# English Literary Studies Subject Assessment Advice

## Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

# School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts

In this assessment type, students produce one to five responses (to a maximum of 5000 words) showing their insights into the following text studies: extended prose text, film text, drama text, and poetry texts. One of these responses can be oral or multimodal in form, where 6 minutes is equivalent to 1000 words. A new feature of this course is the requirement in one task to focus upon one or more texts from two critical perspectives.

The more successful responses commonly:

* showed a strong analytical approach and established the development of an argument in terms of how authors position readers to develop ideas and viewpoints. Therefore, those students who could expand their analysis beyond how techniques shape an understanding of theme and character to how ideas, values and perspectives are developed achieved more highly against the performance standards
* demonstrated clear evidence in terms of connections between texts in comparative writing tasks, rather than writing paragraphs with ‘blocked’ discussion of texts
* showed a range of text forms — including essays, considered paragraphs, annotated scenes, and if suitable, comparative writing.
* conveyed insight into the range of ways in which authors of different text types use such conventions and stylistic features to influence readers
* used evidence appropriately and fluently to support observations

The less successful responses commonly:

* created formulaic texts that only included character analyses or theme discussions which limited students’ ability to discuss their knowledge and understanding of how authors position readers to contend with issues within texts
* approached the critical perspective task as if the perspective in question was a device to only explore aspects of characterisation rather than a ‘lens’ through which to interrogate ideas, perspectives, and values
* attempted to answer questions that were limiting rather than challenging; for example, writing on a general theme without any requirement to analyse and develop a clear point of view
* included ‘blocked’ quotations rather than embedding ‘pithy’ quotations
* examined only one perspective or two very similar ‘lenses’ in the critical perspectives task (e.g. moral and philosophical, or feminist and gender)
* created texts that often seemed ‘formulaic’ and were in essence only slight variations of the same response, with students following the same argument, discussion points and conclusions

Assessment Type 2: Creating Texts

In this assessment type, students create one transformative text linked to another text, with a writer’s statement (1500 words, or 9 minutes, or equivalent in multimodal form). The text chosen as the basis for this task may or may not come from the texts in the shared studies, and the accompanying writer’s statement should outline the choices the student has made in terms of the text type, audience, and purpose. Additionally, students create one written, oral, or multimodal text (1000 words, or 6 minutes, or equivalent in multimodal form) and demonstrate understanding and mastery of the features of the chosen text type.

The more successful responses commonly:

* demonstrated an in-depth awareness of the text type (its stylistic features and conventions), audience, and purpose
* demonstrated an understanding and analysis of devices in the both texts within the transformational task
* showed breadth and creativity in the development of different text types across the assessment type
* conveyed skill in creating a persona and in identifying a target audience in oral text productions
* ensured there was the provision of evidence. Teacher grades and comments were supported, where possible, by videos, audio recordings, cue cards, transcripts, photographs, and other relevant artefacts

The less successful responses commonly:

* read notes in oral presentations without due consideration of the audience and purpose elements of a speech or presentation or the relevant text type
* repeated text types, for example, two persuasive texts, etc. This can limit achievement in Ap1, KU2 and KU3.
* created recounts where little thought was given to the development of ‘voice’ or the skill of indirect observation
* were not clear in the particular conventions of the text type they were creating
* resorted to a ‘retelling’ of the text types rather than comparative analysis in the transformational task
* included two lengthy writers’ statements for each creating text task, shifting the emphasis to analysis
* used source texts in the transformational task that had questionable literary merit; for example, artwork such as paintings and photographs, or very popular songs, where the emphasis is more on musical effects and production values rather than lyrics with sophisticated and perceptive quality
* created transformational tasks where the source text was too similar in text type and style to the transformed text

## Assessment Type 3: Text Study (Part A: Comparative Text Study)

This task involves the choice of one text that has been shared by the class paired with an independently selected text, and results in an essay comparing both texts of up to 1500 words. The teacher may specify which shared text is to be used, or may provide opportunity for students to select from the range of text types studied: drama, prose, poetry or film. When students select poetry as the focus of the essay it is advisable to narrow the study to the work of one poet.

