

# ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022

## ENG315117 – ENGLISH

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall, most students tackled the questions with a positive, confident attitude despite 2022 being another challenging year. This year the exam paper questions were prescriptive and narrower in focus, requiring students to be agile and flexible enough to respond to specific demands, rather than perhaps just writing a learned essay from memory. Students who made a solid effort to respond to the set question were rewarded by markers.

Students are reminded that both Module A and B involve the comparison of texts. It was disappointing to see that some students did not do this. Instead, some students wrote two separate, mini essays on the texts which did not illustrate variation in the application of the conventions and codes. Other students mentioned two texts in their introduction, but wrote about one text only in their paragraphs. It is recommended that the two texts are compared within a paragraph and that connecting terms such as 'similarly', 'in contrast', 'unlike', and a 'main difference' are utilised.

A common problem in all sections of the paper was the clumsy use of quotations. Frequently a quotation was inserted into a paragraph with no attribution to a character or explanation of which point the quotation was illustrating. Students are encouraged to select less well-known statements from their texts to feature in their discussion.

Teachers should ensure that students understand how to write an analytical essay, not just a book report outlining the narrative of the texts. Too many students slipped into second person in their essays which is not appropriate in an academic, analytical response. Both Section A and B require analytical essays in third person. Students have the option of using the first and/or third person in Section C responses, but they do not have to write in the first person in this section to demonstrate an interpretation of the text.

The best way for teachers to ensure that students have the ability to adjust to unpredicted questions is to give them ample opportunities to respond to unusual prompt questions. Teachers can then instruct students on how to apply their knowledge in unpredictable situations, instead of relying too much on pre-prepared essay responses.

It is vital to attempt all parts of the exam. Even if a student writes a few sentences, they are eligible to be marked. If a student does not put anything in their booklet for a section, they will receive Z ratings for that section and will automatically receive a PA award, regardless of their internal ratings or their ratings in the other sections.

## SECTION A

### QUESTION 1 DYSTOPIAN GENRE

Strong responses connected the composers' warnings to their own society of future negative outcomes and the shaping of 'meaning' referred to in the question. They explained the social/political/environmental context that prompted a warning to the audience and was linked to the allegorical intent. The most effective responses analysed the type of environmental ruin, technological control and/or government oppression featured in the text. Some nuanced responses discussed the way in which the lack of access to technology in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Natural Way of Things* was a powerful method of control that led to feelings of powerlessness and loss of independence.

Many responses lacked any discussion of how textual features and technical codes were employed to shape meaning and create an invited reading. There was some very effective discussion of film language including the choice of colour palette, shots, editing and music in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Gattaca* and *Children of Men*. Strong responses to *The Handmaid's Tale* confidently discussed the impact of Atwood's first-person narration, powerful imagery and ambiguous ending. Specific, well-chosen textual examples greatly strengthened responses.

Weaker responses were mainly pre-prepared essays about conventions and codes that students were determined to discuss, with little to no attempt at addressing the elements of the question. Since the warnings in the statement attributed to Atwood did not apply equally to all of the set texts, it was valid for students to argue instead for the significance of their own chosen conventions and codes, provided they explained why Atwood's assertion did not ring true. In particular, Wood's novel, *The Natural Way of Things*, did not obviously feature any of Atwood's codes. Some students did try to discuss the harsh environment of the abandoned sheep station, the lack of communication technology which isolated the women and the tacit government approval of their punishment by a private company. Others instead stressed the novel's warnings about the prevalence of misogyny in the patriarchal society and the sanctions placed on women who transgressed against the sexist norms of their society. Some very weak answers conveyed no understanding whatsoever of the genre, its purpose, or were superficial or largely explanatory.

### QUESTION 2 THRILLER GENRE

Successful students were able to use the essay question as a platform to develop an analysis of the specific sociocultural setting and context of each text in relation to the question. Those who explicitly addressed the essay stem or quote, for example 'believable worlds', 'confronting a disruption to social order' and/or a focus on the 'restoration of justice' crafted meaningful responses that reflected a flexibility of approach. Students who evaluated the textual evidence and in particular, linguistic, structural or cinematic features of texts excelled and were rewarded in Criterion 1.

Stronger responses also compared thriller features such as flashbacks, symbolism, imagery, cinematography, language devices (page-turners, cliff-hangers, sentence lengths) and red herrings. It was particularly pleasing to see students identify the codes and conventions of their study texts in addition to codes referred to in the essay question itself. This indicated to markers that students had appreciated the conventions of the thriller genre. Stronger students considered the evolution of their studied genre over time and were able to show evidence from the film or refer to external source material regarding the composers.

There were a number of students who clearly were able to memorise quotes from their studied texts (particularly from *The Dry*) and were able to integrate these well into their body paragraphs. It should be noted that while quotes are an effective way to show knowledge of the text, it is important not to stack paragraphs with too many quotes at the risk of losing meaningful analysis. It is better to have one or two quotes or evidence in each paragraph and to develop analysis around the evidence. Students should consider whether they are using a quote to retell aspects of the text or using the quote to evaluate linguistic features, or context.

