English Literature
Course Code: ENL315114

Written Examination

As in 2014, the Written Examination allowed students to refer to either a single substantial text studied throughout the year or TWO substantial texts studied throughout the year. Unsurprisingly, the Breakdown of the candidature in answering different Questions was as follows:

Section A
Q 1 (a) Love: 86
Q 1 (b) Loss: 104
Q 2 Single text: 309
Q 3 2 texts: 59

Section B
Qs 4 & 5 Single text: 449
Qs 6 & 7 Two texts: 118

A handful of candidates answered more than ONE question in each section. In all such cases this impacted on the quality of responses. Students must follow instructions as directed by the examination paper.

Please be mindful that the Examination Specifications and the Course document allow the setting Examiner to specify the Module that must be used in any examination item. In practical terms, if you only study one substantial text from the prescribed text list for Module 2, you can only answer on this in either Section A or B, but not in both. Using a single text from the comparative study of texts (Module 3) to respond to a single-text item is against the spirit of the course and the rules outlined in the 2016 Exam Specifications.

General Observations

In both sections of the examination, students scoring in the top range were able to:

1. explore perpectively the extent to which the ‘stated perspective’ aligned with a personal understanding of the substantial text(s) studied
   - to score in the A range the student response must be perceptive in terms of its understanding and this understanding must also be nuanced and authentic – not something that has been merely regurgitated from other sources. Having said that, students who used the work of others in an evaluative manner (especially in Section B), as directed to do so by the Syllabus, produced very sophisticated responses
   - ‘the stated perspective’ is the examination focus which cannot be ignored. When it is students provide a prefabricated response to the modules they have studied and cannot expect to be rewarded for this in an ‘examination’
   - choosing the most appropriate item is an essential component of the examination and it is unwise for students to enter an examination room ‘determined’ to answer on specific texts/modules without seeing the actual examination questions.

2. demonstrate a well-informed understanding of context, compositional techniques, language and ideas using well selected and detailed textual references
   - ‘well-informed’ was handled in a myriad of different valid ways, but mostly was informed by evaluating the ideas of others and by an authentic lose engagement with the relevant text itself
   - the manner in which historical and cultural contexts influence texts was perceptive in section A
   - Using judicioues references from the substantial text is required in both sections of the examination to substantiate own claims – it is not optional!
- examines the compositional features of the prescribed text critically, paying attention to how the language, in a particular medium, is used by the author to communicate ideas

3. construct a considerate argument using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form
- as part of their considerate argument more able students were able to analyse and evaluate connections/ interrelationships between ideas and values in texts
- the analytical essay in both sections was clearly structured, coherent and cohesive which included a clear thesis, flagging all components of the argument, a the outset
- the metalinguage used in the analytical essays was appropriate, particularly in regards the form of the substantial text(s). For example using drama discourse when talking about Shakespearian tragedy or cinematic terms when analysing a film.

**Question 1**

This was handled well. A relatively easy question as candidates could choose their own poems from the prescribed list. Students must be mindful that the setting examiner could choose to nominate one, or both poems, to be used in the examination. Although it was not stipulated that poems discussed derived from different historical contexts, the stronger responses did use poems from contrasting eras, which benefitted the cohesiveness of their argument demonstrating changing ideas and values.

Stronger responses demonstrated how an understanding of context enabled the reader to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the different expressions of loss. Such responses always began with the ideas in the poetry and connected them to the influences of the eras in which they were written. Strong candidates evidenced their assertions with detailed reference to poetic structures and conventions. High quality responses also compared and contrasted the poems even though this was not a stipulation of the question.

The successful ‘A’ candidate interrogates poems, citing lines and poetic techniques as appropriate to the focus question’s keywords. An ‘A’ response examines in detail relevant social/cultural, historical, literary, autobiographical context that may lead to a more profound experience or interpretation. For example, a solid understanding of Victorian, Romantic, Modernist ideology leads to the examination of the relationships between text, audience and context. Above all, the markers are looking for fluency and detail.

