

ASSESSMENT REPORT 2021

ENG315117 – ENGLISH

General Comments

Students would greatly benefit from more guidance from teachers and practice in how to deconstruct an exam question, then outline how they will use the terminology and concepts from the prompt question in their essay response. Too many students are not addressing the key terms, ideas and concepts mentioned in the stimulus question. This tendency makes it difficult for students to achieve the highest marks because they aren't addressing the prompt thoroughly. Markers may also assume that students are trying to write a pre-prepared essay, because there are too few links between the prompt question and the essay that the student writes. Students should attempt to form a thesis statement or a contention in their introduction in response to the question.

Here are some quick points that students should be made aware of:

- They must discuss context in each section of the exam paper. Check the course documents for details on which contexts are relevant to each module.
- Bring a dictionary to the exam to ensure that complex or new words are understood.
- Use the reading time to plan ideas and highlight key words in the questions. Manage the time by using one hour per question. All students should be encouraged to remain in the examination room for the full three hours to maximise success in this course.
- Students do not have to agree with the stem quote. Embedding the key words from the question across all the paragraphs helps build a strong essay.
- Illegible handwriting may affect the Marker's ability to accurately assess the essay, especially if some words can simply not be read.
- As observed in the 2019 report, 'stronger responses were well constructed, content rich, coherent, informative and insightful. They were characterised by the use of nuanced, subtle and precise language, sophisticated vocabulary, correct spelling, expression, grammar and syntax.' The stronger responses in 2020 and 2021 were also characterised by these features.
- Make sure that the correct texts are referred to in each section.
- Try to write at least two and a half to three pages per section to ensure a thorough response.
- Section A and B essays require analytical essays. Section C essays are analytical but may include a personal, reflective response.
- In Section A and B, students should compare the two texts in each paragraph.
- Weaker essays spend too much time retelling the plot and fail to link the plot's structure to conventions or intended effect. These essays are descriptive rather than analytical.

- Students should underline the title of the text.
- Students should ensure that they spell the names of the authors correctly (e.g., Margaret Atwood) as well as genre specific vocabulary (e.g., dystopian fiction).
- Codes, conventions and themes were often used interchangeably.
- Students should write in pen, not pencil. Blue or black pen should be used.
- Don't complete your planning in the exam booklet. Use the paper provided.

Common Criteria

Criterion 4

- The vast majority of the essays were analytical, formal essay responses.
- Most responses contained textual references to support points with quotes used in many responses. In better responses, the selected quotes were less well known and really added to the nuance of the analysis, particularly if the chosen language and its effect were discussed in some detail.
- There were many adequate responses that did not offer a consistent point of view nor argument but mainly discussed aspects of the question.
- In the best responses all the elements of the question were explicitly considered, applied to the texts and evaluated in a considered way. Often the conclusion completed the response in a forceful way with reference again to the main line of argument.

Criterion 6

- A disappointingly high number of titles were punctuated incorrectly.
- There were too many cases of a quote being used in isolation, without explicitly connecting it to a point of discussion (just 'bunged in'). This practice actually weakens the effectiveness of the discussion.
- Don't underline or highlight quotes in the essay - it is distracting, and markers will read them anyway.
- If it is clear from the discussion which text is being referred to don't continually put the author's name after all the quotes. For example, Atwood makes mention of 'a disconnect between self and body' (Atwood) and later in the novel refers again to 'not possessing myself' (Atwood).
- Authors' names were mainly accurately spelled.
- Overall, an appropriate academic style was employed by most students and academic language as well, including literary terms.
- The best responses were characterised by the use of precise and sophisticated language that informed the reader and contained words with evaluative connotations.
- Topic sentences were used well to start each paragraph but frequently did not refer to elements from the set question, but rather the students' prepared answer.

