



GCSE

English Literature

8702/2 Modern texts and poetry

Report on the Examination

June 2025

Version: 1.0

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Summary

Overall performance compared to last year

It has been very heartening to see significant progress in many areas since last year. The teaching of this specification is clearly now very well embedded in centres. Many examiners noted improvements in areas raised in previous Reports on the Examination, commenting for example that they saw more focus on ideas and methods in responses.

Students overall responded with verve and enthusiasm to the 2025 paper. It was often obvious to examiners that students had enjoyed studying the set texts and were keen to share their interpretations.

Areas where students excelled

- There was abundant evidence of candidates being carefully and diligently prepared for this paper. Senior examiners were consistently impressed by students' knowledge of the set texts and their ability to draw on that knowledge to support their responses.
- Engagement with the questions was generally strong across the board. Many candidates demonstrated that they can not only include a thesis statement, but draw on it throughout their response in order to maintain focus.
- Students' responses to Question 28.1 on unseen poetry were a real highlight of their scripts. Across the levels there were many examples of sensitive, thoughtful, mature responses, which showed admirable insight and excellent preparation.
- Examiners reported seeing more fluent responses with more personal interpretations of texts, in keeping with the spirit of the specification.
- Timekeeping in this long exam was again a real strength. If anything, there was even more evidence this year of candidates dividing their time appropriately between the different questions.

Areas where students struggled

- There was a marked increase in students attempting to incorporate critical theory into their responses. More often than not this was done in a clunky and bolt-on way which hindered rather than helped students to answer the question. Only a minority managed to make it relevant to the point they were making, or relate it to a specific moment in the text.
- A significant minority of students used terminology without an understanding of how to comment on its effect or importance, which meant it added little to their responses. For

example, many identified 'asyndetic listing', sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly, but without going on to say anything about its effect in relation to the question.

- Examiners remained concerned about the effect of unhelpful information on social media. Indeed, it may be that this contributed to some of the concerns expressed above. Students are advised that, as with all online information, the quality of advice offered online about this subject varies greatly and they should trust reliable sources – like their teachers – above influencers.
- In Question 28.2, a noticeable number of students fell short of the promise they showed in earlier Sections.

Assessment objectives

AO	
AO1 Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response. • Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.	AO1 overall was a notable strength. In many cases students demonstrated an excellent understanding of the texts and were able to embed textual details fluidly to illustrate their points. In addition to the usual 'high-frequency' quotations that we have come to know and expect over the years, it was good to see more candidates exploring and embedding other key references to the text in some very interesting and creative ways. In the lower levels students tended to drop in quotations without pausing to explain the precise inference or significance before moving into analysis. There was an improvement in maintaining focus on the question across all sections, with fewer essays straying into general narrative recall. Although there was an overall improvement, some still struggled to craft a sustained line of argument underpinned by a big idea or abstract concept, which is important for reaching the top levels. A minority of responses were overly reliant on pre-learned introductions - for instance, referring to <i>An Inspector Calls</i> as a 'didactic morality play' - without genuine exploration, which limited the adaptability of their argument to the specific question. Previous reports have mentioned the benefits for students of pausing before they begin their response, and planning a line of argument. They can then set this out in their introduction, and let it guide the rest of their response. Although many more students are doing this, others would still benefit from doing so. It was clear to examiners that, perhaps counter-intuitively, many students would benefit from writing less, but planning what they do write more tightly.

	As always, the best advice for students in this subject is to know the text well and answer the question as precisely as they can; everything else flows from this.
AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.	Students' grasp of the breadth of what constitutes writers' methods has shown improvement year on year. More students appear to be aware that things like characterisation are part of AO2, and their responses are better for it. Encouraging students to adopt this broader understanding of methods, encompassing sequencing of events, motifs, symbolism, setting and many more things besides, can unlock far richer analytical responses. When candidates recognise that everything crafted by the writer is a purposeful technique, they are better positioned to engage in thoughtful, original interpretation, often elevating their work into the higher levels. Students are most successful when discussing methods that they fully understand, and which help them to answer the question, and this often led to some beautiful analysis. But too often students are peppering their responses with techniques they don't understand. This can detract from responses, and teachers and students are encouraged to keep it simple. Putting words under the microscope has a place, but it can lead to stilted writing that moves away from the task, especially if students struggle to write about effects or to link these to writers' ideas and intentions.
AO3 Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.	Teachers have evidently encouraged students to consider context in a much wider sense: in the context of ideas, driven by the question focus; in the context of the whole text; in the context of the genre and so on. This approach to task is welcomed and well-rewarded. In some instances it led to insightful, developed discussions, very firmly rooted in the text. For example, in <i>An Inspector Calls</i> many candidates understood that ideas of power could mean more than Mr and Mrs Birling appearing to hold power,

