



Course Report 2009

Subject	English
Levels	Standard Grade Access 2 and Access 3 Intermediate 1 Intermediate 2 Higher Advanced Higher

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Introduction

The purpose of this Course report is to give centres:

- ◆ all information on internal and external assessment for the subject in the one place
- ◆ an easier way of making a comparison across levels and years
- ◆ support in achieving consistency in national standards across levels for both internal and external assessment

We will provide a link on the SQA website from the contents page of the Course report to individual sections of the report to allow for easier navigation, in addition to having access to the complete report.

We encourage you to provide feedback about the usefulness of the Course report. Please contact Alan Wilson Qualifications Manager for English with your comments – alan.wilson@sqa.org.uk

Summary of Findings

General

The number of entries at Standard Grade, while declining slightly from 2008 is still high, indicating the continuing popularity of the award.

Much good work is in evidence across the board and the standard of written work is very good for many candidates at all levels from Standard Grade to Advanced Higher.

However the handwriting of increasing numbers of candidates in examinations has attracted comment from both examination teams and markers. The practice of composing text with a keyboard and computer is evidently having an effect on the practice of handwriting and the stress of the examination probably plays a part also.

In Close Reading, particularly in Understanding questions, there has been an increase in candidates merely quoting from the reading passage and not using their own words. While quotation will frequently be a necessary part of an answer, the answer always benefits from the explanation being cast in the candidate's own language. There is a revised rubric on Higher Question papers from 2010 as already indicated in an update letter. Centres should stress this for all candidates they are preparing for all levels which involve Close Reading assessment.

In Critical Essay papers a good range of texts was in evidence and also a good proportion of Scottish texts. At Advanced Higher the exact breakdown of texts and choices can be seen in the External Assessment report.

Entries and Awards

Entries and Awards — Standard Grade English

Year	Entries
2009	53,927
2008	57,910
2007	59,722

Grade boundaries for each externally assessed element

Grade Boundaries 2009

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
Reading	50	38	27	50	32	25	50	33	25

Grade Boundaries 2008

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
Reading	50	32	21	50	31	24	50	30	22

Grade Boundaries 2007

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
Reading	50	32	21	50	24	17	50	27	19

Distribution of awards

	Entries	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	No Award
2009	53,927	10.3%	33.0%	31.7%	20.1%	3.4%	0.1%	0.0%	1.3%
2008	57,910	10.5%	31.0%	32.7%	20.5%	3.8%	0.1%	0.0%	1.3%
2007	59,722	9.2%	30.8%	33.5%	21.2%	4.1%	0.1%	0.0%	1.2%

Entries and Awards — Intermediate 1 English

Year	Entries
2009	6,955
2008	6,647
2007	6,808

Grade Boundaries

Year	Max Mark	A	B	C	D
2009	100	66	55	44	38
2008	100	65	54	43	37
2007	100	66	55	45	40

Distribution of awards

	Entries	A	B	C	Pass	D	No Award
2009	6,955	12.8%	24.7%	29.9%	67.4%	12.1%	20.5%
2008	6,647	11.9%	20.7%	29.7%	62.3%	14.1%	23.6%
2007	6,808	10.1%	22.5%	29.5%	62.1%	12.0%	25.8%

Entries and Awards — Intermediate 2 English

Year	Entries
2009	21,025
2008	20,345
2007	19,103

Grade Boundaries

Year	Max Mark	A	B	C	D
2009	100	67	57	47	42
2008	100	66	56	46	41
2007	100	68	58	48	43

Distribution of awards

	Entries	A	B	C	Pass	D	No Award
2009	21,025	17.5%	25.9%	30.1%	73.5%	10.3%	16.2%
2008	20,345	14.2%	25.6%	31.8%	71.6%	10.9%	17.5%
2007	19,103	18.2%	25.7%	29.2%	73.1%	10.0%	16.9%

Entries and Awards — Higher English

Year	Entries
2009	28,389
2008	27,178
2007	27,750

Grade Boundaries

Year	Max Mark	A	B	C	D
2009	100	65	56	48	44
2008	100	65	56	47	42
2007	100	63	54	46	42

Distribution of awards

	Entries	A	B	C	Pass	D	No Award
2009	28,389	18.45	23.7%	26.8%	68.9%	10.4%	20.6%
2008	27,178	17.2%	21.8%	29.3%	68.3%	12.6%	19.0%
2007	27,750	13.5%	22.0%	29.3%	64.9%	11.6%	23.5%

Entries and Awards — Advanced Higher English

Year	Entries
2009	1,590
2008	1,713
2007	1,620

Grade Boundaries

Year	Max Mark	A	B	C	D
2009	100	70	60	50	45
2008	100	70	60	50	45
2007	100	70	60	50	45

Distribution of awards

	Entries	A	B	C	Pass	D	No Award
2009	1,590	10.0%	25.5%	39.3%	74.8%	11.6%	13.5%
2008	1,713	7.9%	20.0%	39.6%	67.5%	14.7%	17.9%
2007	1,620	7.8%	20.2%	37.4%	65.4%	14.4%	20.2%

Comments on Verification: Standard Grade

Element/Coursework Verified

English Standard Grade Talking

General comments:

Verifiers visited a number of centres. Staff and candidates involved, in all centres visited, found the procedure positive and helpful.

As they tend to, candidates responded enthusiastically to the Verification, often improving on the provisional grading awarded prior to the Verifier's visit.

Internal Verifiers were all found to be consistent with national standards.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

The Verification of Standard Grade Talking is a requirement of the system of assessment. If a centre is unable to provide candidates for Verification, then that requirement cannot be met. In such a case, the centre would need to consider an alternative to Standard Grade English.