Weaker responses assumed that the voice in the poem was the poet’s. Often equal treatment was not given to the chosen poems. Weaker candidates tended to focus on the historical contexts of the poets’ lives at the expense of including the necessary detail from the poems. Such responses often went off on tangents, including information that was not specifically related to the ideas expressed in the poems. It is important to realise that the requirement is a literature rather than a history essay. Inaccuracies with dates and centuries as well as settings also proved problematic for weaker candidates. There was considerable retelling of information and little analysis. For example many candidates identified the use of legal/court imagery in Sonnet 30; however, did not provide any analysis or connection to relevant ideas or issues present in the Elizabethan era. Many weaker responses contained generalisations such as assuming that the persona’s “dear friend” in Sonnet 30 is dead.

**Question 2**

Students were directed to answer this question using a substantial text from the prescribed list. Be mindful that a future examination might stipulate that this text must be one studied in Module 2.

This question was fair but challenging. Students were asked to explore the ways in which fictional characters (plural) reflect or challenge the ideas about gender that are representative of a particular cultural and historical context. Text choice was important here. Effective responses to this question were written based on many texts, including Persuasion, Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Othello and The Tempest. Students who chose to write on The Secret River, The Great Gatsby or Frankenstein in relation to this question often struggled to include all the main themes of their texts within the stated perspective of the set question.
Few students seemed to realise that a discussion of gender need not be limited to the representation of female roles in a text; those few who discussed the way in which the male gender was constructed in their texts were able to broaden the scope of their answers enormously.

Very well-prepared students were able to showcase the depth of their textual knowledge through this opportunity to focus on one text and one issue. Most of the texts are open to feminist or masculinist readings but some texts may not be so easily cross-examined; students who struggled here would be better served answering another option in Section A. There were many and varied explorations of women and class however, including Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle (Fitzgerald); the bind and predicament for women in Shakespeare’s Othello (Desdemona, Emilia but sadly not Bianca); Sarah Thornhill’s colonial struggle (Grenville); and the subjugation and entrapment for Linda Loman (Miller), Tess (Hardy) and Rose (Perkins). Each one offered substantial exploration of their cultural context. Essays that united context, consideration of compositional features and relevant text evidence / quotations fared well.

While there were some strong answers, a much more cohesive essay structure is needed by candidates. This requires using the key word/s of the question, topic sentences and quotations as evidence. More quotations were needed by most candidates. Weaker answers simply resorted to retelling the plot and were around two and a half pages in length. No question asked the student to tell the story.

The question asked for discussion of the characters of one substantial text, so students who dealt only with one character disadvantaged themselves. Generally, there needed to be more specific analysis of characterisation relevant to gender rather than to the other issues or themes raised in the text, for example the class system and the American Dream in The Great Gatsby. Having said this, there were some very strong and developed answers on The Great Gatsby which showed firm understanding of the links between compositional features and context.

Students must ensure that the historical points they include are accurate. For example, The Tempest was written somewhere between 1610-1611 during the reign of King James the First. This is known as the Jacobean era. It is not, therefore, Elizabethan.

**Question 3**

The question itself was quite straightforward, however, a good number of candidates failed to specify/identify the values emanating from both texts in this comparative question, despite repeating the phrases ‘the values of these texts’ ad nauseam.

A very broad range of paired texts was featured in the responses to this question but there were also many comparatively weak responses. Less capable candidates struggled to structure their responses clearly in a way that adequately covered two substantial texts, several themes, contextual information and compositional features: too many balls in the air. Several candidates actually forgot to include a second text, or came to the second text as an obvious afterthought well into the essay.

Comparative texts used in this question, as well as in question 6 and 7 (in Section B) included the following:

- Antigone and One Night the Moon
- Burial Rites and Antigone
- Frankenstein and Blade Runner
- Narrow road to the Deep North and The Railway Man
- Never Let Me Go & Blade Runner
- Othello and Skin
- Othello and Tess of the D’Urbervilles
- Othello and The God of Small Things
- Othello and The Great Gatsby.
- Othello and The Lives of Others
- Othello and The Secret River
- Persuasion and Muriel’s Wedding
- Regeneration and The Railway Man
- Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Skin
The God of Small Things and Muriel’s Wedding
The Great Gatsby and Death of a Salesman
The Great Gatsby and The Lives of Others
The Kite Runner and Skin
The Secret River and Babel
The Secret River and Behind the Beautiful Forevers.
The Secret River and One Night the Moon
The Tempest and The Secret River

Section B

Critical interpretations of others must support the idea being discussed and therefore deepen the analysis. At times interpretations were included without evaluating how this supported the reading of the text being presented. Better answers used the ideas of others to extend their interpretation by including supporting views and those they rejected. This is within the spirit of the Syllabus and is a requirement of C1.