	unlike Eva and Edna. A number of students explored power dynamics through gender, work and pay, and even housing, comparing the substantial suburban house of 'a prosperous manufacturer' to those living in 'dingy little back bedrooms'. Where students wrote less effectively, they resorted to a discussion of, for example, Golding's careers in the Navy and teaching as his inspirations for his ideas on goodness and innate evil, or a rather unfocussed list of key figures from the Russian Revolution in the case of <i>Animal Farm</i>. A growing number of responses included references to critical interpretations, such as feminist, Marxist, or Freudian readings. While some of these were explained clearly, they were not always applied in a way that was relevant to the specific question. In many cases, they appeared to be pre-learned ideas added regardless of task focus, and therefore did not significantly enhance the quality of the response. Most candidates seemed not to really understand what they were writing. Overall, the most successful approaches to AO3 were those that demonstrated a secure understanding of context and used it purposefully to enrich interpretation, rather than treating it as an add-on or separate component. AO3 ultimately, of course, is just about answering the question.
AO4 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.	A number of common subject-specific terms—such as simile and metaphor—were frequently misspelled, which detracted from the overall accuracy of otherwise competent work. In several scripts, key names—including Priestley—were rendered in creative and surprising ways. Where students had taken a little time to plan their responses, and allowed a little time at the end to proofread them, AO4 was most often successful. Where candidates rush to get started, and appeared to want to write as much as possible rather than focus their ideas on the question, AO4 sometimes suffered.

Individual sections

Section A – Modern texts

What students did well

An Inspector Calls continues to be the most popular text in Section A by some distance, and it still inspires, engages and leads to engaging responses across the board. Question 2, on power in *An Inspector Calls* proved accessible for all. Many candidates selected a wide range of relevant examples and maintained a strong focus on the theme, often developing their ideas with clarity and insight. The question on Sheila and Gerald, while sometimes handled expertly, in the lower levels of the mark scheme tended to lapse into narrative recall.

There were some excellent responses to *Lord of the Flies*, where the question on Simon's character facilitated a focus on Golding's intentions for writing the text and opened an interesting debate for candidates about atavism and the illness of mankind. Examiners were particularly pleased to see some very creditable responses to this year's new texts. In responses on *My Name is Leon*, discussion of food as a motif and of Carol as a foil to Maureen led to interesting AO2 ideas in many responses. Candidates who wrote about *Leave Taking* generally showed empathy towards the characters and an awareness of the cultural and generational tensions within the play, while there were some sensitive and nuanced responses to Princess's dreams in *Princess & The Hustler*.

Common misunderstandings

Students were more successful when they thought about the question for themselves, and went beyond repeating ideas that had been discussed in class or which they had seen online. Some of the same ideas cropped up again and again in relation to power in *An Inspector Calls*, including thoughts about the 'well-bred young man', references to the Titanic, ideas about golf and Sheila using the words 'mummy' and 'mother'. None of them are problematic in and of themselves, but some students struggled to relate them to the question.

A number of examiners commented that students' responses on the three new texts were more individual and personal than responses on other texts, perhaps because there are fewer online resources for them to regurgitate!

Section B – Poetry anthology

What students did well

Power and Conflict was the most popular choice of anthology. Students of all abilities engaged with the ideas in 'Exposure', including the power of nature, patriotism, despair, isolation, and a wide range of human emotion. The most successful responses started with a 'big idea' from the poem, such as the horrific nature of trench warfare, and then selected the methods that Owen used to explore this idea. Less successful responses tended to focus mainly on the weather conditions but that still gave them plenty to write about. The most popular second poem was 'Remains' followed by 'Bayonet Charge' and 'Storm on the Island'. All choices of comparison were best served by students having a clear idea from the beginning of their essays as to why these poems were similar or different, and this often hinged upon a very clear interpretation of what conflict meant in the context of each poem. Even the more unusual choices were well answered when candidates had a clear idea about this in their minds.

In Love and relationships, natural choices to compare with 'Follower' included 'Mother, any distance', 'Before You Were Mine', 'Walking Away' and 'Climbing My Grandfather'. There were some beautiful responses in which the students understood the heartache that comes with significant life changes involving close relatives. Some students also selected 'Eden Rock' which led to some sensitive, thoughtful links.

Students who had studied the new Worlds and lives anthology responded really well to the question about how places affect people's lives and to the set poem 'In a London Drawingroom'. Responses demonstrated real engagement with how the environment one is in affects wellbeing and mood. It would appear that students had grasped and taken to heart the spirit and the message of this cluster. Other poems most widely chosen were 'Homing', 'With Birds You're Never Lonely' and 'Shall earth no more inspire thee'. All worked well and made for some thoughtful and interesting comparisons. It was very encouraging to see the depth of knowledge in students' responses to these poems in this first year of their inclusion on the specification.

Common misunderstandings

The choice of the comparative poem is critical to the success, complexity, and coherence of the response. In Love and relationships some poems, such as 'Porphyria's Lover', proved difficult. In Power and conflict many students who chose to compare 'Exposure' with 'Storm on the Island' then wrote about the weather in each but they were often less successful in trying to write about conflict in Northern Ireland. In Worlds and lives less, successful responses tended to focus a little too heavily on the Industrial Revolution from a historical standpoint, rather than using this knowledge as context to respond to the question.

