English Studies

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

English Learning Area

Government of South Australia
SACE Board of SA
ENGLISH STUDIES

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Students who choose English Studies clearly appreciate the opportunity to engage with literature, deconstruct texts, experiment with forms of communication, analyse the work of a range of authors, gain understanding of the features of a range of text types, construct lucid and logical arguments, connect texts, create their own texts, and develop a wide range of skills that are highly transferable to other subjects and life itself. The rigorous and robust nature of the subject is revealed in the high quality of the work that students produce. Markers have the opportunity to read material that has been considered over a long period of time, culminating in the individual study, as well as that which has been produced under supervised and controlled conditions (the examination). That markers comment that both assessment types leave them inspired and even in awe of what students can produce, is strong evidence that the subject caters to, and is appreciated by, students of impressive calibre.

Markers noted that the majority of teachers accurately followed the curriculum statement and provided students with an appropriate range of texts which would broaden their experience of literature. There were only a few teachers who did not structure their course to reflect the requirements of the curriculum statement. It is important that teachers work to the subject outline that will be implemented in 2011.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: EXAMINATION

General Comments

The marking team commented that while students generally found the examination accessible it also provided opportunities for the more capable students to excel. The majority of students were adequately prepared and displayed an understanding of the requirements of the different sections, knowledge of the texts they had studied, and the requisite skills to construct fluent, well-supported arguments in response to the questions posed in the paper.

Criteria for Judging Performance

Understanding and Analysis

Few students had trouble showing at least some understanding of the content, context and ideas explored in the texts. As one experienced marker wrote: ‘There were only a small number of students who simply re-told plot and discussed characters as real people; or in the case of poetry, explained meaning and poet’s intent without acknowledging form.’ Those who engaged with the question and acknowledged the author as the creator of the text were able to produce structured essays which clearly addressed the criteria, making it possible to award high scores. Across all sections, many students displayed a sound ability to compare texts and they had a sound understanding of the techniques of deconstruction. A smaller number also had the meta language with which to express that understanding. Many markers also commented on the fact that the more successful students progressed
beyond the simple labeling of techniques, and not only provided a clear examination of those techniques from the texts, but also explored the effect of these devices on a reader’s understanding and response. Comment was also made about the importance of students selecting the questions most suitable to their texts. Time spent on careful selection and detailed planning in the examination is not time lost.

Application

The primary discriminator of the more successful answers was the depth to which students addressed the question. Those students who tried to adapt a prepared answer to fit a question in the paper did not achieve as well as those students who gave considered thought to the chosen question and selected material that provided a reasoned response to what was being asked. Merely using the words of the question without entering into the ‘spirit’ of what is being asked does not constitute an answer to the question. Students who achieved at a higher level had clearly selected an appropriate question, tailored their material in order to construct an argument in response to that question, and applied relevant evidence and quotations in order to justify that argument. In general those students also wrote carefully crafted essays in which the introduction clearly outlined the argument, each paragraph was signposted with precise topic sentences, and the line of reasoning was maintained throughout and the essay was concluded with detailed reference to the question in the closing paragraph.

Communication

Markers commented once again on the need for students to be conscious of common errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. These errors can be distracting and mar the student’s ability to communicate fluently. Particular attention must be paid to the spelling of subject-specific words, for example techniques (metaphor, onomatopoeia, mise-en-scéne etc.), authors’ names and titles of books or texts. Students should also be aware of the correct nomenclature for text types: mixing plays and films, or labelling all texts as ‘books’ is inappropriate.

Section A: Shared Studies

In the following section of the report specific comments are provided on each of the questions in the examination. Extracts from the instructions to markers are provided, as are comments made by markers about the specific ways in which students responded to the question.

Questions on Poetry Texts

It should be noted that the poetry questions all contained the stem ‘compare the ways’ or ‘compare the techniques’, and all referred to the poets rather than to poems or the more generic poetry. This reflects the move towards a more poet-centred study of poetry in the new subject outline to be implemented from 2011. It also means that students were required to compare the work of different poets in order to answer the question. Therefore, while students could legitimately make comparisons within the work of a single poet, there should also have been a comparison across the work of a range of poets. The word ‘compare’ indicates that students should have explored both similarities and differences; however the balance of this was determined by the particular poets and poems that students chose to write about. For all six poetry questions markers commented that the better responses involved a structure in which comparison was a defining feature. Less successful responses involved a structure where students discussed poem by poem (often with one poem
per paragraph) with scant attention to the connections between either poems or – more importantly – poets.

