



GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for English Literature



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Contents

The criteria	3
Introduction	3
Aims and objectives	3
Subject content.....	3
Knowledge and understanding	3
Skills	5
Assessment objectives	6
Scheme of assessment	7
Internal assessment.....	7
Synoptic assessment.....	7
Quality of written communication	8
Resources in examinations.....	8
AS performance descriptions for English literature.....	9
A2 performance descriptions for English literature	11

The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. AS and A level specifications in English literature should encourage learners to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature and literary studies as they:
 - read widely and independently both set texts and others that they have selected for themselves;
 - engage creatively with a substantial body of texts and ways of responding to them;
 - develop and effectively apply their knowledge of literary analysis and evaluation in speech and writing;
 - explore the contexts of the texts they are reading and others' interpretations of them;
 - deepen their understanding of the changing traditions of literature in English.

Subject content

2. AS and A level specifications in English literature should build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established at GCSE, introducing learners to the discipline of advanced literary studies, and should require reading of the major literary genres of poetry, prose and drama. A level specifications should extend these studies in breadth and depth, further developing learners' techniques of analysis, evaluation and comparison of literary texts.

Knowledge and understanding

3. AS and A level specifications should require learners to use their detailed knowledge and understanding of individual works of literature to explore relationships between texts and to appreciate the significance of cultural and contextual influences on readers and writers.

4. Specifications should require learners to show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and include at least two examples of each of the genres of prose, poetry and drama across the course as a whole. Texts for study should be chosen so that they illuminate one another and enable groupings that facilitate links or contrasts to support a coherent course of study.
5. Specifications should contain clear principles for the review and updating of texts, and for ways of grouping them together.
6. Specifications should cover a minimum of six texts at AS and a further six texts at A level. Learners should experience a wide range of reading in poetry, prose and drama that must include all of the following:
 - at least one play by Shakespeare;
 - work by at least one author writing between 1300 and 1800;
 - at least one work first published or performed after 1990;
 - at AS, work by at least one author published between 1800 and 1945.
7. Learners' study may include texts in translation that have been influential and significant in the development of literature in English.
8. Specifications must ensure that learners experience a wide range of literature of sufficient substance and quality to merit serious attention.
9. AS specifications should require learners to show knowledge and understanding of:
 - the functions and effects of structure, form and language in texts;
 - some of the ways in which individual texts are interpreted by different readers;
 - some of the ways in which texts relate to one another and to the contexts in which they are written and read.
10. In addition, in the context of a wider range of texts of cultural and literary significance, A-level specifications should require learners to show knowledge and understanding of the significance of:
 - the ways in which writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts;

- the interpretation of texts by different readers, including over time;
- how texts relate to literary traditions, movements and genres;
- the cultural and contextual influences on readers and writers.

Skills

11. Specifications should require learners to:

- read texts in a variety of ways and respond critically and creatively;
- vary strategies for reading, including for detail, overview and gist depending on the texts being studied and purposes for reading them;
- explore comparisons and contrasts between texts, establishing links and relationships;
- identify and consider how attitudes and values are expressed in texts;
- draw on their understanding of different interpretations in responding to and evaluating texts;
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and judgement of texts;
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination;
- make accurate reference to quotations from texts and sources.

12. In addition, A level specifications should require learners to show judgement and independence as they:

- synthesise and reflect upon their knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and ways of reading them;
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, including references to quotations and sources.

Assessment objectives

13. There are four assessment objectives (AOs) covering both AS and A level specifications. They aim to describe the areas in which evidence for knowledge, skills and understanding should be collected.
14. Knowledge, understanding and skills are closely linked, as are the individual assessment objectives.
15. Differences in demand between AS and A level specifications may be shown through the choice of different weightings for assessment objectives either singly or in combination to reflect the differences in the depth and breadth of the requirements of the specifications.
16. The weightings of assessment objectives in each part of the course must in combination offer a balanced approach to the assessment of knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to advanced level literary study.
17. Specifications must require that all learners meet the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

Assessment objectives		Weighting		
		AS level	A2 level	A level
AO1	Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO2	Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO3	Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO4	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%

	contexts in which literary texts are written and received			
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Scheme of assessment

Internal assessment

18. All A level specifications in English literature must have internal assessment with a weighting of between 15 and 40 per cent.
19. No more than 40 per cent of either the AS or the A2 may be internally assessed.
20. Specifications must make clear how reliability and fairness are secured, by setting out requirements that ensure the robustness of each stage of the internal assessment, i.e.:
 - the specific skills to be assessed;
 - setting of tasks;
 - extent of supervision in carrying out of tasks;
 - conditions under which assessment takes place;
 - marking of the assessment and internal standardising procedures;
 - any moderation process.