The more successful responses commonly:

* involved the selection an independent text with literary merit that provided ample scope for detailed analysis
* involved a focus on a manageable concept that was able to be explored within the limit of 1500 words
* were the result of well-developed questions that included a comparative element, a sense of the role of the author, and an element of tension that led to a well-considered answer
* involved an argument that was clearly comparative and involved an exploration of the similarities and differences between texts
* involved a line of reasoning within and between paragraphs so that each unit of thought was logically structured and the whole essay involved a carefully organised argument
* involved an appropriate introduction that foregrounded the central thesis and argument of the essay
* involved well-considered paragraphs that started with clear topic sentences and were structured cohesively with logical transitions
* involved final paragraphs that avoided repetition and instead took a ‘big picture’ approach to the question, finalised the argument, and drew convincing conclusions that supported the overall thesis of the essay
* involved fluently incorporated references to a range of stylistic features and conventions
* involved the exploration of the features of the text types being analysed and drew attention to the contrast between stylistic features when the text types differed
* congruently connected the stylistic features that were identified with appropriate evidence and a valid effect (positioning the reader/viewer or presenting an idea)
* involved evidence that was fluently embedded into the line of reasoning so that quotations, for example, were naturally incorporated into sentences
* were polished responses in which students had: checked spelling, particularly of key words such as authors’ names and terms central to the metalanguage being used; appropriately used punctuation, particularly of problematic elements such as apostrophes, colons and semi-colons and the delineation of titles; applied the correct techniques of quoting from texts; had carefully checked the accuracy of word choices, particularly in ensuring the correct use of verbs; had been careful in the use of synonyms, realising that words have particular nuances and choosing an uncommon or unfamiliar word might inadvertently result in using it out of context.

The less successful responses commonly:

* did not involve a structured argument and were, instead, a collection of observations about texts
* involved a sequential, non-comparative exploration of texts
* involved only a few very lengthy paragraphs in which a logical structure was not sustained
* involved large slabs of quotation that were not integrated into the line of reasoning
* were a recount of events, or descriptions of characters, rather than an analysis of thematic concerns and stylistic features
* involved the labelling of stylistic features, but the provision of examples that were not clearly connected to that device or explanations about the effect of the feature that were illogical.

Assessment Type 3: Text Study (Part B: Critical Reading [examination])

The first critical reading in this new iteration of the course included four texts and five questions, some of which involved students making choices about which texts to explore. The examination also provided opportunity for more successful students to develop in-depth literary analysis, engagement with complex ideas and reference to a broad range of stylistic features.

In the more successful responses students commonly:

* addressed the question, ensuring that all material was relevant to the answer provided
* answered the question immediately rather than beginning with generic observations that were largely irrelevant
* avoided the repetition of material
* used sophisticated metalanguage and appropriate examples when discussing conventions and stylistic features, and clearly connected these with an effect (in positioning the reader and emphasising ideas)
* provided detailed evidence from the texts to support points and ensured that these references supported the idea being explored
* chose succinct quotations that were integrated into the line of reasoning and avoided copying large slabs of text
* understood the features of the text types represented in the examination: a fairy tale, poems, a blog
* appropriately divided their time, paying heed to the recommendations of length as an indication of the relative ‘weight’ of the question
* selected key stylistic features of the texts about which to write, rather than following a formula that led to the exploration of peripheral techniques
* avoided slipping into recount by centring the answer on the question and ensuring – when appropriate – that a particular stylistic feature was at the forefront of the analysis.

The following notes were provided to markers for the process of assessing the critical reading. As general principles markers were instructed that:

* the critical reading was to be marked as a whole. Material relevant to particular questions may have appeared in the response to other questions and markers were instructed to credit this material.
* It was not required that students address each of the aspects covered in these notes. These are only a guide to the possible responses students may have provided. Equally, students may have written about additional aspects not covered in these notes.
* The suggestions of length were guidelines only (students may have written more or may have written less; it was the quality of the answer that was to be assessed).

***Notes on the Questions***

1. *Choose one of the four texts and explain how the title establishes its central ideas (two or three sentences)*

Students were not required to write extensively in response to this question.