The national standard is exemplified on the various training tapes. Standardisation within centres is the responsibility of the individual English Department. Verifiers were impressed by centres which explored Talk in a thorough and systematic way, and by those with well planned procedures for internal verification of standards. These centres had in common one or more of the following features:

- ◆ Paired assessing
- ◆ Visits by the Internal Verifier to classrooms
- ◆ Partnering of inexperienced teachers with more experienced colleagues, with particular support for probationers
- ◆ Internal Verifier 'sampling' of classes in the department
- ◆ Periodic review of SQA training tapes
- ◆ Discussions within department
- ◆ A variety of 'talk situations' offered, encouraging each candidate to fulfil potential

Comments on Verification: Units which make up Courses

Titles/Levels of National Units Verified

D8VH Language Study	(Access 3 to Advanced Higher)
D8VJ Literary Study	(Access 3 to Advanced Higher)
D8VK Personal Study	(Access 3 to Higher)
D9GV Textual Analysis	(Advanced Higher)

General comments:

The following points relate to the preparation of the Verification sample:

1. Centres should note that late submissions will be verified in the same way as those submitted on time. Since it is unlikely that late submissions for Central Verification will be verified before early May, centres (particularly schools) judged “Not accepted” are likely to have problems re-assessing candidates at such a time in the calendar.
2. Substitutions for candidates withdrawn from the examination (or for persistent absentees) are perfectly in order. Information sent out with the Verification Sample offers guidance on acceptable numbers of substitutes
3. As in previous years, there was evidence, in 2009, of candidates presented at inappropriate levels. If this mis-match is clear in the Units, it is likely to be more harshly exposed in the external examination.

Verifiers will look for, and comment on evidence of cross-marking, departmental discussion of standards and referral of scripts to the head of department or internal verifier. It is clear, annually, that departments in which such good practice is the norm are more likely to achieve consistency with national standards.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

Unit 1 Language Study

Close Reading

Verifiers found evidence, in a number of samples, of

1. Overly generous marking of the Close Reading Learning Outcome. This will give candidates a misleading impression of standards for Close Reading in the external examination.
2. Lack of proper scrutiny of borderline cases. Borderline cases should be examined carefully. The practice of referral of borderline scripts to the Head of Department or to an internal verifier was commended by Verifiers.
3. Lack of evidence of Internal Verification and cross-marking. Inevitably, these practices will improve accuracy and consistency.
4. Particular leniency in the marking of Analysis and Evaluation questions.

Writing

At the time of writing, the proposed re-introduction of Writing to the external examination is still under discussion.

Verifiers commented on the following good practice:

- ◆ Use of models for writing that link this part of the course to Textual Analysis;
- ◆ Candidates writing in different genres and forms;
- ◆ Taking contexts for writing from other subjects;
- ◆ Non-fictional writing demonstrating that the skills of Close Reading have been successfully absorbed.

The following points summarise guidance that this year's Verification sample suggests will be helpful.

1. The controlled conditions applying to Writing do not require the piece to be written in the teacher's presence. Drafts completed out of class, or out of school, are perfectly acceptable provided that the teacher is certain of their authorship. Drafts containing teachers' corrections and comments are acceptable samples for Verification.
2. Writing pieces covered a good range of genres. In the main, assessments were in line with national standards, although more helpful feedback to candidates could have been given by, for example, specific reference to Performance Criteria.
3. A number of pieces lacked the development required in an essay produced over a period of time, particularly some of the Higher submissions. Centres are reminded that there are minimum word limits specified for each level; if that basic criterion is not met, the piece must fail. Specific word limits can be found in the Unit Specifications.

Well-focused redrafting is a key part of development in Writing

Unit 2 Literary Study

Many of the centres sampled showed signs of students working with determination and commitment to produce detailed and appropriate answers. In the centres Verifiers found most impressive, there was clear evidence of positive teacher support, indicating how best to improve.

Most of the marking sampled was reliable, although one or two centres which had over-rewarded candidates for thin or under-developed answers demonstrated clearly the benefits of cross-marking or referral to an internal verifier for standardisation. It was encouraging, in this respect, to see departments themselves correcting some rather lenient marking, and bringing markers into line with the key principles and standards of the marking guidelines for this Unit.

The National Assessment Bank (NAB) materials for the Literary Study Unit are hierarchical (as they are for Close Reading). A pass at a higher level implies one at a lower. Candidates dropping to a lower level need not, therefore, resit the NAB if they have already passed at a higher level.

At Advanced Higher, centres are reminded of the differences between the Unit Assessment and the external examination:

- ◆ For the Unit Assessment, candidates must have access to texts
- ◆ Where two texts are specified in the Arrangements, the question set for the Unit Assessment should require that the candidate answer only on one
- ◆ Assuming that the conditions set for the Prelim mirror those of the external exam, work produced in the context of a preliminary examination will not meet the evidence requirements of the Literary Study Unit Assessment
- ◆ Questions set for the Unit Assessment should be more focused and specific than those likely to appear in the external paper
- ◆ The Unit Assessment should be marked as Pass or Fail

Centres should note that the Literary Study Unit evidence requirements for Advanced Higher English specify the use of ‘an unseen question’ for Unit assessment, and clearly unadapted questions taken from SQA past papers, which are in the public domain, cannot be guaranteed to be unseen.

Centres presenting for Advanced Higher should also note that the use of questions from past papers for less formal assessments may be disadvantageous to candidates since they are designed not for the specific, focused demands of Unit assessment, but for the more general, broader (and, by implication, more difficult) demands of course assessment.

Unit 3 Personal Study

On the whole, submissions for Personal Study demonstrated good awareness of the evidence requirements of the Unit, with many candidates managing to write at length in the time allowed.

Strong essays were not over-reliant on the pursuit of too narrow an aspect of the text, but had a balanced and well-developed line of thought.

