

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

English Advanced Higher

Selection of suitable topics for the Specialist Study dissertation: supplementary guidance

This document should be read in conjunction with the following:

- ◆ Specialist Study National Unit Specification (pp 26–33) in the English Advanced Higher Arrangements Document (Second edition, published May 2007)
- ◆ English AH — guidance on Specialist Study topics (issued in October 2003 and available in the Downloads section of the list of Candidate Guidance Documents on the English page of the SQA website).

1 The attention of teachers and lecturers is drawn to the following extracts from the Arrangements document.

“The candidate must demonstrate the ability to:

- ◆ select a suitable topic
- ◆ adopt a personal stance towards the topic
- ◆ devise, structure and sustain an argument
- ◆ select evidence from primary and secondary sources to support an argument
- ◆ employ the literary, linguistic or media concepts and terminology appropriate to the exposition of the topic.

The first stage in the process is the selection by the candidate of texts or topics for study and the formulation of a brief descriptive statement of what the candidate proposes to study. This proposal must be submitted to the teacher/lecturer for approval in order to ensure that the proposed materials are appropriate to an English course and worthy of study at this level, and that the study itself is manageable.

The study should explore a limited area and examine it in detail with appropriate supporting evidence.”

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“Teachers/lecturers should:

- ◆ brief candidates on the nature of the task at the outset
- ◆ illustrate the wide range of texts and topics available
- ◆ discuss with candidates their individual and personal interests
- ◆ guide candidates towards consultation with librarians or other teachers/lecturers and towards use of databanks
- ◆ give practical help with final choice and location of texts and with the wording of topics and titles
- ◆ provide regular opportunities for consultation and support.”

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2 Some implications of these requirements

- (a) The teacher/lecturer should assist candidates to identify authors and texts, language or media topics that are:
- ◆ appropriate to an English course
 - ◆ worthy of study at this level.
- (b) The purpose of providing a carefully worded topic is twofold:
- ◆ to focus, at an early stage in the process, the candidate's attention on the aims of the study being undertaken
 - ◆ to provide examiners with the means of assessing the extent to which the candidate has achieved the aims as set out.
- (c) The wording of the dissertation topic should:
- ◆ identify authors and texts, language or media topics to be studied
 - ◆ indicate the scope of the study to be undertaken
 - ◆ provide a concise exposition of the literary, language or media aims of the study to be undertaken.

3 To assist candidates, teachers and lecturers in making a choice of authors, texts and topics, there are appended the following (as a guide, not a prescription):

- ◆ a list of authors whose work, either on its own or in appropriate combination with the work of another author or authors, can sustain extended study at this level and on whose work successful dissertations have been submitted (**Appendix 1**)
- ◆ a list of topics which reflect the principles outlined above and which exemplify good practice (**Appendix 2**).

Notes

- (i) Teachers and lecturers must use their judgement in assisting candidates to determine what constitutes an appropriate range of poems or short stories to be studied.
- (ii) Studies involving the comparative study of texts of different genre — novels with films, films with plays, plays with poems, fiction with non-fiction, etc — are intrinsically difficult and are seldom successful.
- (iii) If a candidate wishes to study an author or authors not included in **Appendix 1** or mentioned in **Appendix 2**, it is strongly recommended that the advice of SQA is sought on the proposed topic.

List of Authors

Pre-19th Century

Drama	Poetry	Prose
Jonson, Ben Lindsay, Sir David Marlowe, Christopher Shakespeare, William Sheridan, R B Webster, John	Burns, Robert Chaucer, Geoffrey Donne, John Dunbar, William Fergusson, Robert Henryson, Robert Herbert, George Herrick, Robert Marvell, Andrew Milton, John Vaughan, Henry The Scottish Ballads	Defoe, Daniel Fielding, Henry Richardson, Samuel Sterne, Laurence Swift, Jonathan