Question 1

*Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use places to present ideas.*

Students were required to compare how poets use the concept of ‘place’ to present their ideas; this could be applied in either a physical or symbolic sense. It was not sufficient, however for students merely to describe the setting of the poems; they needed to explore the link between those ‘places’ and the ideas being expressed. Less adept answers to this question were those where students described the places presented in the poems but did not explore the way/s in which ideas were presented through those places. There were a number of successful responses examining issues such as Indigenous Australian land rights, war, and the limitations of domesticity; and there were some insightful responses in which students considered, more laterally, the emotional or psychological ‘place’ in which poets faced challenges or ‘watershed’ moments.

Question 2

*Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use symbolism to explore ideas.*

Students were able to interpret symbolism as covering a range of literary devices (symbolism in imagery, symbols created through repetition, symbolism in ‘setting’, symbolism in sounds.). However, the focus of students’ answers needed to be on a comparison of the ways in which symbolism was used to explore ideas, not just a comparison of the ideas themselves. It was also not sufficient for students to merely discern the symbolism present in the poems; they needed to show how the device was *used* to explore the ideas. Better responses to this question involved a definition of the concept of symbolism and how it applied to the particular poets and poems being explored. Some students assumed that every technique in a poem could be labeled ‘symbolism’ and therefore displayed little discrimination between poetic techniques. While many students were able to analyse how a particular poet used symbolism, in general students had more trouble exploring the comparisons between poets.

Question 3

*Compare the techniques that the poets you studied this year use to explore the idea that truly significant battles are fought within oneself.*

The focus in this question was on the comparison of the techniques used by the poets to explore the idea of some kind of internal battle. The ‘battle’ might only be significant to the poet – although it may also be a more broadly significant battle – but it must be one that is fought ‘within oneself’. A wide interpretation of this concept was appropriate. This question made it clear that the techniques are the major focus, therefore students were required to compare the techniques used by the chosen poets, rather than just focusing on the idea itself. Some students struggled to define the ‘battles’ being explored, more often simply writing about thematic concerns in general without engaging with the concept of some kind of internal conflict. Others explored battles that were more external to the poet – social injustice, war, sickness, – without considering the notion of what is happening ‘within oneself’ when facing
these challenges. The more successful essays were ones where students explored the idea of the poets coming to terms with life’s difficulties – motherhood, death, inequality – and specifically labeled and explored the varying techniques used by the poets.

Question 4

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use poetry as a form of protest.

The focus in this question was on the comparison of the methods used to convey a protest, or protests. Students did not have to select poems that had a commonality of topic – the emphasis was on the ways that poets use poetry to communicate a protest. The ‘ways’ in the question might have involved a comparison of the treatment of particular protests, or – more likely – an examination of the various techniques used to express those concerns. Poetry about war or racism (particularly the rights of Indigenous Australians), or conformity, provided popular material for this question. Students who clearly defined the protest or protests and connected the central ideas to their definition wrote the best responses; those who did not define the area of protest provided a generic discussion of thematic concerns and did not adequately address the question.

Question 5

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year explore a sense of loss.

This was the most popular poetry question in the examination by a significant margin, and it also attracted the highest mean score. Students were able to define loss in a variety of ways: literal, figurative, cultural and personal. The focus of the essay, however, needed to be on a comparison of the ways in which the poets explored a sense of loss. Most students capably defined the area of loss they were exploring. The loss of innocence, love, the environment, culture, family and life itself were the most popular areas of discussion. Generally students were able to write with clarity and confidence about the poets they had studied, and were conscious of the techniques employed by poets to explore ideas. This question did, however, attract responses in which students attempted to ‘massage’ a prepared answer to fit the question. In these responses the idea of loss was relegated to the background and students fared much less successfully.

Question 6

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use both sound and silence to convey ideas.

This was the least popular question in the poetry section, appealing to only 2% of the cohort. ‘Sound’ and ‘silence’ did not need to feature in each poem, but both elements needed be addressed in the work of each poet. Both sound and silence could be interpreted as themes in the poems (where the idea of silence within a poem is used to explore a wider concern, for example, that silence is the weapon a dominant society uses to marginalise the culturally disenfranchised); an exploration of ‘sound and silence’ could also be applied to techniques (i.e. the use of punctuation, ways to signal silences – e.g. in the poetry of Emily Dickinson) or the use of caesuras, imagery used to signify sound or silence, alliteration, assonance rhythm, rhyme. Students were required to make the link between the techniques and the ideas. In general students wrote capably on ‘sound’ within poetry, but found the concept of
‘silence’ more challenging. Those students who fared well had selected poems carefully in order to ensure that both ‘sound’ and ‘silence’ were present as either devices or thematic concerns.