SECTION A

Question 1 Dystopian Genre

Overall, there was a very pleasing selection of responses with most students demonstrating sound knowledge of the basic codes and conventions of the genre. Few students attempted to discuss the stimulus statement, perhaps having been thrown by the reference to ‘colloquial language’? All responses discussed two texts, but some weaker responses were unbalanced in the time spent discussing them with students focussing most of their attention on one text. The most popular texts were *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *1984*, *Gattaca*, *The Children of Men* and *The Natural Way of Things*. In several successful responses students identified features from a second genre that combined with dystopian features to create a hybrid text which engaged and challenged audiences. *Mad Max: Fury Road* was cited as a film that combined elements from the Dystopia, Road Warrior and Action genres to create an exaggerated, fast-paced plot with a cast of larger-than-life characters.

Some of the best responses analysed the differences between a common text type, such as two films, or texts that offered very dissimilar experiences for the audience so there were plenty of contrasting features to discuss. Stronger responses examined the constraints placed upon the protagonists, and others, by their society and the extent to which they were able to resist ideological, physical, or technological control. In these responses pertinent comparison was made between the protagonists, the imagined worlds and the characters’ opposition to total control. In weaker responses students spent too much time re-telling the plot (often over half a page) of each text and failed to link the plot structure to any convention or intended effect. These essays were descriptive rather than analytical. Many weaker responses neglected to examine the links between the creators’ social context and the warnings they chose to convey in their texts, as required by the question.

Question 2 Thriller Genre

Overall, students were able to write in detail about the texts and the vast majority were able to steer clear of simple plot retelling and offer textual analysis. Most papers demonstrated some engagement with the question, finding various ways to explore the protagonists’ attempts at redemption while having something to say about the idea of identity. While there was some feeling of pre-prepared material, this was limited to the body paragraphs only, with introductions devised for the examination question, rather than obviously memorized essays. While most papers were able to find some links between their studied texts and identify the contexts in which they were composed, strong papers were able to make assertions about the impact of the texts on their audiences. Other strengths included most students’ abilities to integrate their specific textual evidence into their ideas, rather than just tacking on a quote, and clear structure in their response that guided the reader through their ideas.

Stronger responses addressed a component of the question and/or stem quote within each body paragraph. For Criterion 4, students need to incorporate the stem quote and all elements of the question throughout rather than mentioning it quickly in the introduction (quoted directly from the question) and then in the conclusion but with no other mention or analysis connected to it in the actual essay.

It is better to analyse the texts in chronological order, the older of the texts should go first (for example, in 1959 ... and then in 2002 ...).

Also, when providing evidence in the essay the stronger responses covered the full scope of the texts (beginning, middle and end) and in chronological order (Three Act structure).

Stronger responses examined the texts with detail and specificity rather than broad sweeping, generalised statements.

There were quite a few strong responses that compared *The Dry* and *North by Northwest*, focussing on the techniques used to create enthralling characters and a suspenseful plot. Weaker responses discussed each text separately, failing to compare the purpose, themes or use of the conventions.

Question 3 Life Writing Genre

Many responses to this question appeared to have been prepared as they discussed several genre conventions in detail but omitted any discussion of the risks that the composers may have taken in their selection of material, the text structure or the possible consequences of publishing a deeply personal account. For example, few students discussed how Szubanski's frank account of her father's murderous war career risks alienating the reader and leaving her vulnerable to prejudice as the daughter of an assassin. Comparison could have been made to Singer's film which may be regarded as a comparatively safe, whitewashed representation of the sexual and racial issues that characterised Mercury's life. Few risks are taken in this homage to an iconic singer and band.

Stronger responses for this section were made more powerful in terms of their analysis by a deeper engagement with the purpose of a work of Life Writing. In several cases, students were able to link the codes and conventions of the genre to a text creator's purpose, considering the deeper meaning the text offered about not only the subject of the life writing piece itself, but also the world around them.

Many successful students in this genre utilised an understanding of factual accuracy and truth to reinforce their response to the stem quote. Effective essays often discussed where text creators may have manipulated the facts or expressed personal bias, and why this may have emerged in their work.

Weaker responses focused on plot retelling or themes in the two texts, rather than genre conventions.

