2020 English Literary Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2020 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

This task involves the choice of one text that has been shared by the class paired with an independently selected text, or two independently chosen texts for 2020, 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
* focused on a descriptive discussion of author biography rather than textual analysis
* 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.

Assessment Type 3: Text Study

Part B: Critical Reading (exam)

In regard 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 the way that students organised material around a concept, ‘celebrate a love of self’, ‘the ways love changes over time’ and ‘that love is complicated’, creating a more focused response rather than answering as a list of points. They could use the initial question as a springboard to develop a complex and thought-provoking stance
* a differentiator between students was how they explored the nuance of each question; rather than talking about ‘love’ in more general terms
* 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. ‘metaphors make the reader think about what is being compared’)
* 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 type
* were aware that authors are in control of the text; authors use/explore/argue etc.
* were able to recognise the function of a poetic 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 type represented in the examination particularly features of poetry
* understood that ‘How’ in each question implied what stylistic and language features have been used by the authors and this use of devices is to be considered across the responses
* 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 were able to consider how the author used a range of language and stylistic features and conventions to describe and thus celebrate a love of self within the poem ‘Love After Love’. The topic of ‘love of self’ was clearly identified, and more successful responses explored a range of language and stylistic features and conventions of differing levels of complexity. More successful answers explored a range of ways the author explored the idea of self-love, 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

Most students explored the ways love changes over time, exploring more than one change. Better student responses drew out a range of changes in their discussion; these had similar or different effects depending on their interpretation. They explored the tensions inherent in the experience's complexity. For example, some students explored that love changes over time by presenting the contrast between the vibrancy and passion of what once was to the possible solitude and angst that comes from time and possibly being alone. Less successful responses tended to list aspects of love without tying them to the broader experience/concept and often relied on quotations.

Question Three

The topic ‘love is complicated’ was clear to recognise within the text, but the use of language and stylistic features was such that the poem is fairly dense and needed careful analysis in order to arrive at its full meaning. More successful responses identified that the concept ‘love is complicated’ suggests tensions and contradictions in the nature of love. Stronger responses often structured their response through some of the connections, contrasts and dichotomies that exist in the text. Less successful answers often only identified a limited range of devices in a descriptive manner.

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 that 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).

1. How does the author celebrate a love of self in Text 1? (approximately 200-350 words)

* How the loss of the love of another can become the opportunity to regain a love of self.
* Positive diction in words such as ‘elation’ and ‘greet’ displays the joy inherent in love of the self.
* The second person pronoun of ‘you’ and ‘your’, used repetitiously drives home the importance of self within the poem. This is an intimate address to reader.
* Eating and drinking, as metaphors for nourishing the self.
* Symbolism of the heart and mirror.
* Repetition/anaphora in ‘Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart /to itself’, further emphasises how such self-nourishment, using traditional symbols of communal celebration, is achieved through love of self.
* The idea of self-love via self-knowledge is then shown in the metaphor of ‘the stranger’, where Walcott emphasises the longevity of love for the self.
* Celebration of love of self by taking traditional tokens of love, such as ‘love letters’, ‘photographs’ and ‘desperate notes’ and suggesting such things exist, at least metaphorically, for the self.
* Metaphors of celebration are combined with metaphors of love and the use of the second person to become a proclamation regarding the necessity of celebrating a love of the self, despite what failings may come of romantic love with another.
* The series of reflexive paradoxes ‘you will greet yourself’, ‘you will love again the stranger who was yourself’ ‘give back your heart to itself’ etc.
* Shifts in tone across the poem from consoling, to elation to certainty.
* Imperatives in the last short and direct line of single-syllables ‘Sit. Feast on your life.’ The gratification of being completely absorbed in the power of loving and appreciating ourselves for who we are.

