



National 5 English

Course code:	C824 75
Course assessment code:	X824 75
Spoken language code:	HK57 75
SCQF:	level 5 (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 a candidate 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
Question paper: Critical Reading	40	Not applicable	1 hour and 30 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 fourth curriculum level or the National 4 English course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 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 5

Course rationale

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

Candidates continue to acquire and develop the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities, as well as the skills for learning, life and work.

In the National 5 English course, there is an emphasis on the development and application of key language skills closely associated with literacy and communication. Language skills have personal, social and economic value and importance. Our ability to use language, and to communicate, lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, and our sense of personal identity. It is generally accepted that language competence helps to unlock learning across all subjects.

This course provides candidates with the opportunity to develop skills in reading, writing, talking and listening. Consequently, candidates should be able to understand, analyse, evaluate, and use, detailed language for a range of purposes in practical and relevant contexts.

This course will allow candidates to encounter and engage with a wide range of texts across literature, language, and the media. The course enables candidates to communicate, to think critically, and to be thoughtful and creative. Candidates will be encouraged to reflect on, and to build an understanding of, their own experiences, environment, and culture, and the experiences, environments and cultures of others. Through the study of Scottish writers, candidates will develop an appreciation of Scotland's own literary heritage. Language and literature are key aspects of our culture, and the cultures of others, and through them can be fostered an awareness, and a celebration of cultural diversity.

Purpose and aims

The main purpose of this course is to provide 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 in content.

The course offers candidates opportunities to develop and extend a wide range of skills. In particular, the course aims to enable candidates to develop the ability to:

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

As candidates develop their language skills, they will be able to process ideas and information more readily, apply knowledge of language in practical and relevant contexts, and gain confidence to use detailed language with clarity and purpose. Candidates develop analytical thinking and an understanding of the impact of language through the study of a wide range of texts.

Who is this course for?

This course is suitable for those who wish to develop their language and communication skills through the exploration and creation of language, literature and media texts.

It 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 5. They will have attained curriculum level 4 in the broad general education or have gained an award in National 4 English.

This course provides a clear progressive pathway for those candidates who aim to go on to study Higher English, but also provides preparation for future learning in other subjects, employment, vocational training, and life beyond the classroom.

The course is designed to be accessible and inclusive.

Course content

A National 5 English course will enable and encourage candidates to develop their language skills in reading, writing, talking and listening. Although these essential skills can be dealt with and treated separately, often the most effective and natural teaching and learning approaches will allow for them to be integrated.

When operated together, the elements can be said to support each other, and often work on one skill can aid the development of another: broad reading of literature and language will not only strengthen key reading skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation, but will have an impact on a candidate's ability to write. Spoken language has a part to play here too: it is often through discussion that a deeper understanding of language and literature emerges. Talking and listening activities also help to improve candidate interaction and engagement. In this way, a holistic approach can be taken to course content. Areas and topics of study could encompass many of the skills required.

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, and must offer sufficient challenge in that they should be detailed in content.

Teaching and learning approaches should allow for personalisation and choice, where possible. When planning teaching and learning programmes, the needs of the candidates, their interests and motivations should be considered. There is freedom within the course to plan according to the needs of candidates.

The course should allow for the acquisition of competence in key language and communication skills. Candidates should be reminded of the need for clarity and accuracy in their own use of language, and of appropriate use of register. Good study habits should be fostered in terms of research and the use of internet sources. Candidates should be reminded of the need to acknowledge research sources consulted.

Opportunities should be given for candidates to explore the expression of their thoughts and feelings, their creativity and their imaginations. This could be part of work done towards the portfolio-writing.

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 texts in the contexts of literature, language and media, including Scottish literature
- ◆ the production of detailed 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 can be further defined as:

Reading

- ◆ engaging with, considering, and selecting the main ideas of a text
- ◆ identifying and selecting detailed 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 ideas
- ◆ communicating detailed information
- ◆ exploring, describing 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 ideas and/or personal experience
- ◆ communicating detailed information
- ◆ using aspects of non-verbal communication
- ◆ demonstrating listening skills by responding to detailed spoken language

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment

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

Read, understand, and respond to texts:

- ◆ one unseen passage of non-fiction writing
- ◆ one text or extract from a specified and previously-studied Scottish writer
- ◆ make comparisons between texts or within a longer text by prescribed Scottish writers
- ◆ other literature, media, or language studied as part of the course

Analyse a writer's use of language:

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

Write, with satisfactory 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

These skills must be built into the course where there are appropriate opportunities, and the level should be appropriate to the level of the course.

