

National Certificate of Educational Achievement

2011 Assessment Report

English Level 3

- 90721 Respond critically to written text(s) studied**
- 90722 Respond critically to Shakespearean drama studied**
- 90723 Respond critically to oral or visual text studied**
- 90724 Read and respond critically to unfamiliar prose and poetry texts**

COMMENTARY

Candidates need to be given guidance in constructing more complex essays commensurate with Level Three. This includes providing a clear exposition of their argument in the introduction of the essay, and ensuring that this is drawn to a conclusion. Candidates are required to show familiarity with essay structure – this includes clear paragraphing, which shows clarity of thought processes. Many candidates demonstrated lower-order thinking skills (knowledge and explanation) rather than higher order skills (analysis and evaluation), suggesting that there is a need for candidates to develop the skills of argument.

STANDARD REPORTS

90721 Respond critically to written text(s) studied

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

- made it clear in the introduction and conclusion the focus / direction of their response
- quoted sufficiently from their chosen text(s) but often did not explain or comment on the relevance of the evidence
- illustrated a straightforward understanding of their text
- wrote in a recognisable essay structure
- showed an ability to interpret the question in relation to the text that had been studied
- did not identify links to the writer's purpose or world beyond the text
- demonstrated an ability to use writing conventions.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

- showed evidence of having misunderstood the question or merely presented a prepared essay without any link to the question
- did not provide enough supporting evidence and/or explain the evidence in support of their argument
- did not use a recognisable essay structure
- did not effectively use writing conventions
- showed a lack of familiarity with the text(s) chosen to write about
- did not provide sufficient links to the question being answered
- chose a question unsuitable for the text studied
- did not complete the essay.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

- used language terminology appropriately

- provided consistent and effective supporting evidence that was integrated into the response
- regularly focused back on the chosen question
- wrote concisely and clearly and presented an appropriate essay structure
- consistently focused on the question
- engaged with the text, author's ideas, and viewpoints
- presented personalised answers that were mature and perceptive in content
- demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of the text.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

- presented an insightful, original response that illustrated the candidate's substantiated opinion
- used sophisticated, subject-specific vocabulary when analysing texts, successfully demonstrating an assured understanding of this vocabulary
- made use of quotations from learned commentators, philosophers etc that were pertinent to the text, and this pertinence was established with accompanying explanation
- stayed focused on the question throughout the response
- took time to argue their response, often using evidence from other texts or appropriate society
- wrote a highly developed and reasoned argument in a controlled and structured manner
- understood the role of texts as a vehicle for discussion, to comment on society.

90722 Respond critically to Shakespearean drama studied

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

- focused on the question and returned to it throughout the essay
- demonstrated generally sound knowledge, familiarity, and understanding of the text
- asserted ideas rather than analysing the issue
- provided some specific evidence to support points made, either through direct quotes (often inaccurate) or paraphrased material
- offered limited opinions or criticisms to support points made, either their own ideas or those of recognised critics
- showed some ability to use writing conventions accurately
- used appropriate and recognisable essay structure, including a clear introduction that engaged with the question, and a conclusion that restated the focus.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

- showed evidence of not having understood the question
- did not refer to both passages in the questions that required them to do so
- provided over-generalised responses
- used prepared essays that did not address the question
- did not provide relevant, accurate, or detailed evidence from the text
- relied heavily on plot rather than engaging with the question
- wrote essays that were disorganised and/or muddled
- were inappropriate or inaccurate in terms of writing conventions
- wrote less than 400 words.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

- demonstrated an ability to construct an argument that was generally sustained throughout the essay
- offered substantiated, critical opinions with some personal insights
- referred in detail to the text, showing comprehensive knowledge
- used largely accurate quotations that were integrated into the flow of the essay, to support points
- recognised the potential offered by the chosen question for an in-depth answer, showing ability to go beyond the text, and relating material securely back to the question
- used clear essay structure, building a clear and convincing argument, using appropriate connectives between paragraphs and within paragraphs
- wrote with some fluency and accuracy in writing conventions.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

