

Advice from principal examiners about paper 2

Key features

- For paper 2 students have to write a comparative essay—it involves the comparison and contrast of content and form in two works.
- There are four questions students can choose from. They will focus on aspects of literary study which are related to the seven concepts underpinning the course. These questions will not be literary-form or literary-genre specific to allow students to answer them with any combination of works.
- Even though questions may not address the analysis of formal features specifically, an exploration of how authors' choices create meaning is a key feature of the paper, which is evaluated in criterion B, "analysis and evaluation".
- The works used can be of any literary form or any combination of them, be studied in translation or written originally in the language A course studied, from the *Prescribed reading list* or chosen freely.
- No work that has been used for another assessment component can be used in paper 2 and the two works used must have been written by two different authors.
- Paper 2 is the same paper for both SL and HL, and for both literature and language and literature, and it is assessed with the same set of assessment criteria.
- The time available for the completion of the exam paper is 1 hour 45 minutes.
- To see some examples, please refer to the specimen papers and the exemplars.

Tips and recommendations

- Paper authors have set out sensible recommendations for text choices. Examiners would add that engagement with the works chosen for paper 2 is the most important element of success. Beyond any kind of preparation, practise, research or memorization, reading and thinking about the works is the most important work a student can do. Reading and responding will create a more intimate knowledge of the works than available in any study method and will help to increase flexibility when approaching unique questions.
- Teachers and students should be aware of formulaic approaches to analysis, memorized responses to previous questions and "fill-in-the-blank" approaches to building an argument. In relation to formulas and strategies, not all elements—context, imagery, critical views—are important in response to every question. In relation to structure, a three-part thesis statement, for example, may be the right approach to some questions and not to others. In relation to memorized responses, an answer about "physical environment", for example, may not necessarily be easily shaped to fit a question about "sense of place".
- Finally, examiners consistently find that focus on the question is one of the most important elements for a sound response.

Comments in relation to the assessment criteria

Criterion A: knowledge and understanding are revealed in the coherence of elements, not in discrete parts. A fact about a text does not stand alone, but is used in a discussion of a problem presented in the question. In relation to specific evidence, it is just as acceptable in a strong interpretation that bears on a question to make clear reference to moments and features that might not be “labelled” as it is to use direct quotations or particular named elements. Clear response to the question and comparison of the works in relation to the question is a better indication of meeting the standards of criterion A than an exhaustive list of quotations, terms or facts, correct or otherwise.

Criterion B: it is important to remember that analysis of a text involves a close look at the text but is not limited to