Common questions about National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher English

Unit assessment

Can I mix and match the assessment tasks from different Unit assessment support packs? At National 5, for example, can I assess Outcome 2 from the Analysis and Evaluation Unit using Unit assessment support pack 3 and Outcome 1 from the Creation and Production Unit using Unit assessment support pack 2?

This would be an acceptable approach. As long as the Assessment Standards are met and applied there is no issue with combining material from different packages.

You are able to use Unit assessment support packs in their entirety or mix and match, eg using talk from one, writing from another. A combined Unit assessment is a suggested way of overtaking Assessment Standards, but elements of another Unit-by-Unit assessment support pack can also be used. The important thing is that all of the Assessment Standards are matched with appropriate evidence.

If we want to use a Unit assessment support pack but change the text (such as replacing *Romeo and Juliet* with an alternative film of similar difficulty) would this have to go through prior verification?

Changing the topic does not change the assessment — the Assessment Standards are what matter. Provided you keep the types of question and apply the same Assessment Standards, prior verification does not have to be sought.

Are there time limits for completing Unit assessments, and should they be completed under exam conditions?

The Unit assessments for English do not have to be completed within formal timed conditions. The assessor must exercise professional responsibility to ensure the evidence is the candidates' own work and procedures should be put in place to check this.

Are there word guides/limits for the writing assessments?

There are no word limits for these assessments. The priority is to ensure the Assessment Standards are being met.

The only areas where the number of words is considered are the externally-assessed Portfolios and the Literacy Units.

For the Portfolio, there are upper limits: National 5 is 1,000 words, and Higher is 1,300 words.

For Literacy, minimum word lengths apply: at least 80 words for National 3, at least 300 words for National 4, and at least 500 words for National 5.

Under what conditions does the writing assessment for the Creation and Production Unit have to be conducted?

Assessors must exercise their professional responsibility in ensuring that evidence submitted by a candidate is their own work. Unit assessments should not be completed in formal timed conditions: candidates can work on writing assessments at home, they can re-draft and they can use a dictionary.

The candidate can get advice and guidance from their assessor, but it is not acceptable for the assessor to provide key ideas, structure or plan, to suggest specific wording or to correct errors in spelling or punctuation. Support may be offered in such ways as, eg one-to-one discussions. The assessor should, however, put in place procedures to check that the evidence produced is the candidate's own work.

Can candidates use dictionaries for Reading assessments?

Yes, candidates can use dictionaries for all English and Literacy Unit assessments.

Are candidates required to handwrite assessable work?

Candidates can type or handwrite their written work in English (and Literacy).

Can candidates be assessed in pairs or groups for Talking?

Yes, providing each candidate is assessed individually and individual records are kept.

How do I avoid over-assessment?

The best way to avoid over-assessment is to try to integrate Unit assessments into teaching and learning programmes. For example, in National 5 and Higher, an idea might be to assess reading during a study of the Scottish texts. If you are doing, say, MacCaig, a possible approach would be to study three of the six poems from the list with a whole class or group discussion approach. Then, use the fourth poem, unseen, as a reading assessment. Just follow the approach suggested in the published Unit assessment support packs and there is no need for prior verification. Make sure your questions give your candidates opportunities to achieve the Assessment Standards. If you are preparing your students for the portfolio (in National 5 or Higher), assess one of their pieces of writing against the Assessment Standards. If your candidates are carrying out research programmes for a discursive essay then this might be an ideal opportunity to assess talking. This need not take too much time out of teaching and learning: while others are researching or writing, the teacher could assess a small group for talking.

Remember, Units assess minimum competence at any given level, and each Assessment Standard has to be met once only.

If a candidate does not pass an assessment, will the entire assessment have to be repeated?

Unlike the NAB system where whole assessments had to be repeated, under the new arrangements only Assessment Standards that have not been achieved need to be re-assessed. It might just mean asking a candidate to expand on an initially thin answer, or a candidate could give a spoken response, where appropriate. If you accept a spoken response, make a short, written note of the response for your records.

As has always been the case, if a candidate did not achieve any of the Assessment Standards you would have to make a judgement on whether they were ready for assessment at that level. Further teaching and learning would certainly be required.