19th Century

Drama	Poetry	Prose
Chekhov, Anton Ibsen, Henrik Shaw, Bernard Wilde, Oscar	Blake, William Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Byron, Lord (George G) Clare, John Coleridge, Samuel T Dickinson, Emily Hopkins, Gerard Manley Keats, John Kipling, Rudyard Rossetti, Christina Shelley, Percy Bysshe Tennyson, Lord (Alfred) Wordsworth, William	Austen, Jane Brontë, Anne Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Chopin, Kate Carroll, Lewis Collins, Wilkie Cooper, James Fenimore Dickens, Charles Eliot, George Galt, John Gaskell, Elizabeth Hardy, Thomas Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hogg, James James, Henry Melville, Herman Poe, Edgar Allan Scott, Sir Walter Shelley, Mary Stevenson, R L Stoker, Bram Thackeray, William M Trollope, Anthony Twain, Mark Wells, H G

20th Century and 21st Century

Drama	Poetry	Prose	Prose (cont.)
Albee, Edward	Auden, W H	Achebe, Chinua	Jenkins, Robin
Ayckbourn, Alan	Brown, G Mackay	Allende, Isabel	Joyce, James
Beckett, Samuel	Crawford, Robert	Amis, Martin	Kelman, James
Bennett, Alan	cummings, e e	Angelou, Maya	Kenneally, Thomas
Brecht, Bertolt	Duffy, Carol Ann	Atwood, Margaret	Kennedy, A L
Bridie, James	Dunn, Douglas	Auster, Paul	Kerouac, Jack
Byrne, John	Eliot, T S	Baldwin, James	Kesson, Jessie
Churchill, Caryl	Finlay, Ian Hamilton	Barnes, Julian	Kincaid, Jamaica
Friel, Brian	Frost, Robert	Bellow, Saul	Lawrence, D H
Kane, Sarah	Harrison, Tony	Berger, John	Lessing, Doris
Lochhead, Liz	Heaney, Seamus	Brink, Andre	Lewis, C S
McGrath, John	Hughes, Ted	Bukowski, Charles	Lewis, Sinclair
Mamet, David	Jamie, Kathleen	Burgess, Anthony	Linklater, Eric
Miller, Arthur	Larkin, Philip	Burroughs, William	McCarthy, Cormac
O'Casey, Sean	MacCaig, Norman	Byatt, A S	McEwan, Ian
O'Neill, Eugene	MacDiarmid, Hugh	Camus, Albert	McIlvanney, W
Osborne, John	MacNeice, Louis	Capote, Truman	McLaverty, B
Pinter, Harold	Morgan, Edwin	Carey, Peter	Mailer, Norman
Stoppard, Tom	Muir, Edwin	Carver, Raymond	Malamud, Bernard
Synge, J M	Owen, Wilfred	Cather, Willa	Morrison, Toni
Wesker, Arnold	Plath, Sylvia	Chandler, Raymond	Munro, Alice
Williams, Tennessee	Rosenberg, Isaac	Cheever, John	Nabokov, Vladimir
	Sassoon, Siegfried	Coetzee, J M	Naipaul, V S
	Smith, Iain Crichton	Conrad, Joseph	O'Connor, Flannery
	Thomas, Dylan	Dick, Philip K	Ondaatje, Michael
	Thomas, R S	Doctorow, E L	Orwell, George
	Walcott, Derek	Doyle, Arthur Conan	Pynchon, Thomas
	Yeats, W B	Faulkner, William	Rhys, Jean
		Fitzgerald, F Scott	Roy, Arundhati
		Ford, Richard	Rushdie, Salman
		Forster, E M	Salinger, J D
		Frayn, Michael	Smith, Ali
		Galloway, Janice	Spark, Muriel
		Gibbon, L Grassie	Steinbeck, John
		Golding, William	Tan, Amy
		Gordimer, Nadine	Updike, John
		Gray, Alasdair	Vonnegut, Kurt
		Greene, Graham	Walker, Alice
		Greig, Andrew	Waugh, Evelyn
		Gunn, Neil	Wharton, Edith
		Hemingway, Ernest	Wolfe, Tom
		Huxley, Aldous	Woolf, Virginia
		Ishiguro, Kazuo	

