

ASSESSMENT REPORT

ENG315117 – ENGLISH

Report for Students and Teachers

2020 was a very challenging year for students, and yet they still produced meaningful essays that engaged with the complex ideas in this subject. Strong students' writing in all three sections of the exam ensured that they considered the context of composition of each text, along with textual form, themes and techniques.

Here are some quick points for candidates to be aware of:

- They must discuss context in each section of the exam paper. Check the course documents for details on which contexts are relevant to each module.
- Bring a dictionary to the exam to ensure that complex or new words are understood.
- Use the reading time to plan ideas and highlight key words in the questions. Manage the time by using one hour per question. All candidates should be encouraged to remain in the examination room for the full three hours to maximise success in this course.
- Students do not have to agree with the stem quote. Embedding the key words from the question across all the paragraphs helps build a strong essay.
- Illegible handwriting may affect the Marker's ability to accurately assess the essay, especially if some words can simply not be read.
- As observed in the 2019 report, 'stronger responses were well constructed, content rich, coherent, informative and insightful. They were characterised by the use of nuanced, subtle and precise language, sophisticated vocabulary, correct spelling, expression, grammar and syntax.' The stronger responses in 2020 were also characterised by these features.
- Make sure that the correct texts are referred to in each section.
- Try to write at least two and a half to three pages per section to ensure a thorough response.
- Section A and B essays require analytical essays. Section C essays are analytical but may include a personal, reflective response.
- Students should underline the title of the text.
- Students should ensure that they spell the names of the authors correctly (e.g. *Margaret Atwood*) as well as genre specific vocabulary (e.g. dystopian fiction).
- Codes, conventions and themes were often used interchangeably.
- Students should write in pen, not pencil. Blue or black pen should be used.
- Don't complete your planning in the exam booklet. Use the paper provided.

SECTION A – GENRE STUDY

It is important to note that students can write on any of the three texts they have studied in this module. They are directed to write on at least two texts. Students rarely have time to write meaningfully on three texts in this section and almost all of the responses focused on two genre texts. Although students are required to study different text types in Module 1, they do not have to write on different text types in the exam. They may, for example, write on two films or two novels in this section.

Question 1 – Dystopian Genre

Students demonstrated an understanding of the texts, the features and purpose of the genre and were able to show the relationship between the texts discussed. Weaker responses tended to have a more generalised discussion about the genre features and purpose while stronger responses were able to confidently discuss codes and conventions and the way in which these create and shape meaning. Using more textual evidence would enable students to analyse and evaluate the style and purpose of the texts and their relationship to the genre.

Evaluation of the relationship between text and context is generally not well managed by students with their discussion of context tending towards explanation; those essays moving into the B range were able to discuss relevant contextual points, both within the texts and with some moving to the world outside the text, in terms of what influenced the creation of the text and how it still has relevance to a contemporary audience. Strong A responses were able to do this clearly and confidently. Having said that, on the whole, most students could build their discussion of context, particularly as the question clearly directed them towards this.

The more sophisticated responses were not only able to discuss codes, conventions, context and meaning but were also able to incorporate a discussion of the ideas from the statement. Some responses needed to be clearer around defining what codes and conventions are. Stronger discussion around resistant protagonists would have strengthened weaker responses, especially in light of the thesis statement. The best essays were able to examine the different types of rebellion and explore the extent to which the rebellion entailed violence. They also focussed on the idea of the resistant protagonist and any other characters who assisted him or her in their venture to reveal the problems of the world to others.

Question 2 – Thriller Genre

Strong responses addressed the stem quotation as an opportunity to discuss audience responses to their thriller texts, e.g. 'shock'. It is important to remember that students do not have to agree with the quotation used. If the question specifically refers to two particular genre features, they can disagree with the primacy of these elements and discuss other genre features that are more prominent or important in their chosen texts. However, they still need to engage with aspects of the question throughout their paragraphs.

Students need to make sure they do not discuss the purpose of the thriller genre without discussing how the genre features are used to achieve this purpose.

Strong thriller genre essays focused on the impact of the texts' contexts on meaning and purpose. It is vital that students analyse the context of composition for their two texts. The genre texts highlight particular cultural concerns at the time of their construction. Successful students' responses explored, for example, concerns about masculinity in 1950s America via Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Jane Harper's *The Dry* also offered the opportunity to consider more

contemporary Australian contextual concerns. However, many students left out any discussion of context, despite being asked to 'pay particular attention to the context' in the instructions. This disadvantaged their rating on Criterion 1. Strong responses synthesized an evaluation of the context and purpose in their introductions, and wove connections to context throughout their whole answer.

