



Course Report 2015

Level	National 5
Qualification	English

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1 is Reading for Understanding, Analysis, and Evaluation in which candidates apply reading skills in understanding, analysis and evaluation to one unseen non-fiction text.

Section 1 is worth 30 marks.

Section 2 is Critical Reading in which candidates apply Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation skills to questions on previously studied Scottish texts, and write a Critical Essay on a further previously studied text from one of the following contexts: drama, prose, poetry, media or language.

Section 2 is worth 40 marks in total: 20 marks for the extract-based textual analysis on a Scottish text and 20 marks for Critical Essay.

Component 2: Portfolio: writing

The Portfolio writing is made up of two pieces of writing which are submitted by candidates for external assessment by SQA.

The Portfolio is worth 30 marks: 15 marks for each piece. Candidates submit two pieces of writing in different genres: one broadly creative or personal, and one broadly discursive, covering information and opinion.

The Course assessment covers a wide range of skills, giving the opportunity for strengths to outweigh weaknesses, and achievement to be recognised and rewarded. The Portfolio is worth thirty per cent of the overall award. Forty per cent is allocated to text-based textual analysis and critical essay. The final thirty per cent is given to the assessment of how a candidate can apply his or her reading skills to unseen material.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Summary of candidate performance

New and returning candidates coped well with the Course assessment arrangements. It was clear that there is widespread understanding of the requirements for National 5 English, including the new elements of the Course.

A significant, and encouraging, number of candidates accessed the top end of the mark range. The high number of candidates achieving A–C grades mirrors the previous year's performance. This level of success is noteworthy in that candidates were drawn this year from a variety of ages and stages in learning (predominantly S4 in schools, but a significant number (24%) from S5, and a smaller number from S6 and FE).

Only a small proportion of candidates achieved no award. This suggests that commendably appropriate levels of presentation were achieved by centres. Encouragingly candidates who came to National 5 after having completed National 4 last year achieved success at this level.

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1, Reading for Understanding, Analysis, and Evaluation

Candidates again coped well with the high-tariff questions throughout the question papers (in both Reading for Understanding, etc and in Textual Analysis). There was clear evidence that teachers/lecturers had prepared candidates well for the demands of these questions.

In Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation, feedback suggested that candidates found the passage to be accessible, relevant and interesting. Candidates approached the questions with commitment, and succeeded in answering all questions.

Section 2, Critical Reading

In Paper 2, centres had prepared candidates thoroughly and effectively for both the extract-based textual analysis and the critical essay.

Performance was very similar across the options in the extract-based textual analysis. Options in this section proved to be of equal demand. In terms of uptake, the most popular option in this section, overall, was Duffy. There was an increase in uptake for Drama: most candidates opted for *Sailmaker*, followed by *Tally's Blood*, then *Bold Girls*. In Prose, the most popular was *The Cone Gatherers*; then Donovan, with *Kidnapped* and Crichton Smith next. Again very few candidates answered on *Gideon Mack*. In Poetry, most candidates chose Duffy, but MacCaig was also popular, followed by Morgan and Kay.

Some candidates opted to answer on Scottish texts for both the extract based textual analysis and the critical essay, but most candidates did not use Scottish writers for both sections. The range of literature covered was very similar to recent years, ie the plays of Arthur Miller, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Lord of the Flies*, American or Scottish short stories, the poetry of World War 1, etc.

Most candidates opted for Prose in the critical essay section, with roughly equal numbers choosing Drama and Poetry. There was a reasonable uptake for Media, but very few candidates chose from the Language section. Those who did had studied the language of advertising.

Component 2: Portfolio

Centres are familiar with the requirements of a Portfolio of writing in English qualifications. The National 5 Portfolio shares many similarities with the Intermediate 2 Folio. Candidate performance here was similar to last year. It was encouraging to note that submissions were wider in range than last year: poetry, drama scripts, and writing in Scots all featured as 'broadly creative' pieces.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

- Question 1: This opening question was done well. Noticing that three marks were available, many candidates wrote lengthy answers that covered the necessary points.
- Question 3: Many candidates were able to isolate the specific dangers from past and present. Those who were able to re-cast the writer's ideas into their own words scored well.
- Question 4: This question, which required the skills of summary, was again done well by those candidates who were able to gloss the wording of the passage. Candidates did not, in general, have difficulty in identifying five key points.
- Question 6: Most candidates were able to identify two relevant examples of the writer's word choice. Those who could make appropriate analytical comments were able to achieve full marks for this question.
- Question 9: This question, on the effectiveness of the writer's concluding paragraph, was done well by many candidates. Perhaps the scaffolding provided in the question provided assistance here.

Section 2, Critical Reading

Candidates had been very well prepared for the extract-based textual analysis.

Most candidates coped well with the questions on the extracts in the Scottish Textual Analysis. Candidates were successful in their demonstration of understanding and analysis skills in this element.

Candidates showed signs of having done significant amounts of revision: most were able to support their points in both Textual Analysis and Critical Essay sections with direct quotation from, or clear references to, the texts they had studied.

Candidates did not appear to have difficulty in finding a suitable question from Section 2, Critical Essay. Essays were, in the main, full, detailed and relevant, displaying a thorough knowledge of texts.

Component 2: Portfolio

The majority of candidates had clearly worked hard on their Portfolios and were able to submit two pieces of writing that demonstrated their skills in writing for different purposes.