Section B: Shared Studies

Part 1: Questions on Single Texts

Question 7

*How does the author of a prescribed text use an awakening of one kind or another to explore ideas?*

This question required students to identify a key moment (or moments) within the development of the narrative that suggested a new awareness or a new way of perceiving the world. Such knowledge or experience gained should be linked to the key ideas presented within the chosen texts. Students were able to adopt a wide interpretation of ‘awakening’, – moral, spiritual, or more broadly an insight into the motivation of others and/or the workings of social systems. Students were able to limit themselves to one experience or type of awakening, or were able to analyse more broadly the concept of awakening as explored within a text. Those answers attracting the highest marks were ones where students were able to explore how an awakening was used by an author to explore wider thematic concerns within the text.

Question 8

*How does the author of a prescribed text use conflict between cultural context and a character to explore ideas?*

This question directed students to consider the tension between a character and the cultural context. The argument needed to centre on the conflict between a character and the prevailing forces (real or imagined) of the time and place in which the text was set. Students were able to consider one instance of conflict to explore ideas, or may have discussed how ideas are explored through several instances of conflict. The central part of the question, however, required students to link conflict to ideas; it was not appropriate to simply present instances of conflict without explicitly focusing attention on the ideas suggested by a close reading of the text. Those students who did particularly well wrote about a text that was either set in a futuristic society, or at least four or five decades in the past; this allowed them to see a strong cultural context against which a character could have experienced conflict. Less successful responses were those in which students simply described the conflict and did not consider how this allowed the author to explore ideas. This was the most popular question in the single text section of the examination.

Question 9

*‘Success comes in various forms.’ What techniques does the author of a prescribed text use to explore this idea?*

Students were required to unambiguously identify techniques and link such devices to the central idea that success can be defined in different ways, or conceived of in many ways. Students were able to consider several examples of success within a text, or consider this notion as a concept and carefully analyse one example of
success that may not be of the expected or conventional kind. In more successful responses to this question students maintained a focus upon linking techniques to the text's central idea, rather than exploring the idea of success in isolation. Less successful responses involved a description of the plot, often detailing the actions of characters (sometimes dealt with as though they were real people) and the successful outcomes of their behaviour. The quality of the answer often depended on the student’s working definition of the term ‘success’. The more explicit and succinct the definition, the more focused the argument.

**Question 10**

*How does the author of a prescribed text explore the idea that responsibility is both a curse and a blessing?*

While technique was not explicitly addressed in this question, it was expected that students should interpret ‘how’ as a reference to authorial devices within the text. This question had a central premise that the sense of responsibility (which might derive from social obligation or individual moral purpose) can entail positive and negative connotations at one and the same time. *The Crucible, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, The Glass Menagerie and Blade Runner* were popular choices for answering this question. Once again, less successful responses involved a recount of events in which students explained a character’s responsibilities and then simply detailed the positive and negative outcomes for that character. In these responses students found it easier to discuss the curse of responsibility but found the idea of responsibility as a blessing more challenging. In more successful responses, students clearly defined the area of responsibility and explored the techniques used by the author to explore those aspects, addressing both the idea of responsibility being both a curse and a blessing.

**Question 11**

*How does the author of a prescribed text use a range of ‘voices’ to explore ideas?*

The focus of this question was on different ‘voices’ observed within a text and how such voices are used to present ideas. A wide interpretation of the term ‘voices’ was acceptable. Students might have considered how point of view and description (by virtue of what is included, or excluded), reinforces ideas and influences the response of the reader. Similarly, the ‘voices’ of the characters might have involved the exploration of the use of dialogue or interior thoughts, the role of the narrator, or even the form and structure of the text itself. Plays were a particularly popular text type for answering this question and the best responses explored the ways in which ideas are expressed through a range of dramatic devices (various characters, dialogue, monologues, stage directions etc.). In less successful answers students responded by interpreting ‘voices’ to mean simply ‘characters’ and thus produced a character study and limited the scope of the essay.