Stronger responses covered many aspects of the texts, including characterisation, techniques and form and then linked these elements to genre features. Students need to remember that they are demonstrating how much they know and understand about the texts and the genre. It is also important to discuss both texts evenly. Some students only briefly mentioned a second text whilst providing substantial analysis to the first. Each paragraph should be comparative.

Many responses compared the character conventions used in the text, with a focus on the protagonist and antagonist. The antagonist in *The Dry* was often found to be 'unconventional' because the character was not the clearly evil villain used in *North by Northwest* or *The Bourne Identity*, the classic evil villain often used in a spy thriller. However, answers did not consider the use of crime conventions where the identity of the murderer is concealed until the end, and typically the audience or reader is surprised by the solution to the crime. 'The one you least suspect' is a staple of crime fiction, which commonly utilises both thriller and classic detective fiction conventions and acknowledging this would have improved the complexity of responses where character conventions were discussed.

Question 3 – Life Writing

Markers were mostly impressed by the quality of students' responses to this question with many students able to write extensive responses. The language of genre studies is also being aptly used by most candidates. A reasonable number of responses read as 'prepared' and, as such, did not refer to or reflect understanding of the set question in any meaningful way. Such a response in the exam context must be discouraged. In some cases, such responses were rewarded for offering a reasonable understanding of the texts and an awareness of the relevant codes/conventions.

Successful candidates had clearly grasped the idea that meaning changes when form changes, and knew their texts well. The conceptual sophistication of responses, as well as the incorporation of evidence to substantiate a response to the stem and question have improved enormously. Students who had studied *Bohemian Rhapsody* and either *The Laramie Project* or *Reckoning* offered very keen insights into authorial choices regarding manipulation of genre and were able to draw neat distinctions of how authorial choices were shaped by the purposes of the different texts.

Successful responses demonstrated a clear understanding of all elements of the question and reflected this in detailed paragraphs that accurately reflected an understanding of course and content as well as the chosen texts. In particular, students who demonstrated strong coherence to the question were rewarded; phrasing from the question was referenced and/or unpacked during the introductory and concluding paragraphs and synthesised consistently within the analysis during the composition of body paragraphs.

Successful responses in Criterion 4 had also clearly developed a sound thesis in response to the question and argued this successfully. In addition, evidence from texts was both referenced appropriately (although of course this isn't a standard exam requirement) but more importantly it was connected to the relevant point being made, rather than included somewhat randomly perhaps in the hope that the examiner would be able to make the connection. They focused their paragraphs around a single code and convention and then compared the two texts' application of the said feature.

Less successful responses against Criterion 1, tended to 'chunk' responses, confining body paragraphs to a single text and one of its features or codes/conventions. This tended to preclude opportunity for a satisfactory comparison and analysis.

In addition, less successful responses also marginalised analysis or even discussion of relevant codes/conventions and so on, in favour of retelling. (Stronger essays avoid chunking texts into single paragraphs.) Less successful responses had poor paragraph structure, including lacking topic sentences, or concluding sentences, that offered a comparison of the texts' use of the focus code and convention. Sometimes, there was little or no mention of any codes or conventions, or very little detailed, explicit discussion or analysis reflecting an understanding of the question. This was a noted trend in some of the essays featuring comparisons of *Capote* and *Maus*.

Candidates should be encouraged to work carefully on a balanced discussion of text - there were some occasions when an essay made passing reference to one text and focused aggressively on another, to the detriment of comparing and contrasting the two. If teachers are confused about genre conventions in respect to Life Writing, which are somewhat nebulous, they are advised to seek support from Years 9 – 12 Curriculum.

SECTION B – ADAPTATION STUDY

General

In relation to the specific question on Adaptations, there were many elements for students to focus upon (authors as storytellers as distinct from writers, the study of a composer's 'work and style', the adaptation of a text into screen form, the notion of 'surprising ways'). This was a great deal for students to do (or not do – as if they didn't refer to the prompt, there was no opportunity to penalise the response in Criterion 4). The instruction for markers was to examine the student's discussion on the adaptation process – the themes, ideas and concepts and how they are treated in the two different texts. In short, what students needed to do was explain how the text has been adapted and how this changes meaning to gain a C rating. When interpreted in this way, for Criterion 2, it was possible to assess the responses in the same way as in other years.

