

May 2017 subject reports

Literature and Performance

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-13	14-28	29-44	45-57	58-70	71-82	83-100

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-7	8-15	16-22	23-26	27-31	32-35	36-40

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The quality of choice of original texts continues to improve with almost all schools choosing original texts that have an intrinsic literary merit. This is very important to set a clear and effective starting point for the work that follows. Effective choices this year included: TS Eliot, Ray Bradbury, Hemingway, Coleridge, Kafka, Murakami, Conrad and Gogol. There were also cases where schools used individual poems to great effect as a starting point. In some cases, schools used a piece of literature with a strong connection to their own history or culture and this made for some really interesting and even moving performance work. It is worth noting that shorter works – such as poems or short stories – generally fare better than longer novels. In the case of the latter, there continues to be a tendency to re-tell the story and this often leads to a performance that lacks clarity and inhibits creativity and certainly originality.

Schools should be sure that the original work is of sufficient literary merit – there were occasional choices that may have led to good performances, but were not written in such a way that allowed for detailed discussion and analysis in the oral.

Work submitted is also steadily improving in terms of the technical suitability. Less work is inaudible, the quality of the filming is better and very few schools are ignoring the rules in the Subject Guide.

However, there is still a problem with the length of both performance pieces and orals. In both cases, some are too short to allow a fair assessment of candidates, and some go over the prescribed limits. This is one area in which teachers can really help their students without interfering with the work itself – teachers are urged to check the Subject Guide in detail and make sure that both performances and orals comply with requirements.

Schools are reminded that this is not a Film course. The requirement is to record a theatrical performance. The film is merely to facilitate the moderation process. Under no circumstances should a cinematic-style performance be made; the camera should be fixed and there should be no change of focus or editing. The Subject Guide is clear on this.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

There were many highly imaginative and entertaining performances this year; the commitment of many students to this task is obvious.

Stronger performances began from a good understanding of the original literature, and engaged with its themes, intentions and also the way it is written. While not being slavish to the original narrative, they maintained a connection to the literature throughout. There was also a strong awareness of the audience, and of the idea that the purpose of performance is to communicate in some way with an audience. Stronger performances had a clear tone – for example, humorous, melancholy, didactic – that was consistently maintained through the piece. Key in the marking criterion are the words “sensitive, original, imaginative”.

Where the choice of literature was something that had a personal connection for students, it was often very engaging.

Weaker performances were sometimes too short, not allowing for any development of ideas or characterisation and not allowing a candidate to actually perform for long enough to be fairly assessed. Some were also, however, too long, and lacked focus and even coherence.

Criterion B

In assessing this criterion, the examiner is very much dependent on the reliable decisions of the original marker. However, occasionally, the lack of quality in a performance showed that a mark of 4 or 5 was highly unlikely.

Criterion C

Stronger candidates were articulate and coherent. There was clear evidence of planning and resolve. Although there is not an ideal way to structure this oral, stronger orals were clearly purposeful.

The use of an appropriate academic register is necessary here for higher marks; colloquial language and slang are not appropriate. Academic register also suggests an accuracy in vocabulary that precludes the use of overly complicated words.

Stronger candidates often used accurate theatrical and literary terminology throughout their orals. Weaker candidates exposed their lack of understanding of the literary features of a text through inaccurate use of literary terminology.

Unfortunately, there is still a tendency, especially in stronger candidates, to simply read aloud a prepared essay. This is not acceptable and should be discouraged by teachers.

Criterion D

Stronger candidates showed thoughtful reflection on both their performance and the connections made between the literature and that performance. Stronger candidates were sensitive and candid, and included detail.

Weaker and average candidates made statements claiming that a performance was 'good' without actually explaining the reasons or showing any genuine reflection or thought. Opinions may be the starting point of this – including reactions from the audience – but they lose meaning without a coherent and systematic reflection and explanation. Step-by-step description of the process of making the performance is not reflection.

Criterion E

This continues to be the most problematic criterion with the greatest variation in results. Stronger candidates showed genuine awareness of both parts of the criterion.

Firstly, they showed a good understanding of the literary features of the original. In order to show this, they explored the way the writer writes, looking at specifics such as figurative language, vocabulary, sound devices and other features characteristic of the author/poet. Weaker candidates explained the meaning of the literature, which is not addressing the criterion. Some ignored the literature altogether.

Stronger candidates showed the connection between these literary features and their eventual performance very clearly, making links that began with the literature and did not try to impose an explanation retrospectively. This is only possible if the performance is in fact developed this way. Weaker candidates may have described the performance, and the process, step-by-step without making the actual connection to the literature at all or may have made only very loose connections.

