



A-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7702/C NEA: Language in action
Report on the NEA

7702/C
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The NEA submissions for this series were closer to what we saw in 2017-2019 and it was good to find that most folders were complete and students had been given opportunities to range widely in their choices for both aspects of the NEA.

As with previous years, this report should be read in conjunction with ones from other series, so that key themes and the most useful lessons can be drawn for future series.

It should also be noted that further advice and help for next year's submission of NEA can be obtained from your centre's **NEA adviser**. Your exams officer will be emailed in September or October 2023 to inform them of the identity of the centre's NEA adviser and their contact details. It is especially important to make contact with your NEA adviser if marks have been adjusted this year and/or comment has been made on the centre feedback form about problems with any of the work submitted. If you do not receive information about an NEA adviser early next term, please contact the AQA advice team.

Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) folders are made freely available through AQA Centre Services each year (usually in October/November) and these provide a benchmark for assessment as well as detailed marking commentaries to help you with marking and moderation of your own centre's work.

Language investigations overview

It was good to see a varied range of topics being investigated and different methodologies being used. Ones noted as being particularly interesting or original this year included Nike's use language in branding, the nuances of Singlish, representations of BLM campaigns, the language of wedding vows in different cultures and traditions, use of American and British dialects in sports commentaries, the representation of ideal families over time in OXO advertisements, the self-representation of black women, the language of Eurovision presenters and representation of migration and migrants in different newspapers.

Language investigations: what works and what doesn't

Moderators noted a number of patterns in successful work this summer. Investigations that used the following approaches were often more successful than not:

- Clearly formulated and succinctly stated linguistic aims
- A realistic and manageable focus for the investigation (rather than too many, or too disparate a set of, aims)
- A methodology that reflected on the reasons for the data selection (ie why this text and not that text, why this respondent and not another, why these variables and not others)
- Subheadings in the analysis chosen by the student for their own particular research question and analytical methods (rather than a generic, whole centre, set of subheadings for every student)
- Clear exemplification of data in the analysis section
- Contextualised quotations from the data
- Clustering together of extracts from the data to examine patterns
- If appropriate to the task, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods (eg counting the frequency of certain key language features alongside close focus on how some of these were used in context)
- Mini-corpus approaches that allow students to identify patterns on a larger scale and then drill into more specific textual details in context

- Well-chosen and synthesised analytical methods
- Analysis across text and discourse structures, identifying and exploring patterns, going beyond identification of just individual word classes
- Reflective and evaluative analysis
- Open-minded and tentative conclusions
- Making use of targeted and personalised reading to support AO2 (eg going beyond the theorists and research studies used for exam components to find the most relevant and suitable material to inform their own studies)
- A line of argument through the project and a clear project design
- Clear conclusions and references

It was really encouraging to see students from many centres perhaps picking up on previous years' advice (or perhaps drawing on their own wider reading or the support of their teachers) to make use of recent work by linguists such as Gretchen McCulloch, Amanda Cole, Devyani Sharma, Rob Drummond, Elena Semino and Robbie Love and we would encourage this more widely.

Moderators tend to identify the same problem areas each year and these are really best avoided:

- Applying theories from spoken language to written texts (eg Grice, Goffman, Lakoff, Tannen)
- Applying theories from spoken language to online communication when there are more appropriate and mode-specific studies and ideas that can be used
- Applying very generalised readings of (often outdated and/or contested) research into gender to data where other factors are much more salient: please check previous years' reports for suggestions about useful and up-to-date resources for this
- Using data that is not in English (eg translated speeches) without proper consideration of the fact these are in translation
- Over-reliance on the significance of pronouns: students need to ask "What else could have been used here instead of a pronoun?" before deciding that the use of "I", "you" or "we" offers any significance
- Choosing a purely quantitative approach to data analysis (ie counting linguistic features). This is unlikely to be acceptable as it will not allow students to access the AO3 part of the mark scheme where meanings and representations in contexts are credited
- Song lyrics can often be a big problem; they are not always written by the performer, are often part of a broader art form (song writing) and should not always be taken at face value
- Reliance on surveys and questionnaires can be a problem. The data from questionnaires – particularly when it's purely numerical data – is hard to analyse in a way that allows AO3 or AO1 to be credited and even when the data is more attitudes-based, this often results in a more sociological study that does not allow students the chance to analyse language in depth. It is perfectly acceptable – helpful even – to use questionnaires as part of a wider methodology (for example, an identity questionnaire being used as part of a study on language variation), but using them as the main form of data gathering can be a huge pitfall for many students. Again, if in doubt, please contact your NEA adviser.

