
AS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE**

7706/1 Views and Voices
Report on the Examination

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General

In this first series of the new AS specification most students showed good engagement with their chosen texts and answered relevantly on the set questions. There were very few incomplete scripts or rubric infringements. Many students appeared to have divided their time wisely between the two sections, although examiners noted that there were a number of relatively brief answers and some students spent too long on Section A at the expense of less developed answers on Section B. As expected, there was a wide range in the quality of responses. There were some excellent answers that attracted full marks; there were also responses that contained very little analysis of the language of the extracts and poems.

Examiners reported that responses to the poetry questions tended to contain more detailed language analysis. In fact, some students who hardly included any precise linguistic comment in their Section A answers, were able to produce much more detailed and successful analysis in Section B.

The overall impression from responses is that AO1 is the more challenging assessment objective for many students. The central ethos of this specification is that analysis of texts is best done through the systematic and accurate analysis of their language features. There were a number of students who used little or no terminology, applied terminology incorrectly or used terms imprecisely. For example, there was often confusion between simple and minor sentences, adjectives and verbs, simile/metaphor/personification, elision and ellipsis, and 'juxtaposition' and 'oxymoron' were frequently used for any kind of contrast. It was pleasing to see students attempting to analyse their texts using newer concepts and analytical tools. A number of students explored deictic patterns, although some were unsure about what constituted deixis and applied the term to any temporal or spatial reference. Students and teachers may find the following link helpful in discussing deixis: <https://thedefinitearticle.aqa.org.uk/tag/deixis/>

Examiners noted that some students are tending to feature-spot, using linguistic labels purely for the sake of it, rather than discussing how particular word choices create meaning. One of the major areas where students could improve is in the selection of language levels to purposefully explore the ways the writer has constructed the narrative in the prose text and in the construction of the poetic voice and the presentation of time, place, people and events in the poetry. Terminology needs to be used accurately as a tool to explore how meaning is created, rather than simply labelling.

Key messages for students:

- be prepared to focus on language techniques used by writers—analysis needs to be meaningful and precise
- be able to apply terminology accurately—link features with interpretation
- be able to comment on the writer's use of point of view
- be able to write about how the storyworld is created in fiction and how the poetic voice is constructed in poetry.

Section A - Imagined Worlds

The following marks are awarded for assessment objectives:

AO1 (20 marks) – Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

AO2 (15 marks) – Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts.

The AO1 mark focuses in particular on students' ability to apply linguistic/literary concepts and methods to prose fiction, using appropriate terminology in order to analyse narrative technique. It also rewards the ability to maintain an academic style throughout the essay.

The AO2 mark focuses on students' interpretations and ideas in response to the question, and their ability to examine the ways in which meanings are shaped through the selection of relevant parts of the extract.

This section focuses on how language choices help to shape the representations of different worlds and perspectives in prose fiction. The concept of 'world building' and how writers use language to create a fictional storyworld is important in this section and it was surprising that relatively few students dealt with this directly. The most successful answers were able to integrate a consideration of narrative point of view within their response to particular questions.

The most popular prose text was clearly *The Handmaid's Tale*, with *Dracula* being the minority choice.

As a general overview, successful responses:

- focused on the question
- discussed the construction and effects of narrative point of view
- supported ideas by exploring the language of relevant quotations
- applied terminology accurately
- used precise terminology and explored in detail how meanings are shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and tools (eg types of narration, modality, representation of speech and thought)
- provided interpretations that were well supported by detailed evidence from the text
- showed awareness of the conventions of Gothic or dystopian fiction but did not allow this to dominate answers
- produced sustained answers
- produced well expressed, clearly structured answers.