List of Topics

Drama

1	A comparative study of the contribution of setting, incident and dialogue to characterisation and the development of theme in John Osborne's <i>Look Back in Anger</i> and Edward Albee's <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> .
2	A detailed study of the uses Beckett makes of humour in <i>Waiting for Godot</i> , <i>Endgame</i> and <i>Krapp's Last Tape</i> .
3	A detailed comparative study of the dramatic means by which feminist worlds are effectively realised and explored in <i>Top Girls</i> by Caryl Churchill and <i>My Mother Said I Never Should</i> by Charlotte Keatley.
4	An examination of the dramatic means by which Brian Friel explores issues of identity — individual, social and national — in <i>Translations</i> , <i>Making History</i> and <i>Dancing at Lughnasa</i> .
5	David Greig's <i>One Way Street</i> and Liz Lochhead's <i>Quelques Fleurs</i> : a detailed comparative study of the ways in which these two plays make effective use of dramatic monologue.
6	A comparative study of the characterisation and role of women in Henrik Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> , <i>Hedda Gabler</i> and <i>The Master Builder</i> .
7	A comparative study of the dramatic means used in <i>The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil</i> by John McGrath, in <i>Wormwood</i> by Catherine Czerkawska and in <i>Brothers of Thunder</i> by Anne Marie Di Mambro to address issues of contemporary relevance to Scotland (and beyond).
8	Re-defining the tragic hero: a detailed comparative study of the characterisation and role of the male protagonist in two of Miller's plays: <i>Death of a Salesman</i> and <i>The Crucible</i> .
9	A comparative study of the effectiveness of Sean O'Casey's <i>Juno and the Paycock</i> and <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> as dramatic portrayals of the resilience and heroism of ordinary people in the context of political and social upheaval.
10	<p>"Pinter's plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses." (The Online OED, 2006)</p> <p>Drawing evidence from detailed analyses of <i>The Birthday Party</i>, <i>The Caretaker</i> and <i>The Homecoming</i>, I intend to consider the validity of this statement and to come to my own conclusions about the principal dramatic features and effectiveness of Pinter's plays.</p>

11	I intend to analyse and evaluate the principal dramatic techniques Peter Shaffer uses to explore such themes as idolatry, conflicts between passionate and rational impulses, and the quest for immortality in <i>The Royal Hunt of the Sun</i> , <i>Equus</i> , and <i>Amadeus</i> .
12	A study of the characterisation of Beatrice and Hero in <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , Katherina and Bianca in <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> and Portia and Jessica in <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> in order to consider the extent to which the outcomes of Shakespearian comedy may be influenced just as much by the softer sensitivities of female characters as by their obvious strengths.
13	A comparative study of the characterisation and role of the central female characters in Shaw's <i>Major Barbara</i> , <i>Pygmalion</i> and <i>Saint Joan</i> .
14	<p>“While constantly entertaining and delightful and full of wit, Wilde’s plays are carefully crafted to expose darker and deeper themes and to leave audiences with an uncomfortable awareness of more serious issues.”</p> <p>I intend to test the validity of this statement through a comparative analysis of <i>Lady Windermere’s Fan</i>, <i>An Ideal Husband</i> and <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>.</p>
15	A critical analysis of the techniques used to dramatise the forces and passions which destroy the central characters in two of Tennessee Williams’s plays: <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> and <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> .