- ◆ Weaker essays demonstrated one or more of the following features:
- ◆ Over-reliance on narrative
- ◆ Excessive exploration of analysis at the expense of the central concerns of the text
- ◆ A disjointed approach, dealing with discrete techniques but with no developed line of thought
- ◆ Undue leniency in the marking of technical accuracy

Course Assessment: Standard Grade

In Standard Grade English, the Course assessment consists of a Folio, Question Papers and a Talking Assessment.

Comments on candidate performance

Folio

General comments

The vast majority of centres/candidates showed a sound understanding of Folio requirements. Markers commented on the wide range of tasks and texts evident in the Folio submissions from across the country. Candidates continue to be taught a mix of new and more “traditional” texts (*Of Mice and Men, Macbeth, Dulce ... , Our Day Out*) but respond appropriately to both. Media responses continue to rise in popularity with *Jaws, The Shawshank Redemption* and Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet* all in evidence this year. There were many examples of neatly presented work with extensive use made of word-processing.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Folio Writing

- ◆ some markers commented on an improvement in the quality of W1 Writing (*To deploy ideas etc.*) this year
- ◆ some very well-crafted short stories and thoughtfully written personal pieces
- ◆ many examples of a high level of commitment to the given task

Folio Reading

- ◆ texts and tasks which allowed candidates to offer a genuine personal response
- ◆ responding to high quality prose fiction
- ◆ responding to “new” and stimulating poetry and media texts

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio Writing

- ◆ ensuring sufficient attention to purpose for writing tasks (evident in some confusion between W1 and W2)

- ◆ keeping to suggested word limits (as noted in previous years)
- ◆ using source material for W1 pieces effectively

Folio Reading

- ◆ responding to tasks which were too vague (“Write a C.E.L of...”; “Write a review of...”)
- ◆ using media terminology appropriately and effectively
- ◆ making sufficient allusion to the content and ideas of the original text in Imaginative Responses

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ candidates should be made fully aware of the purpose of their writing to avoid confusion between transactional and expressive pieces
- ◆ centres should emphasise the need for candidates to structure their writing effectively
- ◆ critical evaluations which slavishly follow a Point, Evidence, Explanation (or Point, Quotation, Analysis) structure can become very disjointed
- ◆ candidates need to make more effective use of appropriate media technical terms when writing about a media text
- ◆ “compare and contrast” type tasks on two or more texts may prevent candidates offering sufficiently detailed analysis of each text
- ◆ candidates should be reminded of what is allowed to be submitted in the Folio (the three Reading pieces cannot include both an Imaginative Response and a Critical Evaluation of a Media text)
- ◆ if candidates submit word-processed pieces in the Folio then an appropriate size and style of font should be used

External Test of Writing

General comments

Candidate performance was broadly in line with previous years. Markers reported that candidates seemed to respond well to the paper with most being able to select appropriate tasks. Options 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 16 were chosen by many candidates but markers noted a wide range of writing across all topics/genres. Options demanding discursive or informative responses were less popular.

Areas in which candidates performed well

- ◆ candidates observing the demands of the rubrics and writing at length where appropriate
- ◆ some excellent examples of creative writing which were “clear and stylish” in response to short story options 3, 7, 14, 21
- ◆ the best accounts of personal experience continue to display genuine insight and self-awareness

Areas which candidates found demanding

- ◆ combining the genre and format requirements for option 5 (*magazine article*)
- ◆ giving *succinct* accounts of personal experience (options 1, 8, 12) – too often introductions to these pieces were overly long
- ◆ not adhering to the demands of *all* of the rubric – some candidates ignored the “...to a city” element of the account of a school trip in option 1
- ◆ balancing the demands of time allocation in terms of planning and writing to ensure that writing is completed in the time available
- ◆ developing *setting* and *character* in narrative options
- ◆ differentiating between options requiring a short story and those requiring an account of personal experience
- ◆ producing writing of sufficient “intelligibility and correctness” in an examination context - markers continue to report some candidates having problems with spelling, paragraphing, layout of direct speech and consistency of verb tenses

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ candidates should be given regular opportunities to practise their writing “against the clock”
- ◆ candidates should practise proof-reading their own work in order to do so more effectively in the context of the examination
- ◆ candidates should be made fully aware of the genre requirements of particular options in the examination
- ◆ candidates should be given opportunities to practise writing the full range of genres/options available to them in the examination

External Test of Reading

General comments

There was praise from markers regarding the high quality of responses evident from candidates and some indication that candidates had found the papers appropriate and engaging. Many candidates scored 28+ in the higher of the two papers attempted. Markers considered all three passages (all fiction) to be appropriate and stimulating and there was some very positive feedback regarding the selection of another high-quality “literary” text for the Credit passage. Some markers called for fewer 2/0 questions in the Credit paper to allow for greater differentiation between candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Foundation

- ◆ candidates responded very positively to the passage and questions – very few “blank” answers left
- ◆ questions 16 and 17 – candidates at this level were able to cope with the demands of questions relating to imagery
- ◆ questions most successfully answered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 (although some markers felt that providing a box for the answer to question 2 would have made the “one word” instruction clearer)

General

- ◆ markers felt candidates had responded well to the intriguing nature of the passage
- ◆ questions most successfully answered: 5, 6, 7, 8, 10

Credit

- ◆ many markers felt this paper was particularly well done by candidates although some markers felt some questions required candidates to merely quote from the passage instead of asking for a suitable analytical comment (see below)
- ◆ questions most successfully answered: 4, 14, 16, 19, 20 (4, 14 and 20 in particular were regarded as being very straightforward for this level)
- ◆ some markers praised the imaginative responses made to question 22

Areas which candidates found demanding

Foundation

- ◆ Q 19 some candidates struggled to make the appropriate inference
- ◆ Q 21 many candidates gained 1 mark only (overlooking the “Explain fully...” in the question)
- ◆ Q 22 responses to this varied (some candidates gave meanings/reasons rather than the “writer’s craft” type answer required)
- ◆ Q 23 many candidates gained 1 mark only not realising that two separate points needed to be made

