

## ENGLISH (ENG315117)

### FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

#### GENERAL COMMENTS

Students should remember that in any section of the English exam, they do not have to agree with the question. Strong essays provide evaluative responses that make judgements about the effectiveness of a text, or the adherence of genre conventions.

Sections A and B cannot be written in the first person, or in the second person (“you”). Students were marked down on Criterion 4 if they did not use appropriate form as dictated by a formal analytical essay.

The great unknown element of the exam is the question that will be asked. With this in mind, students need to be taught how to massage and mould their knowledge of adaptation and the texts to develop a reasoned and evidenced-based argument. The art of a great essay is to use the knowledge that is relevant to the specific question, omitting that which does not fit, and developing a solid argument response to the question. It is this skill that separates excellent essays from others, and why students need to move away from fully prepared answers.

When handwriting an essay, underline substantial texts such as films or novels and put short texts that are part of a larger whole in quotation marks. Students do not need to include a reference in brackets every time they mention the titles of the text.

Students should not write responses in pencil, and they should try to write clearly. Poor handwriting makes it difficult to decipher meaning, particularly for less-familiar texts.

Candidates should make sure that a decent amount of the writing time is given over to planning the essay prior to writing, remembering to respond to the question in every paragraph.

It would be helpful to have more time working on stronger introductions and conclusions. Logically constructed paragraphs are also essential for strong Criterion 4 ratings. Convoluted and disorganised paragraphs make it difficult for the marker to follow the candidate’s arguments.

Candidates should aim for around three pages of writing for each section of the exam. It isn't possible to achieve solid ratings if an essay is just a page or less. A satisfactory response cannot be achieved in one and a half pages.

Students need to ensure accuracy when using character and author names. Some responses showed an inadequate understanding of the text, containing inaccuracies regarding narrative plot, character actions and purpose.

## SECTION A – GENRE STUDY

Context of composition was not specifically asked about in the Section A questions, but it is an element of Criterion I. Students were not penalised for not discussing it in their essays this year, but it is an essential component of this module.

### DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Strong responses addressed the components of the question and provided an overview of the genre before examining the character actions, setting and generic features in the two texts. The focus of the genre study is to identify the conventions of the genre and how these conventions have been used to communicate ideas to readers. Weaker responses confused conventions and ideas. There was also some obvious recreation of essays that students had written addressing different questions (with bleak futures and the hope for salvation). While there are aspects of the discussion that students can prepare to write on, they must not rely on memorising an essay that does not address the components of the exam question.

In the context of genre, conventions include setting, characters, narrative events, themes/ideas, iconography and, in the case of films, filmic techniques. It is more grammatically correct to identify individuality as a theme. Likewise, propaganda is a social issue represented through the convention of screens, surveillance or a dictator character. Power and control are also central ideas in many dystopian texts, however these similar ideas may be analysed through the shared elements of the text such as a futuristic or totalitarian urban setting.

Many responses indicated that students are struggling with the metalanguage for the Genre Study: dystopian fiction module. The genre is **dystopian fiction** and students need to refer to it correctly. There were many candidates who referred to elements which were “dystopic”. Daily Writing tips website states that: “dystopic is a word in the sense that people do use it but the preferred adjective form is dystopian.” It is also important to address fiction to make a distinction between the worlds represented in fiction. Many students did not accurately use the term ‘convention’, often confusing it with code, theme or even purpose. They also struggled with using it in a grammatically correct way within a sentence, such as saying “McTeigue informs the conventions...” or claiming that the idea of ‘individuality as dangerous’, or codes of oppression, are conventions (codes – of oppression or resistance – form the iconography of the genre, and iconography is a convention, but students are grammatically misusing the terms. Codes are best used in their analysis rather than form the basis of a paragraph on its own). Therefore, things such as surveillance, centralised authority, dark colours etc. are codes: quick ways of communicating meaning to the audience and establishing oppressor and oppressed by means of a common language.