How do I keep track of which Assessment Standards candidates have achieved?

Perhaps the best way to approach this is to become very familiar with the Assessment Standards, and then to internalise them. In this way you can 'spot' teaching and learning situations where Assessment Standards might have been achieved. Share the Assessment Standards with candidates so that they know what they are aiming for. They may well point out/offer a reminder that a piece of work could be used to meet a particular Assessment Standard. Examples of possible record-keeping approaches are provided with the published Unit assessment support packs.

How do I know that my assessment judgements are valid?

We all make assessment judgements all the time in teaching. We know that we are on the right lines by comparing our standards to published assessment exemplars, conducting group moderation, and from an accumulation of teaching, learning and assessment experience. We have come to know the SCQF equivalencies: National 4 is equivalent to Standard Grade General Level and Intermediate 1; National 5 is equivalent to Standard Grade Credit and Intermediate 2; Higher is Higher. There is also a key role for Nominees: if you are unsure about a standard, contact your local authority Nominee for advice. The Nominees are very familiar with the standard. Above all, the best support in this is discussion with colleagues: asking a colleague to have a look at a piece of writing, or a set of responses to reading or listening. Internal verification is also a very important aspect of confirming the validity of your assessment judgements — see questions on this below.

If I am choosing a passage to assess reading, how do I know it is at the right level?

Remember the key language descriptors: National 3 — simple, National 4 — straightforward, National 5 — detailed, Higher — detailed and complex, Advanced Higher — complex and sophisticated. The Unit assessment support packs exemplify the appropriate levels of demand.

If I didn't use Unit assessment support packs exactly as published, should I be concerned about verification?

When submitting evidence for verification, make sure that you annotate clearly where and why you have made your assessment judgements. Verifiers will not be expecting the exclusive use of published Unit assessment support packs. The main thing for Verifiers is that you are applying the Assessment Standards correctly. Sound internal verification procedures (perhaps using your local Nominees), will help to ensure that everyone has the confidence to make appropriate assessment judgements.

If you are in any doubt about the assessment that you have devised, or if your approach is radically different from the published Unit assessment support packs, remember that SQA provides a free prior verification service that will give feedback on your assessment materials.

Why does what is required for Unit assessment seem to be so different from the exam? Why are we not to give marks, for example?

Units assess minimum competence at a given level. Assessment Standards describe what we would expect to be minimum competence at that level. As such, they can only be pass or fail — achieved or not achieved. They have a value in themselves, providing records of achievement for candidates who don't go on to complete a Course award. They also act as staging posts as candidates build up skills towards meeting the added value of the Course assessment. We wouldn't expect candidates to have a complete skills set until the end of the Course. Try to remember the notion of 'minimum competence' when devising assessments, and when making assessment judgements. You should not be assessing the top range of the skills — it is minimum competence at that level.

You should judge a candidate's work with reference to the Assessment Standards. Marks do not help here. Your question should be: can I find evidence that a candidate has achieved the Assessment Standards within this piece of work/set of responses?

I'm confused by the judging evidence tables. What is the best approach to work out which questions, and how many questions, a candidate has to answer correctly in order to achieve an Outcome?

Again, the best approach here is to internalise the Assessment Standards, and look out for places where a candidate has achieved them. It is worth noting that some questions in, say, a reading assessment might not just be tied to one Assessment Standard: a candidate might meet an Assessment Standard in an answer to a range of questions.

Perhaps it is helpful to highlight the importance of column three (Making assessment judgements) in the judging evidence tables. This column provides concise advice on how the Assessment Standards should be achieved. Column four of each judging evidence table is essentially advisory: it is a suggested approach as to how the Assessment Standards might be met.

Where does literature feature in the National 4 English Course?

English can be delivered within the contexts of literature, language and media. It is perfectly acceptable to teach literature in the normal way for National 4 English. Reading at National 4 can be assessed through literature — perhaps listening, too. However, it is worth pointing out that if you are assessing reading for Literacy at the same time as you are assessing it for English, the expectation is that you would use a non-fiction text for this combined purpose. You could, of course, select a non-fiction text that suited a themed study of literature.

