NZQA
New Zealand Qualifications Authority
Mana Tohu Matauranga O Aotearoa

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Assessment Report

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Standards 90849 90850 90851

Part A: Commentary

Examination questions are designed to encourage candidates to truly 'engage' with their chosen texts and to elicit genuine responses; pre-learned responses are therefore not appropriate.

Some planning pages showed real thought and awareness and candidates who took the time to thoroughly plan their essays were often positively rewarded. Higher achieving responses were inevitably the result of careful planning, while other candidates did not take advantage of this time and wrote essays that were plot-driven and unduly lengthy. A thorough, unhurried plan will help candidates identify irrelevant material.

Essays at this level are essentially two-part questions – describe, then explain – and both parts of any question needed to be addressed. Candidates should practise using the keywords from the question as 'signposts' throughout their responses to make sure they are addressing both parts of the question in their response.

The choice of texts is critical in allowing candidates to engage with and respond to in order to give genuine personal responses. To gain higher grades, candidates need to show personal engagement with the text(s) to see their relevance in a

wider context.

For candidates to reach Merit or Excellence levels they must refer to the author's or director's purpose. Some candidates wrote detailed responses that showed a solid understanding of the text(s), but did not address the author's or director's purpose, which only allowed them to attain Achievement.

Candidates are reminded of the statement in the assessment specifications: 'The quality of the candidate's writing is more important than the length of their essay. Candidates should aim to write a concise essay of no more than three pages (or 550–600 words) in length'. Many digital responses far exceeded the recommended word length.

Candidates must ensure they write in the appropriate answer booklet. NZQA may not transfer candidate responses from the written standard to the oral or visual standard, or vice versa.

Part B: Report on standards

90849: Show understanding of specific aspect(s) of studied written text(s), using supporting evidence

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- shared a straightforward response to a text

- addressed both parts of the question, but with some imbalance, often only referring to the second part of the question in the conclusion

- used some detail from the text, but without quotations

- wrote structured essays

- included supporting evidence from just one aspect of the text which was not always clearly linked to the question

- Did not provide well-understood and relevant links that moved beyond the text. If they were included they were often superficial, 'tacked on', and did not develop the response

- showed reasonable understanding of the story and recounted only those aspects relevant to the question

- incorporated at least some aspects of personal response.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- did not address the question

- only addressed one part of the question (usually the describe part)

- did not provide any specific evidence from the text

- provided a brief and superficial response

- retold the plot

- wrote a pre-learned essay that did not fit the question.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- gave a detailed account of their text in relation to the question and supported it with specific examples from the text, usually using quotes

- provided a mostly balanced discussion but may have shown a stronger response to one part of the question

- used various language techniques and understood the crafting of the text

- attempted to link their discussion to beyond the text, but this often was a pre-learned phrase that was repeated rather than a genuine show of insight

- showed engagement with the text

- structured their essay in a manner that allowed for logical progression of ideas in relation to the question asked

- referred to the author's purpose, though this may have been implied.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- made authentic, beyond the text, references that were clearly linked to the question and the text

- used plenty of specific evidence to support points, with quotes woven into the response

- identified the author's purpose aptly and showed a good understanding of how writers deliberately crafted their text

- addressed both parts of the question with balance

- used sophisticated and analytical vocabulary

- wrote concise, well-structured, and cohesive essays

- showed a mature personal interest and engagement with the text.

Standard-specific comments

As expected, there were the standard Level 1 texts: *Of Mice and Men*, *Animal Farm*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *1984*, *Montana 1948*, *Lord of the Flies*, and war poetry. However, many responses showed limited engagement with these texts, as the ideas presented seem beyond the understanding of many New Zealand teenagers e.g. the Great Depression, Russian Revolution, Jim Crow era etc. This was especially true for Question Three where many candidates were not able to explain how these texts were relevant to teenagers today.

Many candidates responded well to short texts in Question Four. However, some responses seemed very formulaic and lacked originality, especially responses on war poetry. Some short texts did not seem to have enough depth for candidates to provide more than a simple response. They were also limited to the questions they could answer, especially when only referring to one poem or song lyric.

While there was a small decrease in the number of rote-learned essay responses, this issue is still problematic. These responses do not do well as they appear inauthentic, even when keywords have been changed around to suit the question. This was especially true for Questions One and Five, as some candidates had obviously prepared for a 'character change' or 'setting' question, but then did not address the specific keywords 'willingly' or 'realistic / unrealistic'. Others tried unsuccessfully to make the question work, such as Elie Wiesel's character in *Night* willingly accepting the change of the war and going to a concentration camp.

Candidates also need to practise using keywords as 'signposts' throughout their essay to show that they are answering the question. Many candidates did not engage with keywords from the question, such as 'relevant to teenagers today' in Question Three, which lead to Not Achieved results as they were not answering the question.

Essays over four pages in length were often lacking specificity and cohesiveness and contained superfluous evidence. Digital responses were typically unnecessarily long and went well beyond the recommended 550 words.