General

- ◆ Q 2 many candidates failed to gloss both parts of the expression and therefore gained 1 mark only
- ◆ Q 4 (a & b) some markers felt these were more challenging
- ◆ Q 11 many candidates offered only one valid reason
- ◆ Q 12
- ◆ Q 14
- ◆ Q 15 many candidates gained 1 mark only
- ◆ Q 16 difficulty in using own words and avoiding use of the word “guard” in the answer
- ◆ Q 17
- ◆ Q 19 difficulty in gaining second mark

- ◆ Q 21 some answers too vague to gain marks

Credit

- ◆ Q3 many candidates did not distinguish between “generous” and “caring” in their answers
- ◆ Q 5 many candidates failed to give two valid reasons
- ◆ Q 6 many candidates identified the parenthesis without giving the extra detail required about its function (a good discriminator)
- ◆ Q 11 difficulty in using own words
- ◆ Q 12 providing a suitable gloss proved challenging for many
- ◆ Q 17 some markers found this a difficult question to mark
- ◆ Q 18 (a &b) selection of appropriate examples and comments proved challenging for some candidates
- ◆ Q 22

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ candidates should practise “in your own words” type questions – this instruction is often ignored in the Credit and General papers
- ◆ candidates should be reminded to provide sufficiently detailed responses to questions which require them to “Explain fully...”
- ◆ candidates should be taught how to “provide evidence” to support answers when required to do so at General and Credit levels
- ◆ candidates should be given the opportunity to read a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction during the two years of the Standard Grade course

Course Assessment: Intermediate 1

In Intermediate 1 English, the Course assessment consists of 2 Question Papers.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Close Reading

The extra time allocated seems to have had an impact: this year, many more candidates were completing the paper.

The candidates seemed to find the content and language accessible. Indications showed that candidates generally understood the passage which was written by the BBC reporter John Simpson on the subject of a confidence trick.

Again, however, some candidates were presented inappropriately at this level. This was especially apparent in the Close Reading assessment where some candidates scored very low marks.

Critical Essay

The paper was well received by markers. The paper was seen to be fair, and gave candidates the opportunity to write about the texts which they had studied. The majority of candidates did not seem to find problems in selecting a question; however, a significant minority displayed confusion over genre requirements.

Most candidates made their selection from the Prose and Poetry sections. The texts chosen were very often by Scottish writers - either Scottish short stories, or poetry by Scottish poets such as MacCaig, Morgan or Duffy.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Candidates demonstrated that they understood the experience described by John Simpson in this passage.

The extra time given to candidates seemed to be beneficial; there were far fewer unfinished scripts. Many markers in their reports noted this.

Candidates scored marks throughout the paper: there was no evidence of "tailing off" towards the end of the paper. Q 11(a) which asked them to summarise the trick played on the writer gave

candidates a confidence boost towards the end of the Question Paper. This question offered 3 marks, and many candidates achieved full marks, or if not 3 marks, then 2.

Candidates coped well with some Understanding questions [e.g. 11(a)], and reasonably well with some Analysis questions (showing ability to offer basic comments about aspects of word choice and sentence structure).

Critical Essay

Candidates showed a good understanding of the texts selected. Signs of engagement and genuine personal responses were evident. Technical accuracy was similar to last year and was not a significant factor in preventing candidates from achieving the standard required for Grade C at this level.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Candidates had difficulty in demonstrating their understanding of the ideas and language of the passage through the use of their own words. At this level it is not a requirement to paraphrase completely an expression or section of the passage; however, many candidates did not make any attempt to paraphrase, and simply repeated the words and phrases of the passage.

Candidates had difficulty with questions relating to figurative language. This was apparent in Q4 where candidates were asked about the expression "wintry smile" and in Q5 where candidates were asked to comment on the metaphor "a ringside seat."

Critical Essay

- ◆ Some candidates found difficulty in structuring their essays: paragraphing was often weak.
- ◆ Some responses were very "plot based"; analysis was thin in these cases.
- ◆ A number of candidates had difficulty in making a selection from the appropriate section of the paper. This resulted in genre infringements, and candidates were penalised as a result.
- ◆ Some candidates relied too heavily on learned essays which did not meet the demands of the questions chosen.
- ◆ Some candidates did not indicate which question they had selected.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

The following points may be useful.

- ◆ Ensure that candidates are entered for the appropriate level.
- ◆ Candidates should be prepared to demonstrate their understanding of the ideas and the language of the passage through the use of their own words where required. Candidates should be

reminded that they do not need to carry-out a full gloss of an expression, but some attempt to gloss the words of the passage is required.

- ◆ Candidates should attempt a wide range of reading in order to help with the understanding of a reasonable range of vocabulary. This will also help with the "own words" type of Understanding questions.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to address the key demands of the question (often in bold type).
- ◆ The number of points or the fullness of the answer required is usually indicated by the number of available marks.
- ◆ Candidates should be able to recognise and be able to comment on the writer's use of word choice, imagery, tone, punctuation, etc.
- ◆ Candidates should be able to recognise features of structure, and be able to comment on their use (eg linkage, sentence variety, listing, etc.).

Critical Essay

The following points may be useful.

- ◆ Care should be taken in reading and understanding the question in order that the response is relevant in terms of the demands of the question, and of genre.
- ◆ Candidates should number responses clearly.
- ◆ Candidates should avoid over-long narrative accounts with analysis and evaluation added on at the end.
- ◆ Care should be taken over paragraphing, sentences and spelling to meet the demands of "mainly accurate."
- ◆ The learning of complete essays should be avoided.

Candidates should be reminded to number clearly the question they have selected

Course Assessment: Intermediate 2

In Intermediate 2 English, the Course assessment consists of 2 Question Papers.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Close Reading

Candidates were able to relate to and to understand the passage which dealt with the effects of books by Charles Dickens on black South African children during apartheid. Candidates showed commitment towards the exercise, and their answers showed signs that they found the language and ideas of the passage stimulating and thought-provoking. A small number of candidates confused the words "Africaans" and "Africans", but this kind of misunderstanding was not evident in significant numbers.