If National 4 candidates are intending to progress to National 5, it makes sense for them to study literature.

When should I do the Added Value Unit with my S4 National 4 pupils?

Remember that the intention is that Added Value comes after minimum competence. It is a demonstration of a candidate going beyond the acquisition of the Course's basic skills. It is a sign for candidates that they have made significant progress. As such, it is best placed in the second half of the Course. While National 5 candidates are finishing off their portfolios and preparing for the Course assessment, National 4 candidates could be working on their Added Value Units. This might give students a sense of moving towards the natural completion of the Course. Verification for Added Value is Round 2 and takes place in May.

What is the best way to approach internal verification?

There is no set, or required, way to approach this. Some centres have a policy that must be followed by all departments or faculties, while others allow for a flexible approach. The main thing is that you engineer a situation in which other specialists are looking at, and reviewing, your assessment materials and judgements. In a subject department this can be arranged in fairly straightforward and supportive ways. It might be possible, for example, to form 'assessment pairs', pairing up two teachers to discuss assessment approaches, to check marking. In a departmental meeting situation, a good sense of an Assessment Standard can emerge from a group discussion of pieces of candidates' writing, or watching video recordings of talk/discussion. Mini markers' meetings can be held to moderate the assessment of reading and listening; newly-devised assessments can be discussed and reviewed in terms of level of demand, Course coverage, etc.

SQA has produced guidance on internal verification. This guidance suggests templates which can be downloaded and used to support an effective internal verification process. Further information can be found at: www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

I teach in a one-person department. How can I carry out internal verification?

A local Nominee would be able to offer real assistance in this instance: assessment materials and candidates' scripts could be exchanged physically or electronically, and standards monitored in this way. If a Nominee is not available, a link with another centre or a local

authority group would be invaluable, and would enable you to feel much more comfortable about making assessment judgements.

Again, consult www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit for further guidance.

How do I make it clear that I have carried out internal verification?

As part of the external verification process, Verifiers will not expect you to include a centre-devised policy on internal verification along with your sample of assessment materials. There will be an expectation, however, that evidence of internal verification will be visible. This could take the form of annotated 'double marking', or 'cross marking', where a second assessor notes and comments on where Assessment Standards have been achieved. The common practice of using different colours of pen is useful here. Comments, rather than just a series of ticks, will make it very clear that a second assessor has reviewed an assessment. If you have had meetings where you have moderated standards, it would be helpful to include a brief note of the meeting along with your sample of assessment materials for external verification.

Is it possible to use work done towards the Advanced Higher dissertation as evidence for the Analysis and Evaluation of Literary Texts Unit?

Yes. In many ways, the dissertation lends itself to both Outcomes for this Unit as the dissertation is likely to consist of an analysis of at least two texts, and there is a requirement for candidates to make an independent selection of at least one text. The candidate must be assessed on untaught texts; therefore the dissertation is again ideally suited to this purpose.

Evidence for these Outcomes need not be written: candidates could give presentations on work done towards a dissertation, or hold mini tutorials on their findings. Assessors could record their assessment judgements on a detailed checklist. It is important to note that this Unit could be achieved before the dissertation is completed.

Is it possible to use work done for the portfolio as evidence for the Creation and Production Unit?

Yes. Again, this would be a sensible approach. Note that for Assessment Standard 1.3 (Critically reflecting on the development of their writing), a candidate must produce two drafts of a piece of writing. The assessor would assess the second draft of the piece in order to judge whether or not it had met Assessment Standards 1.1 and 1.2.

How do candidates show that they have met Assessment Standard 1.3 of the Creation and Production Unit (Critically reflecting on the development of their writing)?

When candidates submit a first draft of a piece of writing, a teacher/assessor would offer some feedback on how the piece could be improved. The candidate would consider these comments (which could be written or oral), and then make changes in a second draft. If using

word-processing software, a candidate could activate the 'Track Changes' function, and could use the 'Insert Comment' function to add a brief commentary on the main changes made to the first draft. Or, if working on printed drafts, a candidate could simply write annotations on a printed draft to indicate and explain the reasons for changes. Note: this does not need to be a complete draft at this stage. It could be, for example, the opening section of a piece of writing.

