

What are markers looking for?

The table below includes some tips for achieving highly in Section One of the exam. Try to incorporate at least some of these suggestions into your study routine.

Criterion and available marks	Helpful tips
<p><i>Reading of text</i></p> <p>(7 marks available)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know how to connect your understanding of ideas to construction and/or context. • Clearly state what you understand to be the main ideas of the text. • Be consistent with your reading. Don't be hesitant or undermine the points you have made. • Ensure you are explicit about the reading practices you are using. Only use a particular lens if the text calls for it. • Be analytical, not descriptive.
<p><i>Use of evidence</i></p> <p>(6 marks available)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you choose relevant evidence that bolsters your points. • Know how to incorporate quotations into your writing. • Avoid lengthy chunks of quotation. • Always explain quotations – state their significance to your argument. • Understand how to quote both directly and indirectly. • Offer appropriate technical analysis of your quotes.
<p><i>Literary concepts and terms</i></p> <p>(6 marks available)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the terminology of this subject. • Know how to use the metalanguage of the course. • Be familiar with syllabus concepts and how they apply to making a reading. • Avoid using jargon and buzz-words. • Spend time studying the generic features which differentiate one genre from another.
<p><i>Expression of ideas</i></p> <p>(6 marks available)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know how to present a 'reading'. • Plan your response. • Ensure your response is focused. • Don't become distracted or stray from your main points. • Reread your work to avoid errors or confusing expression. • Practise writing 'readings' throughout the year. • Don't overcomplicate your writing. Be concise and efficient.

Considering Question 1

Present a close reading of one of the three texts.

Interpreting the question

You can always expect Literature questions to mirror central course skills and concepts. Question 1 invites you to discuss your understanding of such concepts as:

- how texts represent themes, ideas, people, places and events
- the ideological function/s of texts
- the process of meaning making, including but not limited to, ideological reading practices
- the use and function of language and generic conventions
- the role of context in shaping meaning – both your own and that of the text
- the nature of the reader response.

These are broad and complex categories and to perform detailed analyses of each would be impossible in an exam setting. Given the nature of this kind of assessment, students cannot realistically be expected to give equal emphasis to all of the categories listed above.

A sensible approach is to respond to the specifics of each text. A guiding principle for your response is to remember that, above all, Section One is about reading closely. This process is about your ability to explain the relationship between formal aspects of literary texts' construction (the 'how') and meaning (the 'what'). For this reason, language and generic conventions are a good way to ground and focus your reading. After all, it is the way that language is shaped and presented that communicates ideas. If you can explain the way that language works in the text, you will always be able to support your key points.

Below is an example of what the framework for a response to this section might look like.

Close reading response framework

Introduction

1. Present an overarching reading of your text in a few sentences.
 - a. What is the text about literally?
 - b. What is your deeper reading (inferential, thematic, ideological, aesthetic, responsive) of the text?
2. Then present the aspects of this overarching reading that will you address in the body of your response.
3. Refer to the major elements of construction; the generic and language conventions used to communicate the ideas you are focusing on.
4. Don't simply list your ideas, expand them over a few sentences.
5. Consider any background information that you might need to supply the reader with. For example, if you are offering an intertextual or personal context reading.

Body paragraphs

A close reading will usually consist of at least 3-4 body paragraphs, each containing a separate idea. Each paragraph might structurally look something like this:

1. Identify a specific idea or aspect of your overarching reading.
2. Develop this idea over a couple of sentences.
3. Go to the text and find example/s. Use this evidence to support your point.
4. Technically deconstruct your evidence as a way of proving your ability to read closely.
5. Embellish your point by adding greater justification and subsequent depth of analysis.
6. Conclude by linking your idea within your overarching reading.

There are different schools of thought as to the order of paragraphs. Some believe that you should lead with your strongest point to set the tone of your response; others maintain that you should end with your strongest point to leave a powerful impression. Some believe your weakest point should be 'buried' in the middle, whilst others feel it should be last, in case you don't quite finish it. However, there is more at play here than just the psychology of the marker: you should structure your paragraphs in order of *significance*. What is the most important aspect of the text that has a bearing on your reading?

Conclusion

A conclusion assists in the structure of your reading. It reiterates the main elements of your interpretation of the text. In order to avoid being merely a repetition of points you have already made, your conclusion should acknowledge the significance of your reading. For example, you might conclude with a comment to show how the text's representations compare to those of your own context, or you may explain the ongoing significance of the ideas you discussed from an historical text to contemporary audiences, or offer a personal or aesthetic response.

Advice from teachers

- Avoid writing a series of disconnected paragraphs that merely point out various observations. Your response should offer a cohesive reading of the whole text or a significant part of it.
- Too many students fail to address genre in their reading. You have to select a particular genre of text for a reason. If it's a poem – discuss the nature of this poem! Your discussion of the text's ideas should make explicit reference to how they are constructed within this particular genre. We expect to see appropriate metalanguage to help explain the function of form and the use of devices.
- Too many students are writing simply about broad elements such as characterisation, plot and language. This is passable, however, marks would be higher if students dug into the specific techniques within these broad elements, such as:
 - acknowledging how a character acts and interacts with others onstage
 - noting how the plotline shifts in a novel, and how these transitions of time are managed to influence the reader's response
 - exploring how the patterns of language, such as the structure of dialogue or recurring images, work to develop tone and mood in a poem.