

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

Advanced Higher English — Specialist Study (Dissertation)

Guidance on Assessment

Introduction

The following information is based on instructions to be used by SQA Markers for external assessment of dissertations. It is hoped that this will be helpful to centres for the preparation of candidates, and in connection with estimates and appeals.

General Points

Length

As a key evidence requirement, each dissertation must be between 3500 and 4500 words in length, including quotations but excluding mandatory footnotes and bibliography.

There is no flexibility here. There is no sliding scale of penalties. Either the dissertation is valid in terms of length (and can be accepted for external assessment) or it is not (and cannot therefore be accepted).

Footnotes and bibliography

The provision of footnotes and bibliography is mandatory.

Authentication

Authentication of dissertations as having been produced in a manner that satisfies the evidence requirements of the unit (by means of declaratory signatures) must be included on the Specialist Study Flyleaf.

Plagiarism

Almost all dissertations will be to some extent derivative. This is to be expected, and care should be taken not to penalise the efforts of candidates who are honestly using the ideas of other writers to strengthen their own arguments. Usually, the more marked this derivativeness, the weaker the dissertation will tend to be. Although candidates will not always admit the extent of their use and adaptation of key critical ideas, they do normally acknowledge direct quotation and paraphrasing. A minority, however, may attempt systematic plagiarism of a fairly audacious kind. Such plagiarism may be established if the sources used by candidates can be identified. Plagiarism may also be detected from internal evidence — discontinuities in style, extreme variations in the quality of thought and comment in different parts of the dissertation, obvious and elementary failure on the part of candidates to grasp the meaning of what they have written, miscellaneous gross absurdities and tell-tale blunders. Caution, of course, must be exercised in drawing conclusions exclusively from internal evidence. Nevertheless, there is a responsibility to treat all candidates equally.

GRADE C Performance Criteria	GRADE A Indicators of Excellence <i>At least 4 bullet points from at least two categories</i>
<p>Understanding The response takes a relevant and thoughtful approach to the stated topic and demonstrates secure understanding of key elements . . .</p> <p>Analysis The response makes relevant and thoughtful . . . comment and demonstrates secure handling . . .</p> <p>Evaluation Judgements made are relevant, thoughtful and securely based on detailed evidence . . .</p> <p>Expression Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently accurate and effective in developing a relevant argument.</p>	<p>Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A thorough exploration is made of the implications of the stated topic. ◆ Sustained insight is revealed into key elements . . . <p>Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A full and satisfying range of . . . comment is offered. ◆ Literary/linguistic . . . techniques . . . are handled with skill and precision. <p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Perceptive and incisive judgements are made. ◆ Deployment of evidence . . . is skilful and precise. <p>Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are skilfully deployed to develop a pertinent and sharply focused argument.

The words that best strike the note that is characteristic of **competence** of performance (equivalent to Grade C) at the level of Advanced Higher are:

- ◆ relevant
- ◆ thoughtful
- ◆ secure
- ◆ consistent
- ◆ accurate
- ◆ effective.

At this level, **excellence** (equivalent to Grade A) is indicated by words such as:

- ◆ thorough
- ◆ sustained
- ◆ insight
- ◆ full
- ◆ satisfying
- ◆ perceptive
- ◆ incisive
- ◆ skilful
- ◆ precise
- ◆ pertinent
- ◆ sharply focused.

It may be relatively straightforward to find qualitative words that will differentiate — for each criterion — between candidate work that is competent (Grade C) and candidate work that is excellent (Grade A). It is clearly more difficult to find qualitative words to describe the range of performance (Grade B) that may lie between these two well-defined points.

The Arrangements document recognises this difficulty by noting: “Where the overall quality of a piece of work goes beyond Grade C, but falls short of Grade A, it will attain Grade B.” In this case, it may show only **one or two** of the A characteristics or it may show **three or more** of the indicators of excellence without reaching A quality for any.

In response to this flexibility, the following external assessment framework of four “pass” categories and two “fail” categories has been adopted for the grading of candidate performance in each of the Advanced Higher English assessment components:

- Category 1** **Excellent** — well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.
- Category 2** **Still signs of excellence** — but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.
- Category 3** **More than competent** — in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.
- Category 4** **Competent** — in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.
- Category 5** **Less than competent** — in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.
- Category 6** **Incompetent** — well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

A 40-point scale (corresponding to a weighting of 40% in the final award) has been adopted for the external assessment of the dissertation. It applies to these (briefly described) six categories as follows:

CATEGORY 1	40 39 38 37 36 35	Excellent —well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence: thorough exploration and sustained insight; full, satisfying comment and skilful handling of technique; perceptiveness/incisiveness and skilful use of evidence; a sharply focused argument.
CATEGORY 2	34 33 32 31 30	Still signs of excellence —but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence: not quite so thorough or sustained; not quite so full or satisfying or skilful; not quite so sharply focused.
CATEGORY 3	29 28 27 26 25	More than competent —in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria: glimmers of insight or perceptiveness or incisiveness; occasionally satisfying critical comment; occasionally skilful deployment of evidence in support of argument.
CATEGORY 4	24 23 22 21 20	Competent —in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria: relevant and thoughtful secure and consistent accurate and effective.
CATEGORY 5	19 18 17 16 15	Less than competent —in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria: some weakness in relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding or accuracy or consistency or effectiveness in the development of argument.
CATEGORY 6	14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00	Incompetent —well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria: deficient in (probably) more than one of— relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding or accuracy or consistency or effectiveness in the development of argument.

