

National Certificate of Educational Achievement

2012 Assessment Report

English Level 3

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

COMMENTARY

This was the final year for examinations to assess these achievement standards.

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:

- addressed both parts of the question
- introduced their topic clearly and outlined the shape of the essay to come
- provided specific evidence from the text in support of the response
- showed some personal response to the text
- demonstrated an acceptable use of writing conventions
- spent time planning their answer
- remained focused on the question throughout
- supplied relevant evidence and explained the relevance
- answered the question, although they may not have dealt with all parts of the question equally
- used a discernible essay structure
- demonstrated confidence with the text that they had studied.

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 complete their essay
- had difficulty connecting their text to a world beyond the text.
- used texts they had studied at Level 2
- focused on one key word while ignoring the others
- attempted to re-write a pre-learned essay with little or no attempt to adapt it to the current task
- had a limited understanding of the text
- attempted to re-write the question thus avoiding the intended subject of the question
- made cursory mention to the world of the reader.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- saw the text as an interaction between the writer and the reader
- used effective details, including quote weaving and integration of examples
- made points which were consistently supported by detail and evidence

- showed sound understanding and addressed all parts of the question throughout their response
- used a succinct academic style of writing
- developed some perceptive comments
- used increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and varied sentence structures
- focused on the question while showing some awareness of the wider context of their text
- developed clear, well-supported illustrations from the texts to support their assertions.

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:

- made apt use of supporting detail which was integrated cleverly into the main argument
- wrote insightful introductions and conclusions that were naturally structured and accurate
- presented a thesis with relation to the question and systematically and succinctly proved it
- clearly enjoyed expressing judgements on a writer's techniques and the success of the text
- presented the position of the reader with clarity and sophistication in their response
- wrote with confidence and with flair
- integrated evidence from the text seamlessly and eloquently
- showed a depth of engagement linking the text to a broad view of society
- demonstrated a maturity of thought
- used a sophisticated range of vocabulary to forcefully express fully developed ideas.

OTHER COMMENTS

Candidates are encouraged to spend time planning their essay in the space provided. Many candidates who took the time to unpack the question served themselves well. The most popular question was one in which the candidates were asked to discuss the way a writer uses a text as a lens to scrutinise society. Candidates need to be confident with the idea of 'structure'. Question Two was particularly problematic for many candidates who appeared unaware of what structure entails or how it is used to shape a reader's understanding or response to ideas. Candidates need to be aware for example, of how a text is organised, how patterns might emerge and be exploited, or how time may be manipulated for a specific purpose. The elements of structure should be accessible to a student at this level but many candidates misunderstood the term completely. In 2012 more candidates chose to write on the 'Intertextual' questions and did so with success.

90722 Respond critically to Shakespearean drama studied

ACHIEVEMENT

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

- engaged with the text beyond basic knowledge of the plot
- established a basic critical stance

- engaged with the question, albeit sometimes narrowly
- used supporting evidence, incorporating quotes and textual references
- demonstrated a simple thesis which related to the question
- demonstrated some personal engagement with the text.

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 little understanding of key words in the question, such as “resonates” and “perception”
- misread the question, particularly “lessons learnt by the characters”
- did not write enough to meet the prescribed word count of “at least 400 words”
- wrote in a simplistic and basic style that did not conform to Level 3 expectations
- summarised simple ideas about the text, or provided a plot summary
- wrote prepared essays that showed little or no engagement with the question asked
- wrote in a style that was inappropriate for a literary essay
- had little or no relevant evidence in support of their assertions
- misquoted or made up quotes, often using modern language
- referred to the “film” or “novel”, with little evidence of close reading.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- were particularly attentive to the question and constructed an argument in response, with sustained focus
- answered all aspects of the question in a balanced manner
- wrote answers that had moments of perception, though not necessarily sustained throughout
- supported arguments with appropriate quotations and textual evidence, usually well integrated
- wrote fuller answers with more generous support and textual references than those who achieved
- made links to society today and in Shakespeare’s time
- showed some evidence of critical responses to Shakespeare and incorporated these appropriately
- wrote in an intelligent and academic style with few lapses
- demonstrated a greater awareness of Shakespeare’s language and craft.