**Part 2: Questions on Paired Texts**

The verb ‘compare’ in each of the paired text questions assumed that students would explore the similarities and differences between texts. The particular balance of these elements was obviously determined by the question and the texts chosen by the student. Students who achieved more successful results used the comparative elements to drive the argument, rather than referring to the connections between the texts in a cursory manner.
Question 12

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts explore the idea that the search for fulfilment is bitter-sweet.*

This question required students to examine the dual nature of a search for fulfilment. Students were expected to compare the ways in which two authors approached the bitter-sweet nature of this search. Simply describing a search for fulfilment did not suffice. The term ‘bitter-sweet’ assumes that there are both positive and negative elements to this search. The definitions that students gave to ‘bitter’ and ‘sweet’ were varied and markers were instructed to accept those that were reasoned and justified. Similarly, while it was necessary for students to explore bitter and sweet aspects of the search for fulfilment in both texts, the balance of these elements was expected to vary depending on the texts themselves. Texts in which there is some redemptive outcome (*The Crucible, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Gattaca* etc.) were popular choices for this question. Most students competently handled the dual nature of fulfilment, but in less successful responses students tended to focus primarily on the outcomes in the text and thus relied on explaining events rather than exploring the question’s central concept.

Question 13

*‘People are products of their time and place.’ Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts explore this idea.*

The more successful responses to this question moved beyond simple character descriptions that included details about the contextual surroundings of characters – the kind of approach that only reveals that ‘people’ are the product of their surroundings. These responses also discussed how the authors explored the concept itself. It was permissible for students to argue that authors showed that ‘people’ are actually more influenced by factors other than ‘time and place’ (e.g. other individuals, traumatic circumstances, courage, determination etc.), because this still involved them in contending with the concept in the quote. In these more successful responses students clearly established the time and place in which the text was set, and deconstructed the way in which the author explored the effect of this context on the characters created. These students were able to show that some characters are presented as products of the text’s time and place, but others are not, thus contending with the concept on a complex level.

Question 14

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use contrast in characterisation to explore ideas.*

Characterisation is the technique of creating characters. Students were required to examine such devices as: development in a character; use of minor characters; use of setting to reflect characters; symbols that communicate aspects of a character; use of caricatures, etc. However, this question required them to compare the ways in which each author explicitly uses contrast in these methods. This might have been contrast within the same character (i.e. changes in), or contrast between different characters. It was not acceptable for students to contrast only the characters in the two texts, because this did not involve the separate authors’ use of contrast – rather a contrast was created by the student pairing the texts. Less successful responses were the result of confusion about these requirements. Those students who did
understand the demands of the question were able to capably identify contrast within characterisation; but only the best responses involved a clear comparison of the similar and different ways in which two authors used such contrasts.

**Question 15**

*Compare the techniques that the authors of two texts use to explore the struggle against oppression.*

This was the most popular question in the paired text section and it also attracted the highest mean of any question in the paper. ‘The struggle against oppression’ is a concept: there may be several struggles in an individual text and it was acceptable for students to examine a variety of these. It was not adequate for students to simply describe a struggle against oppression itself – there needed to be an engagement with the techniques used to do so. Students who tackled this question generally developed strong comparisons between the two texts and explored the concept of the struggle against oppression with clarity and insight. These stronger responses included an exploration of the similarities and differences in the techniques used to explore the idea. In less successful responses students tended to focus only on the similarities between the texts.

**Question 16**

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use conflict between men and women to explore ideas.*

This question was the least popular one in the paired texts section and attracted the lowest overall mean of any question in the paper. The question required students to examine the ways in which authors used the conflict between men and women to explore ideas: it was not adequate for students only to describe the conflict between men and women. Unfortunately those students who responded to this question tended to limit their response to the description of the conflict itself. There were, however, some very adept responses involving combinations of *A Doll’s House*, *Educating Rita* and *The Piano*.

**Section C: Critical Reading**

**Question 17**

Markers unanimously commented that students found the two critical reading texts accessible. Nearly all students were able to comment on the content and context of the texts, and most were able to identify at least some techniques employed by the authors. On average, the critical reading was the strongest section of the examination paper for most students. This is a pleasing indicator that students have developed the appropriate skills and understanding to tackle unseen texts.

The most successful answers included the following features:

- a careful management of time and attention to the proportion of writing indicated for each question
- paragraphs that were planned and organised and were therefore clear and cohesive
- answers that involved the student in expressing ideas in their own words and then supporting those ideas with close references to the text
• fluently embedded quotation into the line of reasoning in each response
• an awareness of the text types (opinion piece and review)
• an awareness of the intended audience
• an analysis of techniques that involved accurate nomenclature, reference to examples and an exploration of the effect of the technique on the reader
• answers structured around comparison in question (d) where similarities and differences were the driving feature rather than a cursory afterthought.