Criterion 1 requires a strong personal response that is supported through an examination of the compositional features of text. The use of first person is perfectly acceptable in this section as is a third person response, however the marker needs to be able to identify the candidate’s position. Sadly, very few candidates referred to other critics or literary perspectives to strengthen their arguments in their answers. The weaker responses did not even make reference to the composer/s which is a minimum requirement in relation to addressing the ‘other’. In many cases weaker responses read like a regurgitation of Spark Notes – there was very little freshness or originality.

Perhaps this was due to the inclusion of the same phrase from the inaugural Literature exam; “You may refer to the critical interpretations of others in your response”; however in the second year of this syllabus, it is important that the more able candidates demonstrate their understanding of what constitutes a critical response as distinct from an analytical essay.

C1, as it stands in the Syllabus document requires students to:
− demonstrate a perceptive understanding and nuanced appreciation of how the central ideas in substantial text(s)
− support their detailed analytical interpretation of texts by evidence from the text
− compares own and a range of other critical interpretations of texts and synthesise this in their personal interpretation
− explain and evaluate aesthetic and artistic qualities of texts.

Perhaps a better phrase that the setting examiner might include could be:

“Referring to the critical interpretations of others, will strengthen the critical understandings of texts in your response”.

The critical understandings of texts is included in the Exam Specifications for this course.

Question 4

For the last two years, Question 4 stipulated the compositional technique to be explored.

Many students found the specificity of this question problematic. Some students saw the words ‘setting’ and ‘place’ as an invitation to focus on historical context. While some historical detail may be necessary, the emphasis in the question was on connecting to ideas in the text through construction of setting and not to events and issues of the era in which the text is set. Weaker responses concentrated on the ideas and issues without relating the information back to the composer’s use of setting. That being said, students interpreted the word ‘setting’ broadly to include historical and geographical settings as well as stage sets.
Stronger responses on *The Death of a Salesman* interrogated the different settings of the play (confined setting of Loman’s home in Brooklyn – representing lack of self-growth, the setting of Boston – alluding to Loman’s betrayal, the use of transparent walls (the actual set) to allude to Willy’s delusions) These responses also made detailed reference to compositional features such as characterisation and symbolism that reinforced the ideas raised by Miller’s choice of settings. One script incorporated other literary readings in a sophisticated way. The better scripts on *Othello* interrogated Shakespeare’s construction of the settings of Venice (representing strict social hierarchy) and Cyprus (representing chaos) to demonstrate Othello’s own downfall, fulfilling the stereotype of his kind as well as changes in other characters’ behaviours such as Emilia’s. A few candidates writing on this text made reference to others’ opinions to reinforce their own interpretation in a convincing manner.

Whilst *Burial Rites* and *Wuthering Heights* presented many opportunities for candidates who chose to write on these texts in this particular question as the Yorkshire moorland and Icelandic settings, respectively, are crucial to the development of the issue of outsiders, most responses lacked the necessary supportive evidence from the text.

**Question 5**

For the last two years, Question 5 did not stipulate the compositional techniques to be used by candidates but instead, provided a specific idea/issue to be explored.

This question offered candidates options to explore their texts through various aspects of personal, societal and cultural injustice. For example, in *Othello*, *Blade Runner*, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, and *One Night the Moon*, the more compelling answers interrogated the nature of the injustice with regard to class, race or gender as a deep and perhaps ongoing societal issue. Of course those who paralleled their discussion of themes with the text composer’s selection and use of compositional features, earned success, as did those who incorporated external criticism when appropriate, to compare and contrast a range of interpretations.

