



Higher English

Course code:	C824 76
Course assessment code:	X824 76
Spoken language code:	J00T 76
SCQF:	level 6 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from:	session 2025–26

This document provides detailed information about the course and course assessment to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It describes the structure of the course and the course assessment in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed.

This document is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information required to deliver the course.

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Course overview

The course consists of 24 SCQF credit points which includes time for preparation for course assessment. The notional length of time for candidates to complete the course is 160 hours.

The course assessment has four components.

Component	Marks	Scaled mark	Duration
Question paper Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation	30	Not applicable	1 hour and 30 minutes
Question paper Critical Reading	40	Not applicable	1 hour and 45 minutes
Portfolio–writing	15	30	see ‘Course assessment’ section
Performance–spoken language	Achieved/ not achieved	Not applicable	see ‘Course assessment’ section

Recommended entry	Progression
Entry to this course is at the discretion of the centre. Candidates should have achieved the National 5 English course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Advanced Higher English, other qualifications in English or related areas♦ further study, employment and/or training

Conditions of award

The grade awarded is based on the total marks achieved across all course assessment components along with achievement of the spoken language component.

Achievement of this course gives automatic certification of the following Core Skill:

- ♦ Communication at SCQF level 6

Course rationale

National Courses reflect Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles. They offer flexibility, provide time for learning, focus on skills and applying learning, and provide scope for personalisation and choice.

Every course provides opportunities for candidates to develop breadth, challenge and application. The focus and balance of assessment is tailored to each subject area.

Language is at the heart of the Higher English course. Higher English is representative of a set of highly valued, and highly valuable, language skills giving candidates the opportunity to contribute to and to flourish within a communications-driven society.

The growth of language skills, and the acquisition of further language competence associated with Higher English, provides a gateway to further study in English literature and language and in many other disciplines. Increased confidence in reading critically, responding to, talking about, and writing detailed and complex texts ensures that candidates are ready for the demands of further and higher education, and equips them with many of the skills required for the modern workplace.

The course offers candidates further development of their abilities to communicate effectively, to think critically, and to be thoughtful and creative.

Literature is a strong focus of the course: it is a rich source of powerful examples of language in effective use. The study of detailed and complex literature offers candidates opportunities for personal, social, emotional, cultural, and economic growth and development. Engaging with a wide variety of literature, language and media texts exposes candidates to a diversity of people, places, events, cultures, thoughts and ideas, many of which are outside their own immediate experience.

Through the study of Scottish texts, candidates develop an awareness of Scotland's rich social and cultural heritage.

Purpose and aims

The course provides candidates with the opportunity to develop the skills of reading, writing, talking and listening in order to understand and to use language which is detailed and complex in nature.

The course offers candidates opportunities to develop and extend a wide range of skills with growing independence. The main aims of the course are to enable candidates to develop the ability to:

- ◆ read, write, talk and listen in detailed and complex contexts, as appropriate to purpose and audience
- ◆ understand, analyse and evaluate detailed and complex texts, including Scottish texts, in the contexts of literature, language and the media
- ◆ create and produce written texts and spoken language, as appropriate to purpose, audience and context, through the application of knowledge and understanding of detailed and complex language

The broad structure of the course assessment allows these skills to be demonstrated in a balanced way.

Candidates develop complex language skills allowing them to engage with and to process detailed and complex ideas, opinions, information, language forms and use, and to increase their ability to learn with independence.

Who is this course for?

The course is designed for those who are at the stage in their learning when they are ready to develop language and communication skills at SCQF level 6. They are likely to have gained an award in National 5 English.

The course provides a clear progressive pathway for candidates aiming to go on to study Advanced Higher English. It also provides preparation for future learning in other subjects, further and higher education, vocational training, employment, life and learning beyond the classroom.

The course is for those who wish to develop their language and communication skills through the exploration and creation of detailed and complex language, literature and media texts. It provides candidates with opportunities to develop aspects of learning which are transferable across many disciplines. These aspects include creative and critical thinking, spoken and written communication skills, interpersonal and team-working skills, and independent learning. The course promotes cultural and intellectual engagement and curiosity and encourages lifelong learning.

The course is designed to be accessible and inclusive.

Course content

The Higher English course enables and encourages candidates to develop their language skills, showing growth and progression from those demonstrated in prior learning and attainment, most likely in National 5 English. Progression routes cover all four areas of language skills: reading, writing, talking and listening, and throughout the course candidates apply these skills in different contexts. By the end of the course, candidates will display evidence of growth and competence in all aspects of language use.

With the exception of the Scottish text list, which offers a range of prescribed texts across the genres of drama, prose fiction and poetry, there are no restrictions in the selection of texts for study. Texts can be chosen from literature, language or the media, where the content, style and structure allows candidates to conduct detailed and complex analysis, and evaluation. In addition, texts should promote an extension of candidates' imaginative, emotional and intellectual reach.

Teaching and learning approaches allow for the acquisition of, and continued growth of competence in, key language concepts and skills. Candidates engage with language in use and interpret some of its more complex manifestations.

There is opportunity for personalisation and choice, and freedom within the course to plan according to the needs of candidates, taking account of their interests and motivations. Decisions as to teaching and learning approaches, based on the needs of individuals or groups, can include whole-class teaching, group discussion, seminars, and individual learning. Candidates are encouraged to learn with increasing independence: the portfolio-writing, for example, offers clear opportunities for individual exploration of a range of writing types and styles.

Candidates are made aware of the need for depth of thought, clarity and accuracy in their own use of language, and for reasoned and detailed analysis, rather than assertion. Good study habits are to be encouraged in terms of research, using detailed and complex materials. This can include internet sources, where appropriate, and candidates must know the importance of acknowledging all research sources consulted.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course

The following provides a broad overview of the subject skills, knowledge and understanding developed in the course:

- ♦ the development of key communication and literacy skills in reading, writing, talking and listening
- ♦ understanding, analysis and evaluation of detailed and complex texts in the contexts of literature, language and media, including Scottish literature
- ♦ the production of detailed and complex texts in a range of contexts
- ♦ knowledge and understanding of language

For the purposes of the course, the skills of reading, writing, talking and listening are further defined as:

Reading

- ♦ engaging with, considering, and selecting the main ideas of a text
- ♦ identifying and selecting detailed and complex information from a text
- ♦ analysing and evaluating a writer's choice and use of language
- ♦ evaluating the overall effects and impact of a text

Writing

- ♦ communicating detailed and complex ideas
- ♦ communicating detailed and complex information
- ♦ exploring, reflecting on, and communicating personal experience
- ♦ writing creatively and imaginatively in a literary form (for example prose fiction, drama, poetry)

Talking and listening

- ♦ discussing and communicating detailed and complex ideas and/or personal experience
- ♦ communicating detailed and complex information
- ♦ using aspects of non-verbal communication
- ♦ demonstrating listening skills by responding to detailed and complex spoken language

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment

The following provides details of skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment:

Reading, understanding, and responding to texts:

- ◆ two unseen passages of non-fiction writing
 - making comparisons between two unseen passages of non-fiction writing
- ◆ one text or extract from a specified and previously-studied Scottish text
 - making comparisons between texts or within a longer text from specified and previously-studied Scottish text(s)
- ◆ other literature, media or language studied as part of the course

Analyse and evaluate a writer's use of language:

- ◆ two unseen passages of non-fiction writing
- ◆ one text or extract from a specified and previously-studied Scottish text
 - making comparisons between texts or within a longer text from specified and previously-studied Scottish text(s)
- ◆ other literature, media or language studied as part of the course

Write, with consistent technical accuracy, in one of two forms:

- ◆ broadly creative
- ◆ broadly discursive

Demonstrate skills in talking and listening:

- ◆ participating actively in spoken language activities, for example group discussions or presentations

Skills, knowledge and understanding included in the course are appropriate to the SCQF level of the course. The SCQF level descriptors give further information on characteristics and expected performance at each SCQF level and can be found on the SCQF website.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

This course helps candidates to develop broad, generic skills. These skills are based on [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#) and draw from the following main skills areas:

1 Literacy

- 1.1 Reading
- 1.2 Writing
- 1.3 Listening and talking

5 Thinking skills

- 5.3 Applying
- 5.4 Analysing and evaluating

Teachers and lecturers must build these skills into the course at an appropriate level, where there are suitable opportunities.

