2019 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

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
* communicated in a register that was clear, cogent and convincing.

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
* attempted comparison that was either arbitrary in nature or too ‘blocked’ and without appropriate analysis of similarities and differences
* produced texts that still required basic editing and formatting.

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 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
* conveyed an understanding of audience and purpose relevant to each text type
* showed thought to the ‘weighting’ of each section of the transformation task to enable sophisticated insights into the similarities and differences between the source text and transformation
* created transformation tasks where the text was clearly converted or reimagined from the source text but still explored a similar concept or idea.

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
* created straightforward informational texts that contained little literary or aesthetic merit, thus limiting the opportunity to draw on their knowledge and experience of genre and literary devices
* wrote only brief and cursory comments in the writer’s statement as consideration was not given to the ‘weighting’ of each part of this task
* used source texts in the transformational task that had questionable or zero 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 qualities
* the subject outline clearly states on page 9 that ‘students evaluate some of the literary conventions of the original and transformed text types’ but by employing photographs, artwork or musical compositions, which are not literary, this reduces the students’ ability to achieve highly against KU2, KU3, An1 and An2
* if students are passionate about these art forms then these perhaps are explored in the second AT2 task. For example, a short story in which a painter, musician or photographer struggles to achieve their artistic vision.

Student samples submitted for moderation should include all pieces of work for all tasks in an assessment type.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Text Study

Part A: Comparative Text Study (15%)

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 of 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 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 text, that lacked a holistic line of reasoning
* involved a sequential, non-comparative exploration of texts
* involved only a few very lengthy paragraphs in which a logical structure was not sustained or many small paragraphs that skimmed over the texts
* paraphrased or incorporated quotations without acknowledgement into their response
* quotations 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, either without analysis of the way in which these features were used to reinforce/present ideas or the provision of examples were not clearly connected to that device or explanations about the effect of the feature that were illogical
* focused on an individual poem or short story as one of the texts that did not provide students with ample material to construct in-depth arguments
* were unbalanced giving much more attention to one text than the other.

Part B: Critical Reading (15%)

In regards to the online English Literary Studies examination students seemed to be undaunted by the process — the quality of student responses was pleasing, there were few short answers, and very few unfinished papers. Students clearly felt comfortable working and communicating in this medium and teachers had obviously prepared their classes for the task. In further developing the possibilities of the medium it is worth noting the following:

* Students who planned and organised their responses developed more successful answers than those who may have written a lot of material but allowed responses to become unstructured and repetitive. It is important that students understand that quality, not quantity, attracts better marks.
* While there is some facility to copy and paste sections of text within the electronic platform, students who integrated quotes and examples into the line of reasoning fared better than those who used the cut-and-paste function to insert material without wisely incorporating it.
* Practicing editing electronic responses to tasks during the year is highly recommended. It would be good advice to students to ‘reflect before you write’ and/or certainly to review and edit what has been written, even if the time put into this means writing fewer words in each answer.

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
* organised the responses around clear ideas that were logical and accessible; a discriminator was often the way that students organised the material around a concept, 'why write', 'experience of writing', 'celebrate and condemn'; creating more focused responses rather than answering a list of points
* ensured that the stylistic feature being explored clearly connected, in a logical and clearly demonstrated way, to an idea or ideas
* avoided didactic explanation of stylistic features that relied on discussion about an implied audience (e.g. ‘rhetorical questions make the reader think about the question being asked and these are engaging for the reader’)
* avoided exploring the effect of stylistic features as generalised emotional/cognitive outcomes (e.g. ‘helps the reader be more interested in the text’; ‘makes the text more enjoyable’ etc.)
* used specific labels of the stylistic features that revealed an appreciation of the metalanguage appropriate to the text types
* were aware that authors are in control of the text; authors use/explore/argue etc.
* were able to recognise the function of a persuasive technique in relation to audience response and detail how, in the particular instance of its use, it enabled the reader to share the author’s point of view
* 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 conventions of the text types represented in the examination: particularly features of speech, prose, and persuasion
* 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
* wrote with accuracy, precision and an appropriate application of terminology.

Specific comments about each question

Question One

Most students understood the requirements of this question: to consider the possible answer(s) to the implied question 'Why write?' More successful answers explored a range of reasons for writing, linking them back to evidence/ideas in the text. In less successful responses, students tended to have a narrow focus and often answered in the form of a recounting of points.

