

# GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Insight report: 2018 results at a glance

Published: September 2018





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# Series analysis

Conduct your own analysis using data relevant to you. Watch short [tutorials](#) on using Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) for school, subject, group or student performance; or log straight in through [aqa.org.uk/log-in](http://aqa.org.uk/log-in)

## Grade summary

This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.

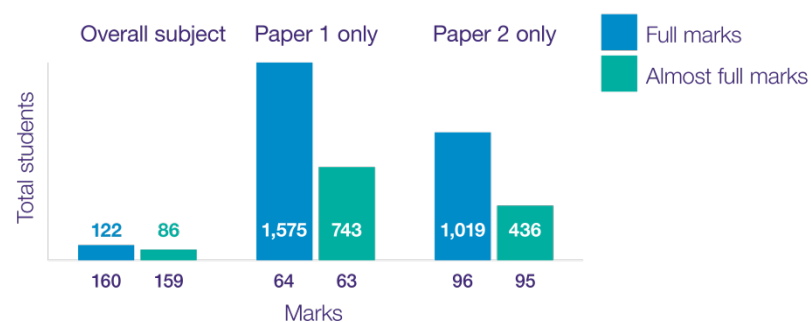


\*The yellow figures represent the remaining grade levels 3–U.

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This shows the percentage of students achieving each grade.

## Students achieving full marks cf. dropped just one



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This shows how many students achieved full marks and how many dropped just one.

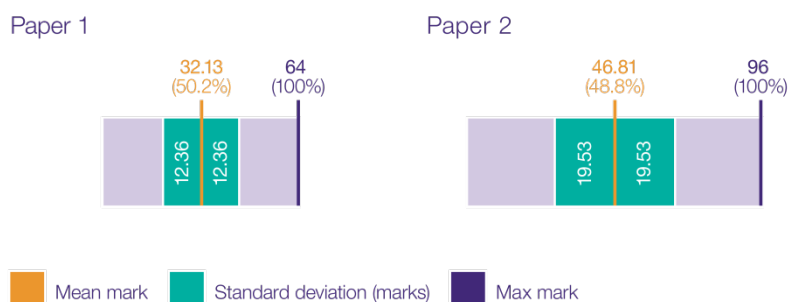
Our examiners look to reward students where possible and use the full range of marks available. We feel it is important to mark positively and we aren't afraid to give full marks when it's deserved.

**Watch tutorials on using ERA for results analysis, or log straight in via e-AQA.**

# Series analysis cont.

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## Mean and standard deviation by paper

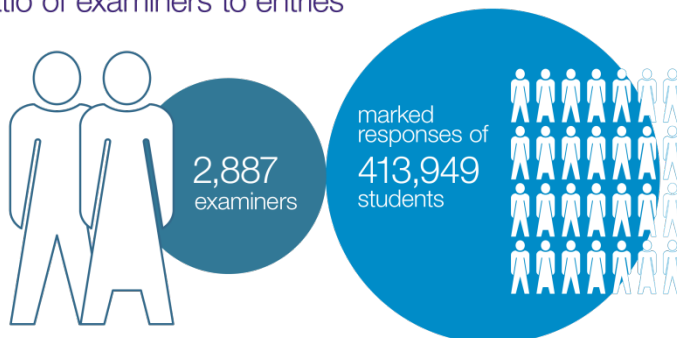


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The mean mark on each paper is close to 50% of the overall mark and the standard deviation is close to 20% of the overall mark.

The mean mark and standard deviation indicate the mark scheme is being applied appropriately and fairly, and that the full range of marks are being awarded across the cohort.

## Ratio of examiners to entries



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Examining GCSE English Literature is no mean feat. Following the exams in May, we standardise thousands of examiners and ensure hundreds of thousands of scripts are marked and processed in time for your students to get their results in August.

We're only as good as our examiners, so thank you to those of you who marked scripts this year and helped us to deliver the right result for each student.