Poetry

16	A critical study of a range of W H Auden’s poems in order to examine similarities and differences — of theme and of technique — between his love poems and those with a political message.
17	With detailed reference to a range of his poems, I intend to examine the poetic means used by John Betjeman to explore aspects of life in 20th century England.
18	A comparative study of the representation of women in Chaucer’s General Prologue to the <i>Canterbury Tales</i> and in two or three selected Tales.
19	An assessment of the contribution of structural features to the meaning and impact of a range of poems by Edwin Morgan.
20	<p style="text-align: center;">“Wordsworth I love, his books are like the fields Not filled with flowers, but works of human kind” (John Clare)</p> <p>A comparative study of the themes and techniques of a range of poems by William Wordsworth and John Clare.</p>
21	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Scars Upon My Heart</i> (edited and introduced by Catherine W. Reilly)</p> <p>A detailed comparative analysis of the poetic expression of women’s voices during the First World War, drawing evidence from a substantial range of poems from the above anthology.</p>
22	<p style="text-align: center;">“Do I dare Disturb the universe?”</p> <p>A detailed comparative study of T S Eliot’s poetic treatment of action and inaction in <i>The Wasteland</i>, <i>The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock</i> and <i>Rhapsody on a Windy Night</i>.</p>
23	<p style="text-align: center;">“Voices from things growing in a Churchyard”</p> <p>A critical study of the principal means by which, in a range of poems, Hardy explores issues of death and remembrance.</p>

24	<p>“His poems combine passion and energy with impressive technical skill. He is in control; there is no fumbling.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Ruth Fainlight)</p> <p>A critical analysis of the technical skill of a range of poems from Ted Hughes’s <i>Crow</i> (1970).</p>
25	<p>A detailed analysis of a range of Norman MacCaig’s poems in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of some of the principal poetic means — tone, form, structure, word choice, imagery, symbolism — by which he explores the relationship between man and the natural world.</p>
26	<p>An examination of George Mackay Brown’s treatment of the tension between land and sea in a range of his poems (or in a range of his short stories).</p>
27	<p>A study of the literary techniques used to show the effect of time on the individual in a range of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Evidence will be drawn from detailed analysis of at least eight sonnets.</p>
28	<p>I intend to make a detailed examination of the interplay of metaphor and narrative and to consider the effectiveness of that interplay in a range of poems from Douglas Dunn’s <i>Elegies</i> (1985).</p>
29	<p>“No one could be that forsaken — and certainly not Wyatt. He is acting a part.”</p> <p>By closely examining a range of Sir Thomas Wyatt’s poems, concentrating on the techniques he employs to create a distinctive poetic voice, I intend to argue that there is more reality and vitality to Wyatt’s rejection poems than one would expect from someone who is simply “acting a part” of the rejected lover.</p>
30	<p style="text-align: center;">“The Man who dreamed of Faeryland”</p> <p>Through close reference to a range of his early poems, I will attempt to show how Yeats makes effective use of Celtic Mythology as a means of exploring personal experiences and beliefs.</p>

Prose Fiction

31	One of the main concerns of George Eliot's novels, in my opinion, is to highlight the restrictions imposed by social conventions and moral attitudes on various aspects of personal freedom. My Specialist Study will focus on Eliot's presentation of the effects of such restrictions on her central characters in <i>Middlemarch</i> and <i>Daniel Deronda</i> .
32	Marriage, Money, Love and the Single Woman: a comparative assessment of two Jane Austen heroines: Elizabeth Bennet in <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> and Emma Woodhouse in <i>Emma</i> .
33	A detailed comparative study of the importance of setting — physical, cultural and historical — in Neil Gunn's <i>Morning Tide</i> , <i>Highland River</i> and <i>The Silver Darlings</i> .
34	A critical analysis of the uses Evelyn Waugh makes of satire in <i>Decline and Fall</i> , <i>Black Mischief</i> and <i>Scoop</i> .
35	A comparative study of the narrative techniques employed in the portrayal of central female characters in <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i> and <i>Wuthering Heights</i> .
36	A detailed exploration of conflict and duality in terms of both individuals and wider society as conveyed through characterisation and setting in William McIlvanney's <i>Laidlaw</i> , <i>The Papers of Tony Veitch</i> and <i>Strange Loyalties</i> .
37	The Use of the Doppelganger in 19th Century Scottish Literature: a comparative analysis of characterisation, structure and theme in <i>The Private Memoirs of a Justified Sinner</i> by James Hogg and <i>The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> by R L Stevenson.
38	A critical analysis of John Galt's portrayal of 19th Century Scottish rural life in <i>The Annals of the Parish</i> and <i>The Provost</i> .
39	A comparative study of the principal literary means employed in <i>The Jewel in the Crown</i> by Paul Scott, <i>Heat and Dust</i> by Ruth Praver Jhabvala and <i>A Passage to India</i> by E M Forster in order to explore the influence of British Rule in India.
40	A comparative analysis of Joseph Conrad's narrative style and characterisation in <i>Heart of Darkness</i> and <i>The Secret Agent</i> .
41	A comparative analysis of the literary techniques employed by Edgar Allan Poe in a range of his short stories to explore the powers of the conscience.