It should be noted here that discussing theatrical theory or the work of a practitioner does not substitute for analysis of the literature and the connections to performance.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is essential that the original literary text is actually taught and analysed in detail before starting the process of developing the performance. It may then be worth moving away altogether from the text for a while and working with the themes and types of literary techniques used by the writer. Always, the starting point should be the literature itself.

Lack of exposure to theatre really holds back students, even those who understand the text well. This is not a theatre course and there is therefore no requirement that a student has studied theatre before. However, students must be exposed to theatre as much as possible. Where theatre is not accessible for students, there are a lot of alternatives available. These include live broadcasts at the cinema and online live streaming of performances by professional companies. Some of this is free. There is also a lot available on Youtube and other platforms, such as Digital Theatre Plus. Wherever possible, students should be encouraged to perform themselves.

There is no requirement to base work on a specific practitioner or style, although these may be helpful in developing the piece. Students should therefore not be encouraged to spend too much time trying to incorporate this into either performance or the oral.

Further comments

- Monologues or solo performances should be approached with caution. Working alone makes it more difficult to fully exploit the dramatic potential of the original text.
- Using a mixture of texts, such as a number of poems, needs careful control and planning. This can become confusing and the narrative of the performance can be difficult to follow.
- The stronger the understanding of the literature, the stronger the work in this component.
- It was particularly refreshing to see students once again taking on important and controversial topics with courage and sensitivity.

Standard level Written Coursework

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

There were a number of interesting texts used for this assessment component. Julius Caesar, King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, The Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, Much Ado about Nothing, A

Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night and Romeo and Juliet covered the Shakespeare element, while other authors included Miller, Williams, Synge, Beckett, Stoppard, Wilde and Wertebaker. So, a wide range of texts and, in general terms, an understanding of the component so that suitable responses were submitted. A couple of points arising in this context:

- It is not appropriate for students to “add” scenes to the play. They should deal with the selected text as it is.
- Students should also guard against taking on too many scenes since, by doing so, it becomes inevitable that the subsequent response will be more shallow and less specific than it should be. It is sometimes useful to trace a character through a series of “linked extracts” that point to development in character, thereby enhancing the acting challenge, but some students were taking on long scenes to little effect. In their response, too much text material will inevitably detract from the specific analysis of the literature and the performance.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

The analysis of the literary features of the selected text always proves challenging for students and this year was no exception. Often summary replaces analysis as the student conveys a knowledge of the extract(s), but the understanding that is required is not evident. This is often because the summary stands alone and does not contain analysis. The nature of the understanding required in the assessment task is to associate the identification and analysis of the literary features of the extract with the performance choices the actor/student will make. Only a comparatively limited number of students were able to explore the relationship between literary and performance analysis. The linking of Criteria A and B requires specific attention to the language of the text so that the activation of it can eventuate in a convincing performance for an audience.

Criterion B

The students generally responded well to this criterion but often did not base some very creative performance choices on the literary features of the extract but on thematic aspects or immediate dramatic context. Both of these can be important but neither constitute the kind of attention to language which is one of the core objectives of the task. The tendency to focus on theme was far more prevalent in the non-Shakespearian texts. At times, it was clear from the uses made of quotation that some of the more modern plays lacked the verbal qualities to be found in Shakespeare with the result that students were reliant on other foci for their analysis that did not always bring them closer to the text as actors.

There is some evidence that the students do not always effectively utilize the terminology associated to performance analyses. They tend to be more familiar with literary analysis. Given the nature of the subject, it is important that the student can use both effectively. The descriptions of the stage, of proxemics and production elements are often only approximate and this detracted from what were often interesting responses.

Criterion C

The appreciation of the interrelationship between Criteria A and B and the ability to create an effective bridge between the two helped students enormously with the structuring of their response. If they struggled with this and created too hard a division between the two, the response often seemed like two autonomous essays yoked together.

Written expression varied in quality with the student's capacity to address the text in an analytical manner. The power of concise and precise writing in this kind of exercise is, arguably, the feature that distinguishes levels of success. Command over the task and the terminologies associated with it are fundamental since this plays into the written response and makes it both relevant and searching.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Teachers should ensure that students appreciate and can demonstrate in their writing the difference between paraphrase and analysis.
- Students must understand the relationship between the demands of Criterion A and B and understand how the former is linked to the latter.
- The teacher should ensure that the student is adept in using the terminology of literary analysis and performance analysis.
- The student should be encouraged to work within a manageable quantity of material and focus on the style of the writing, not on features essentially external to that style. How the extract is written should be seen to define, in large measure, how the student acts it out.
- Students should be selective in their reference to design and production elements. If they are relevant to the performance, then they have a crucial place in the response; they should not, however, be brought in merely for their own sake.
- A variety of themes that may be interesting to the wider text or indeed to the extract(s) should only be very carefully referenced. Actors grapple with the language of the text primarily and it is peculiarly difficult to act a theme.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-2	3-4	5-7	8-10	11-12	13-15	16-20