As a general overview, less successful candidates:

- did not adequately address the question
- did not use precise terminology or made errors in the application of terminology
- used general labels (eg 'word', 'tone', 'imagery') rather than more precise terms
- feature spotted, with very limited exploration of meaning
- made broad assertions, not supported by clear examples
- included very long quotations or did not well contextualise quotations

- drifted off the focus of the question into more general considerations of genre
- produced very brief responses with only a few superficially relevant ideas
- produced answers that were poorly expressed.

Question 1: *Frankenstein*

This question was concerned with the presentation of place, in particular the mountain setting of the extract. There were many pleasing responses to this question, showing students' understanding of how the presentation of the mountain scenery reflects Frankenstein's state of mind and how this changes as the narrative in the extract progresses. However, very few answers made any reference to the poem and how this signals a change in Frankenstein's attitudes. Most students recognised the shift in the latter part of the extract towards a more positive attitude, a recognition of the healing powers of nature and the uplifting presence of the mountains. Many students commented on the use of 'awful majesty' but most thought that this was an oxymoron and spent some time explaining how it illustrated Frankenstein's conflicted feelings about the mountain, without realising that 'awful' in Shelley's Nineteenth Century vocabulary meant 'awe inspiring'. Many students showed an awareness of gothic conventions and the ideas of the Romantic Movement and were able to relevantly use this in their answers.

Successful responses:

- showed clear awareness of Victor Frankenstein's narrative viewpoint in the extract
- explored how Frankenstein's shifting attitude is presented
- contrasted the more sombre description of the mountain in the first half with the sense of wonder in the second half
- explored the description of the mountain setting in detail and correctly identified language features that helped to present it as both overbearing and awe-inspiring
- considered how the presentation of the mountain setting reflected Frankenstein's state of mind and supported this with clear evidence from the extract
- included perceptive and relevant comments on the philosophical concepts in the extract.

Less successful responses:

- mistakenly identified the narrative viewpoint as being the creature's. Whilst this did perhaps reflect some of the doppelgänger links between Frankenstein and the creature, it also led to some unconvincing and skewed interpretations
- commented on the mountain scenery as being purely symbolic of what has happened in Frankenstein's life and provided only broad interpretations. These were often not very convincing and there was much over-interpretation of small details – for example, the broken trees were seen as representing the difficulties in life or the people the creature has killed or even the Industrial Revolution
- struggled to engage with details from the extract and what these conveyed
- made vague and generalised comments on how 'tone' is created or how 'tension' is built up
- made over-stated claims for the significance of alliteration or sibilance
- identified semantic fields but lacked more precise exploration of words, their meaning and effects and made broad comments about them being negative or positive

- showed limited awareness of Shelley’s use of language and misunderstood ‘terrifically desolate’ and ‘awful majesty’
- allowed comments on Gothic conventions to dominate answers.

Question 2: *Dracula*

This question was concerned with the presentation of place, in particular the presentation of the storm in Whitby in the extract. There were many sound responses to this question, with most students showing an understanding of the context of Dracula’s impending arrival in Whitby. Very few, however, commented on the narrative viewpoint of the newspaper article and some students thought that the extract was written from Mina’s point of view. There was a recognition of the destructiveness of the storm, the appeal to the senses, links to death, and often a recognition of links to Dracula himself; a few students recognised touches of admiration in the narrative voice. As with responses to some of the other Section A texts, some students made over-stated claims for the effects of alliteration. The sibilance in ‘sea-mist swept’ was often claimed to create a sinister tone, although exactly how was never explained. There were more convincing points made about the breathy effects created by alliteration of the ‘w’ in ‘white wet clouds which swept’.

Successful answers:

- dealt with the newspaper framing of the narrative, engaging with the idea that it provided a more objective, external view of events
- commented on reader positioning
- explored in detail a range of language techniques to present the power of the storm
- used details from the extract to explore how the storm complemented Dracula’s arrival.

Less successful answers:

- made no comment about narrative viewpoint
- relied on broad labels, such as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ to describe the language used to present the storm
- misused word classes, in particular labelling “roaring” and “devouring” as verbs
- lost focus on the presentation of the storm itself and wrote about Dracula
- allowed comments on Gothic conventions to dominate answers.