**Watch [tutorials](#) on using ERA for results analysis, or log straight in via [e-AQA](#).**

# Series analysis cont.

Conduct your own analysis using data relevant to you. Watch short [tutorials](#) on using Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) for school, subject, group or student performance; or log straight in through [aqa.org.uk/log-in](http://aqa.org.uk/log-in)

## Most popular texts on Paper 1 Section A



1. *Macbeth* 2. *Romeo and Juliet* 3. *The Merchant of Venice*

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## Most popular texts on Paper 1, Section A

1. *Macbeth*
2. *Romeo and Juliet*
3. *The Merchant of Venice*

## Most popular texts on Paper 1 Section B



1. *A Christmas Carol* 2. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 3. *The Sign of Four*

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## Most popular texts on Paper 1, Section B

1. *A Christmas Carol* – Charles Dickens
2. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – Robert Louis Stevenson
3. *The Sign of Four* – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

## Most popular texts on Paper 2 Section A



1. *An Inspector Calls* 2. *Blood Brothers* 3. *Lord of the Flies* 4. *Animal Farm* 5. *DNA*

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## Most popular texts on Paper 2, Section A

1. *An Inspector Calls* – J B Priestley
2. *Blood Brothers* – Willy Russell
3. *Lord of the Flies* – William Golding
4. *Animal Farm* – George Orwell
5. *DNA* – Dennis Kelly

# Grade boundaries

Subject or paper	Max mark	Summer 2018 grade boundaries (raw mark)								
		9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
English Literature 8702	160	135	120	106	91	76	61	45	29	14

## How to interpret grade boundaries

### Grade boundaries are set using a mix of statistics and expert judgement

Our Centre for Education Research and Practice (CERP) uses a range of statistics to make predictions that suggest the most appropriate grade boundaries. The statistical evidence considers the prior attainment of the given cohort as well as the distribution of marks. Senior examiners then review a script sample to confirm the statistically recommended marks are sensible for the grade.

Boundary setting is overseen by Ofqual. To find more grade boundaries and learn how they are set, visit [aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/results-days/grade-boundaries-and-ums](http://aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/results-days/grade-boundaries-and-ums)

## Qualification summary

Much has been developed since 2017 in terms of the ways students are approaching the requirements of the exam. The vast majority of responses were not only a pleasure to read but demonstrated genuine engagement with the studied texts and increasing levels of confidence with the requirements of the assessment.

The overriding impression of senior examiners was of a candidature which was growing in confidence and engaging thoughtfully and effectively with demanding texts. Responses were streamlined and focused, demonstrating that most students were aware of the expectations and of the skills requirements within each task.

This is an un-tiered exam and therefore the following comments will give feedback and suggestions that could inform progress at different levels of attainment.

**Feedback on the exam courses use student responses to explore what happened in each exam series. Visit [aqa.org.uk/literature-cpd](http://aqa.org.uk/literature-cpd)**

# Paper 1

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2018 series in our reports on the exam. Visit [aqa.org.uk/log-in](http://aqa.org.uk/log-in) and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Literature (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

“What worked well”	“Even better if”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the text, both through references and direct quotations.</li> <li>Students approached subject terminology as ‘language of the subject’ rather than irrelevant labelling.</li> <li>Increased recognition of what is meant by context and how it can be approached.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The absence of planning may potentially limit students progressing through the mark scheme.</li> <li>Students need to consider why a writer has chosen particular methods.</li> <li>Students need to link comments on contextual factors/ideas to the text and consider <b>why</b> the writer has presented their ideas in a particular way.</li> </ul>

## Highlights from summer 2018

### Overview

Examiners reported a sense of a growing confidence and fluency in responses, much of which seems to be developing from a greater appreciation of what the exam seeks to assess. There were very few brief responses, indicating that the vast majority of students have been interested, stimulated and challenged by the texts they have studied and the ideas they contain.

A general impression is that a better understanding of what is expected by “subject terminology” and a greater appreciation of how context is being assessed has contributed to many responses being more fluent and integrated in their discussion and understanding of the texts.

### Section A

Most popular texts

1. *Macbeth*
2. *Romeo and Juliet*
3. *The Merchant of Venice*

### Section B

Most popular texts

1. *A Christmas Carol* – Charles Dickens
2. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – Robert Louis Stevenson
3. *The Sign of Four* – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



For detailed insight on responses to individual text choices and questions please see the full *Report on the exam*.

### Exploration of ideas and methods

It is perhaps the case that students find the prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century novel dense with powerful language and are clearly well drilled in analysing this, but are less confident in making connections to the broader themes of the texts. The reverse tends to apply in Section A where they have a strong grasp of character, plot and the themes they embody, but find the language more challenging.

Thought and planning time given to considering how students are going to use the details they choose, not only to explore the writer's methods but also to discuss the writer's ideas, would be beneficial. Without planning there can be a discussion of a number of examples and quotations which repeat the same skills, rather than developing an argument and taking the student to higher levels in the mark scheme.

