

Scholarship

2011 Assessment Report

English

COMMENTARY

This paper provided challenges as well as providing tasks and questions that were accessible to a range of candidates – a choice of stimulating questions provided opportunities to develop discussion, allowing candidates to identify key elements and bring their experience of texts through relevant reflection.

Candidates were able to argue for and against statements. This resulted in excellent academic writing where candidates displayed perception and discrimination.

Section A

Having the focus of a journey allowed students to develop an argument in their writing and provided some focus or purpose for their essay. There were sufficient differences for candidates to draw compelling contrasts and drew out which candidates had a real understanding of audience, purpose and language. Both texts were accessible, although the poetry in Text A required closer reading and allowed students to look past the obvious and give more nuanced accounts.

Candidates who were prepared to contrast and compare produced insightful and focused discussion. Some candidates discussed only easy connections and did not fully cover the extent of both texts. Candidates who focused in depth on particular and well-chosen connections fared better than those who covered a large number in little depth or focus, relying on generalisations.

Section B

The range of genres allowed scope for candidates who had undertaken independent readings beyond those studied in class, including an expansion into newer genres such as electronic texts.

Candidates need to be encouraged to work always within the frame of the particular genre and engage with the question in relation to this, rather than basing study on the text itself in isolation. Candidates who chose texts for the question rather than just proceeding to ‘tell everything I know’ about a studied text fared better. Some continued to work their responses in a Level 3 way. Candidates need to have the question at the forefront of the response and clearly grappled with before employing supporting textual references.

Candidates who produced formulaic and rote-learned responses usually did not engage well with the question and often produced ‘tag on’ statements at the end of the paragraphs that referred glibly and in a generalised way to the question rather than providing focused and creative debate.

Section C

This section allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skill in providing reasoned discussion. The statements invited comment on classic issues to do with literature and the interpretation of literature, but they also invited more than one possible interpretation of the statement and candidates who clearly established an engagement and understanding of just what the statement meant for them and then wove a response with texts, performed well. The topics allowed for the exposition of a balance of discussion and close reading. The Outstanding responses showed regard to all aspects of the topic and wove a supported and connected discussion through their presented readings. To enable this connected and supported discussion, candidates should avoid the reference to an over large numbers of texts, which often precluded synthesising.

SCHOLARSHIP WITH OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically: Generally

- chose a statement they could respond to
- engaged with the statement, keeping to a sophisticated central discussion
- showed 'freshness' of response in working with their own readings and the chosen statement
- were driven by the statement and not by the text
- mounted vigorous response with zest, wit, vigour, and panache
- brought relevant and focused knowledge of texts to support their response
- synthesized information and response
- showed personal insight and independent, critical thought about text and genre.
- formed strong, well-supported conclusions about texts in relation to the statement
- structured fluent discussion that moved from reference / quote to applied readings / analysis
- wrote with flair, sophistication, and eloquence
- demonstrated the ability to write well across the whole paper.

Section A

- dealt with both content and crafting in a balanced discussion
- explored unfamiliar passages with perceptive analysis
- applied their knowledge of techniques in a relevant and productive way to draw out the crafting or ideas of writers
- provided an overview of both texts that compared / contrasted more general effects and implications for a reader
- produced a response that was independent and creative.

Section B

- focused their response on the statement
- responded with a clear understanding of the genre
- developed and supported a cogent and effective thesis
- demonstrated the ability to reconsider, rework, and even refresh learned materials and familiar texts so that materials were brought cogently and judiciously to support chosen topic.

Section C

- focused their response on the statement
- demonstrated an independence of thought
- combined breadth and depth in their discussion
- used specific and appropriate details of the chosen text(s)
- sustained their discussion in a perceptive and engaging way.

SCHOLARSHIP

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship but not Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically:

Generally

- selected appropriate statements
- wrote a response that included critical analysis
- wrote three solid essays that were fluent and well-constructed
- engaged with the statement in their response
- structured discussions with supporting and relevant reference
- showed personal insight and independent thought
- formed strong, well-supported conclusions about texts.