Further information on building in skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work is given in the course support notes.

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

Course assessment structure: question paper

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

The purpose of this question paper is to assess candidates' application of their reading skills in the challenging context of unseen material and a limited time.

30 marks (30% of the total mark) are awarded for applying reading skills in understanding, analysis and evaluation to questions on one passage.

This question paper has one section.

Candidates are required to read and understand one unseen non-fiction text. A series of questions will focus on their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills.

This question paper gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate some of the following skills:

- ◆ understanding of the writer's ideas by re-casting ideas from the passage in candidates' own words
- ◆ understanding of vocabulary in context
- ◆ analysis of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, punctuation, text structure — opening, conclusion, linkage)
- ◆ evaluation of the writer's techniques or the overall impact of the text
- ◆ inferring meaning
- ◆ summarising: candidates demonstrate their understanding of the writer's ideas through identifying and isolating key points or main ideas

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

- ◆ explain (why): used to assess understanding of a writer's ideas (always followed by 'in your own words')
- ◆ explain (how): used to assess the skills of analysis
- ◆ identify: used to assess the skill of summarising (identifying the main points or ideas)

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 complete this question paper in 1 hour.

Critical Reading

40 marks

The purpose of this question paper is to assess the application of candidates' critical reading skills and their knowledge and understanding of previously-studied literary, media or language texts, including the work of at least one Scottish writer from the prescribed list.

This question paper has two sections. Candidates must select two different genres and cannot use the same text twice.

20 marks are available for each of the two sections.

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 can be found on the English subject page. These texts are contemporary, 20th century and pre-20th century, and cover the genres of drama, prose and poetry. The list will be refreshed as required. An extract from each writer is provided (with poetry this will be the whole poem, where possible). Candidates select an appropriate extract (or whole poem), and answer questions.

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

- ◆ summarising: candidates show understanding of the writer's ideas, narrative events or characterisation through summarising/explaining using their own words
- ◆ analysis of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, punctuation, text structure — opening, conclusion)
- ◆ 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 overall impact of the text, or the writer's techniques
- ◆ 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:

- ◆ identify or summarise: candidates are required to identify and isolate, for example a writer's key points and/or key narrative events. Candidates are instructed to use their own words
- ◆ explain: candidates are required to demonstrate understanding of, for example, characterisation, narrative, theme or to analyse a writer's use of language (for example word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, punctuation and/or sound)
- ◆ show: candidates are asked to show how the writer explores a given topic, or uses a literary or linguistic technique, across more than one poem or short story, or a longer text in its entirety

Section 2 Critical essay (20 marks)

Candidates apply their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills to previously-studied texts from the following genres: drama, prose, poetry, film and TV drama, and language, by writing a critical essay in response to one question from a choice of two.

Candidates must choose a different genre from the one selected for section 1. Candidates will gain marks for their knowledge and understanding of the text, their skills in analysis and evaluation, and their construction of a line of thought in a critical essay. The essay should be relevant to the question throughout, and should achieve minimum requirements for technical accuracy, that is paragraphing, sentence construction and punctuation should be sufficiently accurate so that meaning is clear at first reading; writing may contain errors, but these will not be significant.

The following main command words are generally used in section 2 of this question paper:

- ◆ describe and explain
- ◆ show how
- ◆ explain how
- ◆ explain and evaluate

All of the above command words invite candidates to demonstrate their skills of understanding, analysis, and evaluation. Each question includes the instruction: ‘by referring to appropriate techniques’, which serves as a reminder for candidates of the need to demonstrate skills of analysis.

In the language questions, candidates are asked to 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 complete this question paper in 1 hour 30 minutes.

Specimen question papers for National 5 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 explore different types of writing throughout the course but must follow the portfolio–writing process for the piece selected for assessment.

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

The 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 National 5 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 or reflective 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 should take the initiative in the planning, management and completion of the task. However, the teacher or lecturer may support the candidates in the planning and preparation of the piece. Reasonable assistance may be given in general terms to a group or class (for example advice on the finding of 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 deemed to be 'reasonable assistance' they may not be ready for assessment, or it may be that they 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 1,000 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 National 5 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

This information is provided to help you understand the general principles you must apply when marking candidates’ submissions for this portfolio–writing. These principles must be read in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidate responses.