Course assessment

Course assessment is based on the information provided in this document.

The course assessment meets the key purposes and aims of the course by addressing:

- ◆ breadth — drawing on knowledge and skills from across the course
- ◆ challenge — requiring greater depth or extension of knowledge and/or skills
- ◆ application — requiring application of knowledge and/or skills in practical or theoretical contexts as appropriate

This enables candidates to demonstrate the ability to:

- ◆ understand, analyse and evaluate two unseen detailed and complex written texts. This is assessed by a question paper
- ◆ understand, analyse and evaluate detailed and complex texts in the contexts of literature, language and/or media. This is assessed by a question paper
- ◆ apply language skills in the creation of an original text. This is assessed through the portfolio–writing
- ◆ produce detailed and complex spoken language through the demonstration of talking and listening skills. This is assessed through the performance–spoken language

Course assessment structure: question paper

Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation **30 marks**

This question paper assesses candidates' application of their reading skills in the challenging context of unseen material and a limited time.

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 30 marks. This is 30% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

Marks are awarded for applying reading skills in understanding, analysis and evaluation to questions on two unseen passages.

This question paper has one section.

Candidates read and demonstrate understanding of two unseen non-fiction texts connected by theme. A series of questions based on the first passage focuses on their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills. A further question requires candidates to summarise and infer the main ideas of both texts.

This question paper gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate:

- ◆ understanding of the writer's ideas and/or views by recasting content from the passage in their own words
- ◆ understanding of vocabulary in context
- ◆ analysis of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, tone, punctuation)
- ◆ understanding of text structure (for example opening, conclusion, development of argument, linkage)
- ◆ evaluation of the writer's techniques or the overall impact of the text
- ◆ inferring meaning
- ◆ summarising: understanding of the writer's ideas through identifying and isolating key points or main ideas in one passage, and, through comparison, in both passages

The following main command words are generally used in this question paper:

- ◆ identify/explain: used to assess understanding and inference of a writer's ideas and/or views (accompanied by 'use your own words')
- ◆ analyse (how): used to assess the skills of analysis
- ◆ explain (the function of): used to assess understanding of a writer's use of structure
- ◆ identify (three key areas): used to assess the skills of summarising and inference (identifying the main ideas with accompanying evidence across two passages)

Setting, conducting and marking the question paper

This question paper is set and marked by SQA, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by SQA.

Candidates have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete this question paper.

Question paper: Critical Reading

40 marks

This question paper assesses the application of candidates' critical reading skills and their knowledge and understanding of previously-studied literary, media or language texts, including at least one Scottish text from the prescribed list.

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 40 marks. This is 40% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This question paper has two sections. In each section, candidates must cover a different genre and cannot use the same text twice.

20 marks are available for each section.

Section 1 Scottish texts (20 marks)

Candidates apply their skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation to previously-studied Scottish texts from the prescribed list. This list is available on SQA's website on the English subject page. These texts are contemporary, 20th century and pre-20th century, and cover the genres of drama, prose and poetry. SQA refreshes the list as required. An extract from each writer is provided (with poetry this is the whole poem, where possible). Candidates select an appropriate extract or poem, and answer questions.

This section of the question paper gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate:

- ◆ analysis of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, tone, punctuation, sound)
- ◆ analysis of characterisation
- ◆ understanding/analysis of theme
- ◆ analysis of how a writer achieves, for example, a particular effect or mood or atmosphere
- ◆ analysis of overall text structure
- ◆ inferring meaning from what is implied by the writer
- ◆ evaluation of the writer's techniques or overall impact of the extract
- ◆ understanding and analysis of the remainder of the text or other texts

The following command words are generally used in section 1 of this question paper:

- ◆ analyse (how): candidates are required to demonstrate understanding of, for example characterisation, narrative, symbolism, theme or to analyse a writer's use of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, tone, punctuation, sound)
- ◆ explain (how): candidates are required to demonstrate understanding of key aspects, for example characterisation
- ◆ evaluate: candidates are required to demonstrate understanding of the effectiveness of text structure
- ◆ discuss: candidates are asked to show how the writer explores a given topic/theme, or uses a literary or linguistic technique, across more than one poem/short story, or a longer text in its entirety

Section 2 Critical essay (20 marks)

Candidates apply their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills to a previously-studied text from the following contexts: drama, prose fiction, prose non-fiction, poetry, film and TV drama, and language, by writing a critical essay in response to one question from a choice of three. Candidates must choose a different genre from the one selected for section 1.

Note: prose fiction and prose non-fiction are subsets of the same genre: prose.

Marks are awarded for their knowledge and understanding of the text, their skills in analysis and evaluation, and their construction of a critical line of thought in an extended piece of writing. The essay must be relevant to the question throughout and achieve minimum requirements for technical accuracy: few errors in spelling, grammar, sentence construction, punctuation and paragraphing and the ability to be understood at first reading.

The following main command words are generally used in section 2 of this question paper, and are always accompanied by an instruction to refer to appropriate techniques:

- ◆ discuss how
- ◆ explain how

These command words invite candidates to demonstrate their skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation. The expression ‘with reference to appropriate techniques’ serves as a reminder for candidates of the need to demonstrate skills of analysis.

The language questions ask candidates to identify and refer to ‘specific examples’ of language from their studies in this genre.

Setting, conducting and marking the question paper

This question paper is set and marked by SQA, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by SQA.

Candidates have 1 hour and 45 minutes to complete this question paper.

Specimen question papers for Higher courses are published on SQA’s website. These illustrate the standard, structure and requirements of the question papers candidates sit. The specimen papers also include marking instructions.

Course assessment structure: portfolio–writing

Portfolio–writing

30 marks

The portfolio–writing provides evidence of candidates' skills in writing for one of two purposes: broadly creative, and broadly discursive. These purposes are not mutually exclusive, and writing may contain elements of both.

The portfolio–writing has a total mark allocation of 30 marks. This is 30% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

15 marks are available for the piece of writing within the portfolio. The 30% weighting is achieved by doubling the mark for one piece.

Candidates produce one written text: either broadly creative or broadly discursive. They can choose this text from their writing done throughout the course.

Most of the writing process requires candidates to work independently, but the teacher or lecturer can support them to choose the focus and genre of the piece of writing. Candidates must complete the first draft of the piece of writing in class under supervision.

Portfolio–writing overview

Candidates produce one written text for the portfolio. Some appropriate types of writing are, for example:

Broadly creative

- ◆ a personal or reflective essay
- ◆ a piece of prose fiction (for example short story or episode from a novel)
- ◆ a poem or set of thematically linked poems
- ◆ a dramatic script (for example scene, monologue or sketch)

Broadly discursive

- ◆ an argumentative essay
- ◆ a persuasive essay
- ◆ a report
- ◆ a piece of transactional or informative writing

Setting, conducting and marking the portfolio–writing

This portfolio–writing is:

- ◆ set by centres within SQA guidelines
- ◆ conducted under some supervision and control, with the first draft completed in class

Some supervision and control means that:

- ◆ candidates do not need to be directly supervised at all times
- ◆ the use of resources, including the internet, is not tightly prescribed
- ◆ the work an individual candidate submits for assessment is their own
- ◆ teachers and lecturers can provide reasonable assistance

Evidence is submitted to SQA for external marking. SQA quality assures all marking.

Assessment conditions

Time

Candidates are given the opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills at the most appropriate time in the course. That is, when their writing skills have reached the level of development and maturity required for Higher English. There is no time limit for the production of this coursework, and the writing process can take place over a period of time. However, the first draft of the assessment piece must be done in class under supervision over a period of up to 4 hours. This may take place over several sessions, if required. There is no requirement for a formal timed write-up.

Supervision, control and authentication

The early stages of the writing process can be completed outwith the learning and teaching situation. When candidates are ready to complete the first draft of the assessment piece, this must be done in class under the supervision of a teacher or lecturer and with access to appropriate resources (for example notes, outline plan, research and/or ICT, as appropriate). Following teacher or lecturer feedback on the first draft, candidates then complete the final piece of writing under some supervision and control. Note: centres should only submit the final piece of writing for external marking.

Although candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching situation (for example research, planning and re-drafting), teachers and lecturers must put in place processes for monitoring progress to ensure that the work is the candidate's own, and that plagiarism has not taken place.