- developed a lucid, sustained, and convincing argument that included an insightful appreciation of the text, setting up a clear thesis in the introduction
- quoted generously, aptly, and appropriately, weaving evidence seamlessly into the body of the essay
- offered mature, perceptive, and often original personal insights into the texts
- engaged fully with the question, identifying an angle of focus from which to argue
- acknowledged different interpretations of scenes, characters, or ideas, incorporating relevant critical material, and often debated the merits of different critical viewpoints
- made good use of a broad background knowledge, showing awareness of the writer's purpose and the position of the audience
- used a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures
- wrote fluently, persuasively, and accurately, demonstrating a sophisticated command of academic writing conventions.

OTHER COMMENTS

Othello was, once again, the most popular text, constituting around 65 per cent of the responses. *King Lear* was the second most popular play.

Question One produced some fine answers, although candidates must take particular note of the instructions with regard to this question. Question Two required candidates to form a judgment regarding the *centrality* of the thematic concern – it was not enough to simply list where deception or reputation was evident. Candidates are, therefore, encouraged to ensure that they link their observations back to the question and form a judgment in response to the key word – *central* – in the question. Question Three offered students the opportunity to discuss a range of Shakespearean texts, in response to the theme of *loyalty*. This was tackled confidently by a number of candidates. However, simply mentioning a number of texts without critical engagement does not provide candidates with any material advantage. Discussion of other Shakespearean texts is not essential in responses to this question.

Although it is an advantage for students to have practised essay responses assiduously, it is inappropriate to learn practice essays from memory and to repeat these, loosely twisting the essay to the question. Too often, candidates responded to Question Two or Question Three by choosing to disagree with the thematic concern of the question, and forcing the concerns of their pre-learned essay into their argument with no further reference to the original demands of the question. More mature responses incorporated discussion of other thematic concerns while still engaging closely with the question, thus allowing a judgment to be sensibly made.

Candidates must be encouraged to quote accurately. If the quotes cannot be learned with some degree of accuracy, candidates could report the supporting evidence. Candidates must also be encouraged to use more formal writing, avoiding colloquial or idiomatic language. Candidates should be able to spell characters' names correctly at this level.

Candidates are generally making good use of critical material in their responses, although it would be good to see the inclusion of more recent critical material rather than an over-reliance on the work of A.C. Bradley and F.R. Leavis. Harold Bloom, Sean McEvoy, and Michael Mangan, for example, are excellent modern critics whose work is well within the grasp of Level 3 English students. There was clear evidence of some students having read a wide range of critical material.

90723 Respond critically to oral or visual text studied

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

- addressed the question, albeit sometimes narrowly and with inconsistencies in style
- attempted to take a stance on the topic
- demonstrated a straightforward, predictable understanding of the film
- provided some relevant detail from the text to support their discussion/argument
- had a sense of structure in their response
- used reasonably accurate writing conventions and mechanics
- referenced, often implicitly, and discussed at least two filmic techniques/conventions
- demonstrated some ability to critically respond, albeit in a simplistic, rote-learned way

- displayed some originality in adapting internet or published notes and reviews
- responded in a simple but focused way
- provided tag-on links to the question at the end of paragraphs
- displayed some understanding of why a technique was employed
- provided a plot-based response.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

- did not address all parts of the question
- did not incorporate film techniques / conventions
- wrote out prepared essays that failed to respond to the topic
- wrote a generalised discussion
- provided limited detail
- did not consider the position of the viewer
- responded to films that did not give candidates enough material or depth
- did not structure a response
- provided little, if any, personal response.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

- wrote at length, answering the question, and supported an argument with apt details that made the response convincing
- referenced film techniques throughout, weaving them into the response
- made relevant comments that indicated understanding of the film and the genre
- understood and provided viewer response
- provided appropriate personal response
- demonstrated convincing engagement with the text
- dealt with each highlighted aspect of the question and understood their relationship
- understood the director's intention in their choice of using various techniques
- displayed some development of ideas as the essay progressed
- included viewer response and positioning with some confidence
- took a clear stance and argued this throughout
- developed a response with some moments of insight
- displayed competent writing skills and articulated an argument clearly
- wrote about the 'why' with some understanding and confidence.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

