

## Examiner Report Synopsis 2017

**Literature GCSE**

Overall students responded positively to the new paper, they engaged actively and thoughtfully with the new texts, producing detailed and insightful responses. The closed book style of the exam has, if anything, enhanced students' responses. The absence of the text has encouraged students to make their own connections and construct their responses from their own ideas. Many students knew enough references and quotations to support their responses (AQA). Many candidates managed their time extremely well and were able to answer both sections of the question and in many cases with a very detailed focus (Edexcel). Candidates across the whole ability range were able to access the questions and got on with the business of responding, showing real engagement with the texts (Eduqas).

**Shakespeare****Avoid overuse of language analysis and subject terminology**

- While language analysis is an essential part of studying and appreciating Shakespeare, it needs to be recognised that **there are various routes, within the limited time available in the exam, for students to show their understanding of Shakespeare's methods and their effect** (AQA)
- **Subject terminology might more helpfully be seen as the language of English Literature**, the language which allows a candidate to write clearly and fluently about the text. This can be very straightforward because it is the thoughtfulness and validity of the ideas expressed through selecting appropriate subject terminology which is significant, not the subject terminology in itself. (AQA)
- **Identifying verbs or nouns in the extracts rarely led to particularly fruitful analysis** of Shakespeare's language. This was a situation exacerbated when such terms were used incorrectly. (AQA)

**Context**

- The mark scheme recognises a **broad interpretation of context**, meaning that the text does not exist in isolation, but the context within which it can be understood and interpreted is wide and varied. Students found numerous ways of exploring context by exploring the focus of the question. Answers on ambition in *Macbeth* often reflected on the value of ambition as well as its negative consequences. Responses such as these took **the big themes and ideas of the play**, identified in the question, as their starting point and showed their understanding and appreciation by developing their interpretation of the play and its message for them. (AQA)
- AO3 is best approached through providing **specific examples of characters, events and themes within the text rather than being treated separately by providing background information that is unrelated or often irrelevant to the question**. (Edexcel)

**Knowledge of the Whole Text**

- **Knowledge of the whole play is essential**. Candidates who had seen productions of the plays found it easier to discuss them, particularly perhaps when writing on the extracts. Unfortunately, film references sometimes intruded unhelpfully on occasion – mainly in responses to *Romeo and Juliet*. (Eduqas, AQA, Edexcel)

**C19th Literature****Context**

- There remains a significant amount of rather **clumsy and ineffectual historical context which doesn't necessarily contribute to demonstrating an appreciation of the text**. A good example of this would be biographical details of Dickens' life which frequently formed part of responses to *A Christmas Carol* (AQA) [More] impressive work was done with the context particularly of *Frankenstein* which lent itself well to reflections on the nature of good and evil and the role society plays in determining this. (AQA)
- More focused and **integrated discussion of how contextual factors influence writers' characters, themes and ideas - avoid contextual 'bolt-ons'** (Eduqas)

**Structure of Extract/ Essay Questions**

- A frequent indicator of higher level responses was that of beginning by responding to the focus of the question using the whole text, and then **dipping in and out of both the extract and the whole text throughout their response**. This helped to indicate a strong, confident grasp of the text and its ideas. (AQA)
- The most common errors in the prose section were **not exploring the extract enough** – perhaps only giving one or two examples - and appearing to muddle the AOs – for instance, not exploring the language, form and structure in part (a) (given extract), but trying to analyse language, form and structure for their examples 'elsewhere in the novel' (Edexcel)
- **Plan where coverage of the extract will be best placed in the essay**. [Include] more detailed coverage of the extract and wider text, including the beginning, middle and end; more selection of detailed supporting references rather than general impressions; avoid unfocused narrative and retelling of the story (Eduqas)

## Modern texts

### Know the whole text

- There were a number of very impressive responses where the student had taken a **more holistic view of the text as a whole**. The overwhelming view from the examining team was that connection with the whole text by the student is vital in allowing them to explore the ideas raised by the text of a task (AQA)
- **Avoid references to film versions of the texts**. Ensure that students are not focusing too much on scenes / moments from screen versions if these don't appear in the text itself. The BBC *An Inspector Calls* created a few issues here, in particular the scene with Sheila's hat. (Eduqas, AQA)

### Context

- The better responses on these texts again connected this information to ideas about power and human nature, steering away from 'locking the text' into a particular historical window. **The best students integrated contextual ideas seamlessly** - in other words, they answered the question. (AQA)
- Very few responses ignored the importance of context, although there was a tendency for many to propose some interesting theories about 20th century history. There were **some examples of bolt on contextual references** but it was encouraging to see many comments interwoven at appropriate opportunities during the main narrative. (Edexcel)
- **Avoid unnecessary contextual details** as AO3 is not assessed in Section A (Eduqas)

## Poetry - Taught

### Structure of Answer

- The assessment strategy was developed to enable students to connect with some of the poems more deeply in order to **develop a bank of favourites that they might choose from in the exam itself**. (AQA)
- Section B responses were most successful when students established a point of comparison through an idea/attitude. One examiner commented that one of their key teaching points for next year will be that 'comparison comes in a variety of shapes and does not have to be formulaic'. (AQA)
- There were many different approaches to the comparison itself: **confident responses featured integrated comparison, incorporating similarities and differences in style and context as well as themes and ideas**. Plenty of solid answers made straightforward points and connections, while also dipping into mood and language choice. Less able candidates still seemed to gain some success by dealing with each poem in turn and then offering some direct comparisons. (Eduqas)

### Response

- The word '**response**' refers to the student's response to the task, and to the ideas in the text. It refers to ideas and meanings – both those in the text, and the student's ideas about the text. There is a misconception amongst some students that the word 'response' is asking them to comment on an emotional and even personal level. (AQA)

### Context

- **In the Conflict cluster candidates were generally accurate with regards to context and used their knowledge to discuss its relevance**. However, in the Relationships cluster they often suggested that Duffy being a 'feminist lesbian' meant she hated love or that John Cooper Clarke being a 'punk' and a 'heroin addict' made him look at love in an unconventional way. **The context was either inaccurately discussed or irrelevant.** (Edexcel)
- A concern was a **lack of AO3 coverage in the poetry questions**, where a significant minority seemed unaware, despite the prompt in the question, that contextual comments are required for both Question 7.1 and Question 7.2. It was frustrating for examiners to see candidates dealing successfully with AO1 and AO2, but losing marks because of a lack of AO3 comment (Eduqas)

## Poetry – Unseen

- **Read the unseen poem and make sure you get a sense of the overall point first**. Select three or four key things to focus your attention on. (AQA)
- **Avoid spotting techniques and patterns** with no reference to meaning
- **Avoid 'over reading'** of hidden meanings in the poems
- **Practise reading poems where similar topics are handled differently by poets**
- **Practise timings** across the exam to ensure sufficient time is given to the poetry (Eduqas)