Section A

- made reference to both techniques and meaning in the given extracts
- showed understanding of techniques
- compared elements of the texts and were able to discuss similarities and differences.

Section B

- responded to the statements
- took time to wrestle with the statement and understand it in their terms rather than assuming that the meanings were given
- used their understandings and experience of texts to shape developed and linked discussion.

Section C

- responded to the statements
- recognised with a degree of discrimination the thrust of a statement, producing relevant and fluent discussion.
- included textual evidence fluently, selecting details rather than summarising.

OTHER CANDIDATES

Candidates who were not awarded Scholarship typically:

Generally

- did not pace their work across the paper, spending too much time on one section and rushing/leaving out other sections
- did not respond to the statement and redirected materials to pre-worked essays
- did not fully engage with the statement
- did not display a sense of personal voice
- worked at a superficial level of understanding of the statement
- responses were literal rather than analytical
- lacked a clear command of their chosen texts and readings
- wrote literary essays that were not fluent or lucid
- produced work that was unbalanced and lacked the scope to provide Scholarship level responses.

Section A

- showed a misunderstanding of the unfamiliar texts, or did not compare the texts in any way
- focused too much on spotting effects or their absence
- resorted to paraphrased commentaries rather than analysis
- relied on explanation and repetition
- did not develop and structure a coherent discussion
- showed evidence of having made general assumptions about genre and shaped their discussion by this rather than what they actually found in the texts
- were inaccurate in knowledge and identification of language features.

Section B

- pieced together passages of pre-worked materials rather than adapting/responding to the given statement
- often included extraneous reference, detail, or quotation that did not pertain to the chosen statement
- did not move beyond particular studied/prepared “past-essay” areas of a text or texts, producing generic genre-related discussions.

Section C

- showed evidence of having misunderstood the thrust of the statements, without using knowledge of texts or their own reading experience
- retained ‘pocketed’ discussion of individual texts or authors without blending their readings/responses in a relevant discussion
- did not show or develop a personal response.

OTHER COMMENTS

The exam continues to provide evidence that there are some very able thinkers and writers who can construct sophisticated responses in exam conditions with sustained eloquence.

For candidates to succeed at this level, they need four key components:

- a tool kit of techniques
- academic writing skills
- a background of detailed text knowledge including wide independent text reading
- a real interest and engagement with various ideas and texts.

The **tool kit** needs to consist of a thorough knowledge of literary terms and grammatical techniques. Candidates need to practise these skills. The skills need to be developed so they can be used with confidence and accuracy.

Academic writing skills will also require practice. Candidates need to be able to write academic discussions on unfamiliar topics within an exam time frame. It is clear that although many candidates know their material and write well, more practice in non-prepared academic writing would be beneficial.

Detailed text background is as essential as selecting the appropriate exam statement for those text(s). It is essential that texts chosen for class study permit a degree of analysis

and discussion appropriate to the level of statements in the examination. It is not the range and quality of the text that is necessarily the issue. What is of crucial importance is that subsequent study and discussion allows candidates to respond appropriately in the Scholarship exam. A thematic approach to a year's English course coupled with a personal reading programme facilitates this. The need is for students to engage with the question and then use the texts they have at their disposal.

Ideas are fundamental. Candidates' responses need to engage with the statements, and then advance their own take on what that means. The evidence of independent thought and the creative response is vital. Candidates who respond well are those who have a real understanding of where they are, what the world is all about, and how people respond to it. Responses at this level need to include more than just plot, character, theme – what is required is a deeper or more intense understanding. This can include appropriate literary theory, the position of the reader, the position of the text in time, and the inter-relation of that text to others. This development of an independent perspective is critical at this level. The interest and engagement with the argument and the genuine development of an argument with supporting details are crucial.

In an examination of this type and standard, time is of the essence. It is vital that candidates avoid expository introductions and generalised discussions. Candidates would be better served by dealing with the statement and how they perceive it and then enforcing this with textual details. Candidates also need to have a good knowledge of the current assessment specifications.