- a Marks for each candidate response must **always** be assigned in line with these general marking principles and the detailed marking instructions for this assessment.
- b Marking should always be positive. This means that, for each candidate’s response, marks are accumulated for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; they are not deducted from a maximum on the basis of errors or omissions.
- c The candidate’s writing will be marked in terms of content and style.
- d Assessment should be holistic. There will be 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. Marks should be awarded for the quality of the writing, and not deducted for errors or omissions. Writing does not have to be perfect to gain full marks.

Detailed marking instructions

Assessors should assess the piece in terms of content and style and arrive at a final mark. The descriptors for awarding marks for content and style refer to the middle of the range.

The marker should select the band descriptor that most closely describes the piece of writing.

Once the best fit has been decided, then:

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

Satisfactory technical accuracy is a requirement for the piece to meet the minimum requirements for the 9–7 band. Writing may contain errors, but these will not be significant. Paragraphing, sentence construction, spelling and punctuation must be sufficiently accurate so that meaning is clear at the first reading.

The following tables for each genre of writing should be used in helping assessors arrive at a mark.

Writing which is broadly creative

	15–13	12–10	9–7	6–4	3–1
Creative: content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is consistent <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the piece displays very good creativity ♦ feelings/reactions/ experiences are expressed/explored with a very good degree of self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is consistent in the main <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the piece displays good creativity ♦ feelings/reactions/ experiences are expressed/explored with a good degree of self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is reasonably well sustained <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the piece shows some creativity ♦ feelings/reactions/ experiences are explored with a sense of involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is not always sustained <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ the piece has a little evidence of creativity ♦ experiences are expressed, but not always convincingly 	<p>Writing pieces in this category are likely to be very rare and would be characterised by one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ weak attention to purpose and audience ♦ very thin content ♦ no attempt at using language effectively ♦ brevity of response ♦ irrelevance
Creative: style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed effectively ♦ language is varied and often used to create particular effects ♦ structure of the piece enhances the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed, mostly successfully ♦ language is apposite and used at times to create an effect ♦ structure of the piece supports the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed with a degree of success ♦ language is effective in the main ♦ structure of the piece is appropriate to purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ there is an attempt to deploy the features of the chosen genre ♦ language lacks variety ♦ structure of the piece is not appropriate to purpose/meaning ♦ significant errors in sentence construction/ paragraphing/ spelling 	

Writing which is broadly discursive

	15–13	12–10	9–7	6–4	3–1
Discursive: content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is consistent ♦ information shows evidence of careful research, is presented to maximise impact and is sequenced to highlight key points ♦ ideas/techniques deployed to inform/argue/discuss/persuade have a very good degree of objectivity/depth/insight/persuasive force and are used to convey a clear line of thought/appropriate stance/point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is consistent in the main ♦ information shows evidence of relevant research and is presented in a clear sequence ♦ ideas/techniques deployed to inform/argue/discuss/persuade have a good degree of objectivity/depth/insight/persuasive force and are used to convey a clear line of thought/stance/point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is reasonably well sustained ♦ information shows evidence of some research and is presented in a clear sequence ♦ ideas/techniques deployed to inform/argue/discuss/persuade convey a line of thought/stance/point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ attention to purpose and audience is not always sustained ♦ information shows a little relevant research but is not always presented in a manner that enhances meaning ♦ ideas/techniques used to inform/argue, discuss/persuade are not always convincing and the line of thought is not consistently clear 	<p>Writing pieces in this category are likely to be very rare and would be characterised by one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ weak attention to purpose and audience ♦ very thin content ♦ no attempt at using language effectively ♦ brevity of response ♦ irrelevance
Discursive: style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed effectively ♦ language is varied and often used to create particular effects ♦ structure of the piece enhances the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed, mostly successfully ♦ language is apposite and used at times to create an effect ♦ structure of the piece supports the purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ features of the chosen genre are deployed with a degree of success ♦ language is effective in the main ♦ structure of the piece is appropriate to purpose/meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ there is an attempt to deploy the features of the chosen genre ♦ language lacks variety ♦ structure of the piece is not appropriate to purpose/meaning ♦ significant errors in sentence construction/paragraphing/spelling 	

