

ASSESSMENT REPORT 2021

ENL315114 – ENGLISH LITERATURE

INDEPENDENT STUDY

In 2021 the studies submitted for assessment represented a range of texts and the full spectrum of awarded results. Most folios demonstrated authentic engagement with the chosen texts and generally made good connections between the three pieces.

The best critical response began by crafting an inquiry question which tended to brevity, allowing the student to explore the ideas raised in their reading of the text in their own way. Complicated, wordy and multi-faceted questions often produced muddled responses with, occasionally little to no examination of the compositional features of the chosen text. There were also a number of focus statements rather than inquiry questions that, once again, did not allow students to fully use the structure of an analytical essay based on a contention. The vast majority of responses had appropriate questions and used resources strategically to further critical readings.

Students should be reminded that the subject requires a literary focus that seeks to analyse “how” the text conveys its ideas. It is, therefore, important to include analysis of the text’s compositional features. In 2021, a number of folios used the Critical Response to write what was essentially a Sociology essay with examples from the text as evidence, rather than a literary analysis with some reference to issues relevant to the context of reception. Some students relied too much on critical interpretations but did not use them effectively to further their thesis topic. Stronger responses analysed the use of compositional features of the chosen text in relation to the chosen question and provided judicious textual evidence to support claims; however, there were still many who did not.

Students in 2022 are advised to pay close attention to meet the minimum overall word count. Examiners trust that the word counts provided on the cover page are accurate but do have the ability to check. It was unfortunate to note that there were many folios in 2021 which met the minimum word count for the critical response and the imaginative response but when these totals were added – the overall minimum word count was not met. Folios that are less than three thousand words (as well as folios that are over three thousand three hundred words) were penalised a grade on criterion seven.

Reflective statement

The purpose of the reflective statement is to justify their choice of inquiry focus as well as to outline for the assessor the connections between the Critical Response and the Imaginative Response. Students must use it to advocate how the two pieces together answer the focus question. Students are encouraged to think of the reflective statement as an advocacy document which allows them to explain and justify some of the authorial choices in the imaginative response. It is not necessary to list the texts disregarded before making final choice.

A genuine expression of the responder’s engagement with the text is appreciated and rewarded.

The reflective statement provides students with opportunities to frame their study and address criteria six and seven. Students are encouraged to view the reflective statement as a carefully crafted piece of writing that sets the tone and the standard for the folio.

Critical Response

Well-proposed Critical Responses developed, expanded and supported the student's argument. These responses drew on the critical ideas of others and provided evidence for the clearly established contention through reference to the composer's use of compositional features. Most students have a good understanding of what they need to do for the Critical Response and do it well. There were excellent Critical Responses which explored ideas and issues that had captivated previous students and some that looked at the text in new ways. Weaker responses were reflective rather than critical and often did not cite critical ideas which had authority. Some explored their focus in relatively simplistic ways.

Students and teachers must be aware of the significance of using textual evidence in the Critical Response to support the student's discussion of their own ideas. There appears to be a trend toward the privileging of ideas of others over analysis of direct evidence from the text. A reverse of this trend and the emphasis on developing a reading based on close analysis of texts' features is encouraged for 2022. Students are directed to use the critical ideas of others to *extend* their own contention rather than to summarise. Consider the critical ideas as an extension or an enhancing of the flavour (a "seasoning") of the critical response rather than the focus.

The best responses saw students analyse the composer's ideas, values and perspectives through engaging with their own ideas, values and perspectives and acknowledging the influence of the chosen text on their own thinking. This was achieved in part through framing the inquiry question to include their own perspective. It was a delight to join the students on their journey with these literary texts, the influence it had on them as well as how it has helped them to understand and interpret aspects of their own world.