Question Two

More successful responses to this question were able to grapple with the idea that the experience of writing is complicated and multi-faceted. They often worked out some summary terms for what the author was trying to convey — e.g. exhaustion, exhilaration, struggle, privilege, reverence, obsession, precision, intensity, surprise, persistence etc. There was often allusion to the contradictory nature of the writing experience, and this was supported by evidence from the text. Less successful responses tended to list aspects of the writing experience without tying them to the broader experience/concept and often relied on quotations.

Question Three

The challenge for students in this question was to identify what the author is both celebrating and condemning. Stronger responses often observed the interconnectedness of the subjects of their celebration and condemnation; reading and writing. Weaker responses sometimes narrowly suggested that the author was condemning youth culture, rather than a perceived narcissism etc. that comes out of writing without any discernment.

Question Four

Students needed to explore the ways that authors use stylistic/structural features to persuade the reader to accept their point of view. It asks that the central idea or concern of the texts be identified and how the authors seek to influence the reader's response regarding this. The strongest answers often sustained the comparison. These answers identified a range of strategies/devices used to persuade the reader and considered the likely effectiveness of the strategies in terms of reader response. Less successful answers often only identified one or two persuasive strategies in each text, and/or the comparison was not sustained, and in some cases not evident.

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. 'Why write?' What answers does the author of Text 1 offer to this question? (approximately 150–250 words)

This question is not one the speaker directly addresses but is an implied concept in the text. The question asks students to consider a range of reasons for writing offered within the text. Students may consider the broader idea that writing is powerful and complex; hence it can mean many different things to different people.

In response to this question, students may have explored some of the following:

* The author offers three broad answers to be 'righteous', to 'riot', and to 'right wrongs' and these may be linked to a broader range of reasons.
* Writing is driven by artistic, social, moral etc. purpose.
* Writing encourages the better version of self to develop and uplifts.
* Writing can be used to rebel and protest against society's injustices.
* Writing brings out voices missing from the public arena — giving voices to women, to fill in gaps in prize winner lists and 'school text lists'.
* Writing allows us to address the imbalance in the literary world between male and female voices.
* Writing validates the experiences of women. Writing allows us to reflect on ourselves and the world around us.
* Writing can act as a beacon, a flare, a benefit for others.

While it is not necessary for students to explore stylistic features in their response to this question they may choose to do so. For example, through the strategy of a play on words — write, righteous, riots, rights — she suggests that the female writer in particular, as it is a speech at the Stella Prize Award Night, is driven by the 'righteous' desire to prompt the reader to reflect on their world.

2. What does the author of Text 2 say about the experience of writing? (approximately 150-250 words)

Question 2 asks the student to consider what the writer says about the experience of writing as the central thematic concern. While it appears a simple question, the text itself is complex providing many different aspects of the writing experience and suggests that it is complicated. Better responses should draw out some aspects of this, and might explore the contradictions or tensions inherent in the experience's complexity.

In response to this question, students may have explored some of the following:

* Writing can be a thrilling experience with great highs.
* The experience of writing can be one of great pain, described through physical images 'you break your fists, your back, your brain'.
* The experience of writing can be full of contrasts, for example, joy and frustration, excitement and terror etc.
* The experience can be one of discovery.
* It can be a combative experience where the world one writes about is like 'an opponent'.
* Writing offers great rewards 'the perfect line' and the wonder of this.
* It can be an all-consuming experience where the writer must give their all and 'give it now'.
* The experience can drive you to push harder in order to achieve and is one of great persistence.

While it is not necessary for students to explore stylistic features in their response to this question they may choose to do so. For example, the author attempts to capture the experience of writing through a progression, or series, of metaphors and similes that capture the struggle, rewards, and exhilaration etc. of writing.

3. What does the author of Text 3 celebrate and condemn? (approximately 150-250 words)

Students are asked to look at what the author is both celebrating and condemning. Students may choose a range of acceptable ways in answering this question. They might separate the concepts 'celebrate and condemn' looking at one first and then the other or they may move between them in their discussion. They are not asked to compare, but they may choose to do so. They may also deal with these concepts unequally as there are many criticisms offered in the text, and few causes for celebration. However, their celebration of reading and writing is important and underpins the author's criticisms as well. Stronger responses may structure their response through some of the dichotomies that exist in the author's piece.

