

Introduction to Higher English

Arrangements

The Arrangements now in place for Higher English follow the general design rules agreed for all subjects at this level, by which the external assessment should have no more than two components, and should not exceed three hours. The additional interval of time permitted in the Higher English examination between the two papers — each paper being one hour and thirty minutes in length — takes account of the practical aspects of dealing with large numbers of candidates and the desirability of collecting and enveloping each paper separately, for marking by different markers.

Internal assessments, originally 6 in number, were reduced. Four internal assessments are now required: 2 for Language Study (Close Reading and Writing), 1 for Literary Study (Textual Analysis), and 1 for Personal Study (written response or spoken response). The Arrangements are now much less complex. The problems of carrying forward (for repeat candidates) folio material and oral/aural marks from one session to another — and sometimes from one centre to another — have been removed. Any concerns about malpractice/lack of authenticity of submitted work/marks (perhaps a growing problem with more extensive use of the internet generally) have also been removed. All work done by candidates for external assessment is now produced under strictly invigilated examination conditions.

Skills in the Course

The skills developed in the Course are both receptive and productive, exercised on the subject matter of language and literature. Candidates are assumed to have English as a first language.

Each Unit is intended to focus on particular skills relating to language or literature. As in other subjects, 40 hours are allowed additionally in the Course for consolidation, retention, integration, and also checking knowledge of examination techniques, in preparation for the additionality of the external assessment, which samples the skills and content of the Course.

Language Study

The Language Study Unit aims to develop receptive skills of Close Reading — understanding (of content), analysis (of style) and evaluation (of effect) of modern non-fiction prose material. The internal assessment task requires candidates to write answers to questions on one previously unseen passage.

This Unit also aims to develop productive skills of Writing of various sorts — expressive, creative and factual. The internal assessment of this aspect requires on-going work by the candidate to produce a piece of writing which may be an essay (argumentative, persuasive or reflective), a story, a poem, or a report. Drafting, amending and re-drafting are features of this work, as is comment from the teacher/lecturer with a view to improving the work. Skills developed should include structuring of a piece of writing (for example, paragraphing, arrangement of ideas) and technical accuracy (spelling, grammar, punctuation, in accordance with accepted conventions).

The purpose of this Unit (which gives the core skill of written communication) is to enable the candidate to comprehend and evaluate journalistic-type material, and to write coherently.

Literary Study

The Literary Study Unit requires study of a range of texts from at least two genres — prose (fiction or non-fiction), poetry, drama and mass media. Texts for study, which should include at least one Scottish text, are chosen by teachers/lecturers. There are no set texts for English at levels up to and including Higher.

This Unit aims to develop skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation (as does the Language Study Unit), but here the subject matter is generally literary. The internal assessment task is Textual Analysis — writing answers to questions on a previously unseen piece of literature (prose, poetry or drama).

The purpose of this Unit is to enable candidates to become acquainted with a range of literature and to develop skills of critical appreciation, which can then be applied to any literature read.

In workload terms, a Textual Analysis assessment is more straightforward and faster for a teacher/lecturer to mark than an essay would be.

Personal Study

The Personal Study Unit allows the candidate to make an individual choice of text(s) for independent study. The assessment task is either a written essay or a spoken presentation about the chosen text(s). Time-limits and controlled conditions apply, but access is allowed to text(s) and to the candidate's own notes.

This Unit allows wider reading (of the candidate's own choice) and aims to develop skills of note-making, structuring of an essay or spoken presentation, and clear communication (whether written or spoken).

The spoken version gives the core skill of oral communication.

The choice between written and spoken assessment takes account both of those teachers/lecturers who are enthusiastic about developing spoken work and of those who find the practicalities of assessment of spoken work too onerous and time-consuming. The choice also takes account of the individual personalities of candidates — for example, a shy candidate might find a spoken presentation too much of an ordeal.

External assessment

The content studied and the skills developed in the Units have to be brought together and refined further in preparation for the external assessment (examination), which will sample them.

At Higher, the Close Reading examination paper requires the candidate to write answers to questions on two previously unseen non-fiction prose passages, related in theme. This paper tests the skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation developed in the Language Study Unit (and also in the Literary Study Unit).

The Critical Essay examination paper requires the candidate to write two essays, each on a different type of text (prose, poetry, drama, mass media, language). Candidates may answer on any texts studied in the Course, either in the Literary Study Unit or in the Personal Study Unit. In their essays they are required to show technical accuracy to an acceptable level and to give answers relevant to the essay questions chosen.

The skills required here are those developed in the Literary Study Unit and in the Personal Study Unit, and also in the Writing part of the Language Study Unit, for structuring a coherent piece of writing on subject matter to which the candidate has previously given extensive thought.

The external assessment now has a clear focus on language and literature, and requires demonstration of the skills developed in the different Units of the Course.

The examination papers are set by the Principal Assessor and a team of Setters who are teachers or former teachers of the subject. The papers are set in accordance with the published Arrangements for the subject and level concerned. Arrangements are available on the SQA website, as are specimen question papers and specimen marking instructions.