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:

- constructed an intelligent, perceptive and convincing argument that consistently engaged with the question
- used a wide range of quotations and textual evidence, woven throughout the essay, illustrating an extensive knowledge of the play

- made thorough use of appropriate critical material to support arguments
- made use of a variety of critical commentary that demonstrated an opposing viewpoint that they then discussed and were able to refute
- wrote in an intelligent, fluent and engaging style, demonstrating a good command of academic writing conventions
- showed a detailed awareness of the impact of Shakespeare’s writing on his contemporary audience and on today’s audience, frequently commenting on the universality of Shakespeare’s themes and/or characterisation
- made perceptive comments on the impact of the play’s ideas on the real world, and did so consistently
- demonstrated an original response to the question with a strong personal perspective
- sustained and developed ideas, often showing independent thought and alternative readings of the play
- discussed more than one text (where the question allowed for this), drawing significant links between texts and connecting these to contemporary society.

OTHER COMMENTS

Reference to critical commentaries in 2012 was often excellent, and there was evidence of candidates engaging intelligently with literary theory. There was a wider range of critical reference this year, though candidates are advised against quote-dumping of critics’ opinions for the sake of it – critical references must be appropriate to the question asked and need to be accurately integrated.

Question One for each text required candidates to make reference to the extract provided. Where candidates failed to make any reference, they could not achieve. Similarly, where candidates dealt only with the extract and failed to make reference to the wider play, they also could not achieve. The question also required candidates to discuss one character’s “perception” or himself or his world and how this affects his behaviour throughout the play. Many candidates tended to write a general character study instead. However, there were some superb responses to this question, particularly in response to Othello’s perception of Iago and to Shylock’s perception (from “The Merchant of Venice”).

Candidates must read the questions carefully and ensure that they engage with all aspects. The most common error was to misinterpret the question asked. This was most evident in Question Two of the Othello question where candidates took a straightforward approach to the theme and provided a catalogue of examples of *jealousy* rather than looking at the significance of the concept to the work as a whole. Candidates who wrote on Henry V produced some fine answers on the question of *leadership* while *mercy* and *love* varied greatly in quality. Question Two for King Lear produced a very divided response with some excellent answers on the concept of *nothing* but a significant number of answers lacked substance.

Question Three produced very mixed responses. Many candidates failed to engage with the question accurately, providing responses that commonly focused on lessons given to the audience rather than lessons learned by the characters. Even where candidates provided fine, perceptive commentary, this basic error occurred. Candidates also tended to focus only on one aspect of the question – e.g. the lessons learned, ignoring the resonance this has for modern society, or vice versa. The best responses went beyond the text, referring to other texts and showing an appreciation of the writer’s craft.

There were many excellent essays where candidates showed higher order thinking, providing links between Shakespeare and history, society, psychology, or politics often providing strong cases for studying Shakespeare.

90723 Respond critically to Visual or Oral texts

ACHIEVEMENT

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

- were attentive to the question with straightforward analysis
- provided some relevant detail, quotes, discussion
- displayed a sound sense of essay structure
- used writing conventions with control and accuracy.

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 the question/use keywords
- wrote a generalised, often plot based or descriptive account of the film
- provided little or no reference to film techniques
- did not consider the position of the audience/viewer
- provided a rote-learned essay that was not suitable for any question.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- answered the question in detail, supporting argument/analysis with convincing and well-chosen evidence
- referenced film techniques, interweaving them into the response
- made relevant and sometimes insightful comments that indicated a thoughtful understanding of the film
- provided thoughtful and sometimes astute personal response, linking ideas beyond the text
- understood the director's intention and the crafting elements of the film
- provided a well-structured, generally accurate, articulate response that developed the 'why' as well as the 'how' in the essay
- understood what the question required them to do and took control of the argument.

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:

- provided a sophisticated argument that demonstrated a perceptive, insightful response
- wrote an articulate, lucid, well-structured essay and provided integrated, well-chosen evidence and techniques

- presented thoughtful personal comment and observations
- reflected on the text using research and/or critic's responses
- reflected and formed judgements about the ideas presented in the film/about the human condition.

OTHER COMMENTS

Most candidates answered questions on film. Some chose drama productions, television programmes and radio. A wide variety of texts were used but a large number of answers used *American Beauty* closely followed by *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist*.

A significant number of candidates failed to select questions which their studied text would have been more obviously suited to. Candidates should avoid adapting a question to suit a prepared essay. Many candidates used their course essays on character – such as character change – and attempted to adapt it with little success.

Many candidates who attempted Question One struggled with the concept of narration – and responded with a plot summary instead. It was a question which few seemed prepared for, but those who did understand did very well. Hitchcock's films were used well in response to this question.

