. Steven Daedalus' growth to his leaving Ireland at the end was not so much a question of delay but of the struggle between opposing forces in his mind although no one could argue with there being a great deal of narrative tension along the way. Such was the case with a number of the texts presented: the candidates clearly showed the presence of narrative tension, but often it did not come from delay.

8. In this genre this question was by far the most frequently chosen and the most successfully treated. Candidates found that they had a great deal of evidence for both the physical and social setting. Even though the question posed an either/or situation, responses that addressed both were treated the same as those that had chosen one form of setting or the other. It is hard to think of any text used that did not offer sufficient evidence of physical and/or social setting for the candidate to be able to fashion a focused response: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Road*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Untouchable*, *The Guide*, *Oryx and Crake*, *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. However, with character and setting in the question, candidates had to dig deep to find other literary techniques in terms of scoring well on Criterion C.

9. Those candidates who chose this question went for drama above complexity. Too many took an overall approach to the work rather than concentrating on a limited number of scenes from each work (two or three at most) and exploring those scenes in detail. However, a number of candidates produced focused, relevant and developed responses referring to, for example, Gatsby's confrontation with Tom, Daisy's driving into and killing Myrtle, or Crake's murder of Oryx. A few looked at complexity and there were some good answers on *Atonement* looking

at the dinner party scene where all the different threads of the twins' unhappiness, the love story, the assault on Lola and Bryony's possession of the letter weave together. Those candidates who wandered away from the question, and consequently produced less effective responses, generally ended up retelling a great deal of the plot that included dramatic moments along the way although these moments were not given enough attention to suggest special importance or complexity.

10 – 12. Examiners provided no comments on these questions.