Students who structured their essays by codes of propaganda and so on had more difficulty answering the set question than those who structured by conventions, such as setting, character and denouement (part of narrative structure). Most responses failed to clearly explain what the ‘horrific consequences’ actually are; though many implied it in describing the oppressive nature of the dystopian setting, they didn’t quite articulate it. Too many responses slipped into plot retell, describing and discussing with little or no evidence and certainly no analysis (and little in the way of explanation).

## THRILLER

Students demonstrated a solid level of understanding of the Thriller genre. Strong essays found the connections and relationships between the texts, rather than addressing the texts separately. Students who dealt with one text in each half of the essay did not consider the relationship between them, thus they did not effectively analyse the genre.

Effective responses integrated the analysis of both texts in the one paragraph, enabling a more direct and in-depth comparison. Candidates in 2019 would be wise to follow this highly comparative style.

Strong responses broke up the question and organised its components within each body paragraph, for example, feeling fear in a controlled way; hope that events will resolve to our satisfaction; slowly reeling in the audience. Weaker answers did not directly answer the question but wrote on previous essay topics. Students need to ensure they have prepared enough to directly engage with the question in every paragraph.

Candidates should remember that the marker may not know all the texts' characters, settings or key plot points. These elements, along with context, should be explained to an extent by the candidate. Similarly, integrating the context for quotes is important for accurate essay writing. Candidates should briefly contextualise the quotes first rather than just including them and explaining them afterwards.

It is important to distinguish between themes, codes and conventions in the Thriller genre. Identity, for example, is a theme rather than code. A McGuffin is a convention rather than a theme. Strong candidates examined technical aspects of the genre and explored the symbolic meaning that arose from the use of techniques.

Effective essays avoided the shopping list approach to Genre Studies, and instead analysed key features in terms of how they were effective and how they were shaped by their context of composition.

Candidates need to consider the purpose of the genre in much more detail when analysing Thriller texts, otherwise their responses are too descriptive. The question around controlled fear could have been linked to the 'why' of Thriller fiction.

Similarly the concerns of protagonists such as Roger Thornhill and Jason Bourne need to be considered in terms of their context of composition, with issues of masculinity and identity at the forefront of these texts.

Connections between character, structure and style were often ignored in favour of quick descriptive paragraphs that were observational rather than analytical in tone. Ensuring the what, how and why are part of each paragraph would have elevated many candidates' essays from the C to the B range.

### LIFE WRITING

Overall, markers felt the standard of responses was higher than last year reflecting a deeper understanding of the course and the dedication of both teachers and students.

Formal analytical essay writing skills are advised for this section which uses third person view. First person and second person viewpoints must be avoided in this section, as they are too informal and phrases such as, 'This essay will discuss ...' should be avoided. Candidates are also advised to learn the spelling of technical terminology, or key words, they are likely to use. Do not shorten featured individuals' names or that of the text composer, as this suggests a familiarity and is less formal. Text titles should not be reduced to initials. After writing the text in full in the introduction reduce this to key words in the body of the essay. For example, Anita Heiss's *Am I Black Enough for You?* (*Black Enough*) Short quotes should be included within the paragraph. Only very long quotes, more than three lines, should be indented.

Candidates are advised to be more concise with their introductions – long introductions are a time waste. They are best focused and concise. Texts must be named in the introduction (underlined), the text composers, plus the dates of publications. Include a thesis statement which directly addresses the set question and key areas to be discussed (signposts). On the other hand, two sentence introductions are too brief and do not allow students to effectively communicate the purpose, or contention, of their essay.

Markers appreciated that this was a challenging question and it was clear that there was some confusion in respect to the use of the word 'retrospect'. Candidates who did well on this section effectively responded to the set question and managed to pick up on the hooks of the statement to guide the paper and comprehensively answer the question. They signposted the conventions of life writing to be discussed in their introduction to ensure the paper had a clear direction.