The question prompted students to ensure that they examined the compositional features of the text under discussion. This plural implies the need to analyse more than one technique, yet many candidates simply referred to characterisation in their answer. Some students seemed not to understand what compositional features are, confusing these with themes. Occurrences in the plot are generally not compositional features either, unless they are specifically related to characterisation. For example, Caliban’s attempted rape of Miranda is not a technique of itself, but part of Shakespeare’s characterisation of Caliban. By the way, Caliban only attempted to rape Miranda. There is no indication in the text that he was successful. Where compositional techniques were discussed, they needed to be tied to the theme of injustice rather than simply listed or discussed in isolation.

There were some answers which seemed to be prepared essays on the major themes of the text. Such answers were only relevant if there were links made between the theme and the issue of injustice as the question asked. Strong answers considered alternative readings, for example, looking at *The Tempest* through a post-colonial lens but also attempting to approach it from a Jacobean perspective. There were some very strong answers on the two Shakespeare texts.

Some candidates did not seem to understand the focus of Section B. Detailed paragraphs about context were not relevant unless tied to the issues of injustice raised in the text.

**Question 6**

For the last two years, Question 6 stipulated the compositional technique to be explored by candidates but, unlike the single-text question in this section, it was more broad.

Very few candidates answered this question.
Question 7

For the last two years, Question 7 did not stipulate the compositional techniques to be used by candidates but instead, provided a specific idea/issue to be explored.

This was a very clever question since so many of the texts are set in the past.

Candidates focused on the ways in which their texts explored memory and some constructed a good argument how their texts explored the past.

Some responses were very general and recounted the main narrative points of the texts in question. One impressive response explored ideas of memory in The Kite Runner and Her. This script was detailed in its reference to compositional features and was a detailed comparison and contrast of both texts in relation to the focus topic.

Many candidates integrated a discussion of the compositional features into their discussion and were able to show how these features strengthened the ideas of the texts. The better responses moved well between the texts, pointing out similarities and differences between them.

Independent Study – Folio

Most Candidates completed their Independent Study on ONE text from either the 2015 Prescribed Text list OR from the List of Additional Titles for Module 4. Very few candidates chose to include an additional text.

Candidates who performed well expressed their focus as a study question and showed a commanding understanding of Criterion 6.

The Table below lists the texts used in 2015 in Module 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>No of Folios</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>No of Folios</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Let Me Go</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Amnesia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankenstein</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Cats Eye</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Gatsby</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Roving Party, The</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial Rites</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>This House of Grief,</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kite Runner, The</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Muriel’s Wedding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuthering Heights</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ransom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blade Runner (Director’s Cut)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Tempest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Antigone*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrow Road to the Deep North</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Death of a Salesman</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Act, The</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Babel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tess of the D’Urbervilles</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Heretic, The</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the Beautiful Forevers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Black War, The:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regeneration</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>One Night the Moon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Railway Man</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>A Streetcar Named Desire</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All That I Am</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>On the Waterfront</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The God of Small Things</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Eliot T. S.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jasmine</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Harwood, Gwen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were many impressive and excellent Independent Studies this year. These included sophisticated third person and first person critical responses, clever imaginative responses with strong links to the critical focus and insightful reflective statements which provided relevant personal context.

Many candidates had carried out careful research on their text and author and used this research in an intelligent and illuminating way to support their interpretation and focus. A number too had thought carefully, but with a sense of daring, about what form would best allow them to explore their focus in the Creative Response. A refined focus question is crucial – it is best to be precise and not too wordy. Solid focus questions usually make reference to values to reflect upon and explore, cultural contexts to interrogate, and compositional features to analyse, which are utilised in the creative response. Students who had chosen broad statements to discuss rather than inquiry questions were less successful in addressing criterion 6.

Successful candidates chose inquiry questions that enabled them to incorporate their own personal context in the Reflective Statement and in the Critical Essay. Some students had chosen to focus on a particular literary reading such as postcolonialism, or feminism and their personal perspective was evidenced in a sophisticated manner through their third person discussion. A number of studies focusing on The Children Act, Cat’s Eye and Frankenstein demonstrated depth of insight into text and evidence of deep personal engagement.