Course assessment structure: performance–spoken language

The performance–spoken language provides evidence of the 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 National 5 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 detailed and relevant ideas and/or information using a structure appropriate to purpose and audience
- ◆ communicates meaning effectively through the selection and use of detailed spoken language
- ◆ uses aspects of non-verbal communication
- ◆ demonstrates listening skills by responding to detailed 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 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 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 should 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 National 5 English. Please note that 'performance' should not be taken as necessarily implying just one assessment occasion. A holistic judgement can be made on a candidate's performance based on a series of spoken language activities. There is no time limit for this coursework.

Supervision, control and authentication

The assessment should be 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 the finding of 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 any candidates require more than what is deemed to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment, or it may be that they 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

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following marking instructions are addressed to the teacher or assessor.

General assessment principles for National 5 English: performance–spoken language

This information is provided to help understanding of the general principles that apply when assessing candidate performance. These principles must be read in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidate performance.

- Judgements on performance must always be made in line with these general marking principles and the detailed marking instructions for this assessment.
- The candidate's performance will be assessed in terms of the following aspects of performance: deployment of detailed and relevant ideas/information, selection and use of detailed spoken language, use of non-verbal communication, responses to detailed spoken language.
- For each candidate, the assessor should select the descriptions of performance from the detailed marking instructions which most closely describe the evidence.
- Assessment should be holistic. There will be 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.
- On any one occasion, candidates may display ability across both 'Achieved' and 'Not achieved' descriptors. It is important for assessors 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 detailed and relevant 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 could include ideas, opinions, reactions, information or be based on personal experience and must be detailed.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Relevance to task, topic, purpose and audience should be maintained throughout.

- 2 Communicates meaning effectively through the selection and use of detailed 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 and register 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 assessors should accept a wide and inclusive definition of what constitutes non-verbal communication.

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

- ◆ Here, listening is the focus. Assessors 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 for National 5 English: performance–spoken language

All aspects of performance, as stated in the left-hand column, must be met by candidates if they are to achieve the National 5 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 could be the teacher or assessor.

Aspect of performance	Achieved	Not achieved
Employs detailed and relevant 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 detailed and relevant 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, 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 series of discussion-based activities	<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ ideas, views, opinions, and/or information lack detail and/or relevance <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 spoken language	<p>Choice and use of language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ can select and use detailed 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/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 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 and/or meaning, for example facial expression, emphasis, gesture and/or eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ non-verbal communication is not employed
Demonstrates listening skills by responding to detailed 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

A candidate's overall grade is 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

- ◆ [National 5 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 could be included in the course. Teachers and lecturers should refer to this course specification for the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment. Course planners have considerable flexibility to select coherent contexts which will stimulate and challenge their candidates, offering both breadth and depth.

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 texts in the contexts of literature, language and media, including Scottish literature
- ◆ the production of detailed texts in a range of contexts
- ◆ knowledge and understanding of language

Communication and literacy skills

The acquisition and development of communication and literacy skills should be fundamental to the course in National 5 English. To address the development of these skills, many of the teaching and learning activities chosen will be inter-related. There will be a cross-over of skills, and candidates should be encouraged to make connections in their learning across different aspects of the course. For example, it is very likely that work around the study of a Scottish writer for the Critical Reading question paper may well involve activities that would provide assessment evidence for the spoken language component. Similarly, an exercise which requires the close and careful reading of a Scottish text will likely contribute towards the development of the key skills required for the Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAE) question paper.

Understanding, analysis and evaluation

Development of the key reading skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation should be a principal focus of the course.

Candidates should aim to demonstrate their understanding of a text by identifying, isolating and explaining in their own words, for example key ideas, information, points of view.

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, it is reasonable to carry out a line-by-line examination of significant aspects, for example of word choice, metaphor, 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. Here, it would be more logical to divide the whole novel or play into larger parts, for example narrative, character, key scene or episode, setting. It is important to note that this analytical treatment should not detract from a holistic appreciation of the text as a whole. 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 in a position to provide an articulation of the impact of a text (or parts of it), or a judgement on its effectiveness in terms of purpose.