One area for improvement across the poetry responses was the tendency to overuse single word analysis. Candidates often spent several sentences discussing the effect of a single verb or noun, rather than stepping back to consider the broader literary techniques or underlying

ideas being conveyed. This focus on micro-analysis sometimes came at the expense of more developed interpretations of meaning and method.

Centres are reminded that there is no requirement for students to write an integrated comparison, where both poems are compared throughout the response. While some are able to handle this very successfully, for others it leads to forced comparisons and rather hinders their flow. It's absolutely fine for students to introduce the nature of their comparison in their introduction, write about one poem then the other, and then draw their ideas together in their conclusion.

Section C – Unseen poetry

What students did well

'Table' proved an extremely accessible poem, with almost all students able to show at least some understanding of its themes and ideas. At the higher levels there was enormous sensitivity and insight; students could articulate that the 'dents' and 'burns,' rather than just showing the table to be 'worn' and 'over used,' instead captured the history of the family. They understood that the intrusion of the 'elbowing corners' actually reminded the poet of the importance of family and that the piece of furniture was an ever-present nostalgic reminder of love linked to family life and the children who had grown up around it. Many students, at all levels, wrote with genuine engagement and considerable emotional intelligence. In a world where sitting round the family dining table may or may not be as common as in days gone by, students fared really well with this poem in terms of understanding the situation and emotions therein. Even at the lower levels of the mark scheme, most students could still understand the love and life embedded in the table.

In Question 28.2 most students made relevant references to the second poem, though precision and depth varied. For some candidates this was an opportunity to show their considerable skill in poetry analysis. They were able to deftly and succinctly compare the methods used in both poems in a way which was extremely impressive given the time constraints. The best responses tended to compare, for example, the speakers, the tone, the symbolism and the effects.

Common misunderstandings

A recurring issue in Question 28.1 was 'technique spotting', where students listed features without exploring their effect or relevance. This often hindered the development of more thoughtful interpretations. Responses at Level 2, in particular, tended to summarise the poem's content rather than analyse its meaning, occasionally overlooking the figurative dimensions. Examiners sometimes reported coming to the end of a student's lengthy response, but concluding they didn't really know whether the student had understood the poem because they didn't take the time to zoom out and look at the bigger picture of what the writer is saying.

With Question 28.2, although AO2 is the only assessment focus, this still doesn't mean that students should 'technique spot'. It is impossible to analyse in a vacuum. Instead the focus should be on how the poets construct meaning. In other words, it's about focusing on how the methods help the poet to communicate their ideas.

While some students showed an impressive range of technical knowledge, they should aim to discuss only those techniques they fully understand and can analyse in context. For example, vague or unsupported references to a 'semantic field' added little when not explored with clarity or purpose.

Advice for students

- The best advice we can give you to prepare for this subject remains to know the texts well and answer the question as precisely as you can. There are all sorts of tips online, many of them questionable. The truth is that the students who do best know their texts inside out and use their knowledge to construct a compelling argument in response to the question.
- Examiners are interested in what you have to say about the texts you've studied: not your teachers, not your friends and not any online influencers, though of course those interpretations may shape yours. So, think hard about the question, tailor the points you want to make to the question asked, and write about the things that interest you in relation to the question and the text.
- Linked to this, it's a good idea to write about things that you really understand. If there are techniques or theories that you can name, but you don't feel confident discussing how and why a writer has used them, it's probably better to leave them out and just focus on giving your thoughts in relation to the question.
- There is no requirement to write a certain amount, and sometimes very long answers can lack focus. Don't be tempted to think that the more you write, the better! Time spent planning at the start, and proofreading at the end, is often more helpful than spending every minute writing your response.
- Analysing individual words can be effective, but don't let that be at the expense of considering the big ideas about what an author is saying through their text. Zooming in can be effective, so long as you also zoom out!
- In Section B the choice of second poem is the most important decision, and can make or break your response. Again, knowing the poems well will help make sure you choose a second poem with interesting, meaningful links.
- Also in Section B, you can structure your response however you and your teacher see fit. There is no requirement to compare poems all the way through, and sometimes that can lead to comparisons that feel a bit shoehorned. It's often a good idea to introduce your second poem and the nature of the comparison in your introduction, then write about each poem separately, and then draw your comparisons together at the end of your response.
- In Question 28.1 examiners want to hear your interpretation of the poem. There aren't many marks for just spotting techniques like similes or alliteration. The most successful candidates go on to link these to the big ideas of the poem.
- We know that Question 28.2 can be hard. Your focus should be on how the poets construct the poems to create meaning. In other words, your response should be led by

poets' methods, while also considering how those methods have helped the poet get their point across. Remember that the question will give you a steer about meaning.

- Above all we know that you have interesting, thoughtful, original things to say about the texts you have studied, and we want you to enjoy saying them. Advice about how to do well in this exam can sometimes seem confusing and contradictory. To end where we started, if you know the texts well and just focus on answering the question you can't go too far wrong.

Further support

Mark ranges and award of grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [results statistics](#) page of our website.

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Our friendly team will be happy to support you between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 0161 957 7504

Email (GCSE): english-gcse@aqa.org.uk

Email (AS and A-level): english-gce@aqa.org.uk