* *The Frog Prince*: there is a paradox of sorts in the title for it combines the ‘earthy/mundane’ [frog] with the ‘privileged/heightened’ [prince]; this establishes the frog’s ambitions of grandeur. Contained within the moniker is also the conflict between appearance [looks a frog] and reality [is actually a prince]. While the princess could be considered the central protagonist of the fairy tale the title actually privileges the frog/prince and the terrible state into which he has been confined.
* *Desperate Times, Desperate measures*: the poem introduces a range of desperate circumstances (single mother, oppressed worker, refugee, etc.) and the desperate measures to which each goes to improve their circumstances. It refers to the well-known saying and thus preempts the idea that what is gained may not be all that triumphant (being only the product of desperation). The final lines of the poem provide a perspective on this human reaction to adverse situations: applying desperate remedies involves ‘selling out cheap’ and while people make immediate gains, in the end these result in loss.
* *Return of the Prince*: the frog/prince returns to the well from which he originated, longing to return to his old life (one of ‘ooze’ and ‘damp’ and ‘dragonflies’). The title intertextually refers to the ‘return of the king’, but contrastingly introduces a situation that lacks the nobility and regality of that other text. It is ironic that it is the prince that returns, for he actually wants to be a frog and that title (prince) is in fact the source of his despair.
* *The Wary Reader #blog17: Heads you win; tales you lose.* Students may either consider the second line (*#blog17: Heads you win; tales you lose*) as the title, or also consider the author/label (*The Wary Reader*) as a part of the title. This title provides factual information: it is the seventeenth blog in a series of documents created by an author who writes under the non-de-plume of ‘the wary reader’. Being wary…thoughtful, even suspicious…is the focal point of the blog (to be a good reader we must be ‘critically aware’) as the author wants the reader consider the nature of the fairy tale. The idea that readers should be thinkers is also contained in the title (*heads* you win), and the concept that we might ‘leave the influence of these stories on our children to luck alone’ is intimated in the heads/tails dichotomy of flipping a coin.

1. *How does the author of ‘The Frog Prince’ (Text 1) show that the frog is not ‘simple-minded’ as the princess assumes? (one paragraph)*

This question assumed that students would explore the author’s characterisation of the frog. More sophisticated answers will have shown an awareness of the techniques of characterisation.

* Obviously the frog is able to converse and use language. The dialogue itself is precise, analytical and of a more sophisticated register.
* The frog predicts what the princess might offer for the return of her golden ball: ‘pearls, jewels, clothes’ – but not attracted by material things and more aware of the potential of the situation to achieve release from the curse, the frog establishes his request by stating what he *will not* accept. After this, he makes the deal. He is characterized as a clever negotiator.
* The frog is aware of human needs – to be loved and cherished, and what it is to ‘weep miserably’. He also places value on a promise (although it may be considered simple-minded to think that the princess would uphold her promise!).
* The frog’s appearance at the palace reveals determination and perseverance. He is not intimidated by the princess. Nor does he remain passively at the well awaiting her return.
* The instructional mode adopted by the Frog once he has entered the palace, in which he tells the princess to ‘push her golden plate nearer’, ‘get her little bed ready’ etc., indicates a confident sense of control. This is revealed in the authoritative tone (one more befitting a prince than a frog!). His understanding of the political nature of the situation – that the princess must obey her father – reveals an awareness of how to manipulate the circumstances. In this he may be considered self-serving.
* The transformation of the frog at the end of the story reveals that the princess had been fooled by appearances and that that frog, far from being simple-minded, was in fact a ‘handsome young prince’.
* Ironically, it was the princess who was simple-minded in her assessment (but obviously this is an observation about *her* character, not his).

1. *In what ways do the authors of the poems (Text 2 and Text 3) challenge the concept of ‘happily ever after’? (one or two paragraphs)*

Students were not required to compare the two poems. Those who did so may have added to the analytical quality of the answer, but a thorough and high-level response was more than possible without doing so.

