

National Certificate of Educational Achievement

2014 Assessment Report

English Level 1

- 90849 Show understanding of specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), using supporting evidence**
- 90850 Show understanding of specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), using supporting evidence**
- 90851 Show understanding of significant aspects of unfamiliar written text(s) through close reading, using supporting evidence.**

COMMENTARY

Many candidates are still writing responses that are too wordy and lengthy. In many cases where additional pages were used, the quality of the response was not necessarily enhanced by the extra pages. Candidates can often fare better with a concise, succinct answer that is well-planned and thoughtful.

Although the addition of the advisory note, printed in red, about which text type to write on meant that far fewer candidates wrote in the wrong booklet, candidates must be reminded that it is their responsibility to answer in the correct booklet. Candidates must be prepared for what to expect in the examination, and take their time to ensure that they are following all instructions carefully.

Some candidates are still relying on regurgitating previously written and rote-learned essays. Although it is good practice to use previous examination questions to prepare for the examination, candidates must be aware that the questions change every year. It is therefore essential that students are able to answer the question as it is asked in the examination, which often requires them to adapt to small changes in styles of questioning across all three papers. This explicit linking often saw candidates move to the higher grades. Rote learned essays that make no attempt to answer the question do not meet the standard required to achieve.

The choice of text studied influenced candidate results. Texts that were rich in meaning and relevance for students yielded good results. These texts were often age appropriate, and included relevant and engaging themes. Texts need to be of sufficient length and depth to enable criteria to be met, and allow candidate to develop a convincing and perceptive response.

Although many excellence candidates were able to write effectively about events beyond the text, some candidates strayed too far from their text in their responses. Candidates are reminded to address the text first and supply sufficient evidence from the text before delving into events beyond the text.

Candidates can be assisted to develop the skills and knowledge required to achieve by:

- learning to recognise the purpose and audience of texts, whether familiar or unfamiliar, so they can understand why writers / directors manipulate language
- becoming familiar with the language and ideas needed to show understanding of texts such as the terminology used to describe features of language and how these features work to reveal purpose and audience
- becoming familiar with the idea of reading “on the lines,” for literal meaning; “between the lines,” to infer ideas in the immediate context; and “beyond the lines” connecting the text to the candidates’ own world, to other texts and beyond, while still maintaining links to the text itself
- practising selecting the best question for their text. Many candidates choose a question based on a single word (e.g. ‘theme’) without considering the meaning of the question.
- practising planning their response. Candidates who formulated a thorough plan of their essay generally answered well
- practicing shaping their learned material into a personal response to the question, rather than reproducing pre-learned material and trying to twist the topic or question to fit
- ensuring that they address both parts of the question in their response
- using the key words in the question as part of their answer in order to ensure they understand the question.

STANDARD REPORTS

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

ACHIEVEMENT

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

- understood the text
- understood the key words of the question
- used some appropriate examples and specific details from the text
- answered both parts of the question, even if unbalanced
- generally used an essay structure including an introduction and a conclusion.

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 commonly:

- re-told the story or plot of the text
- showed limited knowledge of the text
- showed limited understanding of the text
- did not understand the key words of the question
- did not answer both parts of the question
- did not use specific and relevant examples and/or details from the text
- wrote an incomplete or short answer
- used a pre-learned essay question which did not answer their chosen examination question
- used inaccurate details and examples.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- answered both parts of the question
- understood the key words in the question
- included relevant and specific examples and/or details
- made clear informed points
- responded with some depth of knowledge about the text, sometimes providing several examples from different parts of a text in support
- focused on developing an argument that was relevant to the selected question
- used appropriate quotations to support points made
- connected points made to the author's purpose
- showed some appreciation of the context of the text and its relevance to society/and or teenagers.

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 commonly:

- answered both parts of the question with perception
- demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the text
- showed appreciation and understanding of the writer's purpose
- included relevant quotations, examples and details
- interweaved quotations within the argument
- structured their response effectively including an introduction, linked paragraphs and a conclusion
- developed a coherent discussion
- showed insight and understanding of the writer's craft
- wrote at length with sophistication of argument and style
- related their chosen text to other texts to make effective connections
- discussed the relevance to the writer's purpose of the social backdrop of the text and/or the time the text was written.