Care was taken over the wording of the questions to ensure clarity. Key terms were highlighted in bold.

Critical Essay

The range of texts chosen by candidates was similar to previous years. However, that range was reasonably wide. Shakespeare (Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and less frequently, Hamlet and Othello), and Miller (The Crucible, All My Sons) were the two most popular writers chosen for Drama. Next in popularity would be *Bold Girls* and *An Inspector Calls*. Scottish writers were often used for the Poetry Section (MacCaig, Morgan, Duffy, Burns, Rush). Scottish or American short stories featured in the Prose Section. Novels tended to be *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Animal Farm*.

There was a small increase in uptake for the question dealing with non-fiction texts in the Prose Section of the paper. Similarly, there was a very slight increase in the number of candidates attempting to answer from the Language Section. Most of these chose Q15 which was concerned with the language of groups. Those who had made a study in this area did well.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

- ◆ All questions were attempted by the overwhelming majority of candidates who had no difficulty in completing the paper.
- ◆ Many candidates were able to provide lengthy detailed answers to many of the questions.

- ◆ Questions on Understanding were handled well, although some candidates had difficulty in demonstrating their understanding through the use of their own words.
- ◆ The opening sequence of questions was dealt with effectively by most candidates.

Critical Essay

- ◆ The vast majority of candidates produced two relevant essays of relatively equal quality.
- ◆ Candidates showed commitment in their attempts to answer the questions set.
- ◆ Recent signs of improved technical accuracy were maintained.
- ◆ There were clear signs from the candidates' responses of personal engagement with texts.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

In general, questions on Analysis and Evaluation were less well handled than those on Understanding (eg Q12 which asked for an analysis of imagery). However, in Understanding questions some candidates were losing marks by failing to use their own words where required.

The candidates found difficulty with the question relating to linkage [Q6(a)].

Questions dealing with Evaluation (Q8 and Q13) also caused difficulty. Some candidates were not aware that Q13 required reference to the whole passage.

Critical Essay

A significant number of candidates did not realise that Q6 from the Prose section required the selection of a non-fiction text or group of texts. A fiction text was not an appropriate choice.

The few candidates who relied on learned essays had difficulty in achieving sufficient relevance.

Candidates who chose Q8 from the Poetry section, and concentrated on "a particular place," often had difficulty in achieving relevance.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

- ◆ The following may be useful.
- ◆ The advice, as always, is to encourage candidates to read widely in order to deal with challenges presented by subject matter, ideas and vocabulary at this level.
- ◆ To look out for Understanding questions which require the use of own words.

- ◆ To answer fully questions which require the identification of a technique and an explanation of its effectiveness.
- ◆ To recognise a writer's use of word choice, imagery, tone, etc, and be able to comment on use and effectiveness.
- ◆ To recognise the effect (and effectiveness) of a particular structure (eg sentence variety, linkage, balance, inversion, etc).
- ◆ To recognise the overall structure of a passage, and be able to comment on how the key elements of introduction, topic sentences and conclusion link the central ideas and themes.

Critical Essay

- ◆ The following may be useful.
- ◆ To remind candidates to read each question carefully. Failure to do this properly caused problems for some candidates with Q6.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to develop a line of thought in their essays which answers the questions chosen.
- ◆ To stress the importance of commitment to Analysis and Evaluation in addition to the demonstration of Understanding.
- ◆ Genre features should be analysed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to the conveying of the writer's main ideas and themes.
- ◆ Care should be taken over paragraphing, sentences, and spelling in order to meet the demands of "sufficiently accurate."

Course Assessment: Higher

In Higher English, the Course assessment consists of 2 Question Papers.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Performance, as reported by Markers and Examiners, was broadly similar to that in 2008.

In Close Reading, the additional time given to candidates this year led to a significant reduction in the number of candidates who failed to answer all the questions. This advantage, however, was offset in the work of many candidates who did not use “own words” when answering some of the Understanding questions.

In Critical Essay, the recent years’ improvement in attention to relevance has been maintained, and it was felt that there was a further slight improvement in 2009 in the overall quality of responses. Many Markers felt it was a definite strength that candidates focused well on the key thrust of the question. Handwriting which was difficult to read attracted comment from a number of Markers.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

- ◆ Candidates showed good general understanding of the passages.
- ◆ Where candidates followed the rule to use “own words”, questions on Understanding were handled well.
- ◆ Analysis in questions 1(b), 5(c) and 8(b) was generally good.
- ◆ There were some excellent answers to question 4(b) on tone.
- ◆ The approach to Analysis questions in general has maintained the improvement seen in recent years. Nearly all candidates go beyond mere quotation (or quotation + bald assertion) and attempt genuinely to analyse.
- ◆ Nearly all candidates completed the paper this year, and some of the answers to question 12 were of high quality, especially responses which took a good overview of the ideas of both Passages.

Critical Essay

- ◆ Most candidates were able to write two substantial essays in the time available. It was noted again this year, however, that some candidates' essays were unnecessarily long and that this often weakened the overall impact of their work.
- ◆ Almost all candidates chose questions from Sections A – C. There was a slight improvement (in quantity and in quality) in responses to questions from Section D.
- ◆ Candidates who were well prepared knew their texts in some depth, could select appropriate details/incidents from them and could quote accurately.
- ◆ Most candidates seem fully aware of the need for relevance to the chosen question, and that mere narration of events or unfocused, line-by-line analyses of a poem are not acceptable approaches.
- ◆ Successful candidates continue to pay attention to the structure of their essays, striving to shape them relevantly to the key part(s) of the question.