2. How does the author explore the ways love changes over time in Text 2? (approximately 300-500 words)

* Students could consider the poem to be about either/any gender.
* Within the title, the foreshadowing, within the past tense of, ‘This was once a love poem’, highlights the initial implied contrast to that of there being no love now; reflected in the repetition of this line, as the orientation of the poem itself. The technique of personification is prominent to show the aging process and, with it, the ways in which emotion and inclination change, but longing does not.
* The structure is unusual — the ‘it’ of stanza 1 seems, grammatically, to refer to the ‘this’ of the title that was ‘once a love poem’ but the reader comes to understand that the it/itself that is presented in the sequence of stanzas documents the progress of the speaker’s life.
* Time is indicated through the use of prepositions ‘once’ and ‘before’, along with the repetition of the clause ‘It remembers’, to indicate how things had been and contrast them with how things are now.
* Physical/kinaesthetic descriptions suggest the physical aging process, contrasting youth and age. Hirshfield connects youthful beauty with a form of confidence, not just in physical appearance but also in knowledge and understanding.
* Alongside such physical descriptions come reminiscences of thoughts and feelings, to illustrate further the confidence that used to be felt and now is gone.
* Contrasts with the recklessness of a youthful love in which ‘it drank beer for breakfast’ and, most importantly, ‘drifted its feet/in a river side by side with the feet of another’, which stands as a metaphor for romantic love.
* The way love was understood at its peak in relation to the other great love stories depicted in history and art, ‘spoke with passion of history, of art./It was lovely then, this poem.’
* Towards the poem’s end, Hirshfield shifts to the present, suggesting that while love changes, it does not lose its power. However, time has taken its toll, and so the poem, and thus the individual longing to be loved, resigns them self to other activities or pursuits.
* Such an existence thus seeks feeling through the touching of the cacti, using the simile of ‘a tiny flame’ to express the desire for the heat and thrill of passion that has now passed by.
* This poem is also about loss — of youthful vigour, of youthful love. The poem is also about the desire to make the decision to embrace change in the ‘pure and unfamiliar silence of its new life.’
* Romanticised memories of the past are undercut by the mature awareness of the naivety of youth when ‘what it knew in the morning it still believed at nightfall’.
* Structurally — the conventional subject matter of the love poem in stanzas 2 to 5, but the change that comes and whilst the poem ends on a note of calm resignation and hope, there is a sadness for what is gone, for ‘what was once a love poem’.
* The poem seems to work through sets of parallel and contrasting images that come to represent how the past has transformed itself into the present.
* There is suggested a practicality of accepting where you are now.
* Hirshfield has her character making a final decision, which rests on between choosing a cat (a symbol of being lonely and needing company) or that of cultivating plants. That the character chooses to plant miniature cacti and physically touch them may be interpreted in a range of ways.

3. How does the author suggest that love is complicated in Text 3? (approximately 300-500 words)

* The title is a play on the words ‘to have and to hold’, part of the conventional vows taken by couples at wedding ceremonies. ‘To Have Without Holding’, suggests love cannot involve the idea of ownership, as it may have done in the past, but that it means more of a compromise. The addition of ‘not’ subverts the suggestion of eternal love, instead implying that only with a lot of work will this love have any longevity.
* Use of the word ‘Learning’ suggests such complication at the poem’s beginning along with the idea that such learning is ‘hard’, rather than simply a natural and easy state of being. Further language choices indicate this difficulty, seen in words such as ‘It hurts’ and ‘It pesters’.
* Verbs in the first stanza are plosive, and Piercy describes love when it enters, it does so with a sense of upheaval where doors are banging, blinds snapping, and wind roaring.
* Another complication is that loving makes us change our previous ways of holding on to love; for some, there is an urgency in needing to hold on and grab, and clutch; the sentiment is that you need to quite aggressively and forcefully, hold on.
* Metaphors, along with active verbs, suggest that love is full of action.
* Similes also express this complication, suggesting the difficult balancing act required of love that is likened to ‘a candle in a cave without air’.
* Imagery, simile and metaphor, illustrate the impact of love: ‘you glow / on the street like a neon raspberry, / You float and sail, a helium balloon’ etc are positive images suggest that the love is worth it.
* Contrast is used throughout the suggestion further complication.
* The biological imagery of diastole and systole ‘carries connotations of the laboured efforts of the heart as it beats, which is so closely aligned with imagery of love.
* For all of its complications, contrasts and hard work, for the balancing act between ‘hunger/and anger’, there is value in the uplifting feeling achieved.
* The tension is between the desire to ‘have and hold’ and the contrary desire to ‘love wide open’.
* The images in stanza 1 are of openness, unlocking, letting go, contrasting images of stress and pain in stanzas 2 and 3.
* Laboured alliteration of ‘to love consciously, conscientiously, concretely, constructively’ representing the mental effort of love in words.
* The poem’s final words — ‘moment by moment balanced’ can be interpreted in several ways — affirming and calming or the complication of loving is reinforced in where one holds on to the other with minimized malice and this is only ever tenuous as it is a moment by moment balancing act.