Stronger responses compared the two texts studied and supplied strong evidence from both texts. They actively analysed/evaluated text creators' use of genre conventions, rather than just identifying them. They also made connections between the conventions evaluated and life writing as a genre.

Markers were looking for evidence that students had engaged meaningfully with the texts studied and it was clear that in strong responses, what was written was the culmination of enriched discussions. Some sophisticated responses were able to consider if the applications of genre conventions were typical, or whether the text composer had subverted traditional approaches. For example, if a non-linear structure was used - why this was effective. Stronger responses qualified opinions rather than stating generalisations, or absolutes. For example, 'This evidence suggests ...' Successful responses were able to supply evidence from throughout their studied text, not just the beginning, showing a deeper understanding and knowledge.

There seemed to be a misunderstanding in relation to bias with a number of students suggesting that some texts were 'truthful representations' and others were bias. This lacked the understanding that all life writing texts are constructions in line with text composers' invited reading. Candidates who did poorly in this section ignored the quote and did not show *how* their texts supported the statement. Weaker responses also made claims but failed to support these with relevant textual evidence. In some cases, there was an uneven discussion between texts with candidates clearly focusing more heavily on one text. Markers were looking for balanced discussions which compared the use of life writing conventions.

Candidates must also ensure that they are using evidence from the correct text which is named in the course document (NOT the second book of *Maus*, or the second play in *The Laramie Project*). It is also essential that candidates are familiar with the mode of their text (i.e. *Maus* is a graphic memoir not a graphic novel – non-fiction, not fiction). It was concerning in respect to *The Laramie Project*, that a number of students made comments that the text was biased due to the members of the Tectonic Theatre Company being gay, however, failed to support such statements with textual evidence to show how this influenced the shaping of the text or link to Kaufman's purposes/intentions.

## SECTION B – ADAPTATION STUDY

Students demonstrated some confidence in this section of the exam. Strong responses treated each text equally, analysing the hypotext in the first half of the paragraph before comparing and contrasting it to the hypertext. Students would be wise to structure their essays in this way, rather than discussing the hypertext first.

It is also important that students remember to spend some time analysing the hypotext. Weak responses mentioned the hypotext briefly, but the question (and the module) demands that students need to analyse the representation of ideas in texts, plural, not a single film. Students should be careful not to dismiss the depth of meaning and emotion evoked through printed texts. Often responses were dismissive of the source text and revealed that students rely on visuals for ‘facts’ and the hypotexts were skimmed over.

It was important to demonstrate at least a basic understanding of the texts’ contexts.

Strong essays articulated what the meaning or idea of each text actually was. It was not enough to refer vaguely to the hypotext author’s meaning. Students need to be very clear about which text they are referring to. When examining concepts in the texts, it is important that candidates remember to supply supporting evidence to explain the idea. Similarly, candidates need to incorporate close analysis of evidence. This was often lacking in essays.

There was some confusion with the use of the metalanguage for this module. Adaption is not an accurate word for this module. Students should use ‘adaptation’. Long titles such as “So Much Water so Close to Home” can be shortened to “So Much Water”, or *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* to *Rita Hayworth*, after the title has been introduced it at the start.

Students should consider using the word ‘represents’ in their responses: it turns a descriptive sentence into an analytical one as it forces students to explain the meaning of something, and it connects directly to Criterion 2.



In the introduction, it is important to say what type of text each one is. For instance, Louis de Bernières's *Red Dog* is a novella (and a semi-fictional biography), and the adaptation is a feature film. Always use 'film', not 'movie', as 'movie' is actually an informal word that is not suitable to the formal register of an analytical essay. It is a good idea to say 'novella' or 'novel' instead of the generic 'text' in your essay when discussing one in particular. Candidates should be specific: *The Tall Man* is a documentary, while 'film' on its own implies fiction. The essay will be read by markers who may not be familiar with the texts, so students need to provide explanation and context.