All candidates should follow the process below.

Portfolio-writing process

- ◆ choose focus and genre (with support of teacher or lecturer)
- ◆ explore and develop initial idea (this can involve research and note-taking, as appropriate)
- ◆ plan the writing (outline and structure)
- ◆ complete the first draft in class under supervision (open book conditions, with notes, outline plan, research and/or ICT, as appropriate)
- ◆ reflect on teacher or lecturer feedback
- ◆ complete the final piece under some supervision and control

Teachers and lecturers must carefully monitor each candidate during the preparation and production stages of the piece of writing to ensure that it is entirely the candidate's own work.

If the candidate is likely to have contact with professionals outwith the centre, the teacher or lecturer must make it clear to the candidate that no one else can be involved in the production of the portfolio-writing.

Note: SQA defines plagiarism as: 'Failing to acknowledge sources and/or submitting another person's work as if it were your own.' Examples of this would be using generative artificial intelligence tools to create a text output that is then submitted as a candidate's own work or using it to improve a candidate's own work.

When the candidate is at the stage of writing the first draft, they must complete this in class under teacher or lecturer supervision. Note: candidates must have completed the first draft in class to allow submission of their final piece.

The candidate must complete and sign the portfolio-writing declaration on the flyleaf to confirm that the writing is completely their own work.

The portfolio-writing is a final summative assessment and when a candidate begins the process of drafting their piece of writing this must be under the direct supervision of their teacher or lecturer. At this point, no other person can be involved in the discussion or review of the candidate's work.

Centres must not accept a piece of writing for portfolio submission where:

- ◆ there is doubt over the authenticity of a piece of writing
- ◆ the candidate has not completed the first draft in class under supervision

Mechanisms to authenticate candidate evidence could include:

- ◆ regular checkpoint and/or progress meetings with candidates
- ◆ checklists which record activity and/or progress
- ◆ using the first draft of writing as a point of comparison with the final piece
- ◆ asking candidates to provide an annotated bibliography (writing a sentence or two about the usefulness of a source, for example, can remind candidates of where their information and/or ideas came from)
- ◆ making sure that candidates know exactly what is required for the portfolio, and that they have read and understood the booklet [Your National Qualifications](#)

Resources

There are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access. Depending on the task, or purpose of the writing, it may be appropriate for candidates to conduct research online or by referring to print publications. Alternatively, candidates may produce work which is personal or imaginative in nature and relies on no external resources.

Candidates must be made aware of what constitutes plagiarism. Taking an essay from an internet site or submitting work that is not their own is plagiarism. The following are also examples of plagiarism:

- ◆ copying and pasting from the internet without citing the source
- ◆ copying directly from a textbook without citing the source
- ◆ omitting quotation marks from quotations
- ◆ using software such as generative artificial intelligence for anything other than providing suggestions for potential source material

Candidates must acknowledge all sources consulted. Any sources consulted for discursive writing must be acknowledged in footnotes or in a list at the end of the piece: details must be specific.

Reasonable assistance

Candidates take the initiative in planning, management and completion of the task. However, the teacher or lecturer may support candidates in planning and preparation of the piece. Reasonable assistance may be given in general terms to a group or class (for example advice on how to find information) or may be given to candidates on an individual basis.

The term 'reasonable assistance' is used in recognition of the need to support candidates through this task; however, care should be taken by teachers and lecturers to avoid too much intervention. If candidates require more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance' they may not be ready for assessment, or they may have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

The teacher or lecturer should read and provide feedback to candidates on the draft of writing they complete in class under supervision. It is not acceptable for a teacher or lecturer to provide feedback on more than one draft of writing. Teachers and lecturers must give candidates the opportunity to improve on the first draft following consideration of this feedback, before submitting their final piece.

Once candidates have submitted their final piece, this must not be changed by either the teacher, lecturer or candidate.

It is acceptable for a teacher or lecturer to provide:

- ◆ an initial discussion with the candidate on the selection of a focus and genre, leading to an outline plan
- ◆ written or oral feedback on one draft of writing

It is not acceptable for a teacher or lecturer to provide:

- ◆ model answers, which are specific to a candidate's task
- ◆ specific advice on how to rephrase wording
- ◆ key ideas, or a specific structure or plan
- ◆ corrections of errors in spelling and punctuation
- ◆ feedback on more than one draft of writing

It is not acceptable to use software such as generative artificial intelligence to provide:

- ◆ model answers, which are specific to a candidate's task
- ◆ specific advice on how to rephrase wording
- ◆ key ideas, or a specific structure or plan
- ◆ corrections of errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation

Evidence to be gathered

The following candidate evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ one piece of writing, which is broadly creative or broadly discursive

Volume

The written text produced by the candidates must be of no more than 1,300 words, but full marks can be achieved in a shorter piece, if appropriate to purpose (for example poetry). There is no minimum word count.

If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty will be applied.

Portfolio–writing marking instructions

In line with SQA’s normal practice, the following marking instructions for the Higher English portfolio–writing are addressed to the marker. They will also be helpful for those preparing candidates for course assessment.

Candidates’ evidence is submitted to SQA for external marking.

General marking principles

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates’ responses.

- a Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- b If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.
- c Candidates’ writing is marked in terms of content and style.
- d Assessment should be holistic. There are strengths and weaknesses in every piece of writing; assessment should focus as far as possible on the strengths, taking account of weaknesses only when they significantly detract from the overall performance. Writing does not have to be perfect to gain full marks.

Detailed marking instructions

Markers must assess the piece in terms of content and style and arrive at a final mark.

The marker selects the band containing the descriptors that most closely describe the piece of writing.

Once that best fit is decided:

- ◆ where the evidence almost matches the level above, the highest available mark from that band range should be awarded
- ◆ where the candidate's work just meets the standard described, the lowest mark from that band range should be awarded
- ◆ otherwise the mark from the middle of that band range should be awarded

Consistent technical accuracy is a requirement for the piece to meet the minimum requirements for the 9–7 band.

Consistent technical accuracy means that few errors are present: paragraphs, sentences and punctuation are mostly accurate and organised so that the writing is clearly and readily understood; spelling errors (particularly of high frequency words) are infrequent.

Markers are to use the following tables for each genre of writing in order to help them arrive at a mark. The band descriptors in the tables refer to the middle of each band range.

Writing which is broadly creative

	15–13	12–10	9–7	6–4	3–1	0
Creative: content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ strong attention to purpose and audience As appropriate to genre: ♦ strong creative qualities ♦ skilful command of the genre ♦ thematic concerns which are skilfully introduced and developed ♦ ideas/feelings/ experiences which are explored with a strong degree of mature reflection/ self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity ♦ strong sense of the writer's personality and individuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ clear attention to purpose and audience As appropriate to genre: ♦ clear creative qualities ♦ clear grasp of the genre ♦ thematic concerns which are clearly introduced and developed ♦ ideas/feelings/ experiences are explored with a clear sense of reflection/ self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity ♦ clear sense of the writer's personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ adequate attention to purpose and audience As appropriate to genre: ♦ adequate creative qualities ♦ understanding of the genre ♦ thematic concerns which are adequately introduced ♦ ideas/feelings/ experiences which are explored with an adequate sense of reflection and involvement ♦ adequate sense of the writer's personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ limited attention to purpose and audience As appropriate to genre: ♦ limited creative qualities ♦ limited use of conventions of genre ♦ limited thematic concerns ♦ limited ideas/ feelings/ experiences explored ♦ limited sense of the writer's personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ very little attention to purpose and audience As appropriate to genre: ♦ very few creative qualities ♦ very little use of conventions of genre ♦ very few thematic concerns ♦ very little evidence of exploration of ideas or feelings ♦ very little sense of the writer's personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ no evidence of the skills required in terms of content, style and accuracy
Creative: style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used skilfully to create strong impact ♦ confident and varied expression ♦ effective structure which enhances the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used to create impact ♦ clear expression ♦ clear structure which enhances the purpose/ meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used adequately ♦ adequate expression ♦ adequate structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ limited use of features of the chosen genre ♦ limited expression ♦ limited use of structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ very little attempt at using language effectively ♦ very little use of structure 	

