



Course Report 2017

Subject	English
Level	National 5

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

Component 1: question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Candidate responses and feedback from markers and teachers suggest that candidates found the passage immediately accessible, interesting, thought-provoking and engaging. The topic was football-related, but the writer reflected on personal experience to explore the theme of resilience (as indicated in the title), and this allowed for wider relevance.

Candidates approached the questions with commitment, demonstrating their learning of the key language skills of the course. Most were able to answer all questions. This gives an indication that candidates were presented at an appropriate level. Very few candidates did not complete the paper.

The component performed as expected with all questions providing appropriate and expected levels of discrimination. This contributed to Grade Boundary decisions being broadly consistent with those of 2016.

Component 2: question paper: Critical Reading

As was apparent last year, candidates demonstrated their critical reading skills effectively in responses to both the Scottish text section and the critical essay. Overall, it was clear that candidates had been prepared thoroughly for this component.

Performance was very similar across all Scottish text options, reflecting parity of demand. In terms of uptake, the most popular genre again was poetry, with Carol Ann Duffy attracting most responses. There were similar numbers for Norman MacCaig. However, there was a slight increase in uptake for drama, with *Sailmaker* being the third most popular choice overall, and *Tally's Blood* fourth. Once again, prose was the least popular in terms of uptake. In this genre, the stories of Donovan overtook *The Cone Gatherers* this year, with the stories of Crichton Smith next, followed by Stevenson with *Kidnapped* (which was slightly up), and *Gideon Mack*.

Some candidates opted to answer on Scottish texts for both tasks in the Critical Reading question paper, but most chose a writer from outwith the prescribed list for the critical essay question. Question 3 was the most popular option for critical essay responses. This question allowed candidates to respond using either prose fiction or prose non-fiction texts. The key demand of the question — the textual exploration of an important issue or theme — suited common National 5 prose fiction novels (*Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, etc), and short stories (eg *The Test*, *The Pedestrian*, *The Lighthouse*), but also allowed candidates to answer on non-fiction prose texts (eg *A Hanging* by George Orwell, the writings of Fergal Keane, etc).

Given that poetry is the most popular option for the Scottish Textual Analysis, it is perhaps not surprising that prose was the most popular genre for this section of the Critical Reading question paper. Drama and poetry questions were done in roughly equal numbers. Popular drama texts included *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The*

Crucible, *Blood Brothers*, and *The Letterbox*. The poetry of the First World War was popular, as was the poetry of Seamus Heaney.

Media responses made up approximately 10% of total responses, with most candidates opting for question 7 for responses on films such as *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Jaws*, *The Dark Knight*, etc. There was a very slight increase in responses to questions from the Language section, with candidates here opting for question 9 which had as its focus the use of persuasive language in advertising.

Component 3: portfolio: Writing

Candidate performance here was very similar to that of previous years. This is not surprising, given the familiarity in English teaching of the requirements of a Portfolio-based assessment from Standard Grade and Intermediate English. There was clear evidence of prior learning, indicating that teachers are working hard to encourage and to develop the skills of writing.

For the 'Broadly Creative' piece, the most popular type of writing submitted dealt with candidates' personal experience. However, markers noted this year that there was an increase in candidates attempting to write creatively, most often in the form of pieces of short fiction. A few candidates submitted poetry, drama scripts, or pieces written in Scots. There was a slight increase in candidates exploring the genres of fantasy and science fiction.

For 'Broadly Discursive' pieces, the most common approach is for candidates to select an issue-based topic, conduct research, and to write about it in a persuasive or argumentative way. Common topics for this approach were: the Trump presidency, social media, global inequality, exploitation, racism, mental health, bullying, body image, etc. However, some candidates successfully pursued, researched, and wrote about, information-based topics: biographies, reports, film reviews, etc. Some candidates chose to use anecdotal insertions in 'broadly discursive' pieces in ways that enhanced the ideas expressed.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Question 1: Most candidates could demonstrate appropriate analytical skills in this reasonably straightforward opening question.