Most students had little trouble with the content-based questions (a) and (b). These two questions were designed to give students the opportunity to explore the ideas expressed in both passages and thus access the texts through comprehension exercises. Students were generally precise and concise in answering these two questions.

Question (c) involved drawing some inferences from the passages since neither author is explicit in stating what they believe ‘makes a good car’. Students were generally able to explore what it is that both authors imply in their texts. In the more successful responses students structured their responses around the contrast between the texts; in less successful responses students examined one text and then the other. In the least successful responses students mainly repeated information already presented in their first two answers.

Question (d) required an explicit analysis of techniques. While most students were able to identify some techniques (humour, narrative voice, structural features, colloquial language etc.), better answers used a careful exploration of the similarities and differences between the texts rather than just listing techniques used in one text and then the other. More successful responses also showed a knowledge of a broader range of techniques, an understanding of the purpose and audience of the two texts, more detailed references to examples, and an understanding of the effect of the devices on the reader.

Notes to Markers

The following notes were provided to markers indicating the possible responses that students might have given in the critical reading section. Since this material is relatively exhaustive it was not necessary that students included all of the points in order to achieve marks in the high range; some students may have made other equally valid – observations. These notes are therefore intended as a guide only.

(a) For what reasons does Clarkson condemn Ford as ‘getting the new Escort so hopelessly wrong’? (1 paragraph)

It is expected that students acknowledge that Clarkson is critical of the process used to design the new Ford Escort. Clarkson condemns Ford as ‘getting the new Escort so hopelessly wrong’ because ‘it looks like Ford blundered and built a car that people want’; and he suggests that the general public do not really know what they want. Clarkson believes Ford prioritised the findings of market research over the design and engineering process, and therefore, has settled for a ‘Eurobox’ for ‘Mr Average’. Rather than turning to those Clarkson considers experts and specialists – getting ‘qualified engineers to sit around a conference table hammering out what is feasible in a family car’, – Clarkson implies that Ford has relied on the desires of the public, which he sees as ‘entirely irresponsible’. He criticises the process of questioning the public and attempts to explain why he believes the process is wrong. As a result the
car’s improvements, according to Clarkson, are based on ‘appearance, quality and price’ and not ‘performance and handling’, which he believes are essential. He implies that new cars should continue to add new and innovative features, not just provide ‘more of the same’.

(b) Why does Lacey consider that the Forte ‘risks being forgettable’? (1 Paragraph)

Students are expected to acknowledge that whilst Lacey does not condemn the Forte her review does not reveal it to be an elite car either. Lacey believes the Forte is a good car but that it risks being forgettable as it lacks 'star quality' and does not stand out from cars made by the other talented competitors. Students might acknowledge the 'American Idol' allusion here, but this question is not focused on techniques. She provides many ‘okay’s for the car but qualifies this by ‘damning it with faint praise’. It is in a ‘segment of cars’ that is nothing stunning — the family car. Students may comment on the fact that she is not thrilled by the sports-tuned suspension because it is designed for the wrong purpose (she won’t be racing around a track in it). It is not ‘glitzy’ — while this is seen as a positive (doesn't divert your attention) it also makes the car ordinary by implication. She also asserts that it is a good first car for teens, suggesting that in the end it is nothing special. Measures at the end of each section are rated in the mediocre range. In the key areas of ‘family friendliness’, ‘Fun-factor’, ‘Storage compartments' and 'Cargo/trunk space' she rates these as ‘fair’, ‘some’ and ‘ample’, suggesting that it is a good but not great car. She also claims that Forte is 'not impressive enough to stand out in the crowd'. The car, for Lacey, does 'just fine' and is 'nice' hence it risks being forgettable in a sea of similar vehicles.

(c) Contrast the authors’ suggestions about what makes a good car. (one or more paragraphs)

It is expected that students make contrasts between the two texts, recognising that what each author wants in a good car differs markedly. Better responses should also shift between the texts, comparing as they go.