90850: Show understanding of specific aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), using supporting evidence

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- shared a straightforward response to a text

- addressed both parts of the question, but with some imbalance, often only referring to the second part of the question in the conclusion

- used the key words from the question to structure their essay

- used some relevant quotes and/or examples to support their key points

- may not have specifically mentioned language features but implied them

- discussed their own experiences more than the details of the studied text

- used quotations without identifying other verbal and visual techniques.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- only addressed one part of the question (usually the describe part). Often addressed the second part only in a cursory fashion

- did not provide any specific evidence from the text

- provided a brief and superficial response

- retold the plot

- wrote a pre-learned essay that did not fit the question.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- wrote fluently and had a clear paragraph structure, including a clear introduction that specifically referred to the question

- provided a mostly balanced discussion but may have shown a stronger response to one part of the question

- identified verbal and visual techniques

- included discussion of the director's purpose

- used specific and relevant detail, frequently with more technical vocabulary

- knew the text well and made thoughtful and deliberate comments showing a thorough understanding of the film

- linked examples back to what question had asked

- showed a solid understanding and appreciation of deliberate crafting

- showed evidence of understanding and appreciation of the impact of ideas on the viewers and its application to today's world.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- made authentic, beyond the text, references that were clearly linked to the question and the text

- used plenty of specific evidence to support points, with quotes and visual / verbal techniques woven into the response

- identified the director's purpose aptly and showed a good understanding of how directors deliberately crafted their text

- addressed both parts of the question with balance

- used sophisticated and analytical vocabulary

- wrote concise, well-structured, and cohesive essays

- showed a mature personal interest and engagement with the text

- had a good understanding of technical vocabulary and used this effectively

- adapted their existing knowledge to the question accurately

- showed a thorough understanding of the implications of the text and its place in society.

Standard-specific comments

Some candidates did not read the question carefully, or willfully ignored parts of the question to enable them to use rote-learned notes. Candidates need to highlight the key words within the question parts and write their response answering these and not use a rote-learned essay.

Choice of text is important. If candidates understand the relevance of the text in their lives, they bring that knowledge to the essay question.

There was a very wide range of films used for assessment, including several New Zealand films. Texts that were popular included *The Truman Show*, *Slumdog Millionaire, V for Vendetta*, *Boy*, *Hidden Figures*, *Freedom Writers*, *Pleasantville*, *Remember the Titans*, *Gattaca*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *The Dark Horse*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, *The Help*, *Hidden Figures*, *Black Panther*, *The Matrix*, and *Billy Elliot*. Some of these texts have been used for a long period of time, so new texts are always refreshing to read. It was obvious when a candidate had really engaged with a film, and equally, when they had not.

Teachers must be aware of darker topics covered in some films and the changing nature of candidate mental health. Some films had very mature content that could

be difficult for younger candidates to comprehend.

Questions about ideas are popular and are usually answered well. Some candidates describe scenes rather than time and place when answering questions on setting.

The mechanics of some candidates' writing was poor. While this is not expressly assessed in this standard, it can prevent the meaning of the essay from being clear.

If candidates have a structure to work to, even borderline candidates have something to work with.

90851: Show understanding of significant aspects of unfamiliar written text(s) through close reading, using supporting evidence

Candidates who were assessed as **Achievement** commonly:

- answered the guiding questions adequately

- identified language features and began to unpack their meaning

- answered most parts of the questions in a basic and formulaic but efficient way, with supporting quotation (often only one of the more obvious examples)

- developed their answer in sufficient detail

- had a reasonable vocabulary that they could access to support the interpretation.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- were perfunctory and brief

- did not include a quotation

- included identification of language features but showed no understanding of how they added to the meaning or relevance of the question

- lapsed into a summary, often citing tracts of the text verbatim without interpretation

- did not understand what 'how' means (i.e. 'How does the writer…?') and so were unable to discuss methods

- had limited vocabularies.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- wrote responses that were more developed and focused on the guiding questions

- identified language features and unpacked how they added to the meaning of the text, fully supported by relevant quotations

- began to show a personal response in terms of understanding of the text

- answered all parts of the question well, although occasionally unevenly, with some quotations

- had good vocabularies that they could access to show some insight

- were able to interpret events described in the text and deduce a wider understanding of human behaviour / experience

- understood and were able to discuss the writers' methods of crafting.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- wrote responses that were fluent and coherent

- wrote responses that were focused on the guiding questions and fully supported by relevant quotations

- referred to multiple language features and how they worked in combination to add to the meaning of the text

- unpacked deeper meanings, sometimes looking beyond the text

- answered all parts of the question consistently well, integrating quotations seamlessly

- had proficient vocabularies that enabled them to engage convincingly and perceptively with the texts' ideas and moods

- understood human behaviour / experience that they could connect astutely and throughout their responses with the characters in the text

- had proficient understanding of writers' methods of crafting.

Standard-specific comments

Successful candidates appeared to strategise – reading the passages carefully and unpacking the specific key words in the task enabled them to show a convincing and perceptive understanding of the texts.

If a definition of an aspect (such as a language feature) is required, this should be succinct; there should be greater focus on its explanation or analysis.

Usually formulaic responses frequently did not work because the candidates had not understood the text in the first place.

Some candidates quoted at too great a length and too frequently without explaining or analysing what the quote(s) showed.

English subject page

Previous years' reports

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2017 (PDF, 63KB)

2016 (PDF, 254KB)