Writing which is broadly discursive

	15–13	12–10	9–7	6–4	3–1	0
Discursive: content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ strong attention to purpose and audience ♦ strong understanding and engagement ♦ evidence of skilful research and selection ♦ strong and sustained line of thought/ convincing stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ clear attention to purpose and audience ♦ clear understanding and engagement ♦ evidence of careful research and selection ♦ clear line of thought/ engaged stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ adequate attention to purpose and audience ♦ adequate understanding ♦ adequate evidence of research and selection ♦ adequate line of thought/stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ limited attention to purpose and audience ♦ limited understanding ♦ limited evidence of research ♦ unclear line of thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ very little attention to purpose and audience ♦ very little understanding ♦ very little evidence of research ♦ confused line of thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ no evidence of the skills required in terms of content, style and accuracy
Discursive: style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used skilfully to inform/argue/ discuss/persuade and to convey depth and complexity of thought/ objectivity/insight/ persuasive force ♦ confident and varied expression ♦ effective structure which skilfully enhances the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used clearly to inform/argue/ discuss/persuade and to convey thought/ objectivity/insight/ persuasive force ♦ clear expression ♦ clear structure which enhances the purpose/ meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used adequately to inform/argue/ discuss/ persuade and to convey thought/ objectivity/ insight/ persuasive force ♦ adequate expression ♦ adequate structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ linguistic features of the chosen genre used in a limited way to inform/argue/ discuss/ persuade and to convey thought/ objectivity/ insight/ persuasive force ♦ limited expression ♦ limited use of structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ very little attempt at using language effectively ♦ very little use of structure 	

Course assessment structure: performance–spoken language

The performance–spoken language provides evidence of candidates' skills in talking and listening. This performance, which is part of course assessment, is assessed on an achieved/not achieved basis. It is a compulsory requirement for a course award in Higher English.

The spoken language performance comprises the skills of talking and listening. There are four aspects to the spoken language performance, and candidates must achieve them all. These are:

- ◆ employs relevant detailed and complex ideas and/or information using a structure appropriate to purpose and audience
- ◆ communicates meaning effectively through the selection and use of detailed and complex spoken language
- ◆ uses aspects of non-verbal communication
- ◆ demonstrates listening skills by responding to detailed and complex spoken language

In this assessment candidates have to do at least one of the following spoken language activities:

- ◆ take part in a group discussion, or discussion-based activity, to which they contribute relevant ideas, opinions, or information, using detailed and complex language. Candidates must take account of the contributions of others and stay focused on the topic or task
- ◆ prepare and present a presentation. The presentation must be detailed and complex in content and must be structured in a clear and relevant way. Candidates must answer questions from the audience at some point in the presentation

Setting, conducting and marking the performance–spoken language

The performance–spoken language is:

- ◆ set by centres within SQA guidelines
- ◆ conducted under some supervision and control

Evidence is internally assessed by teachers or lecturers in each centre in line with SQA marking instructions and is externally verified by SQA. Separate information is given on arrangements for submission of evidence for external verification purposes.

Assessment conditions

Time

Candidates are to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in talking and listening at the most appropriate time in the course. That is, when their skills have reached the level of development and maturity required for Higher English. Please note that 'performance' is not to be taken as necessarily implying just one assessment occasion. A holistic judgement can be made on candidate performance based on a series of spoken language activities. There is no time limit for this coursework.

Supervision, control and authentication

The assessment is conducted under some supervision and control. It is important that the assessment environment suits the purpose and nature of the spoken language, as well as the needs of each candidate.

Resources

There are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access. Candidates may produce a presentation or visual aids and may refer to notes or prompts, as appropriate to purpose and audience.

Reasonable assistance

The teacher or lecturer may support the candidate in topic selection, planning and management of the task. Reasonable assistance may be given in general terms to a group or class (for example choice of topic, advice on finding information, choice of stimulus texts), or may be given to candidates on an individual basis.

The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If candidates require more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment, or they may have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

It is acceptable for a teacher or lecturer to provide:

- ◆ an initial discussion with the candidate on the selection of, for example a topic, theme, texts, materials leading to notes or preparation for a discussion or presentation
- ◆ some prompting during a discussion or presentation
- ◆ questioning during a discussion or presentation in order to elicit evidence of listening skills

It is not acceptable for a teacher or lecturer to provide:

- ◆ suggested responses which are specific to a candidate's task
- ◆ key ideas, or a specific structure or plan
- ◆ excessive prompting during a presentation or discussion

Evidence to be gathered

The following candidate evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ a detailed checklist which should be retained by centres for verification purposes

This could be supplemented by a video recording of candidate performance. This may be useful for internal moderation and/or staff development and would also be acceptable for the purposes of verification, in addition to the detailed checklist.

Volume

There is no stipulation as to the length of the spoken language performance.

Performance–spoken language marking instructions

General marking principles

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- a Assess candidates' performance in terms of the following aspects of performance: deployment of relevant detailed and complex ideas/information, selection and use of detailed and complex spoken language, use of non-verbal communication, responses to detailed and complex spoken language.
- b Using the detailed marking instructions for each candidate, the teacher or lecturer selects the description of performance which most closely describes the evidence.
- c Assessment should be holistic. There are strengths and weaknesses in every performance; assessment should focus as far as possible on the strengths, taking account of weaknesses only when they significantly detract from the overall performance.
- d On any one occasion, candidates may display ability across both 'Achieved' and 'Not achieved' descriptors. It is important for teachers or lecturers to remember that a holistic judgement can be made on a candidate's performance based on a series of spoken language activities.

The four aspects of performance

- 1 Employs relevant detailed and complex ideas and/or information using a structure appropriate to purpose and audience.

This could be broken down into three essential elements, all of which should be achieved by the candidate:

- ◆ The content can include ideas, opinions, reactions, information or reflection on personal experience and must be detailed and complex.
- ◆ Structure will vary depending on the type of performance (presentation or group discussion), and on audience and purpose. A presentation should have a clear introductory section, a sequenced body of content, and a suitable conclusion. In group discussion, structure might involve, for example, taking turns, acknowledging the chair (where appropriate), summarising, challenging, developing the views of others. Content should be structured to enhance impact.
- ◆ Relevance to task, topic, purpose and audience should be maintained throughout.

- 2 Communicates meaning effectively through the selection and use of detailed and complex spoken language.

This could be broken down into two essential elements, both of which should be achieved by the candidate:

- ◆ Choice and use of, for example vocabulary, register and tone will be appropriate to the purpose and audience, and allow for the effective communication of meaning.
- ◆ Clarity and accuracy (in terms of the use of language structures) will be sufficient to ensure that effective communication takes place.

- 3 Uses aspects of non-verbal communication.

- ◆ Non-verbal communication will be used by the candidate to assist communication and/or meaning, for example for emphasis, to indicate agreement.

Please note that teachers and lecturers should accept a wide and inclusive definition of what constitutes non-verbal communication.

- 4 Demonstrates listening skills by responding to detailed and complex spoken language.

- ◆ Here, listening is the focus. Teachers and lecturers should judge a candidate's performance in listening from the relevance/appropriateness of the candidate's responses to a group discussion, or from the relevance/appropriateness of the candidate's responses to questioning in, for example a presentation. Again, a holistic approach should be taken when making an assessment judgement.

Detailed marking instructions

All aspects of performance, as stated in the left-hand column, must be met by candidates if they are to achieve the Higher English performance—spoken language. Acceptable performance is described in more detail in the 'Achieved' column.

Please note that group discussion is defined as a discussion involving the candidate and at least one other person. The other person can be the teacher or lecturer.