In defining what makes a good car Lacey is focused on ‘family’. Clarkson, in contrast, believes a new car should be above average and that its performance and handling should be cutting-edge; he looks at the process of creating a new car whereas Lacey looks at a result, the Forte. Lacey looks at creature comforts from a ‘mum’s’ point of view – wanting a car that is practical, reliable and aesthetically pleasing. As a result, her definition of a good car is reflected in her views on its performance, appearance, extras, and safety features. She writes that ‘this isn’t a car I’m going to be racing around a track, and for the kind of everyday driving I do, the Forte does just fine.’ She states: 'It just looks good and doesn’t need all kinds of chrome and special paint to divert your attention.' This focus on appearance and extras is reinforced in her comment that ‘the interior is really the best part of this car. It’s the Forte’s forte!' Lacey focuses on the attractiveness (it looks 'sporty and fun’ and therefore appeals to ‘up-and-comers’) and functionality of the car (ease of use for children – doors, safety seats, wipes and drink holders; and ease of use for adults – storage for mobiles and technology accessories). Clarkson, however is more focused on engineers hammering out what is feasible, finding out what is ‘technically possible’ and the notion of planning ‘the cars of tomorrow’ that significantly improve the experience of driving. For Clarkson breaking the barriers of creativity and improving performance and handling are key concerns.

Lacey is not concerned about a car being on the cutting edge, she is concerned about family issues: appearance, affordability and safety. When she mentions performance and handling she dismisses these aspects as being of little concern,
although she likes the car’s ‘peppy’ qualities. Clarkson, however, bewails this focus on appearance and extras at the expense of performance and handling claiming bitterly: ‘we now have a reasonably attractive, well-priced and quite nicely built car that doesn’t handle’. His definition of what makes a good car is performance and handling.

Some students may also compare the stereotypical gender concerns between the two authors. Lacey deals with appearance and family practicality in a typically feminine manner, whilst Clarkson takes a more ‘testosterone-edged’ view with an emphasis on technical performance and design. This is further reinforced by his final sentence about composing ‘a silly article in a silly women’s magazine …’

(d) Compare the techniques used by the two authors to convince the reader of their points of view. (three or more paragraphs)

It is expected that students will draw comparisons between the texts. As we equate ‘compare’ with both similarities and differences, the most successful responses should involve a discussion of both. The more sophisticated responses will move between texts in order to show this. However, dealing with the texts sequentially is also acceptable, provided that students explicitly demonstrate similarities and differences. The following points provide an overview of the range of techniques from which students may have drawn. Students are expected to justify their observations with close reference to the texts and connect each technique to the way the authors have tried to convince the reader of their point of view.

- The titles of both texts provide an initial insight into the authors’ attitudes. Lacey’s appears straightforward, clearly expressing her opinion in a reasonably balanced way in 'Forte is a Good Car, But Lacks Star Quality'. This is in direct contrast to Clarkson’s title, ‘People’s limousine’, and the play on words – almost an oxymoron – which reveals Clarkson's sarcastic humour and derision of the car that the man on the street thinks he wants.

- Both use a strong but differing personal voice in their respective opening paragraphs. Clarkson employs emotive language and exaggeration, stating that Ford 'wouldn't know what a decent car was even if one jumped out of the bracken and ate the chairman's leg'. Lacey is more personal and conversational, tapping into popular culture: 'When I'm watching “American Idol”, I often wonder how many potential contestants who try out for the show are good, but not great'. Thus she establishes the allusion to the talent show she will use throughout. Both viewpoints are apparent at the end of each text's opening paragraph.

- A gender specific personal voice is apparent and maintained throughout both texts. Clarkson's acerbic irritability and the 'masculine' voice that prevails is in contrast to Lacey's more friendly and supportive 'give it a go' tone. She uses 'I' right from the start and creates a distinctly ‘female’ voice supported by phrases and images like 'my husband', ‘this mom’ and discussion of women buying jeans, children's wipes and lip balm.

- Clarkson develops his point of view through a deliberate use of comical language. His authorial voice is strident throughout. Ironic humour is often apparent in his use of language. For example, he appeals to the reader using qualified language, such as, ‘Not unreasonably’, in relation to ‘car buffs’ and their expectations, and ends the sentence with the superlative phrase, ‘hopelessly wrong’. This tension between the reasoned, objective voice of the author on the one hand, and his use
of hyperbole on the other, is maintained throughout the piece, and readers become beguiled by his comedic use of irony. He has a more formal style of language than Lacey. In contrast, Lacey's voice is more neutral; she avoids exaggeration and appears balanced in her appraisal and is less emotive. Indeed, she writes, 'I was excited to try it out, but it didn't thrill me', in relation to the Forte's suspension, and then deliberates, in consideration of her needs, that 'the Forte does just fine'. Lacey’s reasoned tone, noted in her use of conjunctions of concession, adds an objectivity to her voice which encourages the reader to believe her assessment of the Forte.

- Differing sentence structure is another point of contrast between the two articles. Different sentence lengths create a range of effects. Short, sharp sentences in Lacey's article direct her argument and summarise her main points relating to the Forte. Clarkson on the other hand has longer, more descriptive sentences with many images that build and exaggerate in order to convey his point of view.