Using the category descriptions

The following (fully described) categories are founded on the published performance criteria and indicators of excellence for the Specialist Study. They should be used as the basic “map” by which markers arrive at the category and the numerical mark within that category best representing the attainment of each candidate.

CATEGORY 1

MARKS: 35—40

Excellent — well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.

Understanding

- ◆ A thorough exploration is made of the implications of the stated topic.
- ◆ Sustained insight is revealed into key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

Analysis

- ◆ A full and satisfying range of critical/analytical comment is offered.
- ◆ Literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages are handled with skill and precision.

Evaluation

- ◆ Perceptive and incisive judgements are made.
- ◆ Deployment of evidence from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources is skilful and precise.

Expression

- ◆ Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are skilfully deployed to develop a pertinent and sharply focused argument.

CATEGORY 2

MARKS: 30—34

Still signs of excellence — but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.

Understanding

As for Category 1, but

- ◆ the attempt made to explore the implications of the topic is not quite so thorough
- ◆ insight is not quite so well sustained.

Analysis

As for Category 1, but

- ◆ the range of critical/analytical comment is not quite so full or satisfying
- ◆ relevant techniques, concepts, forms, usages are not handled with quite the same level of skill and precision.

Evaluation

As for Category 1, but

- ◆ judgements made are not quite so perceptive or incisive
- ◆ deployment of evidence is not quite so skilful or precise.

Expression

As for Category 1, but

- ◆ expression is not quite so skilfully deployed or argument quite so sharply focused.

CATEGORY 3**MARKS: 25—29**

More than competent — in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.

Understanding

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of — awareness of implications or thoroughness or insight.

Analysis

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of — fullness or skill or precision of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of — perceptiveness or incisiveness or skilful deployment of evidence.

Expression

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of — skilful deployment of language in the development of argument.

CATEGORY 4**MARKS: 20—24**

Competent — in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.

Understanding

The dissertation takes a relevant and thoughtful approach to the stated topic and demonstrates secure understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

Analysis

The dissertation makes relevant and thoughtful critical/analytical comment and demonstrates secure handling of literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages.

Evaluation

Judgements made are relevant, thoughtful and securely based on detailed evidence drawn from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources.

Expression

Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently accurate and effective in developing a relevant argument.

CATEGORY 5**MARKS: 15—19**

Less than competent — in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.

Understanding

As for Category 4, but with some weakness in — relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

Analysis

As for Category 4, but with some weakness in — relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

As for Category 4, but with some weakness in — relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

Expression

As for Category 4, but with some weakness in — accuracy or effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

CATEGORY 6**MARKS: 00—14**

Incompetent — well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

Understanding

The dissertation is deficient in — relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

Analysis

The dissertation is deficient in — relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

The dissertation is deficient in — relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

Expression

The dissertation is deficient in — accuracy or effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

N.B. It should be noted that, in the category descriptions provided, where performance in one category is described as “significantly” different from performance in an adjacent category, this may be demonstrated by:

- ◆ marginally stronger or weaker performance **in a range of aspects**
or
- ◆ very much stronger or weaker performance **in one or two aspects.**

Several factors should be taken into account before assigning each candidate's dissertation to a particular numerical mark within a particular category.

- (a) Categories are not grades. Although derived from the performance criteria for Grade C and the indicators of excellence for Grade A, the six categories are designed primarily to assist with the placing of each candidate response at an appropriate point on a continuum of achievement. Assumptions about final grades or association of final grades with particular categories should not be allowed to get in the way of objective assessment.
- (b) The expectation is that the vast majority of candidates will already have demonstrated in Unit assessment a level of competence that has merited achievement of the Unit outcome. The initial expectation would be that the dissertation would meet, at least, the requirements of category 4. While there may be some dissertations that for various reasons fail to demonstrate the level of competence required by category 4, the likelihood is that they will prove characteristic of category 5 — and it is hoped that no dissertation will be so incompetent as to require assignment to category 6.
- (c) For each category, a range of marks is available. The marks range within each category should prove sufficiently generous to allow scope for fair and justifiable discrimination. Full use should be made of the ranges of marks available.
- (d) Mixed profiles of attainment will occur. Normally, these will represent variations within the range of performance that is characteristic of a particular category. In some instances, however, performance may be so uneven as to require a weighing up of strengths and weaknesses of performance that extend across categories. Assessment should at all times be **holistic** — each dissertation should be assigned to the category (and to the numerical point within that category) that best describes its overall achievement. In instances where there is genuine doubt as to whether a dissertation should be placed at the lower end of a higher category or at the upper end of a lower category (and only in such instances), candidates should be given the benefit of the doubt, and their dissertations awarded the lowest mark in the higher category.