2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	English
Level:	2
Achievement standard(s):	91098, 91099, 91100

General commentary

In all three standards, candidates who achieved high grades presented responses that were focused and precise. The best responses showed insightful or original thinking, expressed concisely. Candidates clearly benefitted from having been taught how to develop a concise response that shows a discriminating understanding of the aspects of English, which is a requirement of *The New Zealand Curriculum* at this level.

As always, the quality of the analysis is more important than the length of the response. Lengthy responses were not always focused on the questions, and abundance of evidence is not the same thing as "perceptive" analysis.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91098: Analyse specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence

Assessment

Essay questions were developed from the four aspects stated in *The New Zealand Curriculum*: purpose and audience, ideas, language features, and structure. Candidates should expect some essay questions to be specific rather than general. This is because the essay questions are carefully designed to assess the Achievement Standard, the titles of which are "Analyse *specified* aspects …" Candidates are encouraged to review recent examination questions and practise making confident, informed choices about which questions to attempt. Candidates who demonstrated understanding of key vocabulary, particularly "structure" and carefully read task wording were able to secure higher grades than Achievement.

Commentary

Text selection was important in allowing candidates access to higher grades. Texts that supported Merit and Excellence grades typically shared two features: rich, debatable ideas, and deliberate, sophisticated crafting. These texts allowed students to:

- explore "grey areas" or contested ideas
- analyse authorial purpose and audience response
- discuss different aspects together
- move beyond personal response into analytical interpretation.

Texts that consistently enabled strong responses included:

- Shakespeare (especially *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*)
- *Lord of the Flies*, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Frankenstein*, *The Road*, *The Book Thief*, *The Things They Carried*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Carol Ann Duffy's poetry (particularly more complex poems)
- war poetry (Owen, Sassoon, WWI poetry) often enabled Merit-level responses, particularly for language analysis
- NZ and Māori / Pasifika texts, notably: *Better the Blood*, *Dinner with a Cannibal*, *Potiki*, *The Māori Jesus*, Poetry by Selina Tusitala Marsh, Tayi Tibble, Karlo Mila, James K. Baxter, and Hone Tuwhare.

Texts that limited achievement were generally:

- below Curriculum Level 7
- overly plot-driven, simplistic, or familiar from earlier year levels
- chosen through self-study rather than explicit, teacher-led learning.

Texts that were frequently limiting for candidates included:

- *Long Way Down*, *Unwind*, *Examination Day*, *Harrison Bergeron*, *All Summer in a Day*, *The Hate U Give*, *Dustbins*, *In the Rubbish Tin*, *On the Sidewalk Bleeding*, *The Lottery*, *Of Mice and Men*
- song lyrics were rarely above Achievement level
- Young Adult fiction and self-selected texts (e.g. Colleen Hoover novels, children's picture books).

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- produced essays of sufficient length that followed a recognisable essay structure
- selected questions and texts that were appropriate to NCEA Level 2 / Curriculum Level 7 and aligned with their text knowledge
- used key words and phrasing from the question throughout the response to frame ideas and signal relevance
- demonstrated a general understanding of the text and the question, addressing both parts of the task, though sometimes unevenly
- supported points with some specific evidence (quotations or details), though this evidence was often weakly unpacked
- identified language features and techniques and showed basic awareness of authorial purpose, usually with straightforward or superficial analysis
- relied on formulaic approaches (e.g. beginning / middle / end structure, one example per paragraph, pre-learned ideas discussed in isolation)
- engaged with ideas at a surface level, analysing details without developing a sustained or cumulative argument
- attempted connections beyond the text (society, context, personal response).

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

- produced sustained responses that were well-organised and clearly focused on the question
- balanced both parts of the question effectively, weaving each aspect through paragraphs rather than adding one on superficially
- supported arguments with a wide, well-chosen range of textual evidence, often using multiple quotations per point

- unpacked evidence in depth, analysing *how* techniques worked and *why* the author used them
- evaluated the author's purpose and its effect on the reader, showing awareness of deliberate crafting choices
- connected ideas across and within paragraphs to build a coherent, cumulative argument
- extended discussion beyond the text through thoughtful, relevant real-world or societal links without losing focus on textual analysis
- developed original, independent interpretations that went beyond teacher-taught ideas and demonstrated secure understanding of the text as a whole
- concluded convincingly by drawing reasoned insights from evidence, showing depth beyond surface-level readings.