The production of detailed texts in a range of contexts

Candidates should be encouraged 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. The requirement is to produce one broadly creative piece or one broadly discursive piece 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 learn the skills and techniques necessary for the production of critical essays: significantly, the development of a line of thought which addresses and answers a specific question and is sustained across an extended piece of writing.

Candidates should apply the talking and listening skills that they have learned by taking part in discussions or delivering presentations. The production of spoken language texts in the form of presentations or discussions are both valid course assessment activities. It is important to note that there is no requirement for candidates to conduct individual presentations for the purposes of assessment, it is acceptable to 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, and 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. The production of their own texts will see candidates applying their knowledge and understanding of how detailed language is used by writers across various types, genres and purposes. Candidates are required 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 would operate 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 English is used in different cultures.

Approaches to learning and teaching

The National 5 English course is concerned with the language used by candidates in their learning, language which is useful to candidates outwith the classroom, 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 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 reading for enjoyment as a life skill should be promoted. 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 the work of at least one Scottish writer. Learning about Scotland and Scottish culture will enrich the candidates' learning experience and help them to develop the skills for learning, life and work they will 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 'National 5' texts per se. Candidates can 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 should weigh up the scope for developing and demonstrating skills of 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, of course, its ability to widen the reader's intellectual and emotional experience. Texts should also be chosen with this in mind, together with possible progression to 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 National 5 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 National 5 English. Candidates should be given the freedom and opportunity to think for themselves. All course assessment components require candidates to think, for example:

- ◆ dealing with an unseen passage of reading in RUAE question paper
- ◆ dealing with the literature they have read while responding to questions in the Critical Reading question paper
- ◆ thinking through issues as part of discursive writing for the portfolio–writing
- ◆ thinking about ideas raised 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 have been learned 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 RUAE passages are taken from non-fiction sources, often from newspapers, and it is recommended that candidates become familiar with this type of writing. A wide range of types should be tackled, including writing which is, for example discursive, persuasive, didactic, argumentative, personal, reflective, serious or humorous. Candidates could be asked to source and then to share articles of sufficient linguistic complexity. Discussion of main ideas and writers' use of language could then follow. In this way the spoken language component could be integrated into teaching and learning approaches for RUAE.

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

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

Further questions will follow:

- ◆ What is the writer trying to do with this piece of writing?
- ◆ Is the intention to persuade you of something?
- ◆ Or, is it to provoke some kind of reaction?
- ◆ How did you respond to it?
- ◆ Did it make you laugh?
- ◆ Were you, for example, sad or angry?
- ◆ What impact did the writing have on you?
- ◆ Was it effective?

Candidates should aim to isolate main ideas, trying to separate these from examples, such as expansion, anecdote. Candidates should be able to identify, isolate, extract, and render into their own words a writer's key ideas from reasonably large sections of the passage.

The practice of using a dictionary to explore the origins and definitions, core meanings and sub-senses of words should be encouraged, along with the skill of how to come to meanings by recognising stems and roots. The skill of vocabulary in context should be fostered: how meaning can be worked out from the surrounding context. Candidates should be encouraged to take on the challenge posed by unfamiliar vocabulary; that is, not being defeated or put off by it. Similarly, there is the skill of being able to identify which words are central to understanding the ideas of the passage, and which are not.

Candidates should develop confidence in their knowledge of common language techniques, for example word choice, sentence structure, metaphor, punctuation, tone, contrast. In the RUA question paper, questions might point to specific language features (for example word choice or sentence structure) or might give candidates the opportunity to make their own decisions as to which technique(s) to discuss by referring to the writer's use of language. Questions always specify the number of examples which a response should deal with. Candidates should be able to provide analytical comments which focus on and accompany identified examples of a writer's use of language. It should be noted that, at National 5, marks for questions requiring the skill of analysis are awarded on the basis of 1 mark for a correct identification of a relevant reference, and 1 mark for an appropriate analytical comment.

Candidates should be aware of, and be able to recognise, common patterns of structure within pieces of writing. They should be able to comment on how paragraphs are linked, and the effectiveness of opening and/or concluding sections, or paragraphs.

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 from the set list. This list is refreshed 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. This will allow them to conduct analysis of the techniques of writers studied and will also nurture the growth and application of their own writing skills as required for the portfolio-writing. Candidates should be encouraged to explore the complexities of connotative, metaphorical language, and how it deepens meaning and effect.