*Desperate Times, Desperate Measures:*

Like a fairy tale the subjects of each of the stanzas face adverse situations from which they desire a transformation (the refugee is ‘displaced, undereducated’, the mother is ‘abandoned, house-bound’, the worker is ‘machined to the bone’, etc.). Each manages to affect some change in their lives (the mother ‘bytes on some midnight love’, the worker ‘grabs a little promotion’ and the refugee ‘gets to eat McDonald’s). However that change comes at a cost; as the title suggests it is the result of ‘desperate measures’. The refugee must ‘sign away her culture’, the worker must ‘slip into bed with the regime’, the stockbroker must ‘trade his values on the Exchange’, and the frog must ‘cop a load of abuse’. What is achieved is also moderated by qualifying descriptors: the profiles uploaded by the single mother are ‘fake’, the boy who ‘plies the captain with cash’ only gets to ‘sit on the bench’, the stockbroker only gets to play ‘*briefly* with the big boys’, and – sarcastically – the refugee progresses from eating ‘scraps’ to eating ‘McDonald’s’…hardly a wise exchange for an entire culture! The final stanza provides a clear summary of the concept: when people are ‘knocked down and out’ they can ‘sell out cheap’ and while they may gain some immediate benefits they ‘win, only to lose’. Happiness is only transitory and certainly not for ‘ever after.’

*The Return of the Prince*

The first stanza establishes why the frog desired to become a prince: he was envious, blinded by beauty, and deafened by the ‘siren call’ of everything beyond the world of his pond. He experiences a magical transformation – becoming a prince – but (like the characters of ‘desperate times, desperate measures’) the happiness is short-lived. He realizes that the world he desired is in fact artificial, dry, orderly, and hard. He feels displaced, longing instead for his previous existence of ‘oozing mud and muck’ (etc.). He realizes that he ‘should have known’ and becomes desperate to return to his previous life. In the final stanza he aches to do anything that would ‘break the curse’ of being human and allow him to become a frog again, and so – in a symbolic act that reveals how the fairy tale has been a horrible disappointment – he drops the princess’ ‘purloined’ ball back into the well. The direct reference in the text to the fact that the princess ‘sleeps anchored in *untruthful* happy ever afters’ foreground the overall cynicism of the poem towards the traditional fairy tale ending.

1. *Based on what the author of the blog (Text 4) has written, how would The Wary Reader be likely to respond to the characterisation of the princess in ‘The Frog Prince’ (Text 1)? (one or two paragraphs)*

This answer required that students analyse what concerns the author of Text 4 expresses about the presentation of characters in fairy tales, and to consider the way in which these elements would apply to the characterisation of the princess.

The blogger is concerned about:

* The emphasis upon characters of a higher social status. That the child in the story is actually a princess would likely disturb The Wary Reader: this is a character of privilege, who has become self-centered as a result (she lies to the frog in order to achieve her own ends). That she is defined by her status is evident in the fact that she has no name, but is identified only by her title.
* The emphasis upon beauty. The princess is first introduced by this adjective (‘beautiful princess’). As the blogger points out, this princess then marries the frog simply on the basis of the fact that he is in fact a *handsome* prince. The attractiveness of an individual is the basis on which self-worth is formed: a focus that would concern the author of Text 2.
* The fact that the princess marries without question and without thought, displays a disregard for the complexities of that institution. The blogger clearly points out that marriage does not necessitate a ‘happy ever after’: there are conflicts, sickness, times of trial to come…and the need to ‘sacrifice one for the other’ and ‘struggle with compromise’. That the princess so naively enters this contractual arrangement in the fairy tale would upset the blogger.
* The blogger is concerned about the presentation of gender in fairy tales. This princess is characterized as one who is subject to her father and must obey him. That the story vindicates the King’s approach is all the more disturbing for it reinforces the correctness of a patriarchal system.
* The one redeeming feature in the characterisation of the princess is that rather than kissing the frog, she ‘flung him away’. This is the sort of determined, forthright behavior of which the blogger might be more complimentary.

1. *Choose one prose text (Text 1 or Text 4) and one poem (Text 2 or Text 3). Explore the ways in which the authors use the features of each text type to present ideas. (two or more paragraphs)*

Students were not required to compare the two texts that they selected. Those who did so may have added to the analytical quality of the answer, but a thorough and high-level response was more than possible without doing so.

*The Frog Prince*

* Follows the traditional structure of a fairy tale: problem (the curse on the frog, the loss of the ball); a solution; a magical transformation; a happy ending. The opening and closing, in particular, emphasise this with the ‘once upon a time’ and ‘happily ever after’.
* The characters are unnamed (princess, frog, king) and are, instead, labelled by their role within the tale.
* The story progresses in a linear, chronological fashion and in the skeletal nature of a fairy tale in which only the essential events and interactions are recorded. The narrative itself is the sole focus. The simple, repetitive sentence structure (noun, verb) reinforces this mode of accessible story-telling.
* Third person (limited) point-of-view, focusing primarily on the responses, emotions and thoughts of the princess.