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

- produced sustained, fluent responses that were cohesive, confident, and clearly driven by a central argument
- formulated original and perceptive interpretations of the text, offering individual arguments that went beyond classroom-taught ideas
- wove a wide range of well-chosen evidence seamlessly throughout the essay, integrating quotations, paraphrase, and summary to support ideas
- demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of language features and techniques, explaining how they worked together to shape meaning and reader response
- evaluated the author's deliberate crafting choices, purpose, and positioning of the reader with insight and authority
- connected the text meaningfully to wider social, historical, philosophical, or contemporary contexts, integrating these links rather than appending them
- sustained insightful and mature ideas across the whole response, building a coherent and cumulative argument rather than isolated points
- employed precise, varied, and academic language, using evaluative verbs and sophisticated syntax to articulate complex thinking clearly
- reflected genuine engagement and appreciation of the text, showing personal voice, enjoyment of challenge, and thoughtful judgement about the text's value and significance.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- selected texts that were too simplistic or not at Curriculum Level 7, limiting the depth of ideas required for Level 2
- produced responses that were significantly under length, thereby preventing the development of an argument
- misinterpreted or ignored the wording of the question, frequently addressing only one part
- relied heavily on plot summary or description rather than analysis
- provided little or no specific textual evidence, or used evidence that was vague, inaccurate, or unrelated to the question
- demonstrated limited understanding of literary terminology, often confusing language features
- showed little awareness of authorial craft
- used rote-learned or pre-prepared responses that were poorly adapted to the chosen question
- displayed weak essay control, including poor structure, lack of paragraphing, unfinished responses, or failure to develop key points.

Achievement standard 91099: Analyse specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), supported by evidence

Assessment

The essay questions were developed from the four aspects stated in the curriculum: purpose and audience, ideas, language features, and structure. Candidates may expect essay questions to be specific rather than general. This is because the essay questions are carefully designed to assess the Achievement Standard, the titles of which is "Analyse *specified* aspects …" Candidates who only prepared to answer on a single aspect are likely to be disadvantaged. Some candidates seemed to have a weak understanding of key terms used in questions (e.g., "structure", "setting", and "contrast"). Careful question selection has benefitted candidates.

Commentary

Many candidates treated film as if it were the same as written texts, often relying too heavily on dialogue as a language feature. While candidates could identify language features, many struggled to analyse the techniques in terms of the director's purpose. It is crucial for candidates to fully understand what constitutes 'language features'.

Digital answers tended to be far longer than handwritten ones, and often far exceeded the recommended 750–800 words. Although in some cases, candidates did write themselves into an Achieved, more often they wrote themselves out of a higher grade. Candidates need to be aware that quality is rewarded more than quantity.

Texts that consistently enabled strong responses included:

- Films that consistently scored Achieved and Merit: *Shawshank Redemption, Gran Torino, The Talented Mr Ripley, The Truman Show, V for Vendetta, Hacksaw Ridge*, Hidden Figures, Crash, Uproar, Jojo Rabbit, Pride, Parasite, The Dark Horse

- Films that consistently scored Merit and Excellence: *The Prestige, The Hurt Locker, Shutter Island, Children of Men, Eye in the Sky, Black Mirror: Nosedive, Suffragette, Everything Everywhere All At Once, Mad Max: Fury Road, Whiplash, Barbie, The Dressmaker, Mickey 17, Persepolis, Gattaca, Get Out, Joker, Ex Machina, Dark Knight, Birds of Prey.*

Texts that limited achievement included:

- Texts more commonly taught at Level 1: *Remember the Titans, The Blindside, Whale Rider, Hunt for the Wilderpeople, Two cars one Night, Boy, The Help*.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- addressed the key words of the question although often imbalanced

- used straightforward vocabulary / terminology

- did not address the wider purpose of the text

- presented more plot than analysis in their response

- followed a formulaic structure to their essay and missed a few key details

- relied on a single scene as the main evidence for their argument

- frequently lacked an overall thesis, resulting in a collection of disconnected points rather than a cohesive response

- answered both parts of the question where the response to the second part was left to the end.

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

- gave personal opinion or connection to the wider world where relevant
- displayed a convincing understanding or the text with relevant details supporting the response
- referred to relevant visual / oral language features
- usually wrote detailed, comprehensive responses
- wrote convincingly on both parts of the question
- engaged with context or audience positioning, though not always fully integrated into the argument.