General comments

The range of the work was very pleasing with many different texts from the following authors selected by the teachers and students: Twain, Ishiguro, Attwood, McEwan, Rhys, Bronte, Swift

(Graham), Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Walker, Morrison, Vonnegut, Erdrich, Achebe, García Marquez, Wharton, Winterson and Suskind.

All students conveyed knowledge of these texts but some struggled to convey the kind of understanding which addressed the specific requirements of the assessment criteria.

The work was in general “suitable” but obviously there was much evidence that students accessed the work at different achievement levels.

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

There was a general appreciation of the distinctions between the two genres and when this was accompanied by simple and practical ideas for staging the results were often outstanding. The ability to read the passage analytically was demonstrated in the work of students who had obviously extended this to their reading of the whole novel. There is no substitute for this kind of reading and the staging of particular passages is more likely to succeed if they are part of an overall concept or vision for staging that encompasses the novel.

The effective register for these responses holds two principles in relation to one another, the one informing the other: close analytical reading creating a staging concept that is particularly viable in relation to the selected passage and the question but also consistent with the preoccupations of the novel, its characterizations, its themes and its direction.

Criterion A

Most students understood the selected passage and novel at some level but the quality of that understanding and how this was conveyed in the responses differed greatly. Those students who “saw” the passage primarily in terms of its contextual importance to the novel as a whole, and also relished the opportunities it offered to dramatize character, theme and purpose (in relation to the specific questions asked), usually did well. Their work was driven by clear objectives and guided by a specific understanding not only of the passage and novel per se, but also how the author registered significance, emphasis and purpose through style.

A student can demonstrate understanding through careful and apposite quotation from text. Students did this well, even students who struggled with some of the analysis of what was quoted, or found it difficult to put such references to dramatic purpose, were still able to use the text accurately. The “interpretation” of their understanding leads into Criterion B and this vital link was sometimes missed. Some students tended to summarise their understanding of the content of the text and paraphrase details of plot or character. Students who looked deeper and brought the focus of the question to bear on their analysis of not only what the text meant but also how it worked found it easier to demonstrate closer and more detailed understanding.

Criterion B

Some students had a tendency to forget that they were “adapting” the text for theatre, not “transforming” it. This is an important distinction and it should be appreciated. Also, important to stress here is that the performance space to which the text is being adapted should be

carefully described and delineated. This was often not the case. The discipline of adapting prose into drama within a designated space can inhibit the dangerous tendency to forget the theatre and imagine the text as a film, not a play. Too many students write about their adaptation with no reference to the practical restrictions of a performance space. Absurdly complicated or grandiose settings can often be the result of giving the imagination free rein in responses. That continues to be a mistake that too many students make. Simple and practical should be watchwords where staging is concerned.

The neglect of the audience is also a common error. We need to know how the adaptation works on stage and what is its communicative and dramatic purpose. Where are the audience? What is the intention of the performance? How is this delivered?

Performance, design and production elements are all important features of a performance but the question may not ask the student to focus on all of these. Too often the question was only partially addressed or extraneous elements were added to the response to no relevant end.

Sketches are always a good idea since theatre is a composite art where the visual always plays an important part. Too often the sketches were really difficult to decipher and such sketches defeat their own purpose.

Some of the work addressing this component was outstanding. It usually had effective rationales, practical ideas, simple staging and was informed by a keen, specific and analytical appreciation of the selected passage in relation to a sharp overall understanding of the novel and its relevance to the question the student was exploring.

Criterion C

The choice of register was usually appropriate. The keener and more searching the eye of the student, the more precise the response, precision is so important in this exercise. It is not an easy task to deal with such a quantity of language and redesign it into a different genre. The more telling written responses demonstrated an understanding of the two genres and how to write about them as part of a balanced response to a specific question. Many students showed they could write, fewer demonstrated a capacity to address the criterion in their writing.

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

Question 1

The selection of the passage was usually effective. Students struggled a little with the word “revelation” that was often reduced to relative banality. Those who went with the more “dramatic” sense of the term often used this as a strong basis for an exploration of how this event changed the course of the narrative. This second part of the question was frequently ignored to the obvious detriment of the overall response.