Question 3: *The Handmaid’s Tale*

This question was concerned with characterisation, in particular the ways in which Moira is presented in the extract. This was by far the most popular prose text and candidates clearly enjoyed responding to the extract, demonstrated through the wide range of sensitive interpretations of Moira’s character and her experiences. Most candidates were able to make sound observations on Moira’s character, commenting that she was: rebellious, unchanged, a leader, opinionated, cynical. There were some perceptive points made about the wires on Moira’s costume symbolising entrapment, and also about the way Moira uses the second person in ‘your gang’ as a way of ‘othering’ the Handmaids. A surprising number of students struggled to spell Moira correctly, preferring instead ‘Moria’ or ‘Maria’.

Successful responses:

- maintained a relevant focus on the presentation of Moira
- showed awareness of the narrative viewpoint of Offred
- showed an understanding of Moira's lack of control over her life in Jezebel's and that she was showing a certain amount of bravado
- discussed the way Moira spoke and behaved, and the way others responded to her, understanding that she had retained at least some of her rebellious spirit, despite the situation
- explored in detail a range of language techniques used to present Moira as rebellious and confident
- provided some subtle interpretations of Moira's situation at Jezebel's.

Less successful answers:

- struggled to maintain focus on the presentation of Moira and commented more on Offred and her feelings
- made no comment on Offred's narrative viewpoint
- included less convincing interpretations of Moira's character, such as she is dangerous, or motherly
- claimed that Moira had chosen to be in Jezebel's and had choices in what to wear and was thus happy with her lot
- claimed that Offred feels unsafe at first because Moira is unpredictable and might be dangerous
- misunderstood the verb 'teeters' and claimed that it shows she is confident or happy
- discussed at length less central or less relevant details such as the 'pink cubicle' or the 'black van'
- drifted into a discussion of the dystopian society of Gilead and lost sight of the central focus on Moira.

Question 4: *The Lovely Bones*

This question was concerned with characterisation, in particular the ways in which Lindsey is presented in the extract. On the whole, Lindsey's character was well-understood. Many students were able to place this extract into context, demonstrating an awareness of the significance of the extract within the novel. They were able to track her feelings towards others and present often sympathetic interpretations about her motivations. Many focused relevantly on her instructions to herself and made sound comments on the use of metaphor and simile in the extract. It was surprising that a number of candidates made no mention at all of narrative viewpoint as there was much that they could discuss about how the reader is presented with Lindsey through her dead sister's point of view.

Successful answers:

- discussed how Lindsey is presented through Susie's narrative viewpoint
- engaged with Susie's unusual narrative viewpoint, and the idea that as she is dead she is not bound by time or space
- showed awareness of the conventions of fantasy genre in allowing a perspective on events and an insight into Lindsey's thoughts and feelings
- discussed Lindsey's vulnerable state and how she had to arm herself against sympathy so as not to break down
- commented thoughtfully on Lindsey's direct speech in 'What exactly is my loss?' and recognised this as a dispreferred and face-threatening response
- explored in detail a range of language techniques to present Lindsey's methods of coping with Susie's death
- made perceptive and relevant comments about Sebald's use of italics.

Less successful answers:

- showed no awareness of narrative point of view
- discussed Susie as much as Lindsay, and focused on their relationship
- included unconvincing interpretations of Lindsey's character
- labelled features, such as the simile 'like a stone', without making any comment on its effects
- suggested that Lindsey's direct speech to the principal showed she just wanted to forget Susie and get on with life as normal, or that she asked the principal 'exactly what is my loss?' because she didn't know
- drifted into a broader discussion of how Lindsey is presented at other points in the novel.

Section B: Poetic Voices

The following marks are awarded for assessment objectives:

AO1 (15 marks) – Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

AO2 (15 marks) – Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts.