Most students used the cover page template; however, in some cases, the referencing system was not acknowledged. The majority of candidates demonstrated an understanding of the importance of meticulous referencing to address many of the evidences of criterion 7. Of particular concern were those who chose to include extensive bibliographies and no in text references. Some candidates are still failing to reference their primary text. However, for many candidates, even some of the very good ones, there was a reliance on less ‘reputable source’s of information eg Schmoop, endnotes and the like. A good bibliography and reference list should demonstrate sound researching skills and wide reading. Students should aim to utilise a few good scholarly sources. Those who did evidently benefitted from engaging with them.

There were also some candidates who did not provide word counts on their cover sheets and had not taken quotes into account when calculating word counts. It was pleasing to see that everyone acknowledged that the reflective statement is not included in the word count. Note that some candidates handwrote the cover sheet and did not pay attention to other presentation conventions stipulated in the Independent Study Guidelines including font size and line spacing.

The Reflective Statement

Nearly all candidates wrote between 450 - 600 words and recognized that the Reflective Statement is NOT part of the word count.

All Reflective Statements were written in the first person as instructed. Unfortunately, many Reflective Statements did not follow the instruction to:

- give markers an understanding of your intentions for your chosen focus
- explain the relationship between your stated focus and both the imaginative and critical responses
- outline the way(s) in which your imaginative response relates to the critical response
- analyse the influence of chosen text(s) on your own ideas, values and perspectives
- outline any independent investigation/research you may have carried out as part of your Independent Study.

Consequently, they did not support the Critical and Imaginative as comprehensively as it could have been possible.
Generally candidates were much more assured in the Reflective Statement in explaining their focus, and the choices they made to explore it, both analytically and creatively. It was pleasing to see an improvement in the understanding of the purpose of the reflective statement and to see the majority of candidates taking advantage of the 450-600 word limit to convince the marker of their learning. Strong candidates articulated the central ideas of their chosen text and reflected on the relevance of these ideas and values to their own lives. Such candidates recognized the importance of establishing a strong link between the critical and imaginative responses. Strong statements often reflected on the particular employment of compositional features and/or genre they chose for the imaginative component, often analysing how such choices privileged their intended reading.

Most candidates utilised the context statement as a platform for criterion 6 to good effect. Most candidates outlined their focus area and linked their imaginative and critical response effectively. Three examples of how students tackled C6 are included for your consideration.

Student example 1
“As a young woman raised in 21st Century Australia, I am fortunate to live in a society with endless opportunity to create my own social landscape and abundant opportunity for education; I was raised on “a porridge” of freedom and opportunity. I could not help but feel incredible sadness for Agnes’ fate. Agnes was educated and beautiful but she was condemned because of her poverty, gender and because she made one ill-fated attempt to better her life. Kent’s story of Agnes is based on real events; as a young woman, I cannot escape the tragedy and sadness of her story. I feel somewhat haunted by it as Kent did.”

Student example 2
“Being a 21st century feminist, who has grown up in a world that is increasingly becoming more individualistic, and open-minded, a society that deplores racism and sexism, I felt, from the very first page, to the last, of Ostuka’s novel, that there was something inherently wrong about how these women were treated. Ostuka managed to place me in the shoes not of one of these women, but hundreds, leaving me to drown in their oppression, and outraged at the indifference of the American ‘mainstream’ voices at the end of the novel. This novel, through a blatant use of reverse-psychology, highlighted the injustice of this treatment, letting these quiet voices be heard and not left to be forgotten; but also reminded us that there are still many injustices in these areas in the world, and that the most basic human right is to be able to have and express your identity.”

Student example 3
“I felt a sense of connection to the ‘identity-less’ twin protagonists, despite our profoundly differing contexts and life stories. They too clung to what was familiar as I do, blamed themselves for their childhood mistakes, and craved affection and approval. The female characters inhabiting Roy’s novel are amongst the most complex, resilient and strong women I have encountered in fiction, yet they and the millions of unnamed women in India and our world, are systematically discredited, degraded and oppressed. As a young woman waging my own war against sexism and misogyny, the plight of women depicted by Roy fascinated me. I wished to explore the many facets of feminist issues beyond “face-value” oppression such as objectification and the profound lack of autonomy. Sexism runs much, much deeper, and through extensive research and reading I was able to understand the wider plight of women explored by Roy.”