Imaginative Response

Future students are advised that the reflective statement is invaluable to help understand the intentions of the imaginative response. Devote some of the reflective statement to justify why the form has been chosen and why students believe that it is an effective medium to explore their intentions. The connection between the critical response and the imaginative response must be justified. Students are encouraged to explore a greater range of forms for capturing their imaginative ideas. When developing an imaginative response, a student may wish to adapt elements of the text, having a similar character and scene but set in a contemporary setting, for example. These choices must be clearly identified and justified in the Reflective Statement. Use the reflective statement to guide the examiner to the intention of the imaginative response and emphasise the connection between this piece and the critical response.

In 2021 successful students used the ideas from their critical response as a link to present successful imaginative pieces. An engaging imaginative response with clear connections to critical responses will be rewarded on criterion five.

Weaker imaginative responses were those which retold the narrative without adding much to what is already known.

One of the challenges of the imaginative response can be to use the composer's style to extend an understanding of an idea. Weaker responses did not shed further light on the ideas identified in the inquiry question. These made little attempt at language authenticity and often relied upon on retelling.

Referencing and formatting

The best responses saw students using nuanced and sophisticated language and adapting the voice across the pieces to suit the pieces they were creating. Some students do this beautifully while other students are less successful and sometimes an imprecise word choice can have serious consequences for meaning. The independent study is marked as three polished pieces of writing, each of which has been carefully drafted. Careful attention to proofreading and assiduous editing can help with simple punctuation errors caused by adding quotations and references. Perhaps one of the disappointing aspects of some critical responses is the lack of attention to detail (consistency of referencing, line space and other formatting, etc.).

The folio guidelines specify that MLA8 is used. Successful studies saw students handle MLA8 referencing skilfully. In the vast majority of folio referencing was clear, accurate and detailed. It is unfortunate when a student uses odd conventions not part of a recognised style or switches between styles. This has an impact on the grade awarded for criterion seven.

While most students presented polished pieces of work that had been carefully proofread, there were many Imaginative Responses that were marred by mixed tense use.

The choice of texts for independent study in 2021

350 independent studies were submitted for assessment in 2021. A total of **44** options are available for students as the focus of their independent study. But in reality, all students need to choose from **41** different options because they cannot choose the prescribed texts which they are studying in Modules 2 and 3. **66** Students chose their Folio from Module 2 (27%), **163** Students chose their Folio from Module 3 (47%), and **121** Students chose their Folio from Module 4 (26%).

Popular texts for the Independent Study attracting more than ten candidates were:

- *Boy Swallows Universe* (28)
- *The Color Purple* (25)
- *Emma* (20)
- *Dracula* (19)
- *Goodbye to Berlin* (19)
- *Alien* (16)
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (16)
- *Brooklyn* (15)
- *Billy Elliot* (14)
- *The Goldfinch* (14)

- *Belle* (11)
- *M Butterfly* (11)
- *Unsheltered* (11)
- *A Room with a View* (10)
- *Othello* (10)

5 prescribed texts (*King Charles III*, *Little Dorrit*, the poetry of Kenneth Slessor, *The Piano*, and *The Rover*) attracted no candidates at all in 2021. **86** students (25% of submissions) choose to focus on a pre-20th century text for their Independent Study.

7 students chose poetry for their Independent Study (2%), **49** students chose a play for their Independent Study (14 %), **66** students chose a film for their Independent Study (20%), and **204** students chose a novel for their Independent Study (63%).

<i>A Doll's House</i>	4
<i>A Room with a View</i>	10
<i>Alien</i>	16
<i>Armitage, Simon - Poetry</i>	3
<i>Arrival</i>	4
<i>Belle</i>	11
<i>Billy Elliot</i>	14
<i>Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk</i>	4
<i>Bishop, Elizabeth - Poetry</i>	1
<i>Black is the New White</i>	8
<i>Boy Swallows Universe</i>	28
<i>Brick Lane</i>	5
<i>Brooklyn</i>	15
<i>Daughter of Bad Times</i>	3
<i>Dracula</i>	19
<i>Emma</i>	20
<i>For the Term of His Natural Life</i>	8
<i>Gallipoli</i>	3
<i>God of Carnage</i>	3
<i>Goodbye to Berlin</i>	19
<i>Harwood, Gwen - Poetry</i>	3
<i>Lord of the Rings</i>	16
<i>M Butterfly</i>	11
<i>Muriel's Wedding</i>	6
<i>My Brilliant Career</i>	2
<i>New Boy</i>	2
<i>North and South</i>	5
<i>Othello</i>	10
<i>Pygmalion</i>	5
<i>Silas Marner</i>	7

