

## TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

### Overall grade boundaries

#### Standard level

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 44	45 - 56	57 - 70	71 - 83	84 - 100

### Introduction

This was Year seven of a subject that is shortly (2011) destined to go mainstream with some key changes to the course and assessment components.

The results in this session tended to group candidates in the upper middle range. It was rare for a candidate to fall below a grade 4, while the percentages of grade 7 performances were comparatively rare.

Again, as in previous years, Paper 1 proved to be a difficult academic challenge, while candidates enjoyed the freedom of more open ended assessment exercises. Essay work on the written tasks was better than previous years, oral performance varied between the sublime and decidedly less than sublime. In both cases choice of text and the ability of the candidates to adjudge their response according to the relevant criteria dictated the success of the exercises.

The content heavy criteria governing the oral component again gave candidates problems with many able to respond to some of the assessment demands but few managing more than an adequate response to all of them.

Performance, as is usually the case, varied in quality from school to school or even within specific schools where there were a high number of candidates. The continued tendency to ignore basic staging requirements often detracted from what should have been acceptable performances from the candidates. The teacher has a role to play here and really should ensure that the performance space is adequate, that there is no interference from off stage and that the performers are lit!

## Standard level internal assessment

### Oral presentation

#### Component Grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 4	5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 14	15 - 16	17 - 18	19 - 20

The choice of texts for this component was challenging once again with writers like Achebe, Poe, O Henry and Shakespeare (*Henry IVth Part 1*) featuring in the work. There was, as is becoming sadly predictable, in this component, a tendency to not effectively cover the three criteria. The fact that candidates from particular schools often had very little to say that was in any way different from their fellow candidates made for some disappointing performances. On a more positive note there were many examples of accomplished presentations that did emerge from a clear focus on the demands of the exercise; these were comparatively easy to assess since they so clearly registered an understanding of what is required.

Candidates seemed strangely reluctant to discuss the “literary features” of the original text. This is really a straightforward exercise but it must be stressed that giving a plot summary with some remarks on character does not constitute an understanding of literary features. If candidates focus on the style of the original text and the genre from which it comes they will be dealing with questions that are germane to the challenge of transformation. A transformation needs to take genre and style into account. The transfer of plot detail and character identity from one form to another is an important part of the process and it is arguably the most simple. They need not be neglected but they cannot be the only preoccupation. Style is central since this governs the nature of the communication to reader or audience.

The rationale for the transformation will look at the potential for transformation in the original text and some candidates were perfunctory in their remarks on this. Content of the transformation was usually handled quite well but too often at the expense of the “form” of the transformation the second part of the equation (see Criterion B).

The reflective element in Criterion B asks for a specific focus that candidates struggled with in their oral. The reflection needs to be on “the relationship between the concept of the transformation and the actual performance”. Candidates are often liable to treat the word “reflection” as excuses for anecdotal reminiscences about what happened in the performance! The candidates need to be always aware that the oral is about the process of transformation and need to focus on that. They also need to acknowledge that any oral presentation is a performance. Although this may seem excessive it does help the process if candidates can communicate in an animated manner and register a sense of individuality for the examiner. The better the candidate’s knowledge of the material the more likely will it be that an animated and confident manner characterizes the oral presentation. Criterion C should focus the candidates on the need for thinking carefully about what they want to say and how they want

to say it. Terminology is crucial since the act of naming aspects of style, genre, and performance presupposes the prior acquirement of the appropriate descriptive terms.

## Performance

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 20

The opening remarks regarding the teacher's role in ensuring that all performances receive the platform they require to make the most of their theatrical communication is important and needs to be seriously considered as the stressful period of preparation for this component comes around again in the next academic year.

The full range of ability was on display this year as in previous years. The examiner often received the impression that some candidates were acting for the first time during the preparation and performance. This needs to be addressed. The course should be open to all kinds of students but they need to be taught the skill of acting, just as they require teaching in the analysis of texts. This is not something that can be left to the intuitive abilities of individual students.