AO4 (10 marks) – Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods.

The AO1 mark focuses in particular on students' ability to apply linguistic/literary concepts and methods to poetry, using appropriate terminology in order to analyse poetic technique, the construction of the poetic voice and the presentation of time, place, people and events. It also rewards the ability to maintain an academic style throughout the essay.

The AO2 mark focuses on students' interpretations and ideas in response to the question, and their ability to examine the ways in which meanings are shaped through the selection of relevant parts of the given poems.

The AO4 mark focuses on students' ability to make links between poems and explore similarities and differences.

This section focuses on the nature and function of poetic voice in the telling of events and the presentation of people. The role of language in the construction of perspective is particularly important.

Overall, students' responses to the poetry questions tended to be more detailed and analysed language more precisely than answers on the prose texts and examiners noted that there were many excellent answers on the poems. Better responses homed-in on specific features, used terminology accurately and explored meaning precisely. Less successful answers used more general labels, such as 'word', 'imagery' or 'tone', and made broad assertions about effects.

There were some very pleasing answers that discussed the effects of particular poetic techniques, although some students struggled to comment on these effectively. Caesura and enjambment were often mentioned, but rarely to any real purpose. There were many broad comments about enjambment helping ideas to 'flow' without specific examples or more detailed analysis. There were also some very broad, often over-stated, claims about the effects of different stanza lengths or structures. Some broad, often unconvincing, assertions were also made about the effects of phonology, although examiners also noted some thoughtful and detailed work describing sounds with accurate terminology and closely analysed effects.

Most students were able to make connections between the poems and, on the whole, comparisons were sustained well. However, an issue for some was in organising their comparative approach. Some candidates used the approach of looking at one poem first, then bringing in the second and comparing. This was often, though not always, unhelpful, as it tended to lead to limited comparison being made and uneven coverage, particularly if the student ran out of time on the second poem. Sometimes points were set up as comparisons but were not comparing like with like, either thematically or linguistically.

As a general overview successful responses:

- focused on the question
- discussed the construction and effects of poetic voice
- supported ideas by exploring the language of relevant quotations
- applied terminology accurately
- used precise terminology and explored in detail how meanings are shaped
- made considered and relevant use of different concepts and tools (eg modality, phonoaesthetics)
- made thoughtful and relevant comments on the poets' use of rhyme patterns, enjambment, caesura
- provided interpretations that were well supported by detailed evidence from the poems
- made detailed comparisons between the poems
- covered both poems evenly
- produced sustained answers
- produced well expressed, clearly structured answers.

As a general overview less successful responses:

- did not adequately address the question
- misinterpreted elements of the poems
- did not use precise terminology or made errors in the application of terminology
- used general labels (eg 'word', 'imagery') rather than more precise terms
- feature spotted, with very limited exploration of meaning
- made over-stated claims for phonology and/or enjambment
- commented on rhyme scheme patterns with no link to the question
- made broad assertions, not supported by clear examples
- made little or no comment on poetic voice
- made few or very simple and general connections
- produced very brief responses with only a few superficially relevant ideas
- produced answers that were poorly expressed.

Question 5: John Donne

This question was concerned with how people and their relationships are realised through point of view, attitude, specific registers, physical descriptions, speech and thought, in particular on the attitudes of the poetic voices towards their lovers. A relatively small proportion of candidates answered this question. Where students understood the poems, there was thoughtful engagement and close analysis of detail. However, less successful responses revealed that some students had a limited appreciation of what the poems were really about, particularly in 'The Apparition'. Most recognised that the relationship in 'Valediction' is closer than that in 'The Apparition', but there were many insecure readings. There tended to be more secure interpretations of the relationship in 'A Valediction', although students often found it difficult to discuss the vocabulary and imagery used, and frequently seemed rather confused by the compass conceit because they envisaged a different kind of compass to the one Donne intended. Some students did not comment on the conceit at all.