<i>Sweet Country</i>	9
<i>The Color Purple</i>	25
<i>The Goldfinch</i>	14
<i>The King's Speech</i>	8
<i>The Lieutenant</i>	2
<i>The Piano/ The Rover/ Slessor, Kenneth – Poetry/ King Charles III</i>	0
<i>The Tempest</i>	3
<i>The Trojan Women</i>	5
<i>The True History of the Kelly</i>	7
<i>Unsheltered</i>	11

WRITTEN EXAM

English Literature is the study of different forms of texts. Over the course of their study, students also develop the skills of responding to texts in different modes of writing. This includes the mastery of analytical essays. A feature of this text type is the introduction of a contention in response to the essay question posed. The purpose of the Literature exam is to assess what students know about texts, and to assess how well they can think, plan and adapt what they know, under time constraints, to a specific question. Students must tackle all nominated components, including literary language and conventions, structures, and stylistic features. Exam responses which do this will be rewarded.

Students must be aware that examiners are able to identify when a pre-prepared essay is reproduced as there is often little attempt to modify the contention and topic sentences to fit the demands of the question. In 2021 many exam scripts use the same structure, the same critics and the same textual evidence. Whilst these were generally acceptable responses, it is not in the spirit of an English Literature course to reduce the exam to a memory test based on a formula. Excellent essays demonstrated a genuine engagement with the ideas of the text and used all the components of the question to showcase original thinking within the timeframe provided.

Another problem that continued to challenge students and teachers in 2021 particularly in section B of the examination was drawing upon the interpretation of others. The interpretations of others must be integrated into a student's understanding and appreciation of the text/s' central ideas. It was disappointing to observe in 2021 that the application of critical perspectives meant that some students struggled to come to grips with the texts' central ideas. While the application of a critical 'lens' is a valid way to address critical ideas of others, often the constraints of these lenses make it difficult for students to adapt their understanding of the text/s to answer the given questions. A student answering about personal choice may apply a feminist reading to *The Tempest* by discussing the lack of agency/choice that the character of Miranda is allowed, for example. Using three critical perspectives in a one-hour essay also meant that some students found it difficult to demonstrate detailed analysis of the compositional features of text/s which they were directed by the question to evaluate. Strong essays made 'own ideas' the focus and occasionally reinforcing their own insights with a carefully selected and relevant argument from 'an other.' An example of when this was done successfully is:

The horror that is unleashed on the privileged Britons is fascinating in terms of xenophobia. Patricia McKee in “Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker’s Dracula” asserts that “Dracula has been understood to respond to the fears of late Victorians, due in part to Darwinian thought, that degeneration threatened both the British “race” and the British empire.

While the linked article below has an UK focus it raises interesting and important issues about the purpose of studying Literature:

[What's missing from English at school – emotion \(theconversation.com\)](#)

There was some discussion at the exam marking meeting about identifying a range of critical perspectives and the ways in which students might incorporate them successfully. Engaging with critical interpretations is a significant aspect of the course but this element is not as important as a student’s understanding of the text’s central thematic concerns and the influence of context on the attitudes and values represented in the texts studied. It is this knowledge and engagement which the final exam assesses.