Aspect of performance	Achieved	Not achieved
Employs relevant detailed and complex ideas and/or information using a structure appropriate to purpose and audience	<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ can contribute a range of relevant detailed and complex ideas, views, opinions and/or information—contributions could be made through a presentation, a group discussion, or a series of discussion-based activities <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ spoken language is structured effectively to enhance impact, and where appropriate, takes account of the contributions of others <p>Relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ attention to task, purpose and audience is sustained throughout the presentation, group discussion or a series of discussion-based activities 	<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ ideas, views, opinions and/or information lack relevance, detail and/or complexity <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ structure is not effective, and, where appropriate, does not take account of the contribution of others <p>Relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ attention to task, purpose and audience is not sustained
Communicates meaning effectively through the selection and use of detailed and complex spoken language	<p>Choice and use of language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ can select and use detailed and complex spoken language that is appropriate to purpose and audience <p>Clarity and accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ can employ appropriate spoken language with sufficient clarity and accuracy to ensure that effective communication is achieved 	<p>Choice and use of language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ spoken language selected and used is not detailed and complex and/or is not appropriate to purpose and audience <p>Clarity and accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ spoken language employed is unclear and/or is not sufficiently accurate to ensure that communication is achieved

Aspect of performance	Achieved	Not achieved
Uses aspects of non-verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ can employ appropriate non-verbal features to assist communication, meaning and/or engagement, for example facial expression, emphasis, gesture, eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ non-verbal communication is not employed
Demonstrates listening skills by responding to detailed and complex spoken language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ can give relevant responses to the contributions of others in group discussions or in a series of discussion-based activities <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ can respond relevantly to questions which follow, for example a presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ does not respond relevantly to others in group discussions <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ does not respond relevantly to questions which follow a presentation

Grading

Candidates' overall grades are determined by their performance across the course assessment. The course assessment is graded A–D on the basis of the total mark for all course assessment components.

Grade description for C

For the award of grade C, candidates will typically have demonstrated successful performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Grade description for A

For the award of grade A, candidates will typically have demonstrated a consistently high level of performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Equality and inclusion

This course is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Further information

- ◆ [Higher English web page](#)
- ◆ [Assessment arrangements](#)
- ◆ [Building the Curriculum 3–5](#)
- ◆ [Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)
- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Recent SQA research](#)
- ◆ [Remote assessment](#)
- ◆ [SCQF Handbook](#)
- ◆ [Know Your SCQF Level - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)
- ◆ [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#)

Appendix: course support notes

Introduction

These support notes are not mandatory. They provide advice and guidance to teachers and lecturers on approaches to delivering the course. They should be read in conjunction with this course specification and the specimen question paper and/or coursework.

Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

This section provides further advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and understanding that can be included in the course. Teachers and lecturers have considerable flexibility to select contexts that will stimulate and challenge candidates, offering both breadth and depth.

The following provides a broad overview of the subject skills, knowledge and understanding developed in the course:

- ◆ development of key communication and literacy skills in reading, writing, talking and listening
- ◆ understanding, analysis and evaluation of detailed and complex texts in the contexts of literature, language and media, including Scottish literature
- ◆ the production of detailed and complex texts in a range of contexts
- ◆ knowledge and understanding of language

Communication and literacy skills

The development of candidates' communication, language and literacy skills is fundamental to the Higher English course. The course provides candidates with opportunities for growth in self-expression through the development of their skills in reading and writing, and through the exchange of ideas and opinions in spoken situations.

To address the development of these skills, many of the teaching and learning activities chosen will be interrelated. There will be a crossover of skills, and teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to make connections in their learning across different aspects of the course. For example, it is very likely that work around the study of Scottish texts for the Critical Reading question paper may involve activities that would provide assessment evidence for the performance—spoken language. Similarly, exercises requiring the close and careful reading of Scottish texts will likely contribute towards the development of the key skills required for the Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAЕ) question paper, including those of making comparisons between texts.

Understanding, analysis and evaluation skills

Development of the key reading skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation is a principal focus of the course. Candidates should be guided towards a critical appreciation of detailed and complex texts, and an awareness of the richness of their construction and effects.

Candidates should come to a deep understanding of a text, and demonstrate their understanding, for example by identifying, isolating and explaining in their own words the development of a line of argument, key ideas, information, points of view.

Confident and precise analysis is an important requirement for Higher English. Analysis involves the breaking down of the text into parts, and then looking closely at how the parts operate, thereby showing a greater understanding of how the text operates as a whole. For a poem, or a short story, or a short piece of non-fiction it is reasonable to carry out a line-by-line examination of significant aspects of, for example word choice, metaphor, sentence structure, punctuation, sound. However, it would not be fruitful or appropriate to take apart a novel or play in the same way. The scope of a novel or play is simply too large for this approach to be meaningful. It would be more logical to divide the whole novel or play into larger parts, for example narrative structure and voice, character, key scene or episode, setting. It is important to note that this analytical treatment should not detract from an appreciation of the text as a whole, and an awareness that these elements all contribute to the overall impact of the text. It should also be remembered that a writer aims to create a seamless work, not a framework of parts.

Evaluation requires candidates to engage fully with the texts that they are studying. Candidates should be able to articulate the impact of a text (or parts of it), or a judgement on its effectiveness in terms of purpose.

The production of detailed and complex texts in a range of contexts

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to write in different contexts and for varying purposes. It is important to provide them with the opportunity to apply the skills they have learned throughout the course, and to prepare them for possible next steps in their journeys of learning: to Advanced Higher English, or to further and higher education where complex skills in writing will be significant. Candidates need to produce one piece, either broadly creative or broadly discursive, for the portfolio-writing. However, several explorations should be made across types and genres before selection is made for the portfolio-writing submission.

Candidates should develop the skills and techniques needed to produce critical essays: significantly, the creation of a line of thought which addresses and answers a specific question and is sustained across an extended piece of writing. Well-developed skills in this area have the further value of being transferable to learning in other parts of the curriculum.

Candidates should apply the talking and listening skills that they learn by taking part in discussions or delivering presentations. Candidates are not required to conduct individual presentations for the purposes of assessment; teachers and lecturers may restrict spoken language assessment activities to discussion-based tasks only.

Knowledge and understanding of language

Knowledge and understanding of language involves candidates becoming better skilled and equipped in the use of language for the purposes of their own written and spoken expression. It also takes the form of an exploration of the language which is specific to the texts they are studying in preparation for the Critical Reading question paper. This could include, where appropriate, the language of literary criticism. When producing their own texts candidates apply their knowledge and understanding of how writers use detailed and complex language across various types, genres and purposes. Candidates need to have some knowledge of the main ways in which language works, for example:

- ◆ the ways in which sentences are constructed and punctuated
- ◆ how words and expressions can have denotative meaning and connotative meaning
- ◆ the main principles and patterns of spelling
- ◆ how structure and style can be used for meaning and effect
- ◆ how language can be manipulated for different purposes
- ◆ the significance of register in both written and spoken language
- ◆ the ways in which spoken language differs from written language
- ◆ the use of listening skills in order to frame responses to questions, and to make effective contributions to discussions
- ◆ aspects of non-verbal communication

It is anticipated that the study of the ways in which language works operates as part of teaching and learning in other aspects of the course, rather than as a stand-alone element. However, direct treatment of these aspects may be appropriate where needed. Of course, language exploration need not stop here. Other areas worthy of study might include etymological considerations, the sound of words, Scots language, regional dialects and variations, how different cultures use English.

Approaches to learning and teaching

The Higher English course is concerned with language of use to candidates in their current and future learning; language which is useful to them outwith the classroom in, for example vocational situations; and language that they use in everyday life. The aim of the course is to build on prior language and literacy learning, and to improve candidates' use of language. On completion of the course, candidates should be able to deal with and use language which is detailed and complex in nature.

In terms of course planning, there is considerable choice available in order that teachers or lecturers have sufficient freedom to decide on teaching and learning approaches which best suit their candidates.

Reading is central to all English courses, and in Higher English teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to read appropriately challenging texts and promote reading for enjoyment as a life skill. Regular reading provides opportunities to broaden candidates' intellectual, emotional, social and political horizons. The use of, for example, some self-selection of texts or peer recommendations could help to encourage pleasure in reading and contribute to the development of a positive attitude towards reading.

The Scottish texts section of the Critical Reading question paper gives candidates the opportunity to explore the literature of Scotland through the study of at least one Scottish text or writer. Learning about Scotland and Scottish culture enriches the candidates' learning experience and helps them to develop the skills for learning, life and work they need to prepare them for taking their place in a diverse, inclusive and participative Scotland, and beyond.

For the critical essay, there is free choice in the selection of texts. Openness here balances the prescription of the Scottish text section. Teachers and lecturers should consider a wide range of literature/media/language and take account of the needs of their candidates when making selections. While it is accepted that certain texts are popular for this level it is not the intention that there should be 'Higher' texts per se. Candidates should be introduced to a wide range of texts and take from them what they can at their own stage of learning and maturity.