Though candidates have the opportunity to re-draft and improve pieces, the standard of written English was often high.

Personal experience was handled in sensitive, mature ways, and ideas and opinions were often expressed with a degree of sophistication of thought. Some candidates showed impressive engagement with current national and international affairs.

More candidates attempted personal writing than attempted creative writing. However, there was some very strong creative writing to be seen: short stories often had clearly established narratives and characterisation.

Sufficient technical accuracy was achieved by the majority of candidates.

The majority of candidates chose to word-process their pieces, and the standard of presentation was again high. Most managed to use and to identify any sources used.

It was very encouraging to note that attempts to diversify (eg poetry or drama submissions), were often very successful.

Straightforward structures were employed effectively by candidates in both creative and discursive writing.

Many candidates showed a promising awareness of genre features in creative writing.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Question 2: Most candidates were able to gloss 'ingrained,' but not 'deeply.'

Question 5: Many candidates found it difficult to achieve two marks here. They were often able to identify the link forward, but not back.

Question 7: There was a requirement here for a specific identification of an attitude. Some candidates did not provide this, and lost a mark. Weak analysis accounted for marks not being achieved in the main body of the question.

Question 8: Some candidates did not explore the writer's ideas fully in response to this question. Others attempted an analysis of the word 'grab', which was not the focus of the question.

In general, some candidates found it difficult to organise their responses for the higher tariff questions.

Questions requiring own words proved most challenging when fewer options were available in the passage.

For some candidates, there was a lack of clarity in their answers.

Section 2, Critical Reading

- ◆ A small number of candidates found the challenge of the three-part requirement of the final questions in Scottish Textual Analysis demanding, and were able only to write very brief responses. Most, however, coped well with this.
- ◆ Candidates around the C grade boundary often found the final 8-mark question challenging in the Scottish Textual Analysis.
- ◆ Some candidates did not concentrate on the key focus of the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis. Answers were therefore too vague.
- ◆ In Critical Essay, some candidates showed understanding of the key aspects of their chosen texts, but relevance to the question was less explicitly realised.
- ◆ In their analysis of references from texts in the Critical Essay, some candidates concentrated only on meaning, rather than analysis of impact.
- ◆ Evaluative comments were often not fully realised in Critical Essays.
- ◆ A few candidates had difficulty in choosing an appropriate Critical Essay question. In some instances, candidates' knowledge and understanding would have been better directed in response to another question.
- ◆ Time management was an issue for a small number of candidates.
- ◆ A few candidates had difficulty with following the genre requirements of the paper. They did not follow the instruction for Critical Essay that 'Your essay must be on a different genre from that chosen in Section 1.'

Component 2: Portfolio

- ◆ Some weaker discursive writing tended to be anecdotal rather than ideas/research based.
- ◆ Some candidates did not adhere to the published word limit of 1,000 words.
- ◆ For some candidates, there was evidence that research had been conducted, but it was not employed effectively to support the candidate's argument.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Candidates should attempt to adhere to the requirement for own words where required. This is indicated in bold in questions where it is needed. Direct lifts of words/expressions from the passage will gain no marks here.

In questions that require the analysis of the writer's use of language, the simplest model to follow is: reference plus comment. At National 5 level, appropriate references are rewarded with a mark.

Candidates should attempt to explain their analytical comments as clearly and as fully as they can. In questions asking for a response on the writer's ideas, candidates should attempt to ensure that their full understanding is expressed.

The use of bullet points, etc, might assist candidates in the structuring of answers for high-tariff questions.

Reading good quality non-fiction will greatly assist candidates to prepare for this part of the Course assessment.

Section 2, Critical Reading

Candidates should:

- ◆ Try to have a sense of the 'work as a whole' in terms of a play, novel, collection of short stories or poems, while preparing for the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis.
- ◆ Be aware of the three-part requirement of the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis.
- ◆ Be reminded of the requirements for choosing a question from the Critical Essay section of the paper. This must be from a different genre to the Scottish Textual Analysis.
- ◆ Be careful to select an appropriate Critical Essay question. Some candidates were disadvantaged by choosing an inappropriate question.
- ◆ Be reminded to stay relevant to the question in their responses to Critical Essay questions.

Component 2: Portfolio

- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to adhere to stated word limits.

- ◆ All sources used in preparation for pieces of writing must be declared.
- ◆ Time taken on the organisation and acknowledgement of sources improves presentation, assists markers, and helps to develop good study habits.
- ◆ Candidates are required to submit one piece of broadly creative writing. When submitting poetry it is acceptable to submit more than one poem, but, if doing so, it would be advisable to submit related pieces, as a group of poems will be considered as one piece.
- ◆ Clarity of structure should be encouraged in candidates' writing.
- ◆ A degree of personalisation and choice seems to be beneficial when considering topics for discursive writing. Often local issues have powerful relevance for candidates.
- ◆ In discursive writing, sufficient research should be undertaken in order that the candidate's argument can be fully explored.
- ◆ In creative writing, candidates should be aware of the key features of the genre chosen.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	28798
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	44794
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -100				
A	39.3%	39.3%	17604	74
B	28.0%	67.3%	12538	64
C	19.7%	87.0%	8808	54
D	5.4%	92.3%	2403	49
No award	7.7%	-	3441	-

The Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation paper proved slightly less demanding than expected, resulting in a 2 mark upward adjustment to both A and C boundaries.