- As a review piece, Lacey's writing is formatted in a manner to emphasise its key ideas; that is, the audience most likely will be concerned about the car’s exterior appearance, its interior configuration and functionality, and its safety features. The use of sub-headings, a rating scheme, and the economical and easy to read summary sentences at the review’s conclusion, all aid in reinforcing the author’s appraisal of the Forte. Clarkson’s humorous opinionated piece is structured with less emphasis on formatting, and more on hyperbolic, persuasive language. He uses personal anecdotes, exaggeration, and recurring images to direct his piece.

- At all times both authors have their audiences in mind. While the two intended audiences are different, the family car market and a predominantly female audience for Lacey, and the supposed intellectual and car enthusiast for Clarkson, both writers achieve their aims via their use of structure, language and rhetorical devices. Both employ psychology. Lacey appeals to everyday desires – the idea of the ordinary family, and also the desire for stardom, or a moment in the sun. Clarkson, however, appeals to our wit, humour and intelligence separating on one level the reader from the general public he attacks.

- Lacey’s use of cultural references is also effective. The ‘American Idol’ motif and comic asides (about clothes and shopping) suggest that she knows her intended audience well. This convivial tone is maintained throughout the piece. Addressing the audience with an exclamatory sentence, ‘Nice space planning, Kia!', and her brief conversational asides in brackets, make the reader feel at ease and in agreement with her observations. In contrast Clarkson often appeals to our wit, humour and intelligence, positioning us to think of ourselves as different from 'Mr Average’ so that we agree with him.

- Repetition of images and ideas are used to support each writer's point of view. Clarkson's recurring images and anecdotes of students and the public's desires, the analogy of his fridge, a popular culture reference to Sinead O'Connor, and allusions to breakthroughs in science and technology support his claims. Lacey's 'Idol' analogy/motif runs throughout the piece building her picture of the Forte as a contender but not a star.

- Personal pronouns like ‘I’ ‘you’ ‘us’ ‘our’ and so on are used to form a bond with the reader in Lacey's review. This is less apparent in Clarkson's opinionated piece. Although it too is written in first person, he seeks distance from the general public.
The selection of information by both authors is very similar. Both deliberately select material which confirms and extends the impression they wish to create – Lacey looks for the positives and her wording reflects this, whilst Clarkson builds image upon image of why the Escort (and the public) fail.

The conclusion of each article also differs and supports the author's point of view. Lacey comes back to family life in her neat series of dot points about 'Family Lifestages', whilst Clarkson hammers his point home about the car's failings with references to the silliness of the general public declaring that 'questioning people in the street is only useful if you want to compose a silly article in a silly women’s magazine about underarm deodorant.'

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY

While 2010 was the final year in which the individual study was externally assessed, the task will have equal value in the future and will be an important component of students’ folios of work.

Students frequently demonstrated independent analytical understanding, and enthusiasm for the texts they explored, as well as an understanding of the ways in which authors construct texts. The individual study afforded students the opportunity to independently exercise the skills, knowledge, and understanding that the shared texts component of the course taught them. Those students who understood that the development of the individual study is a process of selection, exploration, collation, refinement and drafting – a metaphorical ‘journey’ of sorts – were more able to embrace the spirit of the task, i.e. an exciting opportunity to develop originality of thought, to transfer skills, and to ‘own’ a final product of which they could be proud.

The integrity of this task must be preserved in the future. Teachers must ensure that the study is given equal focus, and is promoted as an essential aspect of the course. The weighting for the task in the new subject outline remains at 20%. Markers have frequently commented that one area in which teachers must be vigilant is in the detection of plagiarism. It is the responsibility of teachers to monitor the development of each student’s supporting material to assist in the creation of a suitable question, and to respond to a draft of the critical essay. Such an approach helps expose possible plagiarism and facilitates the best possible outcomes for students.

Selecting Texts

The careful selection of texts is fundamental to a productive and enjoyable study. Markers unanimously commented on the need for students to choose texts that they find accessible and interesting. Selecting a work for its apparent sophistication and complexity may inhibit the study rather than inspire it; a text must be accessible or appealing to the student. The prescribed texts list can provide a valuable resource from which to begin selecting appropriate texts, but students should not be limited to these for there is an inexhaustible and rich diversity of texts suitable for study. Open discussion with teachers to ascertain a text's suitability, a willingness to consider different text types, and being prepared to allow the study of the first text to generate an interest and focus for the choice of the second, are all approaches that lead to success. Markers particularly commented on the choice of film texts. While film can facilitate interesting contrast with other text types, students must be aware of the appropriate language and terminology for exploring the form and the techniques used to create meaning within the text type. Similarly, students choosing non-fiction texts (such as biographies or documentaries) must be careful to move beyond the account
of reality (i.e. limiting their response to recount) and explore the author’s craft in constructing those texts.

