

Scottish Qualifications Authority

National Qualifications

Higher English Critical Essay

Workshop Instructions

October 2008

The workshop will look at examples of essays from the 2008 examination, with particular reference to the revised Categories and Descriptors introduced in 2008. The aim is to clarify the revised assessment process and to establish strategies for improving candidates' performance in Critical Essay.

For detailed discussion in the Workshop

Script 1	The Crucible
Script 2	Lord of the Flies
Script 3	“A Study of Reading Habits”
Script 4	The Handmaid’s Tale
Script 5	A Streetcar Named Desire

Additional Scripts

Script 6	Brave New World
Script 7	“MCMXIV”
Script 8	“November”
Script 9	“Hotel Room, 12th Floor”
Script 10	Hamlet

Critical Essay

Key points:

1 For candidates:

- Relevance to the question must be explicit and sustained. Just because your text “fits” the opening sentence of the question (the “Choose ...” part), it doesn’t follow that whatever you write will automatically be relevant. The second sentence of the question is what must be addressed. Remember that this sentence often contains more than one instruction.
- Never lose sight of the “central concerns” of the text as a whole; make this a prominent part of your answer.
- You must demonstrate an awareness of the impact of relevant literary techniques. These techniques, however, should not become the most important part of your essay and you should not use them as the structure for your essay.
- Your essay should have a clear structure and be written in an appropriately formal register and style of writing.
- Your writing should demonstrate “sufficient technical accuracy”.

2 For teachers/lecturers:

- **In 2008, revised Categories, Descriptors and Mark allocations were introduced. However, nothing at all has changed in terms of what constitutes a good Critical Essay, and the Performance Criteria (which determine whether an essay passes or fails) remain exactly as before.**
- Assessing Critical Essays is a complex process and an obviously subjective one; nevertheless, it is possible to establish by exemplification a standard for all but the most eccentric responses.
- Make yourself familiar with the Performance Criteria (which establish whether or not a piece can pass) and then with both the “Broad Descriptors” and the “Detailed Descriptors”.
- **Key steps** (see pages 2 – 4 of the Detailed Marking Instructions):
 - judging against the Performance Criteria
 - confirming “sufficient Technical Accuracy”
 - assigning a Category and Mark
- Read and consider carefully the “General Guidelines” on page 5 of the Detailed Marking Instructions

Script 1

Text: **The Crucible**

Question: Choose from a play a scene in which an important truth is revealed.

Briefly explain what the important truth is and assess the significance of its revelation to your understanding of theme or character.

1. Read section “A” of the essay.

On your own or with a partner, jot down first impressions:

Promising features:
Any worrying features:

2. Now read the remainder of the essay.

Your notes:

Your Category/Mark

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Established Category/Mark

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Presenter’s comments:

Script 2

Text: Lord of the Flies

Question: Choose a novel which explores the cruelty of human nature.

Show how the writer explores this theme and discuss how its exploration enhances your appreciation of the novel as a whole.

1. Read section “A” of the essay.

On your own or with a partner, jot down first impressions:

Promising features:
Any worrying features:

2. Now read the remainder of the essay.

Your notes:

Your Category/Mark

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Established Category/Mark

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Presenter’s comments:

Script 3

Text: "A Study of Reading Habits"

Question: Choose a poem in which the speaker's personality is gradually revealed.

Show how, through the content and language of the poem, aspects of the character gradually emerge.

Your notes:

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Your Category/Mark

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Established Category/Mark

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Presenter's comments:

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Script 4

Text: **The Handmaid's Tale**

Question: Choose a novel or short story which is set in a period of social or political change.

Discuss how important the writer's evocation of the period is to your appreciation of the text as a whole.

Your notes:

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Your Category/Mark

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Established Category/Mark

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Presenter's comments:

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Script 5

Text: **A Streetcar Named Desire**

Question: Choose from a play a scene in which an important truth is revealed

Briefly explain what the important truth is and assess the significance of its revelation to your understanding of theme or character.

Your notes:

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Your Category/Mark

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Established Category/Mark

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Presenter's comments:

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Script 6

Text: **Brave New World**

Question: Choose a **novel** in which a confrontation between two characters is of central importance in the text.

Explain the circumstances of the confrontation and discuss its importance to your understanding of the novel as a whole.

Notes:

Category/Mark

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Script 7

Text: MCMXIV

Question: Choose a poem which is strongly linked to a specific location.

Show how the poet captures the essence of the location and exploits this to explore an important theme.

Notes:

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Category/Mark

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Script 8

Text: “November”

Question: Choose a poem which deals with conflict or danger or death.

Show how the poet creates an appropriate mood for the subject matter and go on to discuss how effectively she/he uses this mood to enhance your understanding of the central idea of the poem.

Notes:

Category/Mark

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Script 9

Text: “Hotel Room, 12th Floor”

Question: Choose a poem which is strongly linked to a specific location.

Show how the poet captures the essence of the location and exploits this to explore an important theme.

Notes:

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Category/Mark

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Script 10

Text: **Hamlet**

Question: Choose from a play a scene in which an important truth is revealed.

Briefly explain what the important truth is and assess the significance of its revelation to your understanding of theme or character.

Notes:

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Category/Mark

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End of Critical Essay Workshop