Candidates recognised the context statement as a gift to set their assessor up for reading the Independent Study and mostly used as close to 600 words to do this. Like past years, weaker CS’s outlined unnecessary details of research processes or why they chose their particular texts.

Weaker candidates are still including information about abandoned projects and some are still using the statement as an opportunity to articulate information (often plot retelling) that is then repeated in the critical component. Candidates need to avoid unnecessary repetition at all costs. Many of the weaker responses were rushed indicating that this component of the study was not taken as seriously as the other two. Candidates need to know that the reflective statement is their opportunity to entice the reader and to “sell” their study to the marker.

The marked unevenness of expression, complexity and sophistication between the Critical component and the RS suggests that too many candidates are still rushing their reflective statements, seeing them as less important than the other two components. This also flagged some concerns for some markers that possible undue assistance may have been provided for sections of the Independent Study.
Stronger responses reflected on how their personal context influenced their interpretation on the text. An example is included below:

“When reading Behind the Beautiful Forevers, due to my experiences in Fiji, I could clearly imagine the world which Katherine Boo communicated through her journalist style that is as engaging as that of a novelist. My intercultural experiences assisted me greatly to imagine and relate to the many characters in Boo’s text. The mindset of these characters was inspirational, and aligned with my values of never giving up or losing hope in any situation. Every Annawadian character subject to poverty found their own methods of dealing with personal situations, which were comprised of so many components and layers of difficulty. I believe that Katherine Boo perfectly explored this determination and fighting spirit in all characters, whilst she introduced her audience into a hidden world which is frequently misunderstood.”

It is important to be explicit about the form of the Imaginative Response in the Reflective Statement. Most candidates explained how the Imaginative and Critical Responses connected in terms of ideas, and sometimes setting; but few specified form. In some cases, discerning the form was difficult, even when reading the piece. Three examples of “explanations” of the Imaginative Response from the 2015 candidature are included below:

**Student example 1:**

“My creative response was influenced by my intrigue in the concept of heroism, and the assumed hero of the story’s disregard of anything involved with the idea of him as a hero. After researching the Stanford Prison Experiments, and the questionable line of what is good and bad, I scrutinised in detail what it means to be a hero. Are we all just heroes waiting for the opportunity to step up and assume the position? This concept, I believe, is closely associated to the mentality of Dorrigo Evans, as he leaves the war and shoulders the character he believed he was; not a hero, not a good man. Comprised within the piece, I attempted to create Evans’ reaction to being most prestigiously asked to speak at the 100th Anniversary of World War I, (discounting, for the sake of the response, the fact that the character would not be alive at this ceremony). By incorporating both the speech he wanted to write, along with the speech he would go on to actually deliver, I tried to capture the conflicted man’s character; inhibitions, feelings and the experiences which have shaped him into the man he became.”

**Student example 2:**

“The tragic life story, and hardships, of Toller prompted me to write an obituary for him that would appear in the New York Times as my creative response. I felt this needed to embrace his entire life story including his demise at the end of his life and an exploration into why he decided to end his life after such a strong battle. Through researching and writing about Toller I discovered the full effects that the oppression had into the future on the lives of individuals and my initial response to him altered dramatically.”

**Student example 3:**

“In responding imaginatively, I wished to focus on a character who had arguably been beaten and broken by every male power system there is – Mammachi (Soshamma) was this character. Mammachi is a marginalised and largely peripheral figure, left largely to percolate through the reader’s mind. This emphasis on the disenchantment of a female character is the linchpin between my critical and imaginative responses. Mammachi’s actions, however, in the concluding section of the book can be viewed as a catalyst for massive change. She has been systematically manipulated and controlled since childhood until her final humiliation by Chacko’s usurpation of the family pickle factory. Mammachi has internalised, and accepted her oppression, choosing instead to pour her love towards the one remaining worthy person – the very man who now oppresses her. Lurking beneath this, however, is a woman of integrity who plays the violin, who feels and loves, who once had dreams, and that is the woman I sought to rescue from Roy’s text.”