- wove a response to the question into other observations about the nature of modern film in general which showed they had thought about the medium
- demonstrated that candidates had researched the background to the film and/or the director's work and could quote director's comments in interviews/film commentaries and/or another critic's responses, then reflected on these
- ended essays with strong assertions of the quality of the film
- integrated techniques used into the discussion of the film – often citing six or more
- formed judgments about the text, reflecting on what it said about the human condition
- provided a sophisticated argument, sometimes using quite sophisticated language and syntax
- demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how viewers respond to film
- explored the director's intention(s) and how viewers are positioned as a result of the intention(s)
- integrated well-selected evidence to support an argument
- created a lucid, fluent, cohesive response to all aspects of the question
- presented insightful, judicious comments, judgments, and reflective evaluations.

OTHER COMMENTS

Candidates need to ensure that they address all aspects of the question including key words. It is not enough to mention the words of the question in the opening and the conclusion. Students must be able to unpack words like 'great' in reference to film. "Hinge" was completely ignored by the majority of candidates. Students at this level should be able to unpack what 'critique' means but many found this term problematic.

It is important to encourage students to avoid repeating "model" responses. On a positive note, fewer candidates who responded to the Drama questions elected to discuss inappropriate school or class productions. Candidates who choose Intertextual studies must be reminded that it is not enough to focus on two films. They must choose other genre to accompany their discussion.

90724 Read and respond critically to unfamiliar prose and poetry texts

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

- addressed the questions directly, using the key words from the questions
- used specific references from the text to support their answers
- used accurate and basic terminology (for example, correctly identifying language features)
- wrote some analysis after each quotation to show its relevance to the question being answered
- showed a basic understanding of the ideas in the texts
- showed a basic understanding of language features and effects
- explained to some extent how language was used to convey ideas/attitudes

- demonstrated some engagement with the text
- could articulate the general ideas/mood/tone of the piece
- could explain the images beyond a literal interpretation.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

- did not show understanding of the big ideas in the texts
- did not use appropriate language and stylistic techniques to support their answer
- explained stylistic features in generalised terms rather than linking to the specific writer's purpose
- gave literal explanations of images
- did not complete the paper
- listed techniques sometimes incorrectly but also did not discuss the 'how'
- wrote very little, including some one-sentence answers
- did not communicate their own interpretation of the text clearly.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

- appreciated conflicting aspects within a writer's style and tone
- recognised or understood the humour of the writer
- explained specific language features with detailed reference to the text
- presented a detailed discussion of the effects of specific language features
- demonstrated a clear engagement with the text
- discussed their own personal responses to the texts
- had a clear discussion of language features and stylistic techniques and how these contributed to the tone, mood, or overall ideas of the piece
- made clear links between the language and style, as well as the ideas and the writers' points of view
- explained the mood or tone and supported this with reference to the text, incorporating a clear, detailed discussion.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

- showed a sophisticated understanding of language techniques
- demonstrated an appreciation of the texts' purposes and audiences
- wrote with insight and sophistication
- demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the texts
- showed how the texts' features worked together to create a unified and effective whole
- demonstrated perceptive or sophisticated understanding of the texts
- addressed all parts of the question in detail
- supported their points with detailed, valid evidence
- analysed stylistic features in detail

- showed perceptive understanding of how style and language features were used to create mood and show the writers' attitudes to their subjects
- showed some original insight
- understood the complexity of the text, and this included identifying humour.

OTHER COMMENTS

Although candidates managed to gain Achievement with Excellence by responding critically to basic language features like metaphor or simile, by and large candidates did not discuss more complex language features. Many candidates did not talk about the writers' attitudes toward their environments but rather focused on mood. Very few candidates commented on the humour in Text A and only identified negative attitudes or moods. Students need to move beyond a positive or negative mood and unpack these terms a little more.