- ◆ Candidates who took a broad view of a text as a whole, and did not get bogged down in constant “analysis”, performed well; such candidates were often able to contextualise their comments by effectively narrating key details of selected events.
- ◆ The range of texts offered by candidates remained as wide as in previous years: in Drama, Shakespeare, Miller and Williams continue to dominate; in longer Prose, all the “standard” novels were widely used, with evidence that some relatively contemporary novels are also being studied as class texts; there were fewer responses using a short story; in Poetry, there continues to be a pleasing and remarkably wide range of material being studied.
- ◆ Scottish texts were used widely in all main areas except Drama; around 50% of candidates answered using at least one Scottish text.
- ◆ Markers who commented on candidates' expression and technical accuracy were mostly positive and noted “no change” or “a slight improvement”.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

- ◆ The requirement to use “own words” in Understanding questions has long been established in Close Reading at this level. It is stated clearly on the cover page every year. This year, for no obvious reason, a significant number of candidates did not adhere to this rule, either relying too closely on the wording of the passage or blatantly quoting from it, and consequently lost marks in several questions, most notably in 4(a), 5(b), 5(d), 6(b), and 6(c).
- ◆ Question 2 (a traditional “link” question) and question 9(c) (a traditional “imagery” question) were poorly handled by many candidates.
- ◆ Question 4(b) was challenging; many candidates were able to identify a suitable tone, but were unable to explain *how* it had been created.

- ◆ In question 9(b), many candidates were unable to distinguish between the views of the writer and the views of the conference delegates, despite the careful wording of the question (cf question 8 in 2008).
- ◆ In question 11, many candidates were inclined to repeat the word “dismissive” from the question and quote some words from the paragraph, without appropriate analysis of *how* the tone had been created.
- ◆ Question 12 – the comparison question – was answered this year at greater length than in the past (no doubt because of the additional time), but not always to better purpose. Comments on style were especially weak and there was a lack of genuine comparison. Too many candidates rely on merely re-stating the writers’ key points.

Critical Essay

- ◆ More Markers than ever before commented on the poor handwriting of some candidates, which sometimes made it extremely difficult (and time-consuming) to mark the essay. This is a serious problem in a Critical Essay, which might extend over five or more pages, making it hard to follow and concentrate on the candidate’s line of thought. It must be stressed, however, that no candidate’s work was (or ever has been) left unmarked for this reason.
- ◆ Markers continue to report candidates who appear to have prepared only two texts and are therefore led to implausible lines of argument in order to force a text to “fit” a question. In Poetry especially, where questions are of necessity “focused” (in order to allow the Performance Criterion of relevance to be met), candidates should have studied a range of poems.
- ◆ The number of “genre infringements”, was down slightly, although there were some rather extreme confusions, eg play for novel and *vice versa*. The most common infringement continues to be in Section B – Prose, where candidates use a short story to answer on a question on a novel. While this might be an accident induced by examination nerves, it is hard not to conclude that in most such cases candidates are simply under-prepared and are forced to desperate measures – not infrequently claiming that well-known short stories are in fact “novels”.
- ◆ Inappropriate “micro-analysis” of novels and plays continues to cause some candidates’ essays to be unsatisfactory. Examples were noted of candidates quoting a relatively unimportant sentence from a novel and then subjecting words from it to detailed “analysis”.
- ◆ Inaccurate use of the apostrophe was noted in many cases, and incorrect punctuation when using “however”, “therefore” and “this” was not infrequent.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

Candidates should be reminded that:

- ◆ when answering Understanding questions, they must use “own words” as far as possible;
- ◆ despite the additional time, careful time management is important in the Close Reading paper – not only should all questions be answered, but all should be given an appropriate amount of time; attention should be paid to the number of marks available, eg a 2-mark “Understanding” question (of which there were nine in this year’s paper) should be answered concisely;
- ◆ answers to “link” questions must show an understanding of the key ideas before and after the “link” sentence; they should read beyond the link sentence before attempting to answer a question about its linking function;
- ◆ answers to questions on imagery must show an understanding of the literal “root” of the image and of how this is being developed figuratively by the writer;
- ◆ in questions on word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc, mere identification of a word, image or feature of sentence structure will gain no marks in itself at Higher level; marks are awarded for the quality of comment and the depth of insight;
- ◆ they should pay careful attention to the “focus” given in most Analysis questions (eg questions 1(b), 7, 9(b) and 11 in this year’s paper) and avoid analysing in a vacuum;
- ◆ the question on both Passages is a key feature of the Higher English Arrangements and tests valuable reading skills; it is worth a significant number of marks; responses to comparison questions should be focused, structured and written in continuous prose;

- ◆ extended advice on many aspects of the Close Reading paper can be found on SQA’s website (see “Candidate Guidance Documents” on the dedicated English page).

Critical Essay

Candidates should be reminded that:

- ◆ they must ensure that their handwriting is clearly legible to Markers; centres should explore the provision of appropriate alternative arrangements (eg use of ICT without spellcheck, or transcription without correction) for candidates whose handwriting is seriously weak (or is known to become so under examination pressure);
- ◆ thorough preparation of a range of appropriate texts is essential;
- ◆ the distinctions in prose genres should be fully understood and the terms of the question adhered to; infringements, whether accidental or deliberate, are always penalised, often quite substantially;
- ◆ in order to allow Markers to assess relevance (one of the Performance Criteria), all Critical Essay questions have a defined focus; a prepared, memorised essay is not an option;

- ◆ essays should be carefully structured to respond to the task set, but simplistic formulae such as “Throughout this essay I will ...”, “I will be writing about ...” and “In this paragraph I intend to ...” should be avoided;
- ◆ “analysis” should support, not dominate, the line of thought in a Critical Essay; when attempting to analyse, they should deal with features/techniques which are appropriate to the genre; “micro-analysis” of novels and plays should be avoided;
- ◆ while merely narrating the events or re-stating the content of a text is not acceptable, some narration is often useful in order to contextualise comments; appropriate, limited narration of events can be a strength;
- ◆ care should be taken with the layout of quotations; while there are no absolute rules for this, basic conventions (such as paragraphing and indenting longer quotations, integrating shorter ones into a sentence) should be observed; they should avoid following a quotation with “This quote shows ...”;
- ◆ while due consideration is given for the pressure under which they are writing, they should take every care to maintain “sufficient technical accuracy”; care should be taken with punctuation when “however”, “therefore” and “this” are being used as connectives – a full stop (or semi-colon), not a comma, is the convention;
- ◆ extended advice on many aspects of the Critical Essay paper can be found on SQA’s website (see “Candidate Guidance Documents” on the dedicated English page).