The Critical Response

The way in which the stronger Critical Responses moved so effortlessly between textual analysis and their own response to the text, each helping the other to reach a new level of understanding was impressive. There were many remarkable critical responses in both the first and the third person and both were equally acknowledged and rewarded for the insight of their analysis. Those candidates who wrote the more traditional third person ensured that a personal interpretation and position was discernible in their writing.
It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates demonstrated understanding of the meaning of a critical response as distinct from a reflective or analytical one. Stronger candidates, privileged a particular perspective and provided evidence for their view through reference to the composer and his/her use of compositional features. These studies also referenced critics to further strengthen their arguments. Weaker students wrote a reflective response and often did not include even the composer as an ‘other’, to either endorse or challenge their view. Generally this part of the study was the most pleasing and there were many candidates who carefully analysed texts in relation to set focus questions, carefully selecting evidence and quotations to support the candidates’ ideas. The better critical responses also demonstrated an ability to skilfully integrate a discussion of the candidates’ own ideas, values and perspectives into the analysis of others’ ideas. Only a few candidates identified some of the contextual features shaping personal responses to texts.

Higher quality responses analyse the construction of the text e.g. point of view, characterisation, symbolism, etc (traditional literary criticism) in relation to themes and ideas. Several high quality ‘critical literacy’ essays examined the significance of the cultural context relevant to composer and responder. Quite a few alternative and resistant readings offered thought-provoking, insightful and original arguments as they usually go beyond the dominant interpretation. While feminist readings of texts are the most common, text criticism that deconstructs class and/or race also enabled a rich contextual exploration.

Accuracy of detail is essential to conveying a thorough understanding of the text. For example, Jeanette Winterson’s text does not involve the Catholic Church! Those who wrote on *Oranges* and did not at least mention the unique language and style of the novel missed an opportunity to connect concepts arising from the book and complex poetic literature.

Paragraphs were generally accurately structured with clear topic sentences. In-text referencing was usually accurate but there were numerous Independent Studies without alphabetised bibliographies. Spelling was usually excellent. The intermingling of past and present tense in all parts of the IS was frequently a problem. Strong reflective responses of course connected to insightful analytical responses. Particularly meaningful reflective responses were able to explore the shifts in the student’s attitudes towards a subject. One critical response, for example, looked at the student’s altered position on feminism after studying *Her*. Weaker reflective statements simply outlined the creative response and the analytical response with minimal examination of the student’s context or changed ideas. Simply referring to one’s values and attitudes without specifying any detail lacks meaning and insight.

Exploring the shifts in gender representation was often a solid way for students to respond to the text. This was often done quite successfully through Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. On that note, students need to be wary of forgetting cultural context when discussing gender. There were many essays that assumed women and girls are universally emancipated in the twenty-first century! Similarly, there was an assumption that equal rights for LGBTI groups has been completely achieved.

*Her, Never Let Me Go* and *Blade Runner* enabled students to often write insightfully on what it is to be human. This was most successfully tackled when philosophical ideas were researched and examined in the light of the texts. Students who wrote on *Her* wrote more analytical essays on this than those who wrote on *Blade Runner*. The complex relationship between technology and humans was an interesting topic in several *Her* essays as students were able to consider their own relationship to technology whilst also considering the thematic concerns of the film. Despite the proliferation of secondary sources, *Blade Runner* essays and creative responses were often descriptive and disappointing.

Psychological issues were often raised through *Blue Jasmine*. Students need to be careful not to simply align a character (Jasmine) with a disorder for an entire critical response. It is important to be mindful of the discipline of English when embarking on an Independent Study. Considering the psychological issues of a character is useful when other textual factors are taken into account, but not as a stand-alone diagnostic parallel.