42	Focusing particularly on dialogue and narrative voice, I intend to make a comparative study of the literary techniques employed by Raymond Chandler in <i>The Big Sleep</i> , William McIlvanney in <i>Laidlaw</i> and Ian Rankin in <i>Resurrection Men</i> to create protagonists who are cynical and alienated from the societies in which they operate as detectives.
43	A detailed comparative study of Frédéric Beigbeder's <i>Windows on the World</i> and Ian McEwan's <i>Saturday</i> as explorations of moral ambiguity and the search for meaning in randomness and coincidence.
44	A critical appraisal of Angela Carter's use of traditional myths and fairy tales to explore female sexuality in her novel <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> and in four of her short stories — <i>The Bloody Chamber</i> , <i>The Snow Child</i> , <i>The Lady of the House of Love</i> and <i>The Company of Wolves</i> .
45	A study of Margaret Atwood's representation of the challenges to women's sense of self and women's responses to these challenges in <i>The Edible Woman</i> , <i>Lady Oracle</i> and <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> .
46	A comparative critical analysis of Virginia Woolf's use of the presence of the sea and water in the exploration of key ideas in her novels <i>To the Lighthouse</i> and <i>The Waves</i> .
47	An analytical and evaluative study of the literary techniques D H Lawrence employs in <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> and <i>Women in Love</i> to create powerful female characters who challenge the social conventions of their times.
48	A comparative study of the literary techniques used to convey the experience of the central black female characters as they encounter oppression in the American South in <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston, <i>Beloved</i> by Toni Morrison and <i>The Color Purple</i> by Alice Walker.
49	An examination of the relationship between author and reader as explored through the uses of structure and symbolism in Italo Calvino's <i>If on a winter's night a traveler</i> and Jorge Luis Borges's <i>Ficciones</i> .
50	Laying bare the anxieties of the 19th Century: a detailed comparative study of the ways in which Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i> and Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> explore societal attitudes towards sex, religion and science.
51	A detailed comparative analysis of the satirical treatment of hypocrisy in Thackeray's <i>Vanity Fair</i> and Dickens's <i>Hard Times</i> .
52	More than stereotypes? A detailed examination of the principal literary means used by James Kelman to portray central male characters in <i>A Chancer</i> , <i>A Disaffection</i> and <i>How Late It Was, How Late</i> .

53	A critical analysis of the techniques used by E M Forster to present the theme of forbidden experience in his novels <i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> , <i>A Room with a View</i> and <i>Maurice</i> .
54	A detailed comparative analysis of the representations of home and family in <i>Brick Lane</i> by Monica Ali and <i>White Teeth</i> by Zadie Smith.
55	A comparative study of Graham Greene's portrayal of religion and the concept of sin in <i>Brighton Rock</i> , <i>The Power and the Glory</i> and <i>A Burnt-Out Case</i> .