90724 Respond critically to unfamiliar poetry and prose

ACHIEVEMENT

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

- showed some understanding of the texts' messages and purposes
- showed understanding of basic language features and structures
- supported responses with references from the texts
- attempted to discuss the question and develop a point, but generally simply stated a point without explaining it
- made some connections between texts
- demonstrated an understanding of the main ideas of the texts
- expressed some analysis of the texts, but at a surface level
- used appropriate examples/evidence
- discussed some techniques, showing an understanding of how the writer had used technique to create effect
- addressed the questions directly using the key words from the questions
- used accurate terminology (e.g. correctly identifying language features such as simile, metaphor, personification).

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:

- were unable to address both parts of the question
- provided no or few examples to support points

- were unable to explain “in your own words” when asked
- wrote short, undeveloped simplistic answers
- did not discuss or analyse the “how” and the “why” their examples were relevant to the question
- could not accurately identify language techniques or stylistic features
- wrote about content rather than “stylistic features” when asked
- answered only three or four of the six questions so limited their success
- expressed very simplistic and/or basic understanding of the text but often not at a Level 3 level
- were unable to identify technique(s) and show how technique(s) were used by the writer to create an effect
- did not refer to any evidence from the text
- incorrectly identified language features
- showed no or limited understanding of the texts’ messages and purposes
- interpreted the poem too literally
- were unable to identify correctly specific language features and structures and/or wasted time giving definitions
- used generalised terms, such as ‘descriptive language’ or ‘imagery’ or ‘diction’
- did not answer all the question
- showed no or limited appreciation of the writers’ style
- ran out of time: some quite able candidates fell into this category.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- were able to express ideas with some knowledge of technique
- were able to show some appreciation of the writer's craft
- discussed the main ideas of the text(s) thoughtfully
- Went beyond a basic/simplistic analysis of the texts
- used evidence to support their ideas clearly
- showed a clear understanding of language features
- understood the question and attacked it directly and with precision
- selected the best examples and language features to quote, rather than the most easily identified examples
- discussed the texts and the features employed by the writers in detail
- analysed ideas and language features from more than one point of view
- showed clear understanding of both texts in terms of messages and purposes
- saw changes in the writers’ attitude in the course of the texts
- used a range of language features
- made connections between the writers’ style and the meaning of the texts.

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 and the effects they create
- demonstrated an appreciation of the texts' purposes and audiences
- wrote with insight and sophisticated flair
- seemed to show an intuitive understanding of the texts
- wrote fully developed responses that showed engagement with the texts
- clearly and perceptively understood and discussed both texts
- used a wide range of language features and structures, linking them clearly to audience and purpose
- integrated references, explanation and analysis
- saw shades and changes of meaning
- wrote fluently and confidently, often at some length
- built a strong case
- did not repeat material
- showed an appreciation of the writer's craft and purpose, and were able to express this well
- went beyond the text, to show a perceptive and insightful analysis of the text
- integrated their ideas about the texts to show original thought
- articulated their ideas and analysis skilfully and with flair.

Candidates need to revise and discuss basic parts of speech. Knowledge of language techniques was weak in many cases in 2012. Many candidates could not distinguish a verb from an adjective or adverb. Knowledge of sentence structure/types of sentences was also weak, with candidates labelling any long sentence as complex. Candidates need to understand that when they identify sound techniques (alliteration, assonance, and sibilance etcetera) they need to comment on the effect of the sound.

The questions asked for 'specific techniques' or 'stylistic features.' This in theory gave the candidates plenty of room but weaker candidates seemed puzzled by 'techniques' and 'features'. Sometimes candidates operated at Level 1 in picking some very basic features, such as metaphor and hyperbole. While these basic features are able to help a student reach 'achievement', they do not help the student develop the critical analysis required for 'excellence'. Mood and tone were sometimes confused. 'Positive/negative connotations' were hinted at but poorly explained and often the word 'diction' was used in isolation as a feature without any discussion of the *type* of diction used or how it might create specific effects.

Knowledge of sentence types was particularly weak, especially breaks in a sentence pattern, and candidates' recognition of structures was often limited to rhetorical questions.

Candidates need plenty of opportunities to unpack crafting, beginning with some close reading of their studied class texts. Candidates should go beyond 'analyse' to focus on key Level 8 critical response words: develop, justify, discuss, compare, contrast, evaluate, link. 'Conventions of the genre' also requires more attention and unpacking, particularly those of poetry. Candidates who did grasp the meaning and associated crafting of the poem were highly likely to achieve the standard.