Question 3: Most candidates achieved some success with this question, gaining 3 or 4 marks, showing their ability to identify or to summarise key points.

Question 4: Usually, questions involving the analysis of metaphorical language prove to be challenging, but this was done well by candidates.

Question 6: Despite the challenge posed by the reference to the word 'meritocracy' in the question, most candidates did well here, perhaps assisted by the supportive scaffolding of the question.

Question 8: Candidates dealt effectively with the requirement to deal with one aspect of sentence construction. Most were able to identify a relevant example of the writer's use of sentence structure, but not all were able to provide a full analytical explanation.

Question 9: Again, almost all candidates were able to select an appropriate expression from the passage, but some were not able to relate it evaluatively to the conclusion of the passage.

Component 2: question paper: Critical Reading

As has been the case since the inception of National 5 English, candidates have been very well prepared for the extract-based textual analysis. Candidates were successful in their demonstration of their skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation in the questions on the extracts. For the most part, they scored well. Many candidates successfully employed a clear three-part approach for their answers to the final question of the textual analysis. This seemed to help them to structure their response, and to ensure coverage of all aspects of the question.

For the most part, candidates were able to select an appropriate critical essay question, and offer a response that was detailed, relevant, and displayed knowledge of the text(s) studied. Most essays met the minimum standards required for technical accuracy.

Question 3: Candidates made a clear selection of an important issue or theme, and were able to offer a relevant exploration of the text, analysing the writer's key techniques.

Question 4: Most candidates chose character here, but some successfully offered a response on a 'memorable event.' The latter was often appropriate to non-fiction texts.

Question 7: Candidates demonstrated detailed analytical knowledge of a scene or sequence in response to this question.

Component 3: portfolio: Writing

As in previous years, candidates had clearly worked with commitment on their portfolios, showing that they understood the standard required, and that they were able to meet it. Most were able to submit two pieces of writing which demonstrated their skills in writing for 'broadly creative' and 'broadly discursive' purposes. Given that the opportunity is there to receive feedback on first drafts, and to then improve and re-draft pieces, the standard of written English was often high.

Some candidates handled personal experience in sensitive and mature ways, as one marker noted: 'Real and honest writing, some of which explores the real things faced by young people in their lives so far.'

Ideas and opinions were often expressed with a degree of developed thought, showing candidates' ability to engage thoughtfully with the world around them. In general, candidates appeared to do better when they pursued a topic that they felt strongly about. Some candidates made effective use of learning from other subjects as a basis for discursive writing.

As stated earlier, there was a slight increase in candidates submitting pieces of creative writing. Those who achieved success here showed awareness of narrative, characterisation, the establishment of atmosphere, awareness of genre features, etc, showing the benefits of studying writers' techniques.

Some candidates showed signs of having gone some way towards developing their own style in writing.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Question 2: Some candidates had difficulty isolating four key points from the short frame of reference here. Providing a gloss for the intensifier 'yearned' was challenging for many candidates. The requirement for the use of 'own words' was not met by all candidates.

Question 3: For some candidates 'own words' was again a challenge.

Question 5: Many candidates did not pick up on the requirement to deal with two different language features as stated in the question. Some offered two examples of sentence structure or word choice.

Question 7: Dealing with some abstract concepts presented difficulty for some candidates, and, again, the use of own words.

Question 8: Some candidates were able to provide a relevant reference, but could not support it with an appropriate analytical comment.

Question 9: Many candidates made an appropriate selection, but not all were able to link it to an aspect of conclusion.

Overall, the most common difficulty for candidates this year was the need to demonstrate understanding through the use of their own words.

Component 2: question paper: Critical Reading

In their answers to questions on the extracts in the Scottish text section, some candidates did not make sufficiently developed analytical comments, and concentrated on meaning only.

In the critical essay, some candidates did not provide a line of thought that was strongly relevant to the demands of the question selected. This is a key requirement.

Also in the critical essay, some candidates offered analysis that concentrated on meaning, rather than analysing the impact of techniques. Consequently, they did not demonstrate sufficient skills of analysis.