Original writing and commentary

Moderators saw some good work here and the idea of the style model and its role in the both the writing of the original piece and the commentary seems to be well understood. Some of the most effective commentaries were clearly comparative and evaluative and drew attention to the form, genre and context of the two texts (student's own and style model) that they were analysing.

As in previous years, many different forms and genres were submitted and these varied depending on how competent, convincing or creative and innovative they were judged to be. There seemed to be a few more cases of poor proofreading and/or editing in the original writing this year than previous years, and students could be advised to check their work more carefully, paying attention to things like tense consistency in narrative fiction and consistent register in opinion pieces.

Moderators again identified very similar issues to previous years, often linked to one or more of the following areas:

- Poor choice of style model. Avoid self-published, online pieces where quality control might not be strong. Check with the NEA adviser if in doubt.
- Using the commentary to describe the process of writing the piece rather than analytically comparing the two texts.
- Choosing to write in a different form to the style model. This goes against the idea of using a style model and creates problems for most who attempt it.
- Limited reference to/quotation from a style model.
- Using two style models: it must be one.
- Choosing to write in the same form and genre and on the same topic as the style model. As noted in previous reports, this rarely allows students to create an original work with a genuine sense of their own voice.
- Adopting a persona (Katie Hopkins, Donald Trump, Boris Johnson) or mixing fact and fiction (eg posing as the relative of a celebrity) in non-literary writing. This rarely works and should be avoided.
- Do not try to “script the unscriptable”: ie students should not be permitted to write something as if it is spontaneous speech. This is not a realistic task.

Marking and moderation

Most marking was accurate and the annotation from many centres was helpful, including coversheets, evidence of internal moderation and evidence of use of TOLS folders. It was good to see centres rewarding engaged and insightful analysis and original approaches to the two elements of the NEA. Do not be afraid to reward innovative and creative work highly, so long as you can support it from the descriptors on the mark scheme.

In the minority of cases where there were issues, these could normally be categorised as:

- over-rewarding investigations for AO2 where the references to ideas from language study were just brief references or namechecks rather than discussion that was linked to the data and integrated at a suitable level
- over-rewarding AO1 where there was insufficient evidence to support higher level descriptors such as the need for detail, depth or ‘establishing patterns of use and engaging with complexity’
- marking inaccurate language descriptions as correct
- over-rewarding AO2 where methodologies were weak, undeveloped or where there had been little discussion of why data had been selected
- over-rewarding original writing as either ‘convincing’ (Level 4) or ‘creative and innovative’ (Level 5) when it was – at best – ‘competent’ (Level 3). One of the key questions to ask at the top level is if the student has managed to create work that has developed a voice of its own or is simply an effective or skilful replica of the style model. Too many pieces were credited in Level 5 this year when they were more suitable in Levels 3 or 4, especially when there were basic errors in the writing.

Folders and submissions

Please make sure the folders are laid out and organised into the right sections and avoiding unnecessary inclusions of extra material. We do not need drafts of work or extended appendices. Work for each student in the sample needs to be secured (so not loose sheets):

- Hole punch and treasury tag the work for ease of access.
- Do not use staples or plastic wallets.
- Please put work in the right order in the folder: relevant signed cover sheets, language investigation (and data), references/bibliography, original writing, commentary, annotated style model, references.
- Please make sure all paperwork is signed and enclosed.
- Please make sure the word count declarations are honest and accurate. 10% leeway is fine for word count but 50-100% over is not.

Annotation, comments and moderation notes are all helpful ways of allowing moderators to see the thinking behind each centre's marking decisions and so are welcomed. It is much harder to agree a centre's marks if the decisions are opaque or unexplained. Some suggestions are offered here about good practice seen this year:

- formative annotation that indicates not just where an AO has been met but at which level (eg AO1 L4)
- formative annotation that comments on the work both positively and negatively, identifying errors or areas that could be further developed alongside achievements that can be credited
- summative comments that reference the mark scheme's wording and interpret this in relation to the work seen
- summative comments that reference the work in the TOLS folders (eg "Close to TOLS folder 4 for AO1 but higher for AO2")
- clear moderation comments that explain why certain marks might have been changed

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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