Is it possible for a candidate to achieve the Analysis and Evaluation Unit having done work on just one text which has been selected by the teacher?

No, to achieve Outcome 1, candidates must select at least one text of their own. (For this reason, the Unit fits so well with the dissertation.)

For evidence generated from materials other than the dissertation, it is important to ensure that candidates have the opportunity to select one text of their own. It is, of course, perfectly acceptable for a teacher to give candidates one text and then ask them to find another with which 'to explore connections and comparisons' (required for Assessment Standard 1.3).

Can you provide some guidance about Outcome 2 (Develop literary research skills) of the Analysis and Evaluation Unit?

Achievement of Outcome 2 will be exemplified at the Advanced Higher nominee event in December 2015, and the materials from this will be published on SQA's secure website in January 2016. Essentially, having selected appropriate core texts, a candidate has to formulate a simple research plan, choose at least one secondary source, and then demonstrate their organisation of research findings as they present their planning and research in either written or oral form. Detailed advice on this can be found in the Unit assessment support packs, from which is taken the following:

Candidates should demonstrate understanding by presenting their findings appropriately as a formal, structured presentation/tutorial or written work. There should be clear evidence of:

♦ an introduction
♦ the purpose of the presentation/tutorial/written work
♦ a clear line of argument
♦ analysis/evaluation of the texts
♦ appropriate secondary reading/research
♦ a clear conclusion

Candidates should include a bibliography of the secondary source or sources consulted and notes/comments indicating their evaluation of the source or sources and the impact these make on the research analysis; alternatively, candidates could discuss this in a presentation/tutorial.

Course assessment

For the final question in the National 5 and Higher Textual Analysis in the Critical Reading question papers, are candidates required to produce an essay or is it acceptable for them to respond using bullet points?

In the Textual Analysis, the final question does not have to be answered as a mini essay. It can be answered as developed bullet points or in any other way the candidate wishes. This is advised in the marking instructions to accompany the specimen question paper. SQA has no preference.

Are candidates required to provide quotations in their answers to this question?

Direct quotations and references to text are both appropriate and acceptable here.

Can other texts from the set text list be used for the National 5 or Higher critical essay section of the Critical Reading question paper?

You can use any texts you wish for the critical essay (from the list or not). The only restriction is that a text used in the Scottish section cannot be used twice, and a different genre of text has to be used. If a text, or an extract from a text, appears in the Textual Analysis section, it is still acceptable to use this text as the subject of a response for a critical essay.

In the National 5 and Higher Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation question papers, why are questions not labelled with U, A or E?

It is the intention, with the new style and format of the questions, that the requirements of the questions are immediately clear to candidates, and do not need additional codes for further clarification.

When will candidate exemplars be available?

Candidate exemplars are now available for both Course and Unit assessment at: www.sqa.org.uk/understandingstandards.

If we decide to study poetry, and choose McCaig, do we have to study all of the set poems?

Each author on the list of Scottish writers at National 5 and Higher has to be read in its entire specification. If you choose McCaig then all six poems have to be studied. Candidates will not know which poem or extract will be the focus of the question (nor which others might be the subject of the final question relating to the writer's work) so could only meet this requirement by knowing all of the texts.

How many poems have to be compared for the National 5 or Higher Textual Analysis?

The requirement is to refer to at least one other poem — so it can be one or two, or more.

I am using an old edition of the play *Tally's Blood* for National 5 English. The new edition is slightly different. Does this matter?

No. It is true that the new edition of the play is different in that Act 2 Scene 5 was removed from the text when Hodder Gibson published it. This was done at the request of the author. In light of this, SQA will not use the original Act 2 Scene 5 as an extract for the purposes of the question paper. It is, of course, perfectly acceptable for a candidate to make reference to this scene as part of an answer to the final question in the Textual Analysis if they have studied an earlier edition.

There are variations in some of the published editions of works from the Scottish set text list. Does SQA recommend certain editions?