Question 2

This question was the least popular of the three. Students struggled to establish parameters for their conclusions so that some responses tended to wander a little. There were some very effective treatments, however. Responses that saw some of the more powerful themes of the novel concentrated in climactic endings managed to release some of the power of the text in the performance ideas.

Question 3

This was probably the most popular question. The students were usually able to address the question quite well. The fact that students were asked to focus on the introduction of characters seemed to give them confidence and the resulting analysis was often convincing. The emphasis on character also helped the students since “character” remains one of the more accessible and stimulating features of the novels and their reading experience.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Students should be careful in the selection of the passage and ensure it is apposite to the questions.
- Once selected, there is much work to do in conveying the understanding of the passage and its importance first, to the question and then to the rest of the novel.
- Students should be encouraged to look for practical and simple staging solutions and aim to convey their ideas precisely.
- Students should nominate the performance space and establish the location of the audience.
- Students should be encouraged plan the adaptation as an act of communication, not an autonomous staging construct.
- If they do sketch, sketch neatly.
- Students should answer the question and ensure they take the audience into account.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-2	3-5	6-9	10-12	13-16	17-19	20-25

General comments

There were no problems with candidates choosing inappropriate texts for this examination. Virtually all candidates worked with two different poets and at least one poem from each poet. Some candidates used two or more poems and some used up to five; the most successful

strategy emerged as a probing examination of two poems total, with plenty of detail and citation of poems, firmly directed to the terms of the question. The strongest responses showed an ability to select poems that related clearly to the particular question, whether that question was, for example, about patterns or about setting. Additionally, such essays also revealed that the candidate was able to effectively select material in the poems that was truly relevant. The weakest overall feature in these responses was the attempt by candidates to pack everything they had learned and remembered into their answers, whether it was fitting and appropriate or not. One further general comment must be directed to handwriting that was just barely legible; this occurred in a significant number of instances and should give schools some reason to consider what individual candidates are likely to deliver in terms of examiner access to their ideas.

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

Discerning what the question was asking was often a problem. Often candidates simply fastened onto one detail in the question without taking into account how all elements of the question were to be addressed. Often, reader response was so highly emphasized that critical analysis of both form and content were given very little attention. Unsupported inferences were another recurrent weakness that diminished the persuasiveness of responses.

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

As it often the case, candidates revealed that they had studied the poetry carefully, and were able to speak knowledgeably about it. Often essays revealed both engagement and enthusiasm. Many knew both details and quotations from their poems that they could use to support their assertions and critiques. A solid sense of how to construct an essay was evident in most cases with introductions and conclusions enacting the role of framing the argument.

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

Questions 1, 2 and 3 were overwhelmingly the most popular questions and therefore provided the widest range of performance. Not many candidates were able to handle the notion of 'enjoyment' in **Question 1**, but many were able to identify the question's request for particular description of detail, and some the opposition between detail and generalization.

The range of understanding of the term 'patterns' in **Question 2** was quite broad. This question especially seemed to encourage candidates to include almost anything they saw in the poems without identifying how such matters could fulfill the label of 'pattern.' There were good answers but the failure to connect the included features to the question's central terms interfered with the success of some essays.

Question 3 on loneliness or isolation was the most popular question by far and, as expected, most candidates could find poems that allowed them to discuss these concepts, though not always with precision.

Both Question 4 on setting and Question 5 on questions drew some candidates and there were some very successful answers to both, but also some problems of clarity. While **Question 4** presented fewer of these, very often in **Question 5** candidates followed the somewhat vague approach of putative questions raised in the reader's mind as the focus of their answer. Still, some candidates handled the notion with credibility and sophistication.

Question 6 on heroic words and acts clearly intrigued some of the more independent thinkers in the candidature who seemed to engage well with the demand to define the 'heroic.' Here there were many angles about how the feature appears in poetry and some very interesting and successful responses.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Practice with reading and deconstructing questions in relation to the poetry being studied is essential. Under examination conditions, students often make the mistake of extracting one element of the question and disregarding the particular angle connected to that feature. However, it is also important that students understand that 'practice' essays with past questions are not likely to be imported into their final Paper 2 with any success. It is quite apparent that some candidates are choosing this course of action, with unfortunate results.
- Less is often more in deciding what poetry to write about in these essays. If students have been well trained in including more than the required two poems by two poets, they can produce a rich and convincing essay. If, however, this strategy is chosen at the last minute because poems are not well known in detail, it is usually not effective.
- Sound structures often present problems for candidates in trying to assess effects in a credible way. Observations connecting punctuation and pace or, alternatively, alliteration and emotional effect often go astray and these are recurrent favorites with students who are sometimes grasping to find ways to address features of sound.