In response to this question, students may have explored some of the following:

Celebrate

* The wonder of finding your own 'authentic essence through self-expression'.
* The ability to listen and to learn from the voices of others.
* Becoming a discerning reader and learning from the words/works of others.
* The process of writing and to 'read and reflect and refine' and to 'listen and learn and look inward'.
* The literary tradition of work being deemed worthy prior to publication.

Condemn

* The entitled need to self-express
* The need for attention and 'incessant affirmation' for which this sort of writing asks.
* The narcissism they perceive in the writing of 'misguided egomaniacs'.
* The proliferation of self-publishing, posting, internet authors whose 'so-called writing' 'is little better than graffiti’.
* 'Trite-writing' on what the author considers inane topics.
* That much writing does not come from a wealth of knowledge and experience.
* How the democratisation of writing for a mass audience is a lie because 'not everyone wins a prize'.
* The decline of reading.
* The inability to take one's time to grow and learn.

4. Choose any two of the texts. Compare the ways in which the two authors attempt to persuade the reader to agree with their points of view. (approximately 400-800 words)

The intent of this question is that students show an analytical understanding of the way that authors use stylistic/structural features to persuade the reader to accept their point of view. It asks that the central idea or concern of the texts be identified and how the authors seek to influence the reader's response regarding this.

There must be a comparative element to this response, whether it is in relation to the stylistic features, means of persuasion, or ideas etc. It is not expected that each paragraph will involve a continual movement back and forth between texts/authors, but there must be some discussion of the similarities and differences in the ways in which the authors use devices to influence their reader's response. While students are required to look at both similarities and differences, it is not expected that they do so equally.

In response to this question, students may have explored some of the following: Text 1 — Stella Prize Speech

* Play on words or homophonic wordplay to engage the reader and the mantra 'she writes' which is echoed in 'righteous, riots and rights' and the arguments these raise.
* Tightly structured - may mention triadic structure - following her key concepts.
* Opens *in medias res* on a universal 'she'.
* Repetition and anaphora to emphasise the main action/power of the female author-the piece is then structured around these key words/concepts.
* The personal address and voice-this is a woman's voice speaking to women.
* Carland's use of pronouns -the 'she' and 'her' creating a clear female writer and also the inclusive 'we' to include the female author's audience and Carland's audience.
* lntertextual references to Australian novels by female authors to elaborate on their celebration of female authorship.
* Uplifting and laudatory language, including active verbs to demonstrate to the audience the dynamic nature of the female writer and to persuade them of their power.
* Positive connotations 'loving', 'compelling', 'brave', 'fearless' etc.
* Statistics to add to her argument that women deserve to be heard and should have greater representation.
* Ending with a decisive affirming statement about the power of writing in 'she writes' and 'we rejoice'.

Text 2 — Write till you drop

* Personal and reflective style addresses the reader and 'you' immersing them in the power of words and the creative process.
* Repetition and sensory imagery to evoke the sensation of writing to persuade the reader of its all­ consuming, all-sensory experience.
* Figurative language, metaphors, simile, personification that capture the sensations the author is describing and the nature of writing.
* Mix of colloquial and immediate terms and more poetic images to show the complexity of writing.
* lntertextual references to famous individuals who have grappled with their work and compound her argument that experts in their field understand the complexity and rewarding nature of the creative process.
* Imperatives -to emphasise their points.
* Ends with a powerful passionate quote from Michelangelo about committing to one's art and to not 'waste time'.

Text 3 — Step away from the Keyboard

* Repetition of the concept 'to listen' which becomes a focus and message of the piece.
* Alliteration to emphasise points.
* Humorous comparisons and hyperbole to exaggerate and influence.
* Vitriolic and sardonic language towards writers on current social media platforms.
* Use of pronouns to distance the writer and reader from the bad writes, the 'they', 'their', 'them' in the early parts of the text. Creates a dichotomy between 'self-indulgent' writes and the more reflective readers who she and the reader are implied to belong to.
* lntertextual references to works of classic literature/the canon and authors that provide great insight into human existence.
* Ends with the author's statement of their call to action - to step away from the keyboard, read and listen.
* A strong change of narrative perspective to the second person towards the end invites the reader to become the subject.
* Irony of the author's piece being the type of text that it is condemning.