OTHER COMMENTS

Candidates wrote successfully when they specifically addressed the key words of the question in their response.

Convincing answers showed familiarity with the text, convincing evidence and an ability to relate to the text.

Candidates who related their response to their own personal experience or world events needed to also focus on the details and idea(s) in the text within their answer to their selected question.

The selection of text(s) needed to have a level of complexity that would enable candidates to meet the standard at Achieved, Merit or Excellence.

Some texts that were very successful for candidates who gained Merit or Excellence were: "Night", "Animal Farm", "Of Mice and Men", "Lord of the Flies", "Macbeth", "The Hunger Games", "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time", "Noughts and Crosses", and war poetry.

There were some comparisons between two or more short texts and this often resulted in more able candidates gaining more than Achieved.

Other texts seemed to limit candidate's responses and included: "On the Sidewalk Bleeding," "The Last Spin," and "The Boy in Striped Pyjamas."

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

ACHIEVEMENT

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

- answered both parts of the question chosen, although unevenly at times
- incorporated the question's key wording into their responses
- knew their text(s) in reasonable detail
- made reference to one or more visual or oral language features
- supported responses with some relevant evidence from the text(s)
- wrote structured responses which included an introduction/body paragraphs/conclusion, often formulaic in approach.

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 commonly:

- did not sufficiently address both parts of the question, or only answered one half of the question
- produced plot summaries rather than directed responses, or wrote material irrelevant to the question
- struggled to identify and explain the use of language feature(s)
- wrote a disorganised or confused answer with little evidence of planning, or paragraph structure
- wrote on questions that were not in the 2014 paper, or attempted to adapt prepared material that did not fit the question
- used limited or generalised details from their chosen text that focussed on plot, rather than supporting points made.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

- produced well organised, well expressed responses
- answered both parts of the question evenly and convincingly, often linking points to each other
- developed their points reasonably fully and supported them with a range of examples and evidence
- provided multiple examples of visual and/or oral language features, often exploring other features in addition to camera work and dialogue
- discussed the question in relation to the director's purpose
- showed some understanding of the text(s) as a whole
- moved from identifying the language features used, to a more detailed discussion of each feature and how it was used in context of the question being discussed – showed some understanding of the creator's/director's intention.

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 commonly:

- perceptively answered both parts of the question, often integrating or interweaving the two parts of the task
- wrote a focused response that did not contain any erroneous tangents
- created a fluently written essay that makes confident points that are relevant to the question, and show originality in thought or interpretation
- recognised that a director uses techniques, e.g. camera angles and lighting, together and was able to unpack their significance
- wrote an essay that contained sophisticated vocabulary and revealed personal voice
- showed personal engagement with the text
- showed an appreciation of the director/creator to audience relationship
- structured essays in a way that suited their argument, as opposed to a pre-learnt structure
- displayed evidence of insightful and/or original thinking in their analysis of: visual and oral language features; relevance to society; personal engagement or creator's purpose/intentions.

OTHER COMMENTS

It was pleasing to see many responses where candidates obviously understood the assessment criteria and included visual and/or oral language features in well-structured essays. These candidates clearly and concisely answered the question, and thus achieved well.

On the other hand, there were a number of responses where candidates seemed to know their texts, but did not meet certain aspects of the assessment criteria. Examples of this were essays in which candidates:

- did not refer to the question
- did not answer both parts of the question
- provided no specific evidence.

Candidates need to write a balanced response, with equal consideration given to both parts of their chosen question. Candidates either concentrated on the first part of the question and then wrote a superficial response to the second part, often within a conclusion, or they answered the second part of the question well, without describing the first part at all.

A number of candidates used the majority of their essay responding to the text from a personal point of view – relating it to world events or personal experience – but this was at the expense of providing specific details and understanding of the text itself. Candidates need to be made aware that this 'engagement' with the text needs to be woven within an answer that meets the requirements of the question.

In approaching this standard, candidates should emphasise the exploration of a director's / creator's deliberate use of visual and oral techniques and how these techniques are used to convey ideas and meanings for the viewer to interpret. The candidates that could analyse how the director combined these techniques to create certain effects, generally wrote a convincing or perceptive response.

Some candidates are still relying on pre-prepared responses, which they are unable to adapt to answer the essay questions.