SECTION B: ADAPTATION STUDY

The best responses featured a comparison of texts that contained some clear differences in purpose, context, themes, characters or structure. They managed to balance analysis between the effect of the chosen text's transformation on the original themes with the differences in techniques used by each author relating to their respective modes, i.e., literary techniques used in hypertext versus cinematography in the hypertext. Furthermore, they could consider the 'why' of these differences and make judgements on the effectiveness of them.

While use of the adaptation terminology to support analysis of themes is not absolutely necessary, (i.e., omissions, supplementations and inventions etc.) using them enhanced the overall level of

sophistication and impacted Criterion 6 positively, depending on how nuanced they were; so, to this end, it is encouraged.

Criterion 2 focuses on the representation of ideas and themes in the texts. It is best to start with an analysis of how the hypotext presents an idea and then compare how the film has adapted this idea (or replaced it with another).

In order to critically analyse the depiction of these ideas and themes, students should include examples of how the text conveys these themes through language and stylistic devices relevant to the medium. The better responses went beyond changes to the plot or character, analysing how different mediums convey similar ideas/themes. Students should include a balance of how the original conveys these themes as well as the film. Whilst examples of dialogue from a film are one way to do this, better responses were able to unpack how the theme was conveyed through film codes such as audio, visual and symbolic codes.

Students are encouraged to understand the difference between a novella and a novel if relevant to their selected hypotext. These were used interchangeably by many students.

In particular, students who discussed the adaptation of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* were able to clearly articulate the reasons for the major changes in the film adaptation. They discussed changes to societal attitudes and values that prompted a less risky version of the text to be released and the subversion of the purpose and themes of the hypotext. These clear differences made it easier for students to include evaluation in their essays than in other adaptation discussions.

The analysis of changes to *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* was generally engaging and well supported by textual examples and evaluation of the impact of the changes. Some stronger responses suggested that the success of the film may have created a new audience for the biographical text since it contained richer and more detailed information about the effects of colonisation in Australia.

Students who studied the adaptation of *So Much Water So Close to Home* wrote confidently about the impact of the change in setting and the introduction of the racial elements that enriched the film's themes and appealed to a new Australian audience. They effectively analysed the text language and conventions that created the disturbing, emotion-charged atmosphere of both texts. The effect of the change in point of view was also highlighted effectively.

When discussing King's novella and Darabont's film many students confused the plot of the texts and erroneously attributed characters and events to the incorrect text. Stronger responses focused on the effects of changes made in the film to the novella's plot structure. They showed how the film's opening scenes employ conventions from the murder mystery genre to cast doubt on Dufrene's innocence and present the theme of the pursuit of justice. This contrasts with the novella's beginning which places the focus on Red's point of view as the main character who may be redeemed through Dufrene's rekindling of hope for a future life outside the prison. Many students highlighted the impact of the film, including its gradual but continued success in appealing to new and wider audiences.

Too few responses recognised the limitation of film in accessing a character's thoughts. The director of *The Shawshank Redemption* resorted to a voice-over by Red that often directly quoted his thoughts from the novella at key points in the film in order to present the main themes.

Too few responses considered the impact of the change from a monomodal to multimodal text in an adaptation. Reading is usually an individual experience that depends upon the reader co-constructing the meaning by using their own imagination when applying the imagery, description and dialogue created just by written language. Film is intended to be a shared audience experience and features moving images supplemented by sound to engage several senses at once.

Students are encouraged to organise each body paragraph around an idea or theme to best respond to Criterion 2. For example, instead of comparing a character as either likeable or not, students could focus on themes such as lack of humanity, redemption or corruption. Instead of comparing the setting as harsh or scenic, students could focus on themes such as isolation, emptiness, growth or beauty.

For example, both texts represent the importance of hope in their denouement, where the film enriches this by adding/omitting/using.

SECTION C: CLOSE TEXT STUDY

There was a general over-use of critical perspectives with a lack of understanding. Students are still applying multiple perspectives to one text, leading to a fragmented, disjointed structure, instead of presenting and arguing for their own interpretation, which would lead to a more logical, coherent structure (that does not need to be identified as a critical lens).

In general, many responses did not use critical perspectives accurately or appropriately (such as using words like 'feministic' or saying that a text explores different perspectives).

