

A conscious choice was made to include questions that invited candidates to draw on their contextual and prior knowledge in constructing relatively authentic texts.

Advice for candidates

- Appropriate revision and preparation for the examination is essential. Many candidates this year were unprepared and used little or no textual evidence. Your study should incorporate learning a range of quotations or examples as well as consideration of the way in which they might be used to support your discussion of syllabus concepts.
- It is unwise to go into the examination having revised only a single text. Many questions will require you to discuss two. However, where a question asks for 'at least one text', simply referring to a second text is not a guarantee of higher marks.
- It is highly unlikely that you will ever get a question that you have already written on or prepared. You must be prepared to adapt your knowledge of your texts and the syllabus concepts to the questions that are asked in the paper in front of you.
- Familiarise yourself with the syllabus as it is the source from which all examination questions are drawn; sometimes as literally as reproducing a syllabus examinable content bullet point as a question.
- The first test, if you like, in an English examination is to choose the right question. Not every question will suit every text. You only need to answer one question from a choice of six in the Responding section, so pick the one that suits you and your text the best. Having made that choice – follow through with it. Carefully deconstruct the question and ensure you know exactly what it is asking of you.
- In Section Three: Composing, you need to avoid using overly graphic language and profanity in consideration of your audience, who are the markers of your work.

Advice for teachers

- Be familiar with the phrasing and terminology of the syllabus. Concerns that particular phrases or concepts are 'not in the English syllabus' are unfounded. The examination goes through many rounds of review, so teachers should be assured that all questions are directly drawn from the syllabus documents.
- Teachers are reminded that all aspects of the course, irrespective of how 'difficult', 'minor', or 'particular' they are considered by some, will appear in an examination at some point.
- A focus for teaching should be on the construction and communication of clear, well-reasoned and articulate arguments. Teachers should consider the fact that the mean for Section Two remained similar to previous years, despite a clear reduction in the complexity of the questions.
- The teaching of comparative writing needs to remain a focus, in both the essay and – particularly – short answer format. Integrated approaches to comparison, rather than separate blocks of discussion connected by a single transition marker, seem to produce more insightful comparisons.
- Clearly distinguish between language, generic, structural and stylistic features. While there is some overlap in these areas, many candidates misidentified language features. On this, the term *language features* applies to all modes of communication; thus there are visual language features, spoken language features and so on, and not just written language features.
- Importantly, students need to be able to articulate the relationships between concepts in their texts. Avoid teaching concepts in isolation, and instead teach, for example, the interrelationship between *voice* and the *values and attitudes* communicated, or *context* and the *perspectives* it produces.
- The concept of texts generating multiple readings or interpretations is enshrined in the course. It is also evident in our practice, when we teach a text in terms of its genre, its themes and ideas, its representations of certain groups, and its relationship with its

context or even in our shared classroom discussions of texts. These are multiple readings: make this fact explicit to your students.

- Explore the marking keys published alongside the examination on the School Curriculum and Standards Authority website: these clearly draw attention to the syllabus links within the questions and model various ways in which candidates might approach each question. It is an invaluable tool in teaching students to be adaptable and flexible within the examination context, rather than hoping for that question they have previously prepared.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Comprehending (30 Marks)

Candidates seemed to find the texts and questions largely accessible, with perhaps the exception of Question 2's requirement to identify a 'similar' idea in the two texts. The texts selected by the examining panel were intended to reflect a variety of experiences and voices. Questions asked candidates to identify the voices, ideas and construction of texts. Candidates handled these concepts with varying degrees of success, but largely seemed aware of the requirements of each question. Given the emphasis on comparison in Unit 3, a comparative question was included in Section One this year.

For this year, the three texts selected comprised of an extract from a memoir-style essay, a novel and a multimodal print advertisement.

An observation from previous years is that candidates frequently seemed to write mini-essays, with brief introductions and conclusions that merely restated the content of the analytical paragraph/s. This did seem to be somewhat less of a concern this year. However, some markers commented on the length of responses. Candidates should be encouraged to confine their answers to the recommended limit and focus on concise expression of complex ideas.

Section Two: Responding (40 Marks)

Section Two provided a range of questions on key syllabus concepts from which candidates could select. Questions drew on Units 3 and 4 equally. As mentioned previously, the complexity of the questions was reduced for the 2020 examination, with a reduction from three concepts to two required for each question. Despite this, question means stayed relatively consistent with previous examinations, suggesting that success in this section relies more on candidates being able to frame cogent responses that successfully apply the questions to their studied texts, than with the questions themselves.

Section Three: Composing (30 Marks)

Section Three provided candidates with a range of opportunities to demonstrate their skills of composition, with questions directing them to write imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts for particular purposes, audiences and contexts. In keeping with tradition, candidates were offered three types of prompts: images, quotes and direct instructions. A conscious choice was made to provide prompts that invited candidates to draw on their contextual knowledge. We knew that Question 11 would draw on contemporary weaves of political protest, and believed that the treehouse in Question 14 would allow for explorations of candidates' own childhoods. Although drafted prior to the Covid pandemic, we agreed to retain Question 10 knowing that it might invite candidates to respond drawing upon this as their subject matter. It was hoped that providing such explicit opportunities to comment on the world around them would result in more authentic texts than we have sometimes seen in the past.

A choice of command words was used, providing nuances which served as discriminators in marking. Prompts were carefully chosen to ensure that they offered both literal and figurative interpretations, again allowing for higher order responses to become apparent.

A common criticism noted by markers was the lack of attention given to audience, particularly when composing persuasive and interpretive texts. Candidates would do well to remember that the primary instruction of this section is to choose 'a form of writing appropriate to a specific audience, context and purpose'. The selection of such audiences, contexts and purposes should be a key factor in the shaping of the resultant text. A further criticism from markers was the extent and graphic nature of profanity used. While a degree of swearing may be considered authentic to certain texts, candidates ought to consider their audience here as teachers: if they would not use this language in the classroom it is perhaps best to avoid using it here.

It is evident that teachers and candidates are spending more time preparing for and addressing the Composing section. In comparison to 2019 when many candidates wrote less than two pages, this year most managed three and in doing so, gave space to execute their ideas and showcase their skills more fully. In addition, candidates appear to have a much better grasp of interpretive texts than they had in previous years, with almost every response to Question 10 employing an appropriate form.