It was clear that some candidates did not actually know what setting was, therefore they were unable to answer correctly on this question. They referred to an event or a scene, but did not give relevant details about the time or place.

Choice of text is critical if candidates are to reach the highest levels. The chosen text needs to be of sufficient length and depth to enable the criteria to be met, and to allow the candidates to develop a Merit or Excellence response. In general, candidates performed better when they had studied a text in which the protagonist was a teenager. Some more adult texts, such as 'Thank You for Smoking' and 'Manon de Source' had candidates struggling with very adult ideas, which were difficult for them to relate to or explain. Other texts that seemed to limit candidates' responses included: Remember the Titans, Coach Carter, Mean Creak, Mud, Kenny, Now and Then, and Kevin's Sentence.

Some texts that were successful for candidates who gained Merit or Excellence included: The Truman Show, Slumdog Millionaire, Billy Elliot, What's Eating Gilbert Grape?, The Hunger Games, Dead Poets' Society, Gattaca, and Pleasantville.

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

ACHIEVEMENT

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

Question 1

- identified a significant relationship and gave evidence of this relationship from the text
- showed understanding of how this evidence gave the reader an understanding of the relationship
- gave an adequate description of how a relationship changed or developed based on at least two sections of the text
- identified at least one language technique used by the writer.

Question 2

- identified how the writer's experience of the estuary changed based on at least two parts in the poem
- identified at least language feature, gave an example and offered some relevant comment to illustrate change or difference
- described at least one aspect of the mood developed in the poem.

Question 3

- identified at least one language feature and gave examples and offered some description of effect
- showed an understanding of the target audience of the text and how the writer addressed this audience
- showed an understanding of how the ideas in the text were structured.

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 commonly:

Question 1

- showed a misunderstanding of the text
- made little or no direct reference to the text
- selected evidence that was not relevant
- looked at a relationship at only one point in the text and did not examine its development.

Question 2

- showed a misunderstanding of the content of the poem (e.g. they believed the poem was about a fire or believed the narrator was frightened of the crabs)
- showed a literal understanding (e.g. the daffodils "shivered" therefore it was cold, therefore the narrator found the estuary unpleasant)
- identified a language feature but gave an incorrect example, or vice versa.

Question 3

- gave their opinions about the internet without any reference to the text, or quoted sections of the text without explanation
- showed little understanding of the purpose or intended target audience of the text
- did not accurately identify language features and give examples.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

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

Question 1

- tracked the development of a relationship and carefully selected evidence to support their explanation
- linked the development of a relationship to the author's intended message
- showed a clear understanding of how the author had used language techniques and referred to specific techniques.

Question 2

- tracked the writer's experience at the estuary and accurately explained the experience
- consistently and confidently identified language techniques, gave examples and convincing explanations of effects created.

Question 3

- showed a convincing understanding of purpose and audience by offering a range of evidence and clear explanations
- looked at more than one aspect of how ideas were structured in the text and examined the text as a whole

- showed a convincing understanding of how writer had used language techniques
- attempted to go beyond 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 commonly:

Question 1

- made links between the text and the wider world, making insightful comments about the nature of teacher / student relationships
- referred in detail to specific language techniques
- showed originality in their analysis of the development of the relationship throughout the text.

Question 2

- tracked the writer's changing experiences at the estuary in detail
- showed a perceptive understanding of how language techniques work together to convey mood
- was able to recognise poet's message to the reader about fear of the unknown.

Question 3

- made astute observations on the use of language techniques and structure, deconstructing the text to examine how language was used to create meaning and appeal to a particular target group of readers
- clearly identified author's intentions and showed a perceptive engagement with the ideas raised in the text
- explored meanings beyond the text and offered a considered personal and informed response.

OTHER COMMENTS

The texts were appropriate and engaged candidates judging by the apparent enthusiasm they brought to their responses.

The poem [Text B] proved the most difficult. Some candidates experienced difficulty following the thread of the text and understanding the metaphorical language.

The fiction and non-fiction texts [Texts A and C] were well answered with good levels of understanding.

It is recommended that candidates answer all the questions to be assured of Achievement and to progress to Merit or Excellence.

Use of the guiding bulleted phrases provided helpful scaffolding to develop responses.