Evaluative comments were often not fully realised in critical essays.

Time management was a problem for a small number of candidates, with some perhaps spending too much time on the Scottish textual analysis.

A small number of candidates had difficulty with the genre requirements of the question paper. Some did not follow the instruction 'Your essay must be on a different genre from that chosen in Section 1.' Others selected a question from a section that did not match the genre of their text.

Component 3: portfolio: Writing

In personal writing, some candidates relied too heavily on an account of events at the expense of an exploration of thoughts/feelings/reactions/reflection.

In broadly discursive writing, some candidates found difficulty in constructing a reasonably coherent line of thought.

There were some instances of broadly discursive writing being insufficiently based on ideas or information.

Some candidates did not make sufficient acknowledgement of sources consulted. A few relied on sources that had limited relevance to the topic chosen, suggesting that, for these candidates, more care could have been taken over the research process.

A small number of candidates did not organise their writing into a clear paragraph structure. Problems with sentence structure was often an additional issue for these candidates.

A few candidates found difficulty in producing responses that were of sufficient length and development.

There were indications that some candidates had not spent enough time on proof reading their submissions.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Candidates should read each question carefully to ensure that they follow the key demands of the questions.

Candidates should attempt to adhere to the requirement for own words, where required, to demonstrate understanding of important ideas in the passage. The requirement for own words is indicated in bold in questions where it is needed. Direct lifts of words/expressions from the passage will gain no marks here.

Candidates should attempt to ensure that their full understanding is expressed, and that all significant ideas are covered. Candidates should be re-assured that tolerance is applied in the case of single words which might be difficult or impossible to gloss, eg technical terms.

In questions which require the analysis of the writer's use of language, the simplest model to follow is: reference plus comment. At National 5 level, appropriate references are rewarded

with a mark, and a further mark is given for an appropriate analytical comment. Candidates should attempt to explain their analytical comments as clearly and as fully as they can.

The use of bullet points, etc, might assist candidates in the structuring of answers for high-tariff questions. Many candidates made effective use of a bullet point approach this year.

Wide reading, particularly reading good quality non-fiction, will greatly assist in preparation for this part of the course assessment.

Component 2: question paper: Critical Reading

It should be made clear to candidates that they have to demonstrate skills of analysis in their responses to the Critical Reading paper.

Candidates should try to have a sense of the work as a whole (in terms of a play, novel, collection of stories or poems), while preparing for the final question in the Scottish textual analysis (key ideas, themes, etc).

Candidates should be aware of the three-part requirement of the final question in the Scottish textual analysis (commonality, extract, elsewhere).

Candidates should be reminded of the rules of the question paper — in particular the requirements for choosing a question from the Critical Essay section of the paper. This must be from a *different* genre to the Scottish textual analysis.

Candidates should be reminded of the need to maintain relevance to the question in their responses in the Critical Essay.

Component 3: portfolio: Writing

The acquisition of careful research skills will greatly assist the process of producing broadly discursive writing. Careful consideration of sources consulted, and time taken here, will encourage clarity of thought, promote real engagement with issues, and ensure that the candidate's argument can be fully explored. All sources used in preparation for pieces of writing must be declared. Time taken on the organisation and acknowledgement of sources improves presentation, assists markers, and helps to develop good study habits.

Clarity of structure, and the use of clear paragraphing, should be encouraged in candidates' writing.

A degree of personalisation and choice seems to be beneficial when considering topics for discursive writing. Furthermore, local issues often have powerful relevance for candidates.

In creative writing, candidates should be aware of, and attempt to employ, the key features of the genre chosen.

When submitting poetry, one poem is perfectly acceptable, regardless of length.

Candidates should be reminded to devote sufficient time for proof-reading their submissions.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	45856
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	46273
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	36.7%	36.7%	17005	71
B	30.6%	67.4%	14172	60
C	19.8%	87.2%	9177	50
D	5.0%	92.2%	2325	45
No award	7.8%	-	3594	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.