*Desperate Times, Desperate Measures*

* There is an anaphoric nature to each of the stanzas: they start identically and are structured very similarly (introduction to character; the problem faced by the character; the action of the character to affect change; the result of that change). This reinforces the universality of the problem of ‘selling out cheap’ and of the commonality of suffering.
* Imagery that emphasises the difficulties of the characters: ‘spawned down with kids’; ‘machined to the bone’, ‘tripping over a stutter’…adds depth to the nature of their circumstances (being spawned indicates that the woman has many children and is, like an animal, weighed down by them; the boy trips over the stutter…emphasizes the physical maladies that burden him, etc.)
* Plays on words usually hint at the lack of value in what the characters have gained. The single mother gets to ‘byte on some midnight love’…a play on words that mixes emotion (love) with lifeless technology (byte); the stockbroker ‘trades his values on the Exchange’…a place that should be the source of income becomes the means by which something is taken from him.
* Qualifiers weaken what the characters gain. The boy ‘at *least* gets to sit on the bench’; the worker grabs a ‘*little* promotion’; the stockbroker plays ‘*briefly* with the big boys’; the profiles downloaded by the mother are ‘fake’.
* The final stanza varies from the rest. It explicitly states the ‘moral’ of the poem: that those who are ‘knocked down and out’ and ‘sell out cheap’ will only ‘win, to lose’. Structurally it too follows the order of the other stanzas but offers a conclusion to the range of examples provided in the rest of the poem.

*Return of the Prince*

* First person POV. Allows the poet to explore the emotional and cognitive responses of the central character.
* Structure: begins at the end…with the frog’s sense of despair at having been blinded by envy…and in fact summarises the message of the poem (don’t underrate what you have) at the opening. Each stanza opens with the character’s regret (‘I should have known’, ‘Now I long for’). There is a narrative progression of sorts: making the decision to pursue transformation; the reasons for regretting that decision; the final attempt to return.
* Imagery: much focus is given to the frog’s delight in things that ‘ooze’ and ‘smell’ and ‘tremble’; there is an emphasis upon ‘silt’ and ‘lichen’ and ‘moss’ and ‘algae’; and a range of adjectives that would normally be pejorative but take on a celebratory tone: ‘pungent’, ‘sticky’, ‘brackish’, ‘clammy’, etc.
* As a contrast the human world is portrayed as dry, artificial and lifeless. Adjectives and verbs emphasise an environment that is ‘orderly’, ‘hard’, ‘dehydrating’, ‘hirsute’.
* similarly the frog’s description of his transformation is from something horribly beautiful to something beautiful but horrid.
* The final stanza involves a symbol of desperation: the frog drops the ball back into the well in an attempt to undo the transformation and return to his original home.

*Heads you win; tales you lose*

* First person POV establishes the emotive, subjective voice of the piece: it is a blog and therefore personal opinion!
* The writer directly addresses the reader and compliments them as a way of positioning then favourably. The casual approach that is the result, is continued throughout the piece when the author asks rhetorical questions, uses collective pronouns (fairytales; how we love ‘em!) and even comments on the ways in which the reader might be responding (‘many of you might be thinking that I am over-reacting’).
* This casual element is also developed through the colloquial style of the piece. Abbreviations, vernacular expressions, emoticons, plays-on-words and clichés contribute to this informal nature. (examples of this abound!)
* Yet the Wary Reader wants to present him/herself as a thinker (this is, after all, the point of the blog). Therefore there is also a sophisticated language register incorporated throughout the piece, particularly when the author turns to serious concerns. (again – plenty of examples!)
* The structure of the blog is organized. There is an introduction; a summary of the story of the frog and the princess; an establishment of the central concern; a point-by-point analysis of the problems with the fairy tale; and a call to action at the end of the blog.
* Writing anonymously, the author emphasises the central message of the piece: to be a wary reader. The end of the blog privileges those who are analytical thinkers (happier when we’re smarter!) so that the reader must agree.
* In the end, this is a cleverly structured and analytical piece that is presented in a personal and playful voice.