



## **General Certificate of Secondary Education**

### **English/English Literature**

**3702/3712**

*Specification A*

**3702/3712/CR Coursework (Reading & Writing)**

## **Report on the Examination**

*2007 examination - June series*

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## Principal Moderator's Report

Moderators reported with some consistency that moderation had been a largely smooth process this year and that it was only in a minority of centres that any adjustments to centre marks were recommended. This is probably to be expected as centres become accustomed to the specification. Advice given in previous Principal Moderator reports and at the Autumn Teacher Standardisation Meetings is being followed to the benefit of candidates and the moderation process. The amount of work for centres involved in standardisation and conducting the administration of coursework is not underestimated by the moderating team, and it is a considerable tribute to the professionalism of English departments across the length and breadth of the land that a process involving a huge number of candidates is completed so effectively.

Where there is a disagreement between moderator and centre about standards, the issue is often the quality of task setting. In previous reports there has been a focus on the need for thoughtful, effective task setting and moderators have reported improvements in the ways centres are setting tasks which address the assessment criteria. However in some centres there is still work to be done. Moderators find high marks awarded for responses which simply do not address key criteria, often because the task has not pointed the candidates in the right direction. This can be in any of the coursework pieces: responses to Shakespeare or Post-1914 Drama texts which show no evidence of engagement with writer's use of language, with the structure of the text or with the dramatic nature of the text; tasks based on prose texts which invite exhaustive retellings of the plot rather than analysis of the writer's craft; and En3 tasks generating responses to media which seem to have a focus on En2 rather than En3. It cannot be repeated too often that coursework tasks should be shaped by the teacher's knowledge of both the candidates and the assessment criteria.

Moderators expressed surprise at some of the tasks which are given to candidates operating at the lower end of the mark range: a task based on *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* inviting candidates to explore the 'duality of human nature' does not seem particularly appropriate for candidates aspiring to Grades F and E. Candidates for whom the achievement of Grades G,F and E would be a positive result may benefit from an approach to En2/Literature in which they respond to bullet points targeted at different assessment criteria – such as 'personal response' - rather than sweeping essay titles. Centres' attempts to guide candidates through complex essay titles have led to an over-reliance on writing frames in some cases. It may be better, for some lower ability candidates to move away from the extended essay form, instead to ask them to respond to a series of bullet points which address the range of assessment criteria.

In the best centres moderators see consistently well-focused tasks used across a department. In recent reports there has been an emphasis on the importance of wording tasks helpfully, using a phrase such as 'How does the writer...?' but, as one moderator pointed out this year, it is obviously the teacher's preparation of the task which is crucial. Sometimes candidates respond to 'How?' titles by listing techniques without much real engagement with the text and certainly no 'personal response'. Extremely good responses to a title that seems unhelpful – 'Shylock: hero or villain?' – came from a centre in which candidates engaged confidently with the text in ways which clearly addressed appropriate assessment criteria concerning language and structure. Responses to that title which become simple character study would not meet

assessment criteria such as those in the 37 – 42 range which detail ‘characterisation, structure and theatricality’ as well as Shakespeare’s ‘use of linguistic devices’, but where candidates are made aware of those assessment criteria they can explore an argument and engage with the writer’s techniques.

Moderators sometimes report varying practice within single centres: one moderator commented on centres ‘where best and worst practice could rub shoulders frustratingly’. Certainly moderators have wondered how effectively information in Principal Moderator reports and from teacher standardisation meetings is disseminated in some centres. NQTs and staff new to the specification would benefit from access to a department library of previous reports, standardisation materials with commentaries and the variety of training materials which have been released in recent years, such as advice on drama tasks, improving reading and writing.

Many moderators reported a feeling that annotation of candidates’ work was improving but it remains an aspect of coursework which needs developing in some centres. The key audience for annotation of the work in the sample is the moderator. The purpose of annotation for the moderator is not to show how enthusiastically the marker has responded to the candidate’s work, it is to indicate why a particular mark has been awarded. In the best centres concise marginalia followed by a brief summative comment provides guidance for the moderator; the annotation describes the marker’s thinking about how and where in the response appropriate assessment criteria have been met. In some centres different teachers seem to have different approaches to annotation, some much less effective than others. Moderators are reassured by the consistency of approach they find in the majority of centres. Moderators, in rare cases, find no annotation at all. More frequently they encounter a lot of annotation the validity of which they question. As was mentioned in last year’s report, words like ‘language’ or ‘context’ appear in margins with little regard for how assessment criteria have been met. Where a candidate quotes, for example, it is meaningless to place ‘language’ in the margin; where a candidate writes down some biographical information about a writer it is pointless to draw the attention of the moderator to ‘context’ unless the information is clearly informing the analysis.