Stronger responses focused clearly on the question by referring to perspectives and how they influenced their interpretation of the text and significant issues in society – links to context as in composer's intentions, time period of text setting (what was happening in society at the time – i.e. *The Secret River* or *Black Diggers* and the issues that are still being resolved today).

Strong responses ranged across most texts and they addressed the aspects of the criteria in a balanced manner and made links to specific aspects of how the texts were presented – i.e., play formats and staging etc were key aspects that allowed the students to interpret the text by referring to the composer's use of techniques – breaking the fourth wall or using vignettes to emphasise a specific idea or point in the text. The analysis of 'how' texts convey perspectives (Element 3) involves examining language and/or literary techniques.

Weaker responses focused more on themes and ideas rather than interpretation and perspectives – often retelling plots, or scenes in the text, rather than using points to explore the use of language etc. Length of responses were limited to covering in most cases three characters or three events in the text with no links beyond a main idea such as racism.

Many students misused 'post-colonial' – students used it to mean 'sympathetic' or 'open-minded' or 'reflective of 21st century sympathetic perspectives' by describing characters in the text as 'post-colonial'. Post-colonialism is the idea of privileging the voices of the colonised, who are traditionally silenced by the voices of the colonisers. A text can be postcolonial, and an author can be writing from a postcolonial perspective. A character could be considered postcolonial IF they were concerned with hearing Indigenous voices and this was part of their character and plot.

Some responses incorrectly defined post-colonialism as “the period of time after colonisation before federation.”

Context was often not included in students' essays. Some students misunderstood the meaning of context and used it interchangeably with setting. Some responses, especially on *The Light Between Oceans*, referred only to a character's context within the plot. This led to a missed opportunity to explain how the text helped expose problems in the texts' context of composition.

Students do not need to include the perspectives of others, such as reviewers, which would free up time to focus on structuring their own interpretation.

Overwhelmingly, there was a grammatical misuse of metalanguage e.g., 'interpretation' – that the text offers an interpretation only works if referring to the author's perspective on an issue. However, students are saying the text offers or provides an interpretation through X compositional feature – it's the reader who has the interpretation, not the text.

Likewise, incorrect grammatical use of 'perspectives' persists. For example, “...these characters experience different perspectives based on their own internal views” and “by establishing crucial moments within fictional texts to define the plot and characters, different readings are offered depending on the interpretation of relating perspectives”.

Many students forgot to include or overlooked 'values and attitudes', which is assessable in Criterion 3. This makes it harder for students to explain what the text reveals to them about certain attitudes and perspectives of particular historical time periods and cultures (including their own).

Strong essays analysed language features in texts while weaker ones focused on a general sense of the character's feelings or meaning without explaining how the author has constructed it. Few essays analysed language features, relying instead on describing characters and their actions to serve as evidence and analysis, or to list them or mention them but not include examples.

Students should understand the difference between 'bildungsroman' and 'coming-of-age'; a bildungsroman is a story telling a character's whole life's journey, from childhood to adulthood, usually as a reflection from later in life. 'Coming of age' is a genre that explores a young person's development, in a short period of time, from childhood to adulthood; a period of maturation, often triggered by an important event. *Jasper Jones* is not, technically, a bildungsroman. Students need to be reminded that when writing about a theatrical play, such as *Jasper Jones* written by Kate Mulvany, students should NOT refer to it as a screenplay. Plays are for the stage, while screenplays are for film.

Strong essays set up a contention in the introduction that structured the essay. A strong contention presents a clear and assertive interpretation, such as that *Black Diggers* reveals the dehumanisation of Aboriginal Australians by white Australians and invites the reader to see the need for a treaty in the process of reconciliation; or that *Jasper Jones*' critique of the disempowerment of racial minorities in Australia is undermined by the privileging of Charlie's voice in the resolution. Introductions that make a vague reference to the audience responding in a particular way to key themes, or that the student's perspective informed their interpretation of the text's meaning, without making clear what the themes or meaning are, were unable to set up a strong essay.