

## A LEVEL

*Examiners' report*

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**H470**

For first teaching in 2015

## **H470/03 Summer 2018 series**

### **Moderated component**

Version 1

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## Introduction

The non-exam assessment (NEA) is a compulsory component of the A Level English Language qualification. It is worth 40 marks and counts as 20% of the total A Level.

The non-exam component comprises two pieces of work: an independent investigation of language and an academic poster. For the language investigation, candidates should conduct independent research into an area of language study of their choice and produce an investigation report. The recommended word count for this investigation is 2000-2500 words, excluding raw data and appendices. For the academic poster, candidates should produce an overview of their investigation, repurposing the content of their investigation to meet the poster form and their chosen audience. The recommended word count for the academic poster is 750-1000 words.

Guidance on preparation and marking of the NEA is included in the specification, including the marking criteria. Marking should be positive, rewarding achievement rather than penalising failure or omissions. The awarding of marks must be directly related to the marking criteria. Teachers should use their professional judgement to select the best-fit level descriptor that describes the candidate's work. Teachers should use the full range of marks available to them and award all the marks in any level for which work fully meets that level descriptor. Teachers should bear in mind the weighting of the assessment objectives, place the response within a level and award the appropriate mark. If a candidate does not address one of the assessment objectives targeted in the assessment they cannot achieve all of the marks in the given level.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments.

## General overview

The NEA language investigation is the space in the A Level where knowledge of methods and concepts acquired in the course can be used to explore exemplars of language use, chosen by candidates to reflect their interests and enthusiasms. There was plenty of evidence of real interest and enthusiasm in the diverse range of topic areas chosen in this session. Moderators commented on how often enthusiasm of this kind impacts positively on levels of achievement in the investigation. These areas of interest were sometimes drawn from aspects of the course with which candidates had particularly engaged, such as the exploration of media texts in preparation for the exams, and often from a wide range of interest areas outside of school and college. Many spoken language studies included contexts with which the candidate had direct experience, such as the language of young children in a variety of settings including schools/sports-coaching environments/Scout meetings; social media, several effectively focusing on the impact of the mode of communication – online compared to face-to-face; online gaming; family discourse, with some interesting work on inter-generational talk; occupational language, particularly, and revealingly, the language of part-time jobs undertaken by the candidate; pet-directed speech and many others. Moderators are keen to encourage more candidates to collect their own data for investigation in future sessions, seeing this as a positive learning experience in itself. During this process research questions begin to emerge and decisions can be made about the most appropriate methods and concepts to employ in the analysis. The first-hand knowledge they have of context, personalities and relationships helping to integrate AO3 and often creating a real sense of ownership of the project.

There were of course many other interesting studies of spoken and written English where candidates gathered data from other sources, including: media texts such as newspaper reporting/sports reports/magazines/advertisements; political discourse – Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin all appeared; reality TV, often with a specific focus on power and gender; long form American TV shows such as *West Memphis 3* and *Orange is the New Black*; podcasts including interesting work on *Serial* and the *Adam Buxton podcast*; literary language including a study that explored *Beowulf* alongside a modern Fantasy novel; music lyrics, hip-hop and rap music proving particularly popular; the language of controversial TV personalities such as Katie Hopkins and Piers Morgan.



### OCR support

Centres should ensure that they have their language investigation tasks approved each year, using the Task Approval service available on the subject webpage: [ocr.org.uk/alevelenglishlanguage](http://ocr.org.uk/alevelenglishlanguage)

### Task 1: Independent language investigation

The most successful investigations seen in this session had a scope that was manageable and discrete. By the time candidates reach this stage of their A Level English Language course they will have acquired a range of analytical methods for exploring language and considered language theory, but they shouldn't feel they need to demonstrate all of the above in this piece of work. Moderators in this session often made the point that the scale of what candidates were undertaking was often too large, and how more could have been achieved with a narrower focus of study. Probably best to avoid the big questions about language, such as if and why men and women talk differently or spend too much time trying to prove - or disprove – often very established academic theories on language use: much better to have a set of specific questions and apply them to a manageable data set.

The most effective work in this session did just that. Having established an area of study and gathered an appropriate data set the candidate then made key decisions about which linguistic