Whilst there were a number of excellent, well prepared responses in Section B, many markers noted that this year's Adaptation essays were generally not up to their usual standard. Despite external assessment instructions still requiring students to write an analytical response, as clearly explained by TASC, some students wrote all or partially in dot point fashion, reducing their ability to successfully analyse and evaluate the texts. The length of students' responses in this section were also mostly shorter, preventing many students from analysing the adaptation process in sufficient detail. A number of candidates seem to have written what looked like pre-prepared essays that bore little relationship to the reading enunciated in the essay question. Due to COVID-19 adjustments, students were not penalised for this, however, this practice should be discouraged by teachers and in future years it will disadvantage students. Some markers also noted that on certain texts some responses were almost mirror images of each other containing the exact same paragraph structure and evidence. Such practices preclude students from more original, nuanced responses and therefore higher awards. Some students appeared to have run out of time to fully complete this response, suggesting they may have left Section B of the exam for last. In some instances, these students demonstrated a very strong understanding of adaptation, however, they may have only written 1½ pages; thereby reducing their ability to examine the paired texts in depth.

The adjustment made by TASC to only assess this section on Criterion 2 was advantageous for many candidates as they were able to focus on the main themes and concepts and how the adaptations process from one medium to another changes meaning. Theoretically this meant that markers were tasked with assessing how these Criterion 2 elements were covered unencumbered by Criterion 4 or Criterion 6 flaws relating to essay structure, grammar, spelling expression etc. In reality, this was a difficult task for markers because, as all experienced teachers know, a coherent, logical essay structure and a lucid, insightful, imaginative expression both greatly enhance the evaluation of themes, ideas and concepts.

In this section it is important that students consider the way in which they refer to the texts and distinguish between the original and adapted texts. Some students wrote about the texts in general and when the title is identical, it was sometimes difficult for markers to determine a student's distinct understanding and analysis of each text.

The most successful candidates were able to answer the set question as part of a comprehensive analysis/evaluation of key themes in the texts and the degree to which the adaptations process served to retain the spirit/ideology of the hypotext as well as maintaining the centrality of the narrative. They were also able to include changes to the hypertext that enhanced the meanings of the original, or which altered it. Successful responses also embedded elements of the question throughout their response and were able to effectively challenge or affirm the statement. These essays addressed themes, concepts and ideas in the hypotext, providing evidence and analysis of the purpose/intended effect of that evidence before comparing to the hypertext. This enables the student's understanding of the similar or different purposes and approaches to the texts' themes, concepts and ideas to be made clear. They were also able to explore the impact of the texts' differing mediums on how meaning is created. Successful candidates were also knowledgeable about the influence of context (while not specifically assessed) and the differing demands of the mode and medium of the hypertexts.

Less satisfactory essays often centred on character development or engaged in retell of plot with sometimes no mention of 'themes, ideas or concepts'. (It is essential teachers are aware of the focus for each section of the course and the elements in the TASC standards, for each criterion, which form the marking tool, and that students also know these.) Weaker students were content to undertake an often superficial description of some key themes with limited analysis of the adaptation process and, often, with little attempt to address the set question. A few changes between the texts were mentioned, but there was little effort to analyse how the transformation impacted themes, ideas or concepts, or the idea of 'surprising, new ways'. The briefer answers didn't talk about language or film techniques.

Less successful students brushed over the hypotext, in some cases providing minimal evidence and discussion around how the theme/idea/concept is presented in the original text. (Students need to provide a balanced analysis of both hypotext and hypertext to demonstrate their understanding of the adaptation process.) Quotes may have been included but they did not state their relevance to discussion. Students should consider the best way to prepare themselves for the broad nature of Criterion 2 and ensure that they carry this understanding into the exam. At times students would merely identify a theme, for example 'hope' and provide examples of this in the text without analysing or evaluating the notion of hope that the composer is presenting through these examples.

Analysis of the process of adaptation must be considered within a discussion of ideas, themes and/or concepts and students who merely focused on what had changed in terms of plot, setting or character development and neglected to discuss the meaning or ideas being conveyed, struggled to do well. Students also need to integrate analysis of hypotext and hypertext features within each body paragraph rather than in separate paragraphs.

Some students elevated the status of film texts to communicate ideas and 'bring an idea to life' in a way that 'written texts can't' and this spoke to a concerning trend that students do not understand the stylistic choices and devices open to composers of written texts. Equally, there were some students of the opinion that films required simplification.

SECTION C – CLOSE TEXT STUDY

One of the reasons why fiction is enjoyed is that it provides people with insight into their own and other's experiences, cultures and societies, to understand the 'human condition'. Strong responses in Section C were able to explain what the text studied reveals about the context of production and/or reception. For instance, that toxic masculinity is privileged in Australian society, leading to certain issues continuing to be a problem in our culture. Effective analysis is able to unpack

the features of a text to show how an author constructed an idea and invited a particular interpretation. Less effective responses were limited to saying that an idea or issue was present in a text, and made the candidate feel a certain way about it. Element 3 of Criterion 3 requires students to analyse how texts convey perspectives. This was clear in the last sentence of the exam question. It is this aspect of Module 3 that was missing from many exam responses. Students may use first and/or third person when writing in Section C.