Although the question did not refer to contexts, the first element of Criterion 1 mentions “the relationships between genre texts and contexts”. Strong responses signposted context in the introduction and/or topic sentences, and again referred to the context(s) in terms of how they invite response and/or influence or shape meaning in the conclusion.

In weaker responses, there was a heavy reliance on plot or scene retelling, mistaking this for analytical comparison of genre features. They also limited their comparisons to actions within scenes, and sometimes incorrectly or illogically (e.g., Thornhill’s daylight kidnapping is described, then “Similarly, in *The Bourne Identity*, a body is found floating in the sea and rescued by Italian fishermen” ... when there is nothing similar noted about the two scenes.

### QUESTION 3 LIFE WRITING GENRE

This section was, overall, tackled successfully by students, with the majority finding some connection to the set question stem adapted from Amy Tan including: ‘deliberate on identity’, ‘battle with truthfulness’ or creating an ‘emotional perspective’. There was little reference to the term ‘codes’ and some students clearly presented pre-prepared essays around the conventions of Life Writing they had been taught. When students were able to combine their knowledge, reflect on the two texts and make connections to the set question, they were rewarded in Criterion 4.

An impressive part of marking the Life Writing section was the number of essays which developed complex arguments (five or more pages). This may have been the first section of the exam tackled by students, but nonetheless, students should be congratulated on this effort under time restraints.

Students who included knowledge of texts’ contexts in their essays and compared or contrasted distinctive features of genres, were rewarded in Criterion 3. Detailed plot retelling must be avoided in this and other sections of the exam. There were some insightful

comparisons featuring Bohemian Rhapsody and other texts such as Reckoning, Maus, or The Laramie Project which did this, made links to the set question and where quotations were incorporated seamlessly.

A reminder that Genre Study responses require students to answer the set question in the form of an analytical essay written in the third person. Several Life Writing essays included first person pronouns such as 'our', 'we' and 'us' when referring to how meaning is shaped by a composer, which should be avoided.

## SECTION B ADAPTATION STUDY

The discussion of the hypotext and hypertext was well-balanced for the most part. Despite reminders to discuss both texts, some students only provide a cursory sentence on the original text before launching into an analysis of the changes that were made by the new composer. Again, a reminder that this section is a comparative analytical essay.

Section B appeared to challenge students in the sense that a number of students were reluctant to attack the essay question and formulate a response around the concept that the adaptation process can be both problematic and rewarding for the responder. This could be attributed to confusion around the readers' subjective responses to the texts; however, students should feel encouraged to define the question on their own terms and clearly state this in the introduction. A strong thesis statement was lacking in many responses in this section and essays that developed an evaluative response were rewarded for their efforts.

While the essay question asks students to explore particular themes, a paragraph-by-paragraph theme analysis can sometimes detract from a sustained argument. For example, why might a new target audience find an omission or addition rewarding or problematic? It has been noted, particularly in Section B, that pre-prepared essays can sometimes make for a rigid response that can often result in the essay question being avoided entirely. Markers acknowledge that there is much to cover in Adaptation (Section B) and prepared responses can offer a sense of security, but strong, evaluative responses come from considering the knowledge gained through the year and how that either adheres or is challenged by the set essay question.

## SECTION C: CLOSE TEXT STUDY

Teachers and their students are reminded that this is a close study of a selected text and the language and stylistic devices used by composers. Whilst the question may not specify language, the notion of a close study would imply the inclusion of specific textual evidence (quotations, stage directions etc). Some markers were concerned that the use of multiple critical lenses in this section meant that students were unable to adequately address the elements of Criterion 3. More often than not, many responses that applied lens/es to a text did not fully understand their application, or completed a prepared essay that did not acknowledge the set question.

Most of the responses showed that students had engaged with their selected text as they were able to write in a confident and fluent way, employing pertinent textual evidence. It was, however, surprising to see that too many responses analysed the text without referring to perspectives, attitudes or values, even though these concepts were explicitly referenced in the question. Instead, themes appeared to be the focus of the close study and discussion centred on how the characters and plot represented these, particularly in Jasper Jones and The Secret River. The question clearly focused on the importance of characterisation, but weaker responses consisted of a prepared essay that mainly discussed other literary techniques.

The requirement to select contrasting characters challenged some students. Many students struggled with their discussion of Black Diggers as it does not feature contrasting main characters. Better responses focused on contrasting archetypal characters or how the composers created contrasting characters to represent different perspectives. Discussion of key scenes that showed conflict between characters and their opposing attitudes was a characteristic of the strongest responses as it enabled some depth of analysis.

Weaker responses contained too much re-telling of the text's plot and described many characters in a superficial way. The question in this section required the close study and discussion of a limited number of elements, not a general discussion.

Although the question did not call for a personal perspective, quite a few students provided their own response. Stronger essays offered a convincing reasoned interpretation of the text, responding to the invited reading and analysing how textual features were used to position readers. In weaker responses, the student's own perspective was quite shallow and simplistic, detracting from the overall success of the discussion. This year there were fewer references to literary perspectives but some responses to Jasper Jones effectively applied a feminist lens to analyse the attitudes and actions of the main female characters located in a patriarchal rural community.