SQA is aware of these variations. In an acknowledgement that English departments may well be in possession of a number of different editions, SQA does not recommend specific editions. SQA will endeavour, however, to take extracts from the most up-to-date versions of the text, where possible. This will allow for cases (such as the one above) where a writer decides to revise a text. Marking will not disadvantage candidates who have studied a different edition from that printed in the question paper.

Please see the 2014 National 5 Critical Reading past paper for a note of the editions used: http://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/papers/2014/N5_English_all_2014.pdf

Can a candidate submit more than one poem, if they are submitting poetry for the portfolio?

One piece of writing from any given genre should be submitted. A series of poems on a related topic or theme would, however, be acceptable. Length should be appropriate to purpose.

Why do we have to use an SQA template to submit portfolios for National 5 and Higher English?

The decision to move National 5 and Higher English portfolios to e-marking has been under consideration for some time and we now have the systems in place to be able to support it. The benefits of e-marking have been significant for English question papers and we are keen to extend the same benefits in terms of marking training and quality assurance to portfolios. Over the last two years, the portfolio has been the Component that practitioners have expressed concerns about in terms of the reliability of marking and the move to e-marking is in many ways a direct response to this feedback.

Are candidates able to access and use the templates themselves? And could they do this at home?

Candidates can download the templates themselves from the English homepage on SQA's public website and copy and paste anything they have already started working on.

Should you start a new template for each piece of writing?

No, it is important that both portfolio pieces are copied into one template. The 'broadly creative' piece should be placed first, before the 'broadly discursive' piece.

Do footnotes work with the SQA templates?

Footnotes can be inserted in the usual way.

We have printed some completed portfolio pieces already. What should we do?

If you have candidates who have finalised a hand-written piece or printed a finalised word-processed piece, there is an option this year (2015–16) to submit the finalised piece without re-writing or re-printing, so long as candidates write their Scottish Candidate Number on each page and add a page count, eg 1/2, 2/2.

Which genres of writing should be covered in the Advanced Higher portfolio?

For the Advanced Higher portfolio, candidates have to produce two pieces of writing from the following genres: persuasive, informative, argumentative, reflective, poetry, prose fiction, drama. There is no requirement to write both a broadly creative piece and a broadly discursive piece. For example, it is perfectly acceptable for a candidate to write a reflective piece and a poem, or a persuasive piece and an informative piece.

Is there a word limit for portfolio pieces at Advanced Higher?

Portfolio pieces at Advanced Higher have to be at least 1,000 words (with the exception of poetry which could be shorter). There is no upper limit.

As there are now no set texts for Advanced Higher, will the questions in the Literary Study question paper be directed to specific writers or time periods?

As there are no set texts, or specified writers, the intention is that the questions in the Literary Study question paper will be open enough to allow for freedom of choice here, while also retaining sufficient depth and complexity in demand, as appropriate to this level. Please see below for information about the Exemplar Question Paper.

Will there be any significant changes between the Specimen Question Paper and the Exemplar Question Paper for Advanced Higher English?

In December 2015, we will publish Exemplar Question Papers for all new Advanced Higher Courses that include a question paper as part of the Course assessment. The Literary Study Exemplar Question Paper for Advanced Higher English will vary slightly from the Specimen Question Paper, as a consequence of additional targeted engagement with stakeholders. There are now no references to specific time periods or movements, in order to make the questions relevant to a wider range of texts, and each section contains an equal number of questions. Additionally, there is a greater range of question styles, incorporating command words such as 'analyse' and 'compare', as well as 'discuss', which is the main command word used in the Specimen Question Paper. This is to provide candidates with additional support to structure an appropriate response to the ideas and expectations of particular questions.

How many texts should be covered for the dissertation and for the Literary Study question paper?

The expectation is that two novels or plays would be covered. Poetry and short stories would depend on length/complexity, but a rough guide here might be five short texts. In a few cases, it would be possible for a candidate to focus on just one text for a dissertation. However, this approach would be reserved for very long novels (eg *Bleak House*), or highly complex shorter texts (eg *The Wasteland*).

For Literary Study, please refer to the Specimen Question Paper and the Exemplar Question Paper.

Can candidates use media or language texts for the dissertation?

No, candidates cannot use media or language texts for their dissertations. The focus of Advanced Higher English is on literary texts.