Course Assessment: Advanced Higher

In Advanced Higher English, the Course assessment consists of 1 Question Paper and submitted dissertation (Specialist Study) and submitted folio (if the Creative Writing option is chosen).

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

There were fewer Advanced Higher English candidates in 2009 than there were in 2008. The performance of these candidates, however, was better than in 2008, resulting in:

- ◆ a significant improvement in the A -C pass rate
- ◆ an improvement in the number of candidates achieving grade B
- ◆ a marginal improvement in the number of candidates achieving Grade A.

Compared with 2008, candidate performance was judged to be:

- ◆ in Literary Study, no better but no worse
- ◆ in Textual Analysis, marginally weaker
- ◆ in Creative Writing, clearly better
- ◆ in Specialist Study, significantly better.

Comments on individual assessment components

Specialist Study

There were only a few reported instances of candidates failing to comply with evidence requirements.

The vast majority produced serious specialist studies, and there were significantly more examples of genuinely scholarly approaches to challenging topics focused on complex texts. Markers reported a generally good standard of discursive writing.

In a few centres, however, approval was given to topics that made it difficult for candidates to meet the standards of the published assessment criteria. There was also evidence (more widespread) of an unhelpful formulaic approach to the wording of topics (“*A literary study of...*”).

The following table provides data relevant to the nature of the specialist studies undertaken by candidates in 2009. The figures for 2009 are in bold and beneath them, for comparison but not in bold, are the figures for 2008. These continue the pattern of previous years: a clear preference for specialising in prose fiction and, within that, for studying the work of two or more than two novelists.

Drama	83 104	Poetry	107 129	Prose fiction	1249 1398	Other	64 70
One dramatist Three or more texts	28 35	One poet Wide range (7+ poems)	59 71	One novelist Three or more texts	112 128	Mixed genres	49 55
One dramatist Two texts	41 48	One poet Narrow range (–4 poems)	21 20	One novelist Two texts	195 202	Language study	3 3
Two or more than two dramatists	14 21	Two or more than two poets	20 38	Two or more than two novelists	904 1042	Non fiction	9 5
Other drama	0	Other poetry	7 0	Other fiction (including short stories)	38 26	Film or other media	3 7

Literary Study

The responses of candidates to questions in the Literary Study section of the examination paper were judged by markers to be of a similar standard and to have a similar profile to responses in 2008:

- ◆ the vast majority of candidates appeared to have been well taught and thoroughly prepared
- ◆ there was evidence that a good range of authors and texts had been studied
- ◆ knowledge and understanding of texts was generally secure
- ◆ most candidates acknowledged (at least) the general tenor of their selected question
- ◆ many, however, were reluctant or unable or lacked the confidence to engage directly with the actual terms of the question
- ◆ not many answers, therefore, were at all points fully relevant to the real demands of the question.

There was also some concern expressed about the time-management skills of candidates and about their preparedness to plan and to produce effective critical essays setting out relevant and (where appropriate) progressive lines of thought.

The following table provides information on the uptake of questions in Literary Study. The figures for 2009 are in bold and beneath them, for comparison but not in bold, are the figures for 2008. The wider and slightly more even uptake of questions noted in Poetry and Prose Fiction in 2008 continued in 2009, as did the preference of more than 46% of candidates for Shakespeare or Williams.

Drama	845 913	Poetry	340 458	Prose Fiction	317 324	Prose Non-Fiction	1 6
1 Beckett	11 27	12 Burns	17 14	23 Atwood	8 21	34	1 1
2 Byrne	7 10	13 Chaucer	18 26	24 Austen	33 37	35	0 5
3 Chekhov	24 29	14 Donne	50 83	25 Dickens	40 52		
4 Friel	29 31	15 Duffy	47 55	26 Fitzgerald	18 25		
5 Lindsay	4 6	16 Heaney	87 135	27 Galloway	23 26		
6 Lochhead	18 23	17 Henryson	6 15	28 Gray	3 5		
7 Pinter	20 36	18 Keats	28 34	29 Hardy	77 105		
8 Shakespeare	434 410	19 MacDiarmid	5 7	30 Hogg	25 12		
9 Stoppard	18 26	20 Muir	4 12	31 Joyce	43 14		
10 Wilde	17 25	21 Plath	52 42	32 Stevenson	32 15		
11 Williams	263 290	22 Yeats	26 35	33 Waugh	15 12		

Optional Study

Approximate percentage uptake by candidates of the four optional components was as follows (2008 figures in brackets):

- ◆ Creative Writing 67.9% (73.2%)
- ◆ Textual Analysis 29.4% (24.9%)
- ◆ Reading the Media 02.6% (01.6%)
- ◆ Language Study 00.1% (00.3%)

Those who opted for Language Study attempted questions on Language and Social Context and acquitted themselves well. Although their references to relevant literature were felt to be somewhat dated, candidates were able to support their arguments with good evidence drawn from clearly enthusiastic and detailed individual/personal research.

The responses of the 39 candidates who opted for Reading the Media were generally sound, especially in the categories of Film and Advertising. There were 22 answers on Film, 12 on Advertising, 4 on Print Journalism and 1 on Television.