When considering the selection of texts, teachers and lecturers should weigh up the scope for developing and demonstrating skills of detailed and complex analysis in a critical essay, and have in mind the personal, social, emotional, and developmental needs of their candidates. An important function of literature is its ability to widen the reader's intellectual and emotional experience. Teachers and lecturers should choose texts with this in mind, together with possible progression to Advanced Higher English, and to further and higher education.

Text selection has an important part to play in our work towards a diverse and inclusive curriculum where all candidates feel they have a voice and a sense of belonging. The texts they study help them to understand their own worlds and the worlds of others. Text selection, therefore, has significance for all candidates. Where possible, teachers and lecturers should have a discussion with candidates about the texts they want to read (within the confines of available resources). This could be a focus for departmental or faculty planning and discussion.

Candidates should experience a range of texts to show that reading offers them choice and is an interactive and enjoyable activity. In the senior phase of the curriculum, reading should still be for pleasure. A narrow focus limits choice and opportunities for candidates to find connections with the texts they are studying.

The texts they read should cultivate intellectual and emotional curiosity, helping candidates to find their own voice and expression. In order to do so they must find other voices that they can relate to, either in direct representation or indirectly through imaginative or empathetic response. An appropriate reference here is the metaphor devised by Rudine Sims Bishop, 'Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors' (The Ohio State University, 1990). Within this metaphor, texts can be:

- ◆ mirrors: readers see themselves directly reflected in the text
- ◆ windows: the text offers readers a new view of their world, or a view of an imaginative world
- ◆ sliding glass doors: the text seems to allow readers imaginative entry into the world of the text

If candidates do not feel included by the texts studied, they may feel excluded by the experience of reading critically. Equally, if they see only direct representations of themselves in these texts, they might be encouraged towards a limited and narrow view of the world and its diversity. In summary, candidates should feel both included and challenged by the texts they read.

Teachers and lecturers should consider the following reflective questions when selecting texts to study for the critical essay:

- ◆ Does the text provide suitable challenge for the development of candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding at Higher level?
- ◆ Have candidates had a say in what they want to read?
- ◆ Does the text meet the needs of a diverse and multicultural candidate population?
- ◆ Does the text accommodate multiple perspectives, for example linguistic, religious, faith, ethnic, cultural, racial, gender, sex, sexual orientation, family, age, neurodiversity, disability?
- ◆ How would you address the ways in which the text might promote a certain cultural way of thinking, or view of the world?

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to:

- ◆ think critically about, and develop a critical stance towards, the texts they are reading. Taking a wider view, candidates increasingly need to be able to think critically in order to be able to judge information and content online
- ◆ have opportunities to respond to texts through discussion and examine texts from different perspectives or through different lenses. The exchange of responses, perspectives and ideas helps to refine understanding and develop critical skills
- ◆ develop conceptual skills (to deal with ideas) in addition to functional skills of analysis. It is important that the texts they study allow them to do this

As a mediator of the texts studied, the teacher or lecturer has a key role guiding discussion in a careful and sensitive way. This may be especially true in the case of problematic or challenging content or language.

As candidates read, or following reading, the teacher or lecturer could ask them to consider critical questions, for example:

- ◆ Whose point of view or voice is heard in the text? Why do you think the writer made this choice?
- ◆ Whose point of view might be missing? How would it change the text if their voice was heard?
- ◆ How does your personal experience and identity affect how you engage with the text?
- ◆ Do you think the text is trying to influence or change the way you think? If so, how?
- ◆ What do you think the writer wants you to believe or feel? How has the writer made you feel this way?

Some useful websites include:

Critical reading

[National Literacy Trust](#)

Professional practice

[Building racial literacy](#)

[Breaking the mould: principles for an anti-racist curriculum](#)

[Promoting race equality and anti-racist education: a curriculum which reflects diversity](#)

[Promoting race equality and anti-racist education: Literacy and English](#)

Text suggestions

[Scottish Book Trust: book lists](#)

[Penguin: Lit in Colour](#)

[Glasgow Women's Library](#)

It is important to emphasise the significance of thinking skills to success in Higher English. Candidates should have the freedom and opportunity to think for themselves, to develop and to express their own considered views.

All course assessment requires candidates to think, for example:

- ◆ dealing with two unseen passages of reading in RUAE question paper, following and comparing lines of argument
- ◆ dealing with the literature they have read, addressing complex themes and considering the personal, social and moral dilemmas presented, while responding to questions in the Critical Reading question paper
- ◆ thinking through issues, weighing up and sifting research evidence, as part of work towards discursive writing for the portfolio–writing
- ◆ thinking about ideas raised, modifying views, appreciating points made by others, as part of a discussion in the performance–spoken language

It is also important to emphasise the necessity of providing opportunities for the application of skills which candidates learn during the course. Teaching and learning results in the acquisition of important skills, and it is through assessment that we see, and measure, their application.

Preparing for course assessment

Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAE) is reading closely. It requires candidates to pay close attention to both ideas and language in their reading. The importance and value of wide reading in preparation for RUAE cannot be stressed too strongly.

The two RUAE passages are taken from non-fiction sources, often from newspapers, and it is recommended that candidates become familiar with this type of writing. Given that candidates have to read and respond to two passages, a wide range of types should be tackled, including writing which is, for example discursive, persuasive, didactic, argumentative, personal, reflective, serious or humorous. Teachers and lecturers could ask candidates to source and then to share articles of sufficient linguistic complexity, making observations on differences in purpose, voice, tone, stance, etc. Discussion of main ideas and writers' use of language could then follow. In this way, the performance-spoken language could be integrated into teaching and learning approaches for RUAE.

When reading in preparation for RUAE, candidates should ask themselves the following questions:

- ◆ What are the writer's main ideas and/or views?
- ◆ Which language techniques are used to get these ideas across?

Further questions will follow:

- ◆ In general terms, what is the writer trying to do with this piece of writing?
- ◆ Is the intention to persuade you of something? Were you persuaded?
- ◆ Is there an intention to provoke some kind of reaction?
- ◆ How did you respond to it? Did it compel you to think about an issue in a new way? Were you, for example, angry, or moved, or inspired?
- ◆ What impact did the writing have on you? Did areas of the text have particular impact?
- ◆ Was it effective? Why was it effective?

Candidates should isolate main ideas, trying to separate these from examples, such as expansion, anecdote and do this with growing independence. Candidates should be able to identify, isolate, extract, and render in their own words a writer's key ideas from reasonably large sections of the passage and be able to track the expansion and refinement of an argument. This process is invaluable in preparation for the question on both passages, where candidates have to identify three key areas of either agreement or disagreement and provide supporting evidence.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to:

- ◆ practise using a dictionary to explore the origins and definitions, core meanings and sub-senses of words, along with the skill of how to come to meanings by recognising stems and roots
- ◆ develop the skill of vocabulary in context: how meaning can be worked out from the surrounding context
- ◆ take on the challenge posed by unfamiliar vocabulary; that is, not being defeated or put off by it
- ◆ develop the skill of being able to identify which words are central to understanding the ideas of the passage, and which are not
- ◆ develop confidence in their knowledge of common language techniques (for example word choice, sentence structure, metaphor, imagery, punctuation, tone, contrast)

In the RUA question paper, questions might point to specific language features (for example word choice, sentence structure, imagery, tone), or might give candidates the opportunity to make their own decisions as to which technique(s) to discuss by referring more generally to the writer's use of language. If appropriate, questions will specify the minimum number of examples which a response must deal with.

Candidates should provide analytical comments which focus on and accompany identified examples of a writer's use of language. Note: although references from the passage are essential elements of a response, no marks are given for the identification of examples alone. Marks are awarded for analytical comments, and are generally done so on the principle of 1 mark for a basic analytical comment, and 2 marks for a more detailed and/or insightful analytical comment. However, this depends on the specifics of the text, and, on occasion, the material available for analysis might only allow for basic analytical comments.

Candidates should be aware of, and be able to recognise, common patterns of structure within pieces of writing. They should comment on how paragraphs are linked (in terms of the structure of the writer's argument), and the effectiveness of opening and/or concluding sections, or paragraphs. Candidates must incorporate direct references from the text in their responses.

Question paper: Critical Reading

This question paper has two sections. For section 1, Scottish texts, candidates must study at least one of the Scottish writers or Scottish texts from the set list. SQA refreshes this list as required. For section 2, critical essay, there are no restrictions on text selection. This allows for personalisation and choice across literature, film and TV drama, and language texts.