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 an important 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to evaluate the impact of reading the texts they have studied. They might want to consider whether the impact was overall or confined to certain sections of the text(s).

Section 1 Scottish texts

When candidates are studying the texts of their chosen Scottish writer, 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 should 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 be able to show how this connection operates in the printed extract, and elsewhere. To do this effectively, candidates will have to make detailed references.

There are opportunities here to incorporate discussion-based activities. If, for example a study is being made of the work of a poet, a group discussion could be used 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 sufficiently accurate to access the full range of marks.

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 section of the Critical Reading question paper, candidates are asked to deal with actual examples of particular or specialised language use. Topics should be taken from an area of language use which provides sufficient scope for understanding, analysis, and evaluation. This could include the particular language used by groups (for example geographical, interest, political, social), 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 should 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. 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 is to be encouraged.

Experimentation in terms of purposes, genres, and contexts is highly desirable in order that candidates begin to discover types of expression best suited to their needs and development. 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.

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 may well 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 cross-over 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 must be acknowledged and declared.

Much of the above is also true for pieces of writing which are information-based, such as reports, blogs-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 National 5 English portfolio–writing. The written text must be of no more than 1,000 words. This figure is intended to be task appropriate for National 5 English. The skill of containing writing within specified word limits will be invaluable for candidates, if or when they progress to learning for 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 1,000 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 be 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 (“...”), will ensure 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. Firmly established teaching and learning approaches and contexts will generate assessment evidence for the performance–spoken language. The integration of 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 are the selection, organisation, and presentation of detailed information, ideas, views, and language, together with a full awareness of intended purpose and audience.

Discussion can be a hugely effective contributor to learning, and to the creative process in general. Group discussion in which there are different perspectives 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 roughly as much talking as listening in group discussion situations. Candidates should learn to recognise, to value, and to use techniques of non-verbal communication. These should be seen 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 the drama teaching 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 will 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

Course planners 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 for how these skills can be further developed in the course.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work	Approaches for learning and teaching
1 Literacy	1.1 Reading This may be developed by activities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ involve fiction and information, or discursive texts♦ use discussion to help candidates engage with texts♦ identify the ideas within texts♦ identify and explain the language techniques used by a writer Activities to support candidates to identify 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 a writer's intended purpose.

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 (using connectives) ◆ planning paragraphs ◆ considering register ◆ use of topic sentences ◆ developing vocabulary ◆ exploring the denotative and connotative meanings of language ◆ developing technical skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling ◆ using plans for writing <p>1.3 Listening and talking</p> <p>Where appropriate, candidates should be encouraged to use the language skills in real language situations.</p> <p>In such situations, particularly drawn from life and work, activities may involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ asking and answering questions ◆ taking part in group discussions ◆ planning and delivering an individual presentation ◆ listening for and making comparisons/contrasts ◆ summarising, clarifying and predicting ◆ exploring the ways in which spoken language differs from written language

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work	Approaches for learning and teaching
5 Thinking skills	<p>5.3 Applying</p> <p>This is the ability to use existing information to solve a problem in a different context, and to plan, organise and complete a task that reflects what may be required by life or work situations.</p> <p>In order to do this in a supported way at this level, candidates should be given the chance to work at language tasks which are carefully staged and sequenced, allowing them to work from what they know and to apply it to different situations (writing for the portfolio, writing critical essays, etc).</p> <p>5.4 Analysing and evaluating</p> <p>Whenever possible, candidates should be given the opportunity to practise developing these skills in real communicative contexts.</p> <p>A range of texts is vital to developing analysing and evaluating skills in reading in order to develop candidates' awareness of such aspects as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ writers' purpose/theme/etc ◆ writers' use of common language techniques (word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, punctuation, tone, contrast, etc) ◆ distinguishing fact and opinion ◆ discussing bias, balance and point of view ◆ impact of a text (or parts of a text)

Useful websites

The below list may provide resources suitable for the National 5 English course.

- ◆ [Scottish text list](#)
- ◆ [SQA National 5 English past papers](#)
- ◆ [SQA Understanding Standards](#)
- ◆ [SQA National 5 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.	August 2017
2.1	Minor changes made to 'Assessment conditions' section for the portfolio-writing.	July 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>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>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: please check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.

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