To meet Criterion 3 effectively, candidates need to focus their analysis on the 'perspectives, attitudes and values represented in the text' and how compositional features construct these. To do this effectively, candidates need to deconstruct the reasons why characters act in particular ways – for example, why does Paula stay with Gavin in *The Eye of the Sheep*? What does it reveal about her values and how is her implied reasoning constructed in the text? How is this influenced by her context? Weaker responses merely offered an overview of what happens (for instance, that Gavin is abusive when he drinks) and mentioned that choices are influenced by values, but failed to explain which values, what's complicated about it or what it says about, for example, Australian society (in extending the analysis to include the relationship between texts and contexts).

It is concerning to see that some students studying *The Eye of the Sheep* are not challenging, or are possibly misinterpreting, the author's invited reading that women should stay with men who are abusive and that, to quote from one candidate's response which said it more explicitly, "This leads me to believe that women should stay [in an abusive relationship] if they love the man enough." Weaker responses on this novel were mostly concerned with excusing Gavin's abusive behaviour due to inter-generational trauma and alcohol abuse.

There is a missed opportunity here to make connections to and critique Australian culture, values around drinking etc and the myth of 'the good man', which would enable students to meet the first element of Criterion 3 and evaluate the text more fully.

In attempting to explain what other, hypothetical readers may think, candidates are in danger of appropriating others' voices and making assumptions (for example, about what a WWI veteran would think or feel). Hence, they should focus on their own response, which may be the same or different from the invited (intended) meaning.

While using a critical perspective (ideological lens) may be effective in analysing some texts in Module 3, students should practise how to use the language in a grammatically correct way before the exam. Saying that a text "features (or 'represents') postcolonialism" or that an author "analyses Marxism through characters" is misleading when you mean that *you* are interpreting it through that lens. Students could instead say that an author "writes from a postcolonial perspective" in order to "interrogate colonialism and its values of white superiority, represented through the characterisation of X".

Essays showing "specific reference to the literary features of the text through close analysis" was also notably lacking. A significant number of students did not mention any literary techniques/features which impacted the "how" of the criterion-specific element. Stronger responses were able to present a big idea based around how techniques shape key ideas or themes such as love, violence or belonging, and used this to structure their response.

Stronger responses made it clear how the text enables them to see their own society more critically, while weaker ones focused on their own emotional response to shifts in plot and what it made them wonder.

In most responses, candidates simply included the wording of the stem in their paragraphs without actually saying anything about it or translating it to interpret it and add meaning. This caused the essay question to function as filler with little purpose and the language around interpretation, values and themes became vague.

'Values and attitudes' are products of context; candidates should try to offer an explanation of what influences these in society and the text. For example, the Lu family in *Jasper Jones* are victims of casual racism because of the deep cultural fear of Asians amongst white Australians. This fear led to the White Australia Policy in 1901 (which was still in force in the 60s), giving white people tacit permission to discriminate against Asian minorities. The 60s was also the time of the Vietnam War and the personal fear of parents for their sons was transferred into attitudes of hate towards Asians. Criticism of this historical context is offered via the context of composition. Students often confused setting/historical context with context of composition. In Module 3 students are required to consider the context of composition as well as the context of reception.

As with the term 'conventions' in Genre Study, there was some confused use of perspectives in Module 3 responses, such as identifying 'character features' or 'secrets' as a lens. Attempting to apply multiple perspectives to a reading of the play may be the undoing of less confident candidates, who would be better served to focus on their own interpretation, with or without a critical perspective, as described in Criterion 3. Weaker responses structured their paragraphs around different critical lenses, and this did not enable them to effectively address the elements of Criterion 3.

Candidates should avoid using the terms "male" and "female" unless as an adjective. To refer to women as "females" is dehumanising and grammatically odd. Candidates should also not use the term "half-caste" when describing characters unless it is in a quote from the text.

Effective responses included careful selection and close reading of textual evidence to form the basis of the students' own interpretation of the text. Use of relevant evidence to support students' own interpretation allowed for sharper analysis and more essay cohesion than responses where students made general statements about the text overall.

Successful essays also incorporated evaluation of the text by considering gaps, omissions and/or problematic character representations. Strong responses also considered dilemmas within the text from several character perspectives, demonstrating a thoughtful understanding of ethics and their relationship with historical and cultural context.

Weaker responses included value judgements on the behaviour of various characters without reflection upon the characters' historical context, their contrast (or similarities) with the students' own context, and the writer's creative choices (and purpose) in representing characters in particular ways.