Students should be careful of focusing purely on 'factual' or plot changes when the point of the module is the representation of *ideas*. Changes in plot are only relevant if they support a change in idea or meaning, which should be the focus of the essay.

An opinion on whether the 'book is better than the movie' is completely irrelevant and should not be included. Likewise, it is ineffective to focus on 'accuracy' in the adaptation process, because adaptations do not need to be accurate or 'true' to their source material, the hypotext. The point is to analyse how *meaning* is transformed and why. Don't just focus on technical changes (the 'how') but expand on these techniques to support the 'what' and 'why'.

Weak responses contained laundry lists of similarities and/or differences of plot and themes which had no apparent relevance to the module or the question.

Strong responses evaluated 'how' texts represent similar ideas in different ways (not similar ideas in similar ways!). In exploring a change of meaning, especially in relation to how a text will be received by different audiences, specific audiences were identified – for instance, a cinema-going audience for the Hollywood 'blockbuster' *Argo*, and their expectations as being different from the more academic readers of the memoir. Another example: "Darabont chooses to follow the Hollywood norm of having a happy ending, showing the audience that Andy reaches Zihuatanejo; this satisfies the audiences' film expectations."

## SECTION C – CLOSE TEXT STUDY – PERSPECTIVES

Generally, candidates appeared to have a better understanding of this section of the course than in 2017, however, markers found that many incorporated both inside and outside perspectives in their responses. No penalty was applied, if this was the case, as the set question did not ask for a distinction. Common critical perspectives included: Marxist, feminist, post-colonial and psychoanalytical. These critical perspectives were a useful match to the texts on offer and also assisted in candidates elaborating upon their interpretative responses. For example, looking at the same character from a variety of perspectives.

Candidates are reminded to refer to the correct text, for example the play *Jasper Jones* is the set text, not the film version or novel. Academic reviews may have a place in the analysis of a text, however, teachers are advised to avoid more general, public reviews. Many candidates did not effectively complete this section of the exam as they appeared to have run out of time. They are reminded of the importance of time management.

Successful candidates were able to discuss texts from at least two critical perspectives (or a number of internal ones, such as character perspectives) and composed sophisticated and relevant responses with embedded evidence. They clearly had an in-depth knowledge of their study text and were able to also elaborate on how the text conveys perspectives through stylistic devices such as, diction, dramatic techniques and figurative language. Markers were looking for evidence that candidates had attempted to engage with the set question and make connections to this, rather than regurgitating a learned response.

Markers did not penalise candidates for omitting their own 'reasoned interpretation' as this was not specifically requested in the set question. It was clear that stronger candidates had been taught to include this, even if not specified.

Candidates who were unprepared to discuss perspectives in the 'Perspectives' section of the exam generally gave weaker or irrelevant responses. They generally repeated the events of the narrative and often did not engage with the set question. More focus on attitudes and values represented in the text, is advised.

There were a number of candidates who were very confused about what 'critical perspectives' are, leading to odd views such as the neo-Nazi perspective or racial perspective. There are more widely used terminology on offer (psychoanalytical, Marxist, feminist) which could help candidates (and markers) reach a considered understanding. Internal perspectives through characters and the invited reading need to ensure they link to universality as much as those who focus on critical theory. Further Professional Learning for teachers to potentially reach an agreed understanding for recognised academic critical theory which could be applied to a text, is advised. Some candidates had a poor understanding of what was worth discussing for a 'resistant reading' which often led to irrelevant or facile responses.

Markers noted that there was some confusion between a Marxist perspective, which focuses on class relations and social conflict, and Critical Race Theory. Teachers need to clearly explain how Critical Race Theory fits within a Marxist perspective to avoid students making erroneous claims that racism is also Marxism.

Candidates are advised to consider the context of a text, including why and when it was written as well as when it is set and how this influences actions or events. Personal interpretations need to be authentic, rather than forced, to show a broader understanding of the issues and history that a responder can interpret within a text.