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

- set up a strong thesis on the question and maintained discussion focused to this
- made perceptive, insightful links between language features and the relevant points made in their analysis
- showed a mature appreciation for the wider context of the text, and often made links beyond the text
- wrote responses that had a clear, logical structure and sequence with evidence from the text which was consistently relevant and insightful
- demonstrated understanding of genre conventions, including when these were subverted or deliberately used to shape audience perception.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- selected inappropriate questions to the text
- did not address the question or the aspects of the question
- wrote responses driven by plot that were lacking in depth
- did not show fluency and control in conveying ideas to the level of the standard
- did not give enough evidence from the text to support the description in the first half of the question
- repeated points and evidence rather than developing an argument.

Achievement standard 91100: Analyse significant aspects of unfamiliar written text(s) through close reading, supported by evidence

Assessment

All three questions began "Analyse how…", inviting candidates to examine the techniques used to create the text, and to link them to ideas, purpose, and effects. It is important that candidates relate their discussion directly to the question posed in the examination, and that they focus their discussion on the techniques employed by the writer. The number of techniques mentioned in an answer is much less important than the quality of analysis of each technique; answers benefit from discussion of fewer techniques and more analysis of how they work in the context of the text and in relation to the question. Candidates are not required to write essays. Lengthy introductions including the title of the text and the author's name are not necessary and could inhibit candidates from gaining higher grades.

Commentary

Candidates who attained higher grades showed how meaning is crafted across the three unfamiliar texts by closely addressing the question and supporting ideas with evidence. In "Dig Deep!", stronger responses explored how the contrasting communication styles of the speaker and the basketballer

lead to moments of frustration as well as warmth, showing how people can talk past one another despite good intentions. In "The Boy with the Long Hair", candidates examined how hair functions as a symbol of identity, linking the narrator's refusal to conform to gendered expectations with a sense of personal determination. In "Beyond the Rubik's Cube", effective responses explained how dynamic verbs such as *"blurred"* and *"erupted"* create excitement and position speed cubing as thrilling and competitive. Excellence responses integrated quotations smoothly and made perceptive judgments about how language features shape meaning and purpose across all three texts.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- made a link between the content of the texts and the question although they may have misunderstood some of the content or ideas
- identified at least one technique supported by specific evidence from the text
- linked their understanding of evidence to the question
- discussed parts of the text more fully than others, rather than the text as a whole
- made straightforward links between content and the question
- interpreted the effect of language features, often at a surface or descriptive level
- used direct quotations as evidence rather than paraphrasing
- identified the main idea of the texts
- incorporated key words from the question to maintain focus, often reiterating these in a concluding sentence
- addressed the writer's purpose, often in an underdeveloped way.

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

- explored the ideas in the text in some depth
- identified quotations and examples, and gained some depth on them
- analysed the 'so what' of their statements, with sentence starters like, "This example demonstrates …"
- started to make relevant links beyond the text
- referred to the intent of the author and explained how the work fulfilled the intent, rather than simply declaring that the work fulfilled the intent
- identified techniques with supporting examples from throughout the text that demonstrated overall understanding
- linked their understanding firmly to the task at hand dictated by the question
- expressed a summary of the whole text in terms of writer's purpose
- linked examples and developed their response as a whole, rather than listing points
- wrote fluently and gave fully developed answers
- clearly addressed the writer's purpose
- referred to tone and structural features where appropriate, moving beyond the two to three language features
- supported their ideas with a range of relevant examples from the text
- followed a clear and consistent structure in their response, often working their way through a whole text.

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

- developed genuine, insightful links beyond the texts
- analysed a clear relationship between the wider message and a specific aspect of the text

- analysed ideas that were explained clearly, were relevant, and were focused on the question
- used precise language
- covered the whole text systematically in their analysis, integrating examples and techniques
- demonstrated an overall sense of authenticity when discussing writer's purpose and linked their understanding beyond the text
- demonstrated a perceptive understanding of the text as a purposeful and crafted whole
- developed a cohesive, insightful response that explored ideas in depth
- discussed a variety of aspects, showing clear control and accuracy
- explained how language features, tone, and structure worked together to shape meaning and purpose
- wove a wide range of relevant examples seamlessly into the response
- sustained a consistent focus on the question throughout
- may have compared the beginnings and endings of texts to show how ideas and purpose were developed or resolved
- shaped the response to be driven by ideas rather than language features.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- paraphrased the plots / events in texts and described what happened
- identified language devices without making a link to the question
- provided a list of language devices and attempted to unpack what the features were rather than how they were effective in the texts
- answered fewer than three questions, or did not respond to the question in their answer
- showed little or no understanding of the text or task
- used examples that were irrelevant, inaccurate, or not clearly explained
- showed little sense of the text as a purposeful piece of writing.