Prose Non-fiction

56	A detailed comparative study of two war memoirs — <i>Shoot to Kill</i> by Michael Asher and <i>Jarhead</i> by Anthony Swofford — examining in particular the ways in which first-person narrative and imagery are deployed and atmosphere and setting are created to explore issues such as isolation, loneliness and the individual's status and sense of identity in time of war.
57	A detailed analysis of the techniques used by William Dalrymple to explore places, peoples and cultures in <i>In Xanadu — A Quest</i> and in <i>City of Djinnns — A Year in Delhi</i> .
58	A study of the principal techniques used by George Orwell in his portrayal of the deprivations of the life of the lower classes of society in <i>Down and Out in Paris and London</i> and in <i>The Road to Wigan Pier</i> .
59	A comparative analysis of Paul Theroux's <i>The Kingdom by the Sea</i> and Jonathan Raban's <i>Coasting</i> as examples of the art of travel writing.
60	A critical appraisal of the effectiveness of Laurie Lee's evocation of time and place based on evidence from his autobiographical volumes <i>Cider with Rosie</i> (1959), <i>As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning</i> (1969), <i>I Can't Stay Long</i> (1979) and <i>A Moment of War</i> (1991).
61	A comparative study of two Orkney Writers: Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown. My study will focus on comparing and contrasting the literary means by which each of these writers effectively creates a sense of place and time in their respective texts: <i>Scottish Journey</i> and <i>An Orkney Tapestry</i> .

Language

62	On-going changes in Scots: a study of ten lexical variables across three generations in a Scottish community.
63	The linguistic characteristics of football commentary: a detailed analytical case study of six Scottish Premier League matches.
64	A comparative study of the use of figurative language in six political speeches: three by Tony Blair and three by Gordon Brown.
65	The sociolinguistics of text messaging: I intend to gather data from a wide range of sources and to subject that data to detailed analysis in order to classify it from a sociolinguistic perspective.
66	My Specialist Study will take the form of a detailed analysis of the forms and functions of tag questions in a corpus of Scottish speech or writing.
67	A study of some changes in the grammar of negation in the history of English.
68	My purpose is to record evidence and to use that evidence to produce a detailed sociolinguistic account of code-switching in a Polish-English bilingual family.

Media

69	<p>Film <i>The Naked and the Dead</i> (Raoul Walsh) <i>Catch-22</i> (Mike Nichols) A comparative study of the directors' uses of cinematic techniques — camera, lighting, mise-en-scène, montage — to convey the horrors of war.</p>
70	<p>Film A detailed critical comparison of the filmic techniques employed by Francis Coppola to depict the rise to power of Michael Corleone in <i>The Godfather</i> and his decline in <i>The Godfather Part Two</i>. In addition to analysing the changing representation of Michael Corleone in terms of film language (mise-en-scène, editing, sound) I intend to analyse the narrative structure of each of these films to show how it contributes to the central theme of the corrupting influence of power.</p>
71	<p>Television A detailed critical comparison of <i>Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?</i> and <i>Deal or No Deal</i> in terms of televisual language (set design, lighting, mise-en-scène, sound), narrative structure, role and representation of the host, contestant and audience, and the attitude to winning and losing and to the acquisition of wealth expressed or implied.</p>
72	<p>Print journalism A comparative study of the coverage and representation of the issue of climate change in <i>The Independent</i> and <i>The Daily Mail</i>. I intend to make a qualitative and quantitative analysis by taking a single month's coverage of this topic in each newspaper and analysing it in terms of prioritising, frequency of coverage and content, both image and text.</p>
73	<p>Advertising A detailed critical evaluation of the representation of Scotland in print and television advertising. I intend to study a range of advertisements for products seen as typically Scottish (beef, whisky, Scottish Widows insurance...), analyse the images and texts used in them to convey a form of national identity and assess the possible effect of such stereotyping.</p>