The problems of plagiarism have been highlighted in previous reports. It is pleasing to note that fewer instances have been reported this year, suggesting that centres have developed approaches to both preventing and weeding out Internet plagiarism. The strong advice given in the last two reports should be followed: centres must do all they can to stop Internet ‘cutting and pasting’ in the first place and to deal with it appropriately when they find it. Occasionally moderators receive work from centres in which teacher annotation acknowledges plagiarism but the work is still marked and submitted. Annotation which states “I’m not convinced that all of this is your own work” followed by the award of a mark only confuses. If plagiarism is found, work should be withdrawn prior to the submission of coursework marks to AQA. It is only in a tiny minority of cases that moderators find bibliographies at the end of candidates’ assignments. It would be very helpful if candidates were instructed to list the resources they had used, especially Internet resources.

The impression of moderators was that there has been more oral assessment of En2 / Literature by centres this year and less confusion about which assessment criteria to apply. There are still some instances of En1 criteria being applied but it has been far

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less of a problem this year than previously. Good task setting is as important in oral assessment as in written coursework. One moderator reported that the most positive task setting they saw was in Special Education: work they had done using an oral approach to assessing Prose and Shakespeare. The ability of the teacher to ask probing questions which built on the initially limited responses of the students to a stimulus question meant that their knowledge and understanding of texts was genuinely laid bare – and found to be significantly higher than would have been the case if they had only written about the task.

## Shakespeare

*Romeo and Juliet* has become the most widely used text and it seems to have become a play of two scenes – Act 3, Scene 1 and Act 3, Scene 5. Successful candidates comment on the structure and importance of the chosen scene and explore language and layers of meaning. Where they comment in a rather basic way about events and characters they are less successful. The best responses to single scenes explore a writer at work and reveal an awareness of the dramatic nature of the text. There has been much less interpretation of ‘stagecraft’ being about music, costume and lighting – the kinds of responses in which candidates draw pictures of stage sets and costumes – but moderators still report that in many centres candidates could be better guided to explore aspects of stagecraft such as contrast and the structure of character interaction.

Despite guidance in previous reports, moderators are still finding tasks which begin ‘Who is responsible for...’ They find very formulaic responses: candidates write extended lists following a frame which guides them through the Nurse’s responsibility, then the Friar’s, then Capulet’s, then Fate’s... Candidates certainly need guidance about structuring their responses to texts but the problem with ‘Who is responsible?’ and use of a writing frame is that it seems to lead to candidates writing about *Romeo and Juliet* as though it were real life rather than a drama written to entertain an audience. It would be a more interesting and helpful assignment if candidates explored how the demands of drama – the need to entertain an audience and to compress time, for example – shape a complex and often ambiguous notion of responsibility.

Some particularly interesting work was seen based on *Othello*: in one centre candidates produced theatre programmes for a production of the play. With poor guidance this task can lead to candidates producing mountains of computer-generated, expensively-colour-printed lists, but this centre gave clear guidance to candidates which enabled them to address very high assessment criteria: a section on ‘Director’s Notes’ enabled candidates to explore stagecraft, and actors’ notes on playing particular characters led to close analysis on textual detail. The highest achieving candidates were also able to include notes from an invented Professor of English Literature about themes and context. The task was an impressive alternative to the traditional essay and had clearly motivated candidates in the centre.

But moderators sometimes find ‘different’ approaches to texts which simply do not work. Writing a ‘modern day’ version of *Romeo and Juliet* does little to address key assessment criteria for En2/Lit.

Approaches to the contexts vary. Irrelevant and endless descriptions of the Globe Theatre are still encountered by moderators but there is a growing and welcome

tendency to embed relevant contextual detail concisely in responses. Candidates writing about Shylock, for example, often successfully explore the cultural and historical context of anti-Semitism – the nature of the play seems to lead to genuine rather than pretend engagement with the contexts.

## Prose Study

The most widely used texts are *Great Expectations*, *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Perhaps in response to last year's reports there seemed to be fewer irrelevant potted biographies of Charles Dickens and assertions about C19th society. The best responses touched concisely and appropriately on, for example, crime and punishment in C19th Britain by making a few brief remarks about Dickens' presentation of Magwitch in Chapter 1 of *Great Expectations* rather than beginning an essay with a lengthy project on criminality in C19th Britain.

As is the case with responses to Shakespeare, the best writing about prose texts was in response to carefully considered tasks. Tasks which invited candidates to explore authors' techniques by close examination of parts of texts worked best although some of the poorest responses come from candidates who explore techniques with no sense that they have engaged with the narrative: there is little point in analysis of language divorced from the situation it is being used to create and develop. Higher achieving candidates developed quite complex arguments in response to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and *Frankenstein* although at least one moderator found some candidates confusing the narrative of the film of *Frankenstein* with the novel.