Candidates should explore the techniques of writing, in particular the writing techniques specific to the writers and texts studied as part of the course. A growing awareness of a writer's style and voice should be encouraged. This allows candidates not only to conduct analysis of the techniques of writers studied, but also nurture the growth and application of their own writing skills as required for the portfolio-writing. Candidates should explore the complexities of connotative, metaphorical language; how it deepens meaning and effect, and how it relates to central concerns and theme.

In their responses for the Critical Reading question paper, candidates are required to make reference to the texts which they have studied. A reference does not have to take the form of a quotation. A reference might be:

- ◆ a summary of what a character in a play, novel or short story has said
- ◆ a summary of a significant event or a moment
- ◆ an aspect of conflict
- ◆ a description of aspects of setting, or comments on characterisation, for example a character's mental state or feelings

There is of course a place for actual quotation in, for example, drama where analysis of a speech or dialogue might reveal key aspects of characterisation and/or the use of dramatic irony for thematic purposes. In poetry, there will likely be words and/or expressions where detailed analysis is required of, for example word choice, use of metaphor and/or sound. This approach might also be appropriate for the analysis of short stories, or short pieces of non-fiction.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to evaluate the impact of reading the texts they have studied. They might want to consider whether the impact was overall or concentrated in certain sections of the text(s).

Section 1 Scottish texts

When candidates are studying the texts of their chosen Scottish writer or Scottish text, they should be on the lookout for connections between short stories and poems, or between parts of a longer text. These connections may take the form of central concerns or themes, or may be aspects of a writer's techniques, including, for example characterisation, setting, word choice and imagery.

While preparing for the final question in this section, candidates must be aware that they will be required to make a connection between the printed extract or poem, and at least one other poem or short story or part of a larger work. They must show how this connection operates in the printed extract, and elsewhere. To do this effectively, candidates have to make detailed references, and conduct precise analysis on these references. Note: marks are not given here for reference alone.

There are opportunities here to incorporate discussion-based activities. If, for example, candidates study the work of a poet, they could use a group discussion to explore further poems from the list, following initial, more teacher-led work from the first group of poems. There could be group annotation, or collaborative annotation of poems, with groups being asked to look at writers' techniques or central concerns, or key features of the text(s). Approaches like these could serve to foster greater independence of learning.

Section 2 Critical essay

When writing a critical essay, candidates must remember they are writing in response to a question which directs them to a specific purpose. It is important that candidates aim to construct and communicate a line of thought in their critical essay. The line of thought must be relevant to the question and be structured in such a way that meaning is clear. Critical essays must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the text(s), and include analysis of the writer's techniques, and evaluation in the sense of the candidate showing what has been gained from, or enjoyed about the text(s). Candidates must be aware that technical accuracy is judged too, and that writing must be consistently accurate to access the full range of marks.

For a longer text, a key skill to be developed is selection. Candidates should acquire confidence in selection of key episodes, key speeches, key moments (depending on genre) for analysis. Selections should then be related to central concerns or themes. Again, discussion groups could help here, with candidates proposing, presenting, or defending their selections.

All questions contain the expression 'with reference to appropriate techniques' in order to remind candidates that they have to give a full demonstration of their skills of analysis.

Note: a technique might be appropriate for drama, but not, for example, poetry and candidates should know the difference.

For example, techniques might include:

- ◆ drama: key scene(s), structure, climax, theme, plot, conflict, setting
- ◆ prose fiction: characterisation, setting, key incident(s), climax, turning point, plot, structure, narrative technique, theme, description
- ◆ prose non-fiction: use of evidence, stance, style, selection of material, narrative voice, description
- ◆ poetry: word choice, tone, imagery, structure, rhythm, rhyme, theme, sound
- ◆ film and TV drama: camera, key sequence, characterisation, mise-en-scène, editing, music, sound, special effects, plot, dialogue

Note: for film and TV drama, candidates should study important scenes or sequences, in addition to developing an awareness of the work as a whole.

In the Language questions, candidates are asked to deal with examples of particular or specialised language use. Topics should be taken from an area of language which provides sufficient scope for understanding, analysis and evaluation. This could include the particular language used by groups (for example geographical, interest, political, social, employment), the language of advertising, the language of politics, medicine or law. 'The language of groups' should be viewed as a wide term of reference.

Analysis conducted must deal with actual examples of language use. Language features to cover might include register, accent, dialect, slang, jargon, vocabulary, tone and/or abbreviation.

Portfolio–writing

The portfolio–writing allows for the assessment of candidates' ability in writing. It is the culmination of the teaching and learning of the skills of writing conducted throughout the course and will build on prior learning. It represents the application of this learning, and teachers, lecturers and candidates should have high expectations of finished pieces. The teaching and learning of writing skills can be integrated into the work of other aspects of the course, especially reading.

All writing must show an awareness of structure. In its most simple form this involves an opening, main body, and conclusion. However, more complex structures can produce powerful effects in creative writing, and experimentation should be encouraged. Clearly, genres such as poetry or drama require careful consideration of aspects of structure. Candidates should be encouraged to extend their range of written expression, perhaps using some of the techniques employed by writers studied for the Critical Reading question paper.

Experimentation in terms of purposes, genres, contexts, and types of writing is highly desirable in order that candidates begin to discover forms of expression best suited to their needs and development. Resilience and the ability to work independently are fostered here as candidates learn to review and evaluate their work, making adjustments as appropriate. In work towards broadly creative writing, candidates should be encouraged to make use of their imaginations, as a faculty, as part of the process, in the creation of written artefacts, both for imaginative writing, and in their exploration of their own life experience. Teachers and lecturers should encourage and nurture creativity in order that candidates have a growing awareness that to be human is to be creative.

When candidates are writing about their own experience, it has to be acknowledged that they will approach this task with differing degrees of personal maturity or self-awareness. It is acceptable and sufficient for candidates to deal with thoughts, feelings and reactions. There is no necessity for a sense of distanced reflection to be present in the writing, unless it happens to emerge naturally from a piece of writing, or if a candidate has the personal maturity for that kind of expression. It should be stressed that it is the candidates' ability in writing that is assessed in the portfolio–writing.

Teachers and lecturers should offer as much personalisation and choice to candidates regarding the selection of topics and types of writing as possible. If candidates are fully involved with their tasks and topics, it generates a high level of engagement, and this enhances the prospects of success. Differentiation here largely comes from outcome, rather than being built into the task itself.

Discursive writing may be supported by discussion-based activities, particularly group discussion on topics selected by candidates as part of independent learning. Discussion can help to deepen candidates' understanding of the issues they are investigating and exploring. Discursive writing is typically a mixture of facts and opinions. Candidates should be encouraged to include both in their own discursive writing. Discursive writing can include personal aspects, but should not be too anecdotal. There should be as full an exploration of the relevant arguments as possible.

Research for discursive pieces will likely involve candidates reading pieces of professionally written non-fiction or news articles. A dual purpose can be achieved here as candidates may have opportunities to improve their RUAE skills while preparing for the portfolio-writing. Further crossover may occur between discursive writing and the RUAE question paper as candidates need to use their own words in the handling of ideas. Teachers and lecturers should promote good study habits regarding the conducting of research in that all sources consulted should be evaluated for accuracy and veracity, and all must be acknowledged and declared.

Much of the above is also true for pieces of writing which are information-based, such as reports, blog posts, open letters, and biographies. Pieces of writing which are primarily concerned with conveying information are perfectly acceptable for portfolio-writing submission.

Teachers and lecturers must make candidates aware of the word limit associated with Higher English portfolio-writing. The written text must be of no more than 1,300 words. This figure is intended to be task appropriate for Higher English. The skill of containing writing within specified word limits will be invaluable for candidates if or when they progress to learning for Advanced Higher English, and in further or higher education.

For poetry, a single poem is treated in exactly the same way as any other piece of creative writing: one piece is required. It is acceptable to submit a group of related short poems, but these will be treated as one piece and will be marked as such. In terms of length, brevity would be expected given the concentration of language that is characteristic of poetry. The maximum length of 1,300 words applies to poetry, but it may be significantly shorter.

Writing in Scots can be submitted for both broadly creative, and broadly discursive pieces.