frameworks/language levels to analyse (AO1). Not all of them will be relevant to the data collected and just as having a focused hypothesis enables a greater likelihood of meaningful conclusions being arrived at, the choice of which of the frameworks to analyse – lexis and semantics, syntax, phonology and graphology, pragmatics, discourse – enables candidates to analyse their data productively. A close focus on both AO1 and AO3 was evident in the strongest analysis. The relevant language frameworks were applied but also there was due consideration of meanings, representations and contexts. A continued focus on the key question of where the language being studied comes from and what it means in its context, was central to this work and fully integrated into the analysis. An understanding of AO2 language concepts and theories and application of them then naturally followed. All of this work had clear linguistic aims and formulated hypotheses which were tested by exploration of the data set. Many of the most interesting investigations had human interaction at their core and explained the data in terms of roles and relationships. Some of the work which compared technology-mediated interactions with face-to-face conversations was particularly effective in this regard. Unscripted and interactive data really does seem to be a productive area for language investigation at A Level. The best work was able to distinguish features characteristic of spontaneous interaction from those which showed evidence of planning and performance, and explored the contexts determining each participant's contribution. Methodologies explained the choices of data and showed awareness of ethical issues, the dangers of bias and how to control variables. This work had really clear aims and a sustained focus on testing the hypothesis through analysis of language features. The work of relevant theorists was critically engaged, in some instances to support findings and in others to suggest that the theory did not match the exemplars of contemporary language use being explored. The conclusions in this impressive work related the findings to the aims of the study, and the hypotheses formulated, and were expressed in a clear but appropriately exploratory and tentative way. Evaluations revisited methodologies and considered how these might have been refined in the light of conclusions arrived at. Although it is a requirement of the component that candidates evaluate their investigation, this doesn't need to happen in a block at the end of the work. Some of the most interesting evaluations seen by moderators in this session were ongoing rather than one-off processes; where candidates reflected on their methodologies as they undertook the analysis and considered what was beginning to be revealed about the questions asked.

Some of the less successful work tended to lack aims, or present ones that were generalised or unlikely to be achievable by analysis of the data collected. Language and gender remains a very popular investigation area and the aim of some candidate work in this session to 'prove' that men and women talk differently proved to be problematic, especially when the data didn't support such an assertion. In this work analysis tended to be too reliant on assertion, and conclusions were rather too ready to claim that hypotheses had been proven. Attempts to justify these assertions by reference to the work of well-known but quite outdated gender theorists, such as Lakoff, Zimmerman and West, tended to be rather unconvincing. Where candidates were more successful in this regard they showed a willingness to critique these studies and, in several instances, cite more recent work that suggests that the most important variable is not the sex of the person talking, but that of the person being spoken to (Hancock and Rubin, 2014). Another characteristic of some of the less successful investigations was a tendency to be too self-critical in evaluations focusing on the limitations of the data collected, or the hypothesis formulated and the analysis undertaken.

Most of the work seen by moderators demonstrated knowledge of linguistic terminology which enabled some precise comments to be made about language use. Those features associated with spontaneous spoken English tended to be the most securely applied, along with identification of word classes and sentence functions. There wasn't always security in the identification of sentence types with particular difficulty in distinguishing between simple and minor sentences.

**OCR support**

Support and guidance on the language investigation task is available in the following guides: [‘Setting up a language investigation’](#), [‘Approaching the Language Investigation task’](#) and the [‘Independent Investigation of Language in Use’](#) teacher guide.

**Task 2: Academic poster**

The academic poster provides space for candidates to communicate an effectively organised overview of their investigations. There were many examples of carefully produced posters submitted in this session with effective use of visual and presentational devices to communicate meaning. Candidates who adopted a quantitative approach to the interpretation of data in their investigation found it straightforward to express their findings in the form of graphs, tables, bar/pie charts which work well in the poster form, and rather better than blocks of text. Synthesising information from the investigation in a concise way and providing an overview of outcomes and findings is key here. How such conclusions have been arrived at is perhaps less important in the poster than a clear representation of what was being researched, and what was found out about it. Extensive summaries of the work of theorists rarely contributed much in this form.

The specification gives guidance on the audience and purpose for the academic poster form in general as something which would be suitable for display at an undergraduate conference. There's therefore an expectation that the candidates will adopt an appropriately formal register and style in this task. However, there is scope for candidates to choose a specific audience for their posters and space is provided on the non-exam assessment cover sheet for candidates to indicate the chosen title and audience.

The best work for Task 2 imagined a specific context and audience for the poster. Candidates at more than one centre produced posters that were to be displayed at a Sixth Form Open Evening for Year 11 students and their families. Such a focus allowed candidates to think very clearly about purpose, and of ways of making the poster attractive, stimulating and accessible. This made decisions about what aspects of the investigation to include seemingly easier too. These posters began to take on something of a persuasive as well as informational purpose, in their role of attracting students to study A Level English Language.

Some candidates struggled to think of ways in which they could creatively transform and re-purpose the language of their investigation. It could be helpful when thinking about the term ‘academic poster’ to think of the content as ‘academic’ but the poster itself having a broader purpose. It might be possible to think of particular audiences of the poster that relate to the topic area studied. For example, for the candidate who undertook an investigation of GP/patient discourse then the audience of the poster might be trainee doctors reflecting on their own language in consultations; or for the candidate who explored media responses to there being a female Doctor Who, perhaps the poster could appear in the foyer of a Doctor Who Fan Convention: or posters representing investigations into the language of Jeremy Corbyn being displayed at a Young Labour Gathering.

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