### A01 – Response to task and text

Students have lots to say, are clearly well prepared for the exam, have a lot of knowledge of the texts and want to communicate this. Where students have written a plan, there is often a sense of a coherent and organised response, for which references and quotations have been selected to support the student's argument.

It also seems that a lack of planning is potentially limiting some students who could progress through the mark scheme if they developed a clear and sustained interpretation of the text. There is certainly evidence of students contradicting their own arguments, claiming one thing in one paragraph and then the opposite case later on, which might have been avoided if they had planned an answer and were clear about their view of the text.

### A01 – References

Nearly all students respond to the extract, so how they establish links to the rest of the text frequently becomes a determining factor in deciding a student's level. It is the quality of the student's knowledge of the text which allows them to select references effectively. These do not necessarily have to be quotations, and there were fruitful areas to be explored in looking at contrasts and parallels in characters and situations at different points in the text.

### A02 – Subject terminology

It was pleasing to see a marked reduction in the unhelpful and obstructive use of subject terminology which was a feature of responses last year. Last year saw students identifying Shakespeare's choice of nouns or verbs (often incorrectly), which frequently limited their ability to discuss the power and impact of his imagery.

**Reports on the exam are written by senior examiners who see more responses than anyone else. Access full reports via [aqa.org.uk/log-in](https://www.aqa.org.uk/log-in)**

## A02 – Writer’s methods

A02 remains an area with room for improvement. There is recognition of the need to discuss the writer’s methods, but often this is in isolation from the bigger ideas of the text. While students may discuss aspects of how methods are used, they don’t always develop this discussion into why the writer has used these methods.

Many students discuss specific images or words from the text, exploring connotations in detail, and the more successful responses link those connotations more broadly with the characters and the ideas they embody; acknowledging where the writer’s methods developed character or setting or highlighted a significant plot development. Students were rewarded for developing ideas about the writer’s methods, and going beyond how they work, into **why** the writer has chosen to use them.

## A03 – Relationship between texts and their contexts

Examiners are looking for evidence that students understand the text in relation to the question. Remember that context informs, but should never dominate, a reading of the text. The text comes first.

There are myriad interpretations that students can offer to demonstrate their own engagement with the text, these may relate to historical factors, for example the structure of society in Shakespearean England, but equally they can be seen through a different prism, for example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the universal urge for teenagers to challenge the attitudes and beliefs of older generations, which is not confined to a specific time.

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# Paper 2

This is a snapshot. Learn more about every question from the summer 2018 series in our reports on the exam. Visit [aqa.org.uk/log-in](http://aqa.org.uk/log-in) and follow:

e-AQA > Secure Key Materials > GCSE > English > English Literature (new specification) > Reports on the exam.

“What worked well”	“Even better if”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pertinence of references demonstrated an increased level of confidence and knowledge of the text.</li> <li>• Holistic approach to ‘methods’ rather than a pre-conceived list of techniques.</li> <li>• Linking contextual points back to the question throughout the response.</li> <li>• Knowing the text as a whole enabled careful consideration of the ideas and questions that the text raises.</li> <li>• Majority of students attempted all questions on the paper.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer the specific question on the exam paper rather than the one that they would have preferred to be asked.</li> <li>• Over-reliance on acronyms/mnemonics which tend to limit the lines of enquiry.</li> <li>• Terminology does not hold value unless it supports analysis. If used, linguistic terminology needs to be applied with genuine insight.</li> <li>• Chunks of biographical or literary/historical detail are almost always redundant – context informs but should never dominate a reading of a text.</li> <li>• Focus comparison on writers’ methods for question 27.2 on the paper.</li> </ul>

## Highlights from summer 2018

### Overview

The majority of students approached the paper this year with confidence and clarity. There was an improvement in the ways in which all aspects of the paper were managed, in particular question focus.

There were very few cases of students not attempting an element of the paper, which demonstrates increasing confidence with the scope and purpose of the assessment strategy, as well as improved management of time.

### Section A

Most popular texts

1. *An Inspector Calls* – J B Priestley
2. *Blood Brothers* – Willy Russell
3. *Lord of the Flies* – William Golding
4. *Animal Farm* – George Orwell
5. *DNA* – Dennis Kelly

For detailed insight on responses to individual text choices and questions please see the full *Report on the exam*.

### Section B – Poetry past and present

Responses to both tasks raised varied, thought-provoking ideas and many displayed true knowledge, understanding and passion for the poems. However, there was a marked rise in rubric infringements with regards to Section B, questions 25 and 26, where there was a noticeable increase in the amount of students only writing about the named poem, with a large proportion of these not appearing to have come across that poem before. A significant rubric infringement penalty is applied to these cases which can be damaging to the overall marks for these students.