Section A

To successfully address criterion two there needs to be a synthesis between an understanding of the significant events of the time period of production and the features of the texts. This is the second year of examining the current selection of poems for both Love and Loss, and the quality of student response has improved. The 2021 examination did not require students to respond to specific poems, but a setting examiner is cognisant of what previous questions have been asked of students and are free to delve into the six poems in any way they wish. That is, they could direct students to examine poems from different historical contexts, different centuries, different forms, or different literary movements.

Both questions 1a and 1b were accessible for students. Students must integrate their knowledge of the importance of historical and socio-cultural context with their analysis of the poems, instead of including a snapshot of historical and social contexts which does not arise from the discussion of the poem itself. Comments about the various aspects of historical and social contexts is not enough. To be awarded an A, students must interrogate aspects of socio-cultural and historical context of poems and how these have influenced the construction of a specific poem. In 2021 strong responses to both questions 1a and 1b deconstructed the poetic techniques used and connected these literary features to the attitudes towards love or loss in the period of the poem’s production.

Stronger responses were characterised by a balanced approach to analysing the poems in relation to their historical and cultural contexts, the central idea (Loss/Love) and close literary analysis of each poem. Appreciation was evident in the tone of these essays both through choice of language, understanding of context and close textual analysis in relation to the topic of Loss or Love. Strong responses were able to connect the historical context of the poet to the choice of poetic techniques and form. Students and teachers are reminded that historical context needs to be relevant to the essay question and the poem.

Areas for students to improve when writing on texts in context:

- identify relevant literary movements, such as modernism or Romanticism and comment on the attitudes and values of this movement as part of your analysis
- focus on distinctive features of the form
- use detailed textual evidence that is linked to a cogent thesis
- sustain a skilful control of language and ideas – even though spelling is not a distinct criterion in its own right in this course, spellings errors cannot be accepted within a *skilful*/response
- develop responses using aptly chosen and detailed textual references to support the central line of argument
- specifically, address the question using its phrasing extensively and directly
- use textual evidence to target the question specifically
- check the accuracy of their sources
- include a discussion of attitudes, beliefs and values of the era – not just historical events
- critical interpretation of others is not assessed in this section of the exam but memorised quotes from critics are becoming increasingly used in this section. This takes the focus away from analysing the poetic techniques used. (see remarks on critical interpretations above)
- students are still underlining poem titles instead of using double quotation marks.

Students are advised that they are able to refute a statement presented in an exam question. In the instance of Section A Question 1b, for example, they could have made the claim that love is not always complex and that some poets explore the simplicity of love. This may have helped some students to make comparisons between the poems and ideas of love presented.

Weaker responses were characterised by a focus on one poem at the expense of the second, a distinct lack of literary analysis and exploration of their effect and limited historical and contextual detail. The student may have listed poetic devices at the expense of exploring how they contribute to meaning. Many love poetry responses touched only briefly on poetic form if at all and the weaker responses made little or no attempt to connect use of form to cultural context which is important even for a C rating on C2. Again, there was the issue of students knowing only one poem well so the discussion on the two poems was disproportionate. Weaker responses tended to assume a connection between identifying a compositional feature, form of stylistic feature (describing); more sophisticated responses analysed how a particular compositional choice shaped/ invited a particular perspective.

Question 2

In 2021 there was a disappointing number of scripts on *The Trojan Women* which did not satisfactorily address the influence of cultural context. There needs to be an explicit teaching of the conventions of tragedy, for example and how this informs the ways in which the text reflects the values of the society/time period. Students writing on *The Trojan Women* limited their discussion to the world of the text and did not explicitly connect the features of this text to attitudes and values from the context of production.

The exams scripts which dealt with other pre-twentieth century texts in Section A were able to demonstrate an understanding of the influence of context with varying degrees of success. The most successful responses were able to move from an identified compositional feature

(protagonist, genre, setting, language used, symbolism) to a discussion of how this literary technique reflected the attitudes and values of the context of the text's production. Students who demonstrated an understanding of elements of a text creator's personal context were rewarded when this evaluation was linked to a feature of the text.