## Media

There was further evidence this year of the general improvement in centres' approach to this component of coursework. Most centres now appreciate the importance of focusing on En3 criteria and have created assignments in which candidates respond concisely to media texts with a clear sense of audience and purpose. Analytical essays are most successful when there is an issue to be explored and least successful when they become an exercise in technique spotting. A quite common assignment based on the opening of *Saving Private Ryan* seems often to lead to overlong essays which list and repeat rather than develop. Judicious use of technical language is to be encouraged but candidates who treat the media assignment as an opportunity for endless technical trawling end up writing poorly-structured essays.

There were some concerns about the brevity of some reviews. Persistent advice about the desirability of concise forms of writing has been followed in most centres but occasionally it has led to very thin responses as candidates write reviews for a 'teen' audience. Reviews should always have an element of analysis, otherwise they tend to become based upon description of plot and character, and lack substance.

Moderators read some very good responses to a variety of films, programmes and adverts. Amongst them they commented on a particularly good critical comparison of two quiz shows – *The Weakest Link* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*; an analysis of the use of black and white used in Pleasantville, using specific scenes to illustrate the argument; the portrayal of Nazis in two films. The reason the last assignment on that list was successful was because it gave a clear focus for comparison, rather than simply

inviting the candidate to compare two of something. Moderators found, however, examples of candidates responding to two or more texts for no good reason. There is very little merit in writing reviews of two films rather than one unless there is a reason based upon audience and style.

### **Original Writing**

There are signs of development in Original Writing. Several moderators reported that they had found more evidence of a focus on the craft of writing and fewer instances of long unshaped stories or Work Experience reports. Some gifted candidates responded with great enthusiasm and skill to quite challenging tasks – Bill Bryson pastiches, for example – whereas some very able young writers seemed to be placed in a straitjacket by following a rigid writing frame. Moderators are aware of the need for some kind of supporting frame for some kinds of candidates, but from their position of being able to compare work from a range of centres, they see the often very dull responses which emerge from writing frames.

Some interesting prequels to *Of Mice and Men* were seen this year, a reminder to centres that integration of the different elements of the course(s) is fruitful.

### **Post-1914 Drama**

*An Inspector Calls*, *The Crucible*, *A View from the Bridge* are the most common texts. There is some feeling in the moderating team that centres may not have developed tasks in response to Post-1914 Drama as successfully as with Shakespeare: there seems to be more simple character study and less focus on drama. The Miller plays seem to more successfully provoke a diversity of response, often very personal and engaged, than *An Inspector Calls*, but it depends on the task. Responses about dramatic effects in *An Inspector Calls* often fail to rise above fairly obvious remarks about how the lighting changes. The lack of subtlety in some candidates' writing may be explained by their treating the text as a slice of real life rather than engaging with its dramatic nature.

## Administration

The vast majority of centres handles the administration of coursework in an exemplary way: deadlines are met; Candidate Record Forms and Centre Declaration Forms are completed and signed; marks are correctly recorded. The efforts centres make to ensure the smooth process of the summer moderation are greatly appreciated.

Where things go wrong there are often extenuating circumstances. There is some evidence that in very small centres teachers working on their own have uncertainties about the requirements of the specification and its administration. It is worthwhile reminding centres that in addition to the Subject Administration team at AQA they have a coursework adviser to whom they can turn for advice. It would be very desirable for small centres to establish contact informally with a neighbouring large centre.

There are some seemingly insignificant aspects of coursework administration which create problems for moderators. It is very important to moderators that centres follow the instruction to place an asterisk next to the names of candidates with incomplete folders. Moderators need to identify the highest and lowest **complete** folders for their coursework sample and they quite often find that the lowest folder they have requested is actually incomplete. They then have to contact the school again to get the lowest complete folder. It is very time consuming and delays the moderation process.

The other aspect of administration which seems to be problematic concerns the carbonised Centre Mark Forms. Moderators occasionally receive bottom copies of these which are impossible to read, often because a mistake has been made on the top copy and corrected on this copy without reference to what this looks like on the bottom two copies. Centres are asked to cast an eye over the lower copies they send off to make sure that they are legible.

Administrative problems, where they occur, really only become an issue for a few weeks at the end of the course and must not be overstated. The overwhelming evidence of this year has been of clear improvements in task setting and, consequently, candidate response. Now that the starting date for new specifications in English has been postponed until 2010, centres may wish to discuss within their English departments how they can refresh and adapt existing approaches to coursework for the continuing development of their candidates' enthusiasms and results.