Comparison is not a discrete assessment objective and therefore students can come at this task in whatever way is most useful and effective for them. Where comparison was treated as a thinking methodology, explicitly linked to the task, rather than an inherent way of structuring the responses, students did seem to fare better. Treating comparison as a ‘connection’ enables students to make more judicious selections of second poem. Where students seemed to have been encouraged to view the poems thematically, with a clear emphasis on power and conflict or love and relationships, this often resulted in them having a more successful framework with which to tackle the formal exam.

Students’ performance was closely monitored on question 25 and question 26 during marking and there is no evidence of any students being either advantaged or disadvantaged by question choice. The nature of responses from students were typical for GCSE English Literature and in line with those seen in the 2017 series. A wide variety of approaches were taken and the choice of second poem was broad and wide ranging across the two optional questions. There was no evidence from the student responses or concern from examiners to suggest any advantage or disadvantage to students.

### Section C – Unseen poetry

Examiners found that responses to 27.1 were a pleasure to read in terms of the levels of engagement with the ideas in the poem. Many felt that, freed from the burden of a prepared poem, the unseen poem actually enabled some lower ability students to write with empathy and understanding. Those who fared better kept their comments firmly rooted in the text rather than making lengthy, speculative comments on possible contextual factors.

For 27.2, there was an increased focus on AO2 (methods to create meanings) and many students were able to write a concise and well managed response. However, often students wrote some lovely responses to the ideas in both poems but neglected to mention anything that either writer had done on purpose to make meaning. Students would benefit from remembering that this task is all about the ‘ways’ as stipulated in the question.

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### A01 – Response to task and text

It is important to remember that part of the assessment is driven by the way in which the student has crafted their response. Where plans were used the responses tended to be of better quality as the thinking time enabled the response as a whole to be more crafted and purposeful. As such, a clearer focus was easier to identify throughout the response and therefore marks could be awarded for identification of a Level 5 ‘thoughtful’ thread.

### A01 – References

There was a marked improvement in the way that relevant references were selected to support their ideas, rather than the focus being on the inclusion of a quotation per se. As a result, references were more refined and more embedded.

It is the quality and relevance of the reference (direct or indirect), and the applicability of the reference to illustrate the ideas being developed, that examiners are looking to reward, rather than the amount. In the most successful cases, students referenced the text flexibly, exemplifying their points via pinpointing specific moments in the text rather than relying on extended, often unnecessary, quotations.

### A02 – Subject terminology

Where specialist terminology was included it was far more relevant and assured rather than the tendency towards naming of parts and feature-spotting that examiners noted last year. This has had a very positive impact on responses, with students being more fluent and relevant in their approach to analysis and thinking more holistically about writers’ methods linked to meaning and purpose.

Where some genre-specific terminology had clearly been integrated into study of the text, these terms were often effectively used as they were both relevant and helpful to the students’ understanding of the text: morality play, stage directions, exposition, turning point and so on were some good examples of terminology used ‘effectively’ (in other words, effective to the students’ understanding of the writer’s purpose).

### A02 – Writer’s methods

The improved focus on ‘methods’ in a truer, holistic sense proved to be extremely enabling. Rather than attempting to respond to a pre-conceived list of techniques such as those suggested by the narrowest interpretation of ‘language/structure/form’, or focusing on naming micro-features of the English language, there was a notable focus on characterisation, tone, dialogue, imagery, responses to characters by other characters, plot development, setting, and so on.

### A03 – Relationship between texts and their contexts

The word ‘implicit’ in the mark scheme refers the ability to integrate appreciation of ideas/contextual factors into overall understanding of the text. ‘Explicit’ (in Level 1) refers to extraneous context that is not linked to the ideas in the text. Therefore students get no marks for bits of biographical information or historical facts.

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Many responses integrated AO1 and AO3 seamlessly, allowing for a much more holistic and less prescriptive response. The most successful of these were the ones who simply answered the question. Where the AO3 emerged from the text, this was very enabling for students. There were some fantastic treatments of how characters, settings, events and plots embody/demonstrate ideas and perspectives, and these were far more successful than those who presented extraneous pieces of historical information not rooted in the text. Perhaps the most useful way of thinking about context is that the type of context needs to be particular to the text being studied.

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‘Excellent assessment resource with example materials which highlight how to gain marks for each Assessment Objective.’

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