Advice on authenticity and plagiarism

Most candidates will know that taking (or purchasing) an essay from an internet site or submitting work that is not their own is plagiarism. It is also worth emphasising that the following are also examples of plagiarism:

- ◆ copying and pasting from the internet without citing the source
- ◆ copying directly from a textbook without citing the source
- ◆ omitting quotation marks from quotations
- ◆ using software such as generative artificial intelligence for anything other than providing suggestions for potential source material

Candidates' portfolio-writing must be written in their own words unless they are quoting from a referenced source. If candidates are asked to explain what they mean by a certain expression or sentence, they should be able to do so.

It is important that candidates understand that, when they sign the authentication statement on the flyleaf, they are confirming that the work is their own, they did not use generative artificial intelligence other than to identify potential sources, and any ideas or language belonging to someone else are properly acknowledged.

Encouraging candidates to choose their own subject matter for pieces of writing not only encourages personalisation, choice and independent learning, but also reduces the chances of plagiarism between groups of candidates all tackling the same topic. For broadly discursive writing, insisting on the use of at least one source written within the past year will outdate most online essay bank materials.

A marked change in writing style can be an indicator of plagiarism, as can a reliance on non-UK sources (where these are clearly inappropriate). Using an advanced search in an internet search engine, and enclosing suspect phrases in double quotation marks (“...”), ensures that pages with this particular sequence are returned.

The most effective way to help candidates avoid plagiarism is to spend time discussing the issue (including the risks and pitfalls), and by teaching basic research skills along with the teaching and learning of writing. A good starting point might be with the definition of plagiarism used by SQA: ‘Failing to acknowledge sources and/or submitting another person’s work as if it were your own.’ Examples of this would be using generative artificial intelligence tools to create a text output that is then submitted as a candidate’s own work or using it to improve a candidate’s own work.

Candidates should have read and understood the rules surrounding the construction of a portfolio–writing, contained in the booklet [Your National Qualifications](#).

Performance–spoken language

Spoken language (talking and listening) is fundamental to English courses. For Higher English, the aim is to enable candidates to become articulate communicators in personal, social, intellectual, educational, and vocational contexts. Firmly established teaching and learning approaches and contexts generate assessment evidence for the performance–spoken language, notably the exploration of detailed and complex literature. The integration of the performance–spoken language assessment into work done in other areas of the course is encouraged. In this way, the assessment of spoken language need not stand apart from the teaching and learning process.

The core concerns of the teaching and learning of spoken language in Higher English are the selection, organisation, and presentation of detailed and complex information, ideas, views, and language, together with a full awareness of intended purpose and audience. The development of candidates’ skills in spoken language from National 5 to Higher will likely be most evident in the complexity of thoughts and ideas listened to, and expressed, rather than necessarily the complexity of, for example vocabulary or word choice used.

There is no prescription of ‘Higher suitable’ topics or material. However, the subject matter selected must allow for the communication and exchange of detailed and complex thoughts, ideas, information, feelings and/or reactions.

Discussion can be a hugely effective contributor to learning and to the creative process in general. Group discussions consisting of different perspectives backed by reasoned, evidenced argument can lead to highly productive, creative interactions. For this reason, it is hard to predict the outcome or to legislate for consistency of discussion (it being dependent on so many factors). Therefore, it is important to remember that assessment evidence can be taken from a series of discussion-based activities, or that the duration of the spoken

interactions can be increased, so all candidates have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Varying the candidates in the group can change the group dynamics and help produce different outcomes.

In discussion, it is expected that talking and listening will play equal parts. Candidates will do as much talking as listening in group discussions. Candidates should learn to recognise, to value, and to use techniques of non-verbal communication. They should see these as aids to communication, often used in place of a spoken word, or for emphasis. Non-verbal aspects might include nodding, shaking of head, gestures, hand movements, eye contact, varied pace, stress and intonation.

Formal debates can be very effective in the development of spoken language skills. The importance of turn-taking, and the skills of argument development, reasoned refutation, etc are valuable tools for discussion. Teaching and learning activities associated with drama can also contribute to the development of spoken language skills, for example role play, or 'hot seat' techniques used to explore characterisation in literature.

Presentations might be conducted on an individual or group basis. Topics could be drawn from, and links could be made to, work done towards broadly discursive writing for the portfolio—writing. Question and answer sessions at the end of presentations provide evidence for the performance—spoken language but could also help candidates to clarify their thinking on ideas and/or evidence pertinent to their chosen issues or subjects.

An understanding of the forms and varieties of spoken language can assist candidates with their learning of other aspects of knowledge of language, for example register, dialect, accent, tone.

Developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

Teachers and lecturers should identify opportunities throughout the course for candidates to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

Candidates should be aware of the skills they are developing, and teachers and lecturers can provide advice on opportunities to practise and improve them.

SQA does not formally assess skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

There may also be opportunities to develop additional skills depending on approaches being used to deliver the course in each centre. This is for individual teachers and lecturers to manage.

The table below provides some suggested opportunities to further develop these skills within the course.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work	Approaches for learning and teaching
1 Literacy	1.1 Reading Develop this skill through activities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ involve fiction and non-fiction texts♦ use discussion to help candidates engage with texts and identify the ideas within texts Activities to support candidates in identifying the ideas within texts include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ asking and answering questions♦ comparing and contrasting♦ sorting and sequencing♦ summarising, clarifying and predicting♦ text completion Candidates also benefit from activities focusing on the audience and purpose of texts.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work	Approaches for learning and teaching
	<p>1.2 Writing</p> <p>Candidates may be encouraged to plan their writing by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ creating mind maps ◆ peer discussion where they consider the genre, audience and purpose for their writing <p>Candidates' writing will benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ discussing structure and layout ◆ building up sentences by linking ◆ planning paragraphs ◆ use of topic and concluding sentences ◆ developing vocabulary ◆ developing technical skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling ◆ using plans for writing <p>1.3 Listening and talking</p> <p>Wherever appropriate, candidates should be encouraged to use language skills in real language situations. In these situations, particularly drawn from life and work, activities may involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ asking and answering questions ◆ listening for and making comparisons/contrasts ◆ summarising, clarifying and predicting
<p>5 Thinking skills</p>	<p>5.3 Applying</p> <p>In order to do this in a supported way at this level, candidates should be given the chance to work on language tasks which are carefully stepped and sequenced, allowing them to work from what they know and to apply it to different situations.</p> <p>5.4 Analysing and evaluating</p> <p>A range of texts is vital in developing analysing and evaluating skills in listening and reading in order to develop candidates' awareness of such aspects as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ gist and effect on audience ◆ distinguishing fact and opinion ◆ discussing bias, balance and point of view

Useful websites

The below list may provide resources suitable for the Higher English course.

- ◆ [Scottish text list](#)
- ◆ [SQA Higher English past papers](#)
- ◆ [SQA Understanding Standards](#)
- ◆ [SQA Higher English course report](#)
- ◆ [SQA English common questions](#)
- ◆ [National e-Learning offer](#)
- ◆ [Scottish Poetry Library](#)
- ◆ [The Association for Scottish Literature](#)
- ◆ [BBC Bitesize](#)

Administrative information

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History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Course support notes added as appendix.	June 2018
3.0	Updated to reflect portfolio–writing requirement reduced to one piece of writing.	May 2023
4.0	Guidance on text selection added to course support notes, 'Approaches to learning and teaching' section.	September 2023
5.0	Updated to reflect changes to conditions of assessment for the portfolio–writing.	May 2024
6.0	<p>1. Updated to show that the question paper for Higher English Critical Reading has increased by 15 minutes.</p> <p>What you need to do differently Advise candidates that they now have 1 hour and 45 minutes to complete the Higher Critical Reading question paper. Ensure that you incorporate the extra 15 minutes into any prelims and past paper practice.</p> <p>2. Clarified evidence requirements for the performance–spoken language.</p> <p>What you need to do differently Ensure you retain a detailed checklist for the purposes of verification.</p> <p>3. Update on use of software such as generative artificial intelligence.</p> <p>What you need to do differently You must be aware of SQA's current policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence tools in assessment. Ensure candidates know they cannot use these tools for anything other than providing suggestions for potential source material for English portfolios.</p> <p>'Further information' section updated.</p>	September 2025

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.