Use of Supporting Material

While the supporting material was not assessed, it is an essential element of the study both for teachers to verify students’ work, and for students to broadly explore the texts and create material from which they can select in order to develop an appropriate focus for the critical essay.

Developing a Question

Once again, markers unanimously commented on the importance of a useful and appropriate question for the generation of a well-structured and well-argued essay. Students fared best when they developed succinct questions that involved a comparative element, referred to the author’s construction of the text, and drew connections between ideas and techniques. The stem ‘compare the ways in which the authors explore the idea...’ proved to be a useful starting point for many students.

Criteria for Judging Performance

Understanding and Analysis

Most students displayed at least a sound grasp of the content, thematic concerns, character and context of the texts they explored. Most were also aware of the importance of exploring the author’s construction of the text, and were aware – to varying degrees – of the effect of those techniques on the reader. Such analytical content is often the discriminator of the best critical essays. Students should be aware, however, that they are writing to an informed marker and do not need to be didactic in their exploration of techniques. Explaining the different types of narrative perspective, for example, is not nearly as relevant as analysing the narrative position within the text and exploring the way in which that perspective influences the reader’s perceptions. Markers also commented on the difficulty that some students experienced in exploring characterisation.

Comparison

It is important in the study of the two texts that students understand that they must explore the similarities and differences between the two works. Selecting texts in which some tension is created through the process of comparison leads to greater success; texts that are too similar or too variant can inhibit useful comparisons. Those students who developed their question around a comparison between the two texts, and then structured an argument that was driven by an exploration of the similarities and differences succeeded at a higher level than those students who paid cursory attention to the relationship between the texts. In less successful essays students tended to switch between texts in paragraphs but not actually compare them. The use of comparative words (similarly, alternatively, in contrast, etc.) when moving from one text to the other, was the extent of the comparisons made in the majority of the essays in the lower bands.

Application

Students who had developed a clear line of reasoning throughout the essay achieved the best results. Those students often presented succinct introductions (in which the argument of the essay was made apparent); used precise topic sentences;
maintained a focus within each paragraph in which the discussion of, and comparison between, the two texts was apparent, and they developed a conclusion that 'sealed the argument' rather than repeated the essay's thesis. In particular these students created paragraphs of an accessible length; in less successful responses students developed overly long paragraphs in which the central premise seemed to shift and become elusive. The significant majority of students were able to work within the word limit, generally producing work between 1800 and 2000 words in length.

Markers frequently commented on the use of evidence and quotation. As a summary of the general impression one marker wrote: 'almost all students recognised the importance of including evidence to support their points, but this was done to varying degrees. A number of students simply placed quotations within sentences without introducing them or explaining them. In these cases they relied on the marker to surmise from the inclusion of the quotation that this supported the point being made.' The essays that attracted higher marks were those in which quotations had been integrated into the flow of the discussion and appropriate examples were employed to support ideas. In general it seems that students were aware that quoting large slabs of text is not as efficient or useful as selecting shorter pertinent phrases and embedding these into the flow of communication.

**Communication**

Those students who had clearly spent time editing and polishing their essay achieved at a higher level. Markers frequently commented that it was a distraction when otherwise good ideas were inhibited by poor expression and common errors. Markers also continued to comment on those essays written in a convoluted style that aimed at 'sounding impressive' but really just obscured the meaning. A clear, precise style is far more accessible than that which is 'over-written' and heavily reliant on the use of a thesaurus. The following list of particular errors gives an indication of some of the points to which students should pay attention:

- the use of 'although' when 'however' is intended
- the correct delineation of titles
- the misuse of semi-colons, to replace commas and full stops, that interrupt the flow of ideas
- inappropriate colloquial language ('this text is lame', 'really truly' etc).

To conclude, markers overwhelmingly commented on what a privilege it is to assess this particular task. This is a piece of work into which many students invest passion, effort and skill. Often the product is a pleasure to read and an inspiring reminder of what the students are capable of: intelligent, original thinking that is adeptly communicated, and evidence of that which every English teacher desires to foster – a passionate engagement with literature.

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