Question 3

As in previous years, very few students attempted Section A Question Three in which students must deal with two texts and their context in a detailed, balanced way. This is understandable given the complex nature of this question. There were some students who managed to deal with this sophisticated undertaking. Students and teachers are reminded that the pairing for the texts for comparative study are mandated by the text list. Students who write comparing texts which are not paired for study will be awarded a 't' for Criterion 4.

SECTION B

(refer to general comments for points about critical ideas of others)

Students must present a cohesive and explicit response to the set question using the question's phrasing to formulate a strong thesis. Often material presented, although absolutely correct, did not demonstrate an understanding of the students' questions and often ignored the question which the student had nominated to answer. These responses ask the examiner to do the 'heavy lifting' by identifying the setting of the novel explicitly as well as another narrative feature for themselves as students were directed to evaluate in Question 4. An example of a skilful response that tackles the set question explicitly is the following:

With its deceptive narration and genre-blending structure epitomising its themes, Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma* may be considered a masterclass in tying narrative theme to compositional elements. Even its setting, the fictional village of Highbury, shines with verisimilitude such that the author may incorporate it into her interrogation of the real communities of Regency Britain. Areas for students to improve in this section:

- refer to the phrasing of the set question explicitly and develop a cogent thesis that uses the keywords as part of it.
- demonstrate a critical and informed understanding of the play that is not a mirror-image of the responses of other students in your class
- use more detailed textual analysis
- select your textual support more judiciously
- [for *The Tempest*] evaluate dramatic techniques, rather than focusing purely on character
- use more detailed textual analysis
- select your textual support more judiciously
- don't ignore the cultural context of the work and especially the meritorious nature of the prescribed text.
- integrating values in your evaluation of the text is often a characteristic of perceptive responses, but there is no need to mention your personal context, as you do in the Folio.

- [for Emma] demonstrate an understanding of Austen's aesthetic as a reflection of her criticisms of the restrictive nature of the Regency Period in England
- [for the Tempest] skilfully explore the influence of the Elizabethan context on Shakespeare's work
- [for the Tempest] move beyond a generalised discussion of characters to focus on features of form

As in previous years, it is necessary to underline the titles of published works in Modules 2 and 3. If you have permission to type, these must be in italics.

The topic in Question 5 gave students many avenues of discussion. Better responses were able to engage with all parts of the topic to look at how their chosen text explored the impact of personal choice and the wider implications of such choices showing an understanding of how language can be used/ deconstructed to support claims made and drawing on critical perspectives of others to support those claims. Weaker responses focused on part of the topic (or part of the topic more than the other), for example, not really exploring the wider implications of personal choice.

When addressing Question 6 students were rewarded for looking at not only the overarching connecting ideas, but also through providing close textual detail. Stronger responses identified unique connections between the comparative texts, using critical ideas to carefully frame the responses to the question. Students who discussed the texts in relation to each other, tended to produce stronger essays. These essays were characterised by the use of strong verbs, breadth of vocabulary, agreement or disagreement with critical interpretations or lenses through which the text was viewed and close literary analysis. Further, appreciation of the texts is evident in stronger responses both through choice of language and insight offered in relation to their analysis of the texts and the topic.

Weaker responses tended to retell the plot of the comparative texts and disregarded the topic. They also tended to involve a lack of quotes to substantiate and few to no critical responses to help frame analysis. There was also a distinct lack of cohesion in the organisation of the essay. It is recommended that time is spent planning the structure of the response to ensure Criterion 4 is addressed.

When answering Question 7 most students chose to discuss the protagonists' struggles to satisfy their personal desires which conflicted with their societies. The strong responses analysed prodigious evidence and compositional features from text to reveal the moral dilemmas that the characters faced. The stronger responses compared the two texts side by side, using their paragraph topic sentences to interrogate the question and reveal the complexity of the characters' moral dilemmas.