Close textual analysis still provides the most effective and original examination of a text. A focus on language was often missing from critical responses in favour of wide descriptions of events. An excellent analysis of *Blue Jasmine*, for example, focused carefully on the construction of characters through visual devices and included film stills in the essay.
The introduction should signpost the landscape of the essay to follow – be clear, succinct and try to construct a thesis. Long introductions highlight lack of clarity and focus, as do bloated body paragraphs. Make connections between paragraphs through transitional links or via the essay focus; this is crucial to overall cohesiveness. Above all, do not retell the narrative. Sometimes it may be necessary to recount aspects of the text; and ensure there is analysis and relevance to the focus question. Mid-range folios lose sight of their focus.

Far too many candidates are not treating characters as fictional constructs of the composer. This led to many pedestrian statements that implied the characters were real people. Weak candidates are still not treating characters as fictional constructs in their writing which hampers sophistication. Teachers and students need to be aware of this. Also pedestrian statements such as, “If I had been Anne Elliot, I would have....” showed awareness that characters are not real people. By contrast, stronger students showed awareness by using present tense when discussing characters and past tense to refer to historical information.

The CR was, typically, the strongest piece in the Independent Study which suggests that the time allocation given to the all three pieces was uneven. The task for the critical response is to express a personal position and examine your own ideas, values and perspectives and those of others by critically reflecting on the text(s). Writing in the third person does not preclude you from doing this.

A critical response is different from a reflective response. A critical response is formed after consideration of a close examination of the text, its context and other perspectives. Candidates must consider how this information interacts with their personal context and informs their own response.

A carefully phrased question is essential for a successful critical response. To evaluate textual integrity as part of a critical reflection, an analysis of compositional features is required; to express a personal position, candidates needed to reflect on the influence of the text on their own ideas, values and perspectives. The most successful questions made specific reference to both of these components. This often involved a two-part question. General statements followed by ‘Discuss’ or very general questions which could have applied to many texts limited the capacity of the candidate to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the text.

By contrast, critical components that showed understanding of texts as purposeful constructs were outstanding and sophisticated. These candidates were able to use present tense when discussing characters and plot as constructs, and past tense when referring to historical and cultural contextual information relevant to their text. Such sophisticated critical writing showed candidates’ understanding of the complexity of the issues explored and how composers can create characters to highlight such issues. There were some outstanding critical components written in the third person which were complemented with reflective statements explaining personal contextual information resulting in the position adopted in the study. Such positions included literary perspectives such as Feminist and Marxist readings.

The Imaginative Response

The imaginative response must will relate clearly to the critical response and serve as another way of showing knowledge and understanding of the chosen text(s).

In the second year of the new syllabus, there has been a marked shift in the quality of the imaginative responses in 2015. Both students and teachers seem to have understood that the imaginative component not only has its own criterion for assessment but is also assessed on the other two criteria. The 1200 word count was therefore taken more seriously this year and there were some very sophisticated and engaging responses that strongly resonated with focus topics. Stronger students used their imaginative responses to extend their understanding of text and to do something fresh and original, whether it was to write from a different character’s perspective, to insert a chapter etc. Most imaginative responses were extensions of the texts themselves; however there were a few outstanding responses that had taken the issues of the text and explored them in a completely different context. It is important to note that such responses are only successful if the candidate has clearly articulated the connection between the critical and the imaginative components in the reflective statement and that is another reason why the latter cannot be rushed up at the last minute! Strong personal positions were also evidenced in the more sophisticated responses as capable students, utilised characters to voice their own perspectives.
What differentiated the stronger responses from the more pedestrian ones was the believability of the characters. Weaker students are still changing the very essence of their text’s characters which does not make for a convincing read! Also transforming the first person narration of events in a text into the same protagonist’s diary entries with very little new material does not constitute a successful imaginative response.

Insightful creative responses explored minor characters’ viewpoints and/or what happened next (using the language and style of the original text). The most successful imaginative responses showed a preparedness to ‘play’ with language and to integrate literary and stylistic features into the piece; for example, writing from a particular character’s perspective which endeavoured to capture the voice of the character was rewarded.

A number of candidates used the ideas in their analytical response as the link, presenting pieces that were contextually outside the focus text. This was often successful but candidates must ensure the connection is clear and developed throughout their piece. Imaginative pieces which presented possible scenarios that could have occurred within the prescribed text were often successful.