Literacy Units

What are the implications for assessment arrangements for the Literacy Units?

As described by Specification 3, for National Literacy Units:

♦ candidates will not be permitted to be exempted from any of the four assessed skills of reading, writing, listening or talking
♦ candidates will not be permitted to use a human reader or a human scribe for the reading and writing skills being explicitly assessed

A wide range of other support methods may be used. Please refer to the S*upportive practices for National Literacy Units* section of our website for further information: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67598.5248.html.

There is also a video which you may find useful: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/66274.html.

What support strategies are available to all candidates when they are undertaking the Literacy (National 4) Unit assessment?

Page 5 of the *English Listening and Writing Package 1 combined approach* Unit assessment support pack for National 4 provides information on support strategies for all candidates: https://secure.sqa.org.uk/secure/CFE/English

Do candidates need to pass the Literacy Unit in order to gain the National 3 or National 4 English Course?

Yes, it is part of the Course Specification. The Literacy Units are mandatory within the National 3 and National 4 English qualifications.

Is it possible to combine the assessment of the Literacy Unit with the assessment of the other Units in the English Courses?

Combined assessment of Literacy and English is possible in the combined approach — provided texts are transactional. Where special assessment arrangements are required for candidates with additional support needs, however, this may not be possible.

How can Literacy be taught at National 5?

Literacy is not a mandatory Unit of the National 5 English Course. It is a free-standing Unit.

It could be delivered to school candidates not undertaking a full English Course in fourth or fifth year. It could be delivered on its own or integrated with other subjects. For example, it could be studied in conjunction with Scottish Studies or History Units as part of a learning theme.

National 5 Literacy is worth 6 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 5. Achievement of National 5 Literacy guarantees **automatic** certification of the Core Skill of Communication at SCQF level 5.

There is a National 5 bridging pack on SQA's secure website which you may find useful. Your SQA Co-ordinator will have access to this material: https://secure.sqa.org.uk/secure/CFE/English.

The bridging Unit assessment support pack for the Literacy (National 5) Unit/English shows how literacy skills can be evidenced within the National 5 English Course, and used to gain certification of the free-standing Unit in Literacy.

Please note that Specification 3 applies to the Literacy (National 5) Unit.

Further information on supportive practices in the delivery of Literacy can be found here: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67598.5248.html.

You may also find the following link to our 'Recognising Positive Achievement' document useful: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Recognising_Positive_Achievement_N4N5.pdf

How does the bridging pack help generate evidence for the Literacy (National 5) Unit?

As stated in the bridging pack, its purpose is to provide advice for centres wishing to generate evidence for the Literacy (National 5) Unit within the delivery of the National 5 English Course.

Meeting all the Outcomes and Assessment Standards of the free-standing Literacy (National 5) Unit will allow candidates to achieve certification in that Unit so long as there is an entry and a result for the Unit — certification will not happen automatically.

Candidates are able to overtake both English and Literacy Outcomes using the bridging pack — but if they fail the English Course assessment at National 5 they cannot gain a pass for National 4 English unless they also achieve the National 4 Added Value Unit.

In my National 5 class some pupils have dropped down to National 4. They have completed all of the National 5 Unit assessments. These assessments will cover National 4 English, but what about National 4 Literacy?

Unit assessments for National 5 English in Analysis and Evaluation, and Creation and Production can also contribute to National 4 English as the Courses are in a hierarchy. The Assessment Standards for National 4 Literacy are also met, except in two key areas:

♦ National 4 Literacy Outcome 1 (Reading) asks candidates to comment on the effectiveness of a piece of reading (Assessment Standard 1.3). In other words, a personal response to the text must be made and supported by reference to the text.
♦ National 4 Literacy Outcome 2 (Listening) asks candidates to comment on the effectiveness of a listening text (Assessment Standard 2.3). In other words, a personal response to the material must be made and supported by reference to the text.

It is worth noting that these assessments could be met by simply inserting a question into your assessments for Reading and Listening. Spoken responses from candidates could also be taken and recorded.

Remember that for a Course award in National 4 English to be achieved, an Added Value Unit will also have to be completed.

General Curriculum for Excellence questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.