It is not unusual to see performances that consist of little more than a group of earnest students walking about a restricted space exchanging words with little by way of measure, emphasis, gesture, tonal shift, establishment of mood etc to distinguish one phase of the scenario from another. At times the poor student is unleashed onto an empty space and clearly expects to communicate complex areas of human experience by simply wandering about and talking. This will not happen.

Teachers are often inclined to take a charitable view of this (agonizing process) and award quite high marks to such meanderings. Again this will not work and teachers have to be realistic in their assessment of this component.

Once it is apparent that there have been sustained teaching underpinning performance skills and there has been a sense for the design of the space then the individual energies of even the least likely of actors among the group will take over to produce a convincing few minutes in front of the video camera. The sense of theory supporting performance was apparent in many of the better pieces and this is not an arbitrary factor since it naturally spills over into other components and ensures that the candidates do appreciate that acting has a body of theory attached to it and that an exposure to that material can give the performer-student a useful context to work from.

One of the other characteristics of too many performances was a difficulty in sustaining the tension of the performance through to the end. Candidates often begin well and then as they continue they begin to lapse in terms of concentration and focus. Again this is more likely to

happen if the actor is cast adrift in an empty space with few resources to fall back on when the lines won't activate the performance.

The need to act from as well as act to is also apparent in these pieces. Here it is easy to see tension drain away, high tension in speech, and low tension in receptivity. The actor needs to keep acting after they deliver a line since re-acting is as important as acting.

## Standard level written tasks

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 19	20 - 25

### Coursework: Personal Report and Critical Analysis.

There were encouraging, well written pieces of work produced by candidates for this component. The key factor seemed to be the choice of text for study and the fusion of understanding between literary style and dramatic technique. The appropriate focus on the required assessment elements, if connected to a direction (the development of the candidate) in the reflective process, the candidates usually performed well here.

### Assignment A: Personal Report

Criterion A is asking for two responses which are (inevitably) connected. An understanding of performance elements and, secondly, how these elements might be deployed "to affect an audience". The weaker candidates were able to identify performance elements the more assured candidates made the required connection appreciating the strategic term "deployed" and being continually aware that theatre is performed for an audience. Schools were ambitious in their choice of texts looking to writers like Williams and Shakespeare for inspiration and the better the writer, the more challenging the response.

There is often a lot of content at the candidate's disposal in this task, since it is invariably interesting to write about a practical process one has been immersed in. Key success factors will therefore include what the candidate selects for inclusion in the essay. Here a very careful study of what the criteria require will ensure that extraneous material is cut out. The ability to write in a concise manner when dealing with detail and in a reflective style when considering levels of development is judged in Criterion C; the word "persuasive" in Achievement Level 9-10 under Criterion C should give candidates the vital clue that the writing must stem from conviction, this is not an artificial exercise but a statement of intent and the more clearly this is realized the more likely that the writing takes on a stylistic colour that will distinguish it.

### Assignment B: Critical Analysis

Again, given the word count, candidates need to be discriminating and select their focus carefully. If you are critically analyzing complex literature the importance of choosing a representative section of the text that captures the essence of what the play means for you is a crucial part of the exercise. Writing that has a general focus on the text with little by way of specific detail will struggle under Criterion B that demands a “focus on a significant part of the text”.

The importance of textual reference or direct quotation from the text to support the argument is picked up by Criterion C entitled “support”. Candidates need to learn how to quote from the text. At times it was clear that candidates did not do this with much clarity. Textual quotation can be used to support an argument but quoting many lines from a play may actually dilute the argument. The candidate needs to be concise and focused in their use of reference and quotation and be sure that what is quoted is entirely apposite to the argument.

There tended to be certain uniformity between performances across the two exercises. It should be understood that literature and theatre are the foci in this exercise so that the candidate is directed towards an appreciation of how specific aspects of a play might be deployed by the actor to communicate a vision of the play to an audience. As is common the process of reflection which underpins this exercise can be effectively written into the personal report on performance and should be considered at every juncture of that process.