Synoptic assessment

21. Courses as a whole should develop learners' abilities to make connections and comparisons between a wide range of texts, of different periods, genres and traditions between texts read, and approaches to reading them. The A2 assessment units will require learners to:
 - develop a broader and deeper understanding of the connections between the knowledge and understanding set out in the specification as a whole;
 - draw together some of the key insights from their studies;
 - make purposeful use of these in undertaking assessment tasks.
22. Synoptic assessment in English literature includes:

- the explicit synthesis of insights gained from a close and detailed study of a range of texts important for the development of English literature;
- evidence of the ways in which contextual factors and different interpretations of texts illuminate their own readings;
- skills of interpretation and expression to give insightful, accurate, well-argued responses to texts.

Quality of written communication

23. These aspects of learners' skills will be assessed through assessment objective 1, which includes assessment of learners' overall competence in using language accurately and effectively in constructing well-argued responses to assessment tasks in English literature.
24. Where learners are required to produce written material on paper or on screen in English, the assessment arrangements in AS and A level English literature must require learners to:
 - ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear;
 - select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and to complex subject matter;
 - organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate.

Resources in examinations

25. Where a scheme of assessment includes access to open-book or pre-release material in examinations, a clear rationale must be given for its use.
26. Only clean texts will be allowed in examinations, and awarding organisations must prescribe editions for use in examinations that are free from editorial material or commentaries.
27. The amount of annotation allowed by learners on pre-release materials prior to the examinations must be clearly prescribed and kept to a minimum. Pre-release materials brought into the examination room must also be free from annotation.

AS performance descriptions for English literature

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression.	Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts.	Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers.	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate wide knowledge and understanding of literary texts;</p> <p>b) present relevant responses, using appropriate terminology to support informed interpretations;</p> <p>c) structure and organise their writing well</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify relevant aspects of structure, form and language in literary texts;</p> <p>b) explore, through critical analysis, how writers use specific aspects to shape meaning;</p> <p>c) generally use specific references to texts to support their responses.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) explore connections and points of comparison between literary texts;</p> <p>b) communicate clear understanding of the views expressed in different interpretations or readings.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate understanding of the relationships between literary texts and their contexts;</p> <p>b) comment appropriately on the influence of culture, text type, literary genre or historical period on the ways in which literary texts were written and were – and are – received.</p>

	d) communicate content and meaning through expressive and accurate writing.			
E/U boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate some knowledge and understanding of literary texts;</p> <p>b) make some use of appropriate terminology or examples to support interpretations;</p> <p>c) communicate meaning using straightforward language.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify some aspects of structure, form and language;</p> <p>b) describe some aspects with reference to how they shape meaning;</p> <p>c) make some related references to texts to support their responses.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify some connections or points of comparison between literary texts;</p> <p>b) show some appreciation of the views expressed in other interpretations of literary texts.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate some understanding of context through descriptions of culture, text type, literary genre or historical period.</p>

A2 performance descriptions for English literature

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression.	Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts.	Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers.	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate extensive knowledge and understanding of literary texts;</p> <p>b) create and sustain well-organised and coherent arguments, using appropriate terminology to support informed interpretations;</p> <p>c) structure and organise their writing using an</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify significant aspects of structure, form and language in literary texts;</p> <p>b) explore, through detailed critical analysis, how writers use these aspects to create meaning;</p> <p>c) consistently make reference to specific texts and sources to support their responses</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) analyse and evaluate connections or points of comparison between literary texts;</p> <p>b) engage sensitively and with different readings and interpretations demonstrating clear understanding.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) explore and comment on the significance of the relationships between specific literary texts and their contexts;</p> <p>b) evaluate the influence of culture, text type, literary genre or historical period on the ways in which literary texts were written and were – and are – received.</p>

	<p>appropriate critical register;</p> <p>d) communicate content and meaning through expressive and accurate writing.</p>			
<p>E/U boundary performance descriptions</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate knowledge and some understanding of literary texts;</p> <p>b) present responses, making some use of appropriate terminology and examples to support interpretations;</p> <p>c) communicate content and meaning, using straightforward language accurately.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify some aspects of structure, form or language in literary texts;</p> <p>b) comment on specific aspects with reference to how they shape meaning;</p> <p>c) make some reference to texts to support their responses.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) make connections between literary texts or note comparisons;</p> <p>b) communicate understanding of the views expressed in other interpretations or readings.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) comment on some of the relationships between texts and their contexts;</p> <p>b) comment on how culture, text type, literary genre or historical period influence the reading of literary texts.</p>

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