A total of 441 candidates opted for Textual Analysis. There were 159 responses to Prose Fiction (a chapter from the novel *No Great Mischief* by Alistair McLeod), 65 responses to Prose Non-fiction (an essay *Where Does Writing Come From?* by Richard Ford, 143 responses to Poetry (the Wordsworth sonnet *The world is too much with us...*) and 74 responses to Drama (an extract from *Walking Through Seaweed* by Ian Hamilton Finlay). Markers reported the overall response of candidates to be “slightly disappointing”, especially in Prose Fiction and in Poetry (where questions

were fairly open), although a little more secure in Prose Non-fiction and in Drama (where questions required candidates to concentrate on specific aspects or features of the texts).

The 1021 candidates who opted for Creative Writing submitted:

- ◆ 808 pieces of fiction
- ◆ 582 reflective essays
- ◆ 384 examples of poetry
- ◆ 268 examples of drama

In all categories, markers noted a significant improvement in candidates' grasp of the conventions of the writing forms they had selected. There were very few pieces that could be dismissed easily as formally inadequate or thematically inept. The general impression was of candidates who had been well instructed and given lots of practice and lots of opportunity to improve and refine their final submissions. There were, as always, examples of quite outstanding pieces of creative writing (in all categories), but even the majority (fairly mundane reflective essays and pieces of fiction) were judged this year to be more interesting and better crafted than in recent years. Although Poetry submissions were (usually) either very well done, or very poorly done, there were some very pleasing, well conceived and well executed submissions in Drama.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Specific advice issued in previous years continues to be relevant.

1. In relation to the Specialist Study, teachers/lecturers should ensure that:
 - ◆ texts of appropriate substance and quality are selected
 - ◆ groupings of disparate texts are avoided
 - ◆ mixed genres studies (novels and films, films and plays, plays and poems, etc.) are avoided
 - ◆ specific and manageable topics are constructed
 - ◆ unambiguous statements of intent are included (as headings to dissertations)
 - ◆ the analytical thrust of each study is incorporated into the statement of intent or title
 - ◆ length is between 3500 and 4500 words (including quotations)
 - ◆ mandatory footnotes and bibliographies are provided
 - ◆ dissertations are free from plagiarism
 - ◆ candidates are acquainted with all of the advice and regulations provided by SQA.

The importance of the topic to be pursued in the Specialist Study cannot be overstated. In specifying topics candidates and centres should be aware that they are effectively selecting and defining their own individual instruments of assessment. It should be emphasised, therefore, that vague, generalised and unfocused topics are unlikely to enable candidates to demonstrate attainment of the standards against which their dissertations will be assessed.

2. In relation to Literary Study, teachers/lecturers should ensure that candidates are:
 - ◆ offered an experience of literary study of sufficient depth and width to allow reasonable choice in the context of an unseen examination
 - ◆ thoroughly prepared in the art of critical essay writing
 - ◆ given ample practice in making effective use of the time available (1.5 hours)
 - ◆ provided with strategies for addressing the terms of the question and for appropriate planning of their responses

- ◆ equipped with a precise and extensive critical vocabulary
 - ◆ reminded that “analysis” need not always be “inserted” (often inappropriately) in the form of extensive quotation that is then subjected to microanalytical comment on individual words and phrases
 - ◆ shown how valid analysis may well reside (often by implication) in a permeating thread of relevant critical comment that informs an emerging argument.
3. In relation to Creative Writing, it is recommended that:
- ◆ candidates should enrich their own experience by reading extensively in the work of other writers (including their peers) in order to familiarise themselves with genre conventions and the range of approaches that might be taken in their own writing
 - ◆ the submission of pieces generated by common stimuli or arising from whole-class exercises should be avoided
 - ◆ the submission of groups of unrelated (or loosely related) poems should also be avoided.
4. In relation to Textual Analysis, it is recommended that candidates should:
- ◆ through guided reading, develop close and essential familiarity with the conventions of a range of literary genres
 - ◆ through focused teaching and extensive practice, acquire the critical apparatus necessary for the analysis and evaluation of complex text(s).

In addition to specific advice already issued, there are two further general issues that might well be considered by teachers/lecturers in the light of the features of candidate performance in 2009.

Coursework submissions

Arising from the relatively disappointing coursework submissions of candidates in 2008, it was suggested that there might be a “need for refreshment and enhancement of the tutorial skills of teachers/lecturers in monitoring and advancing the independent study and coursework skills of their candidates”. The significantly improved coursework submissions of candidates in 2009 may well be due, at least in part (and commendably), to the seriousness with which teachers/lecturers have taken this issue. Whatever the reason, in order to maintain and build on the improved attainment of candidates in these components in 2009, it is recommended that the Specialist Study Unit and the Creative Writing Unit continue to be the subject of rigorous teaching and monitoring. Regular use of the Specialist Study NAB published in 2008 should help with the process of the monitoring and formative assessment of candidates’ dissertations as they emerge and are refined through their various stages and revisions. Similarly, Creative Writing requires judicial and regular teaching and tutorial input emphasising to candidates the importance (in all writing) of substance, form, coherence, clarity and economy of expression.

External assessment

With regard to the preparation of candidates for those components assessed by the external examination (Literary Study, Language Study, Textual Analysis, Reading the Media), candidates should be given clear guidance and practice not only in what to include in their answers, but also in how to shape and present their comments. It should be noted that for each of these components, the Unit outcome itself (“Respond critically to...” or, for Language Study, “Describe and analyse...” and the Unit evidence requirements assume that candidates should be able to produce a “critical essay”, a “critical response” or, for Language Study, an “essay/analytical report”. To make full and profitable use, therefore, of their undoubted knowledge and understanding, candidates should be well taught,

well grounded and well practised in those higher order skills required for the writing of clear, relevant and effective essays at the level of Advanced Higher