## Standard level paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 6	7 - 13	14 - 18	19 - 25	26 - 33	34 - 40	41 - 50

### General comments

Performance in this component has improved in some schools. There does seem to be some difference in approach in schools where the English part of the syllabus is being taught by separate teachers whose specialty is English and those where both aspects of the syllabus are taught by a teacher whose primary interest is theatre. There is also a certain narrowness of what is being offered in the part of the syllabus devoted to a literary critical approach. In one school, candidates offered a study of one poem by one poet for one essay and two short stories for a second essay. Some of the questions had more terms than students could handle very effectively, and very little attention was paid in essays to such terms as “structure,” “analysis,” “related” or “presentation.” Most essays were devoted to the summation and delivery of content with only passing reference to the significance of this content in relation to the question. Students need regular reminders that one of the 5

descriptors demands attention to “literary features.” In some cases students addressed this when writing about poetry and completely ignored it when writing about prose.

## The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Some of the schools had provided a fairly thorough instruction in both prose and poetry.

Even in weaker responses, a sense of appreciation managed to shine through, especially where students showed a sense of the demands of the paper and made a serious effort to respond to the questions, using texts they had read. Students in some schools had memorized large portions of poetry; unfortunately these were often deployed with limited effect, inserted without more than a sentence of comment or connection to the argument being attempted.

## The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Students had a hard time deciding which of the terms in the question to address and usually opted for some stab at a theme like “hope-and-despair” or “dreams-and-fantasy,” or “time-and-love,” without making much distinction, often treating the doublet in a mantra fashion. Many candidates seemed to think the task involved listing as many instances as they could of literary “devices” or instances of “hope” or “money,” perceiving that quantity of instances would suffice for analysis. Supporting assertions with details was the problem on the other end of the spectrum, though less common than the preceding practice.

## The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

#1 was one of the most popular, although few had anything to say about “structure,” really. The attraction was to talking about relationships with others, or with nature.

#2 interestingly, attracted about 5 students who actually had a sense of didactic intentions and were able to comment fairly well about this feature in some poetry.

#3 like number #2 attracted a small number of candidates who were ready to discuss some poetry in terms of the authorial choices of particular features, in some cases, quite successfully.

#4, like #1, was very popular, although only a small number of candidates were able to successfully connect time and love in any convincing way.

#5 elicited a large number of essays replete with examples of “hope” and “despair,” though many were clearer about what hope means than despair. “Presentation” or “appreciation” seldom appeared in the answers.

#6 was also fairly popular, though not one candidate that I can recall made any distinction between the two terms. Still, candidates were ready to point these out in both prose and poetry.

#7 proved that while the question of “two worlds” was attractive to candidates, not many had any real notion of “conventional” and “unconventional,” but adapted the terms to some sort of opposition that could lead to “tension.”

#8 was also popular with many candidates, especially those who had read *The Great Gatsby*. By using either money or “material gain,” a number of candidates were able to make viable essays out of this focus.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

First of all, schools must make a clear determination of what works they are going to teach and provide advance notice to any examiner marking such a paper, just as is done in Language A1. If a random collection of poetry is going to be used, all of the titles need to be included in that list, and the same would be useful for the study of any poet.

Students need to be trained in how to answer the kind of question that appears in this paper, being warned that simply writing about themes or content will not gain high marks. They must take note of all the elements of the question and the questions need to contain reasonable scope. If this portion of the syllabus is to meet the conventional demands for an English course, it must contain both teaching and testing that will pass muster for university preparation.

Finally, the issue of handwriting needs to be addressed. Two of the essays I “read” were almost illegible. I gave both candidates the benefit of a doubt, but I am uneasy about it. Teachers must also work with candidates who do word-process essays, in, for example the written tasks, as there is a very strong tendency in this situation to write on and on, with little form and little coherence, with candidates producing lengthy and unfocused pieces of writing, quantity instead of quality.