Successful responses:

- discussed how the poetic voices convey attitudes towards their lovers and supported this with clear evidence from the poems
- explored the language of the poems in detail, discussing how requited and unrequited love is conveyed
- explored the conceit of the compass in a convincing and relevant way
- showed evidence of a secure understanding of the details of both poems.

Less successful answers:

- made very broad and general points about the speakers' attitudes to the lovers
- misinterpreted aspects of 'The Apparition'
- took 'The Apparition' literally and thought that the poetic voice had actually been murdered
- made no attempt to explore the conceit in 'A Valediction'
- made unhelpful or very basic points about the use of rhyme, unconnected to the question.

Question 6: Robert Browning

This question was concerned with the importance of place, the ways in which locations and memories are captured in voices and their effect on individuals, in particular how Browning presents England and Italy. There was quite a wide range in the quality of responses to this question, from answers that focused clearly on a number of ways in which Browning has presented England and Italy, to those that revealed that the poems were not always well understood, particularly 'De Gustibus'. Generally, comments on 'Home Thoughts From Abroad' were better than on 'De Gustibus'. Most students were able to discuss a number of valid comparisons between the poems and understood that England and Italy are presented differently. There were some interesting, but occasionally rather wayward, interpretations of the viewpoint of the first stanza of 'De Gustibus': from the deceased Elizabeth Browning's point of view; Browning addressing a dead friend; from the point of view of a blackbird. Most students recognised that the poetic voice in both poems was likely to be Browning's own, given his personal experiences of coming from England but moving to Italy, although a number of students asserted that both poems are dramatic monologues, which is debateable.

Successful answers:

- recognised the poetic voice's love of both England and Italy
- included perceptive comments on the more subtle differences in attitudes towards England and Italy, supported by close analysis of language details
- used the speakers' emotional attachment to England and Italy as a basis for comparisons
- suggested convincing interpretations of the first stanza in 'De Gustibus'
- made valid and interesting comments on phonoaesthetics, supported by close analysis of details
- used biographical knowledge to enhance interpretations.

Less successful answers:

- made limited or insecure comments on poetic voice
- misinterpreted aspects of ‘De Gustibus’
- asserted that the first stanza of ‘De Gustibus’ was about Italy not England
- made unhelpful/very basic points about the use of rhyme and structure, unconnected to the question
- made quite broad comments about language, in particular applying more general labels like ‘positive lexis’, ‘negative lexis’, ‘aural imagery’, without more precise focus on exploring the meaning of details
- identified semantic fields but provided only one example
- broadly asserted that particular words were either euphonious or cacophonous with no explanations as to why this was so
- drifted into biographical detail not well linked to the question.

Question 7: Carol Ann Duffy

This question was concerned with the presentation of events and people, in particular how the poetic voices present the experiences of youth. This was by far the most popular of the poetry questions and many students showed a real engagement with the poems and had clearly enjoyed studying them. Most answers were relevant and showed that students had a basically sound understanding of Duffy’s intentions. It was pleasing to see a wide range of features being analysed in both poems, with students really taking advantage of the wealth of content available. There were some responses, however, where understanding of the viewpoint in both poems was not secure; some did not identify the speaker of ‘The Captain’ as almost certainly a male persona rather than Duffy herself, and some failed to grasp that the speaker of ‘Before You Were Mine’ was describing her mother’s youth, not her own. Better responses more precisely identified the poetic voice and made careful selections from the poems to explore his or her attitudes. Many students made thoughtful comments about the use of the ‘fizzing’ image in both poems, although few recognised that ‘fizzing’ in ‘The Captain’ is used as an adjective and not a verb. Most students were able to discuss how both poems portrayed youth as exciting and carefree, which was then lost in later life. There were many interesting connections made between the poems: celebrities appear in both poems; both deal with attention to appearance; both show a contrast between work and having fun; ‘The Captain’ shows conforming to authority whereas ‘Before You Were Mine’ shows rebellion; wanting attention from teachers vs admirers; both refer to young love; early teens in ‘The Captain’ vs later teens in ‘Before You Were Mine’; mothers proud vs disappointed; happy to be alone vs happy with friends.

Successful responses:

- showed evidence of a secure understanding of the point of view in the poems
- included sound analysis of how the attitudes of the poetic voices are conveyed towards youth
- showed awareness of the more subtle differences in attitudes towards their youths of the ‘Captain’ and Duffy’s mother
- recognised that there are two ‘youths’ being presented in ‘Before You Were Mine’—Duffy’s and her mother’s

- based comparative discussions around the feelings about youth expressed by the poetic voices, rather than being led by features themselves.

Less successful responses:

- misinterpreted the poetic voice of one or both poems
- asserted that the poetic voice in 'Before You Were Mine' was a man addressing his lover
- misunderstood references in the poems, such as the 'Bzz' in 'The Captain' and 'the thousand eyes' in 'Before You Were Mine'
- focused heavily on sentence types and very few other features
- included irrelevant ideas and lost focus on the theme of youth
- wrote about the theme of time rather than youth—perhaps reproducing an earlier practice essay.

Question 8: Seamus Heaney

This question was concerned with the importance of place and memories, and also the presentation of time in understanding the past and reviewing past experiences, in particular through Heaney's presentation of nature. This was another popular question, although not quite as popular as Question 7. Most students clearly appreciated how both poems featured a change from positive to negative and linked this to growing up and a loss of innocence. There were some excellent answers that recognised Heaney's disillusionment with nature, as exemplified in the blackberries and frogs, and explored in detail how this is conveyed, linking it to the fact he was growing up and that his perspective on life was changing. There were also some excellent comments on the presentation of place and exploration of 'world-building' through engagement with the language of the poems. Many answers included thoughtful comments on how references to specific places and times of the year are important in the poems. A number of students discussed the use of deixis, although this term was not always applied securely. Some students appeared to believe that any temporal or spatial reference is 'deictic', for example, claiming that Heaney had used temporal deixis in 'late August'. In terms of comparisons, most students were able to make a number of connections between the poems and offered mostly valid interpretations of the significance of Heaney's experiences with nature.

Successful responses:

- perceptively explored the subtleties in the speakers' conflicting views of nature within each poem
- identified the speakers' passion for nature through close focus on details
- commented on a range of techniques used to present the blackberries and frogs and offered purposeful explanations as to their impact
- explored in detail the shift in attitudes in both poems
- explained in detail how Heaney has created an adult voice looking back on childhood events
- made relevant and secure comments about Heaney's use of discourse and rhyme in both poems.

Less successful responses:

- struggled to explain the adult perspective on childhood events and asserted that the first stanza was from a child's perspective and the second from an adult one
- oversimplified the shifting tone in both poems by picking out isolated words to prove that the first stanza in each case was entirely positive and the second negative
- made assertions about Heaney's use of sensuous imagery but did not analyse details
- lacked more precise language analysis and included over-simplified or rather unconvincing interpretations of examples from the poems
- made unhelpful or very basic points about the use of rhyme and structure, unconnected to the question
- rather narrowly interpreted both poems as being about a growing awareness of sex, or that Heaney was writing about man's destruction of nature
- included irrelevant ideas – perhaps pre-prepared answers on 'childhood'.

Advice to students

To improve performance in the different assessment objectives on this unit, students are advised to do the following:

- learn how to apply a range of terminology accurately and precisely
- practise exploring how the writer's particular language choices create meanings and effects. If AO1 techniques are not identified in detail, it makes it harder for students to more precisely interpret effects for AO2
- make detailed as well as general comparisons. Explore how each poet uses particular techniques. A general comparison really needs to be followed by more detailed examination.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.