

A-level

English Language and Literature

7707/C NEA: Making Connections

Report on the Examination

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Introduction

The non-exam assessment allows students the opportunity to carry out independent study to investigate literary and non-literary material. As with previous series, moderators were pleased to report that there was some exceptional work on show, with some impressive levels of analysis and insight into a wide variety of texts and topics.

Assessment criteria

The following marks are available:

AO1 (15 marks) Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

AO2 (15 marks) Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts.

AO3 (10 marks) Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received.

AO4 (10 marks) Explore connections across the texts, informed by linguistic methods and literary concepts and methods.

Approaches to the task

For the NEA students are able to focus on a theme or representation (eg. representations of relationships, mental health), or they may focus on a specific linguistic concept or theme (eg. narrative strategies to present personal experiences). The majority of students opted to focus on a theme or ideas about representations. Moderators saw a wide variety of topics, including representations of controlling relationships, victims of crime, disempowerment, place and journeys, as well as the more familiar topics focused on mental health and gender inequalities.

In order to meet the NEA requirements, students must study a substantial literary text and some non-literary material that meets their investigation focus and aims. Some students had misunderstood the nature of a literary text, referring instead to fiction and non-fiction texts. Centres are reminded that literary texts comprise prose fiction, dramatic texts and volumes of poetry. Fictional screenplays are classified as non-literary texts. If centres are unsure about the suitability of text choices, they should contact their NEA Adviser for guidance.

It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of centres are encouraging students to select their own texts rather than steering them to a narrow range of literary texts. This celebrates the independent nature of this NEA task, and it prompted students to explore topics and texts of personal interest. Their engagement was evident in the quality of the work produced.

Investigation titles can be an indicator of how successfully a student has understood the task requirements and moderators reported that titles which were clearly and straightforwardly expressed were often the most developed and thoughtful. Overly complex titles led to a confused approach with students sometimes losing sight of the aims for their investigations and thus resulting in an investigation that lacked coherence.

The suggested word limit of 2,500-3,000 words was frequently exceeded, sometimes more than twice the recommended limit. This was particularly disappointing to see as this issue has been raised in previous exam reports. Without exception, investigations that significantly exceeded the word limit showed a lack of judicious selection of methods and secondary sources and offered analyses that lacked precise focus. Editing work is a high-level skill, and students should be guided to carefully reviewing their work so that it closely aligns with recommended word limits.

Text choices

Moderators were pleased to report that there was a really interesting range of texts used by students, both literary and non-literary.

As with previous years, the vast majority of students focused on novels for their literary material. Moderators saw the usual favourites: *1984*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *American Psycho*, *Lolita*, *The Bell Jar*, *The Road* and *Animal Farm*. It was pleasing to see a wide variety of novels, illustrating students' diverse reading tastes. Amongst some of the more interesting text choices, moderators read work based on *Call Me By Your Name*, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, *An American Marriage*, Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, *Eleanor Oliphant Is Doing Fine*, *Shuggie Bain*, and Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*. Colleen Hoover's novels were also popular this year, particularly *It Ends With Us*, as was *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*.

Young Adult fiction was also a popular choice, notably Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*. It was disappointing to see some GCSE texts being recycled and used for the NEA, notably *An Inspector Calls*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Lord of the Flies*. Whilst these texts are perfectly permissible for study for the NEA, students who opted to focus on these tried and tested texts tended to offer rather limited analyses, perhaps constrained by their previous study of these texts.

Short story collections remain popular, particularly *The Bloody Chamber*. Centres are reminded, however, that the study of short stories must be part of a published volume, not stories in isolation. Study of a single short story such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* or *The Speckled Band* do not meet the specification requirements for study of a substantial literary text for the NEA.

Novels were the most popular literary text choice, with fewer students opting to study poetry and drama than in previous years. Some students did focus on *Ariel*, poetry from the War poets and Grace Nichols' poetry, and one folder was based on *The Lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock*. However, moderators saw relatively few investigations focused on poetry this summer. Similarly, there were few examples of investigations based on drama texts. *A Doll's House* remains a fairly popular choice and there was some focus on various Shakespeare plays, including *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Taming of the Shrew*.

Non-literary text choices were more varied than in previous years. Moderators saw work based on memoirs, letters, documentaries and screenplays, as well as the usual focus on speeches and news articles. There was also some focus on webpages and blogs. Lyrics proved very popular this year, mainly Taylor Swift and Kendrick Lamar lyrics, and they were handled with mixed success. Where they had been carefully selected, lyrics offered scope for interesting and thoughtful study. However, often students had selected only one or two sets of lyrics, chosen mainly due to personal preference rather than to explicitly meet their investigation aims. These tended to result in quite superficial analyses with minimal focus on

relevant linguistic and contextual detail. Some students opted to work with the screenplay of an adapted novel, with *Little Women* again proving popular but also seen with *Good Omens* and some Harry Potter novels. Without exception, these texts proved very limiting as students responded to them as though they were literary texts, offering minimal discussion of genre and contextual factors. It raised the question of why the novels themselves hadn't been selected as the literary text. Centres should discourage students from working with screenplays for adapted novels.

Some students selected a range of non-literary texts to work with, and this was not a successful approach. Working with three or four lengthy articles proved to be too much for meaningful analysis alongside the literary text, leading to some descriptive comment. Some students offered a collection of different texts, such as a combination of article, speech, blog and webpage. Working with such disparate texts led to a lack of focus and resulted in some superficial analyses. There were fewer translated texts than in previous years. It is absolutely fine to study texts in translation. However, the translated nature of texts must be taken into account when analysing language use.

Where students engaged with the genre of their text choices, both literary and non-literary, exploration of textual meanings tended to be more secure and insightful. Often students hadn't fully engaged with genre conventions or contexts of production and reception. Centres are reminded that the NEA task is synoptic, and students should be encouraged to draw on learning from the whole course in the production of their investigations. The Paris Anthology is particularly helpful in illustrating how contexts and representations can contribute to meaningful exploration of textual meanings.

The Investigation

Introduction

For the Introduction section of the investigation students are required to provide an account of their literary and non-literary texts.

More successful approaches:

- referred to both the literary and non-literary texts in detail
- clearly stated the aims for their investigation in light of the investigation title
- stated which passages they had chosen for close analysis
- explained which methods they had selected for analysis.

Less successful approaches:

- provided detailed description of the literary text choice, with minimal detail about the non-literary material
- provided very brief accounts of the chosen texts to allow for more space within the Analysis section. This led to uneven distribution of the assessment criteria where it was difficult to meet the higher mark ranges for AO1
- lacked specifically defined aims. This led to some loss of focus throughout the investigation
- made no reference to passages selected for close analysis, making it very difficult to determine the main focus for the investigation
- selected methods that lacked a linguistic focus, were broad and therefore unhelpful (eg. 'lexis and semantics') or did not provide sufficient scope for detailed analysis.

Review

Secondary reading is a requirement for the investigation. Lack of secondary reading is a rubric infringement and would result in a mark of zero for AO1.

More successful approaches:

- referred to a range of sources to aid the study as a whole, eg. addressed ideas surrounding the theme, focused on specific language methods chosen for close analysis, referred to contextual factors to support discussion of the chosen theme
- offered ambitious and interesting reading of a range of sources that genuinely illuminated the focus of the investigation
- explored ideas taken from secondary sources when analysing their chosen texts.

Less successful approaches:

- referred to sources solely based on theme or the literary text
- made reference to some language methods using some basic dictionary definitions or websites such as the OED, Wikipedia, BBC Bitesize or Grammarly
- interpreted the review literally and provided reviews of their chosen texts
- treated the Review as a separate section that seemed almost detached from the investigation as a whole, referring to sources and ideas that were not then used to inform the study.

Analysis

The majority of students shaped their analyses using carefully chosen linguistic methods.

More successful approaches:

- retained a clear focus on the investigation aims and focus throughout
- selected appropriate linguistic methods in clearly phrased subheadings to allow for exploration of interesting patterns of language use in both the literary and non-literary texts
- offered thoughtful and open-minded discussion to consider textual meanings in detail for both texts, providing a balanced and even analysis
- provided carefully selected textual evidence to support their comments
- drew on ideas from secondary sources to explore textual meanings in detail
- embedded relevant contextual comment to support interpretations
- considered links and connections throughout the analysis.

Less successful approaches:

- selected some simple language features for their analysis, eg. pronouns or sentence functions. These were very limiting and led to identification of some obvious points. Students working with these simple methods struggled to engage with more subtle aspects of textual meaning
- provided broad, non-linguistic subheadings such as ‘presentation of victimhood’ or ‘presentation of a hopeless tone’ This non-linguistic approach led to descriptive responses to the texts under study
- selected subheadings that were suitable for one text but not the other, eg. focus on dialectal features in a novel when there were no dialectal examples within the non-literary material. This led to an unbalanced approach
- took a text-by-text approach that didn’t allow for careful exploration of links and connections. Links were sometimes limited to discourse markers: ‘similarly,’ ‘contrastingly,’ ‘however,’ but without further discussion

- made very few references to textual examples, sometimes limited to one short quotation for each text within each subsection. This sometimes resulted in no more than six short quotations across the entire investigation
- over-emphasised the significance of some language features, eg. second person pronouns or phonological descriptions
- provided several subsections, sometimes as many as five or six, which led to a list-like approach that lacked development of ideas.

Conclusion

The conclusion allows for links and connections to be explored and evaluated.

More successful approaches:

- reflected on salient points of comparison and contrast to consider the investigation focus and aims
- reflected on patterns of language use as well as treatment of themes and ideas and focus on contexts
- adopted an open-minded and thoughtful approach throughout.

Less successful approaches:

- provided a brief summary of main points from the analysis section without further comment
- offered undeveloped and very brief conclusions that did not add any additional information to the report
- offered an evaluation of what they might have done differently if they had more time, a greater word limit etc
- offered a discussion of other texts they may have also looked at. This did not add to the discussion of the texts actually under study.

Moderators noted that some students tended to approach the investigation in a disconnected way, producing each section separately without considering how the whole report would fit together. The best investigations were cohesive, with each section building on and developing ideas to produce a well-structured, organised investigation.

Assessment Criteria

AO1

There was some over-rewarding of marks this year for AO1. This was often the case where students had provided a useful account of their chosen texts but not provided clear aims for their investigations, or where there was only a very minimal discussion of passages chosen for close analysis. Students who had offered a clear rationale for their choices offered more controlled and well-structured investigations.

There was also some over-rewarding where secondary sources were made relevant to the topic or literary text but were not particularly useful in exploring methods within the analysis. More carefully selected secondary sources allowed students to engage with complexities of linguistic methods which then allowed them to explore textual meanings more subtly, thus impacting AO2.

A02

Most students offered even discussion of their chosen texts, but there were still instances where the literary text was favoured over the non-literary material, and this led to an uneven approach, making it difficult to attain marks in the higher mark ranges. This was particularly the case where subheadings were chosen that focused on only one text.

As with previous years, students who had selected linguistic methods carefully and thoughtfully tended to offer more insightful discussion of textual meanings. Some features, such as pronouns, offered little scope for interesting discussion. Similarly, very broad headings led to some very descriptive responses.

Again, as seen in previous years, some students offered few textual examples in their analyses, and this led to some laboured and often unconvincing discussion of meanings. There was some mistaking of lengthy explanations for thorough and detailed analysis.

A03

This year saw some thoughtful discussion of relevant contextual factors, but this AO was the most over-rewarded. Whilst there was some focus on social, historical or political factors, there was less focus on genre.

Many students selected their non-literary material for the content and link to the chosen theme and overlooked important aspects of genre, mode and contexts of production and reception. Similarly, there tended to be fairly limited discussion of genre of novels, with some students noting the Gothic, dystopian or bildungsroman genre of their chosen texts, but many students overlooked this completely.

Moderators continued to see some very broad contextual comment, such as sweeping comments about gendered roles. Not all women in the Victorian era or the 1950s were the same or had the same experiences.

A04

The NEA task is structured around Making Connections and this needs to be clearly addressed throughout the investigation.

Most students were aware of the need to make links between their texts and had carefully chosen their texts with this in mind. However, some students assumed that the topic and text choice was sufficient to signal these connections and did not explore them further. Students adopting a text-by-text approach didn't explore links fully, and there were many missed opportunities to consider some interesting points of comparison and similarity. Stronger responses explored thematic, language and contextual links in depth and throughout the investigation.

The conclusion section was often a discriminator of students' competence with AO4: developed conclusions showed engagement with subtle links, whilst at the lower end conclusions were frequently brief and simply provided a potted summary of the analysis section.

Marking

Marking was mostly detailed, with close reference made to the assessment criteria. Some centres had produced their own internal mark sheets which were very helpful in illustrating how final marks were awarded. Marginal annotation was often very detailed, but in some cases, annotation simply listed AOs in the margin; this does not indicate levels of attainment, and it would be useful to have some comment about the quality of work for the different AOs. Whilst positive points were noted in marginal annotation and within the body of the investigation, errors were frequently ignored. It is important for centres to indicate any errors within work, particularly with application of terminology, as this makes it clear that all aspects of the work have been taken into account when awarding final marks.

There was clear evidence of internal moderation in the vast majority of centres, and this is important to ensure parity of marking across a centre. Some centres showed very little evidence of internal moderation, sometimes limited to a second teacher's initials on the work and no further comment. Some centres showed no evidence at all of having completed internal moderation. This is mandatory for the non-exam assessment and centres should ensure that all marking within a centre has been standardised.

Where centres had referenced the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) materials, marking was the most securely marked. The TOLS folders should be referenced to ensure the required standards for marking are being applied.

Administration

Most folders were carefully put together. In some cases, data was not included or was in the form of thumbnail images that were illegible. Centres should make sure that students provide copies of all extracts and materials used for close analysis. As a reminder the NEA folder includes:

- Investigation
- References (not an extended bibliography)
- Appendices, to include all data used for the investigation.
- For the literary text, this should be copies of the extracts that have been chosen for close analysis.
- Photocopies should be for the extracts only.
- Notes about start and end points within a text are not sufficient.
- Full texts should not be submitted.
- For the non-literary material, this should be copies of all texts used: printouts of any texts taken from online sources, transcripts of any spoken data, and photocopies of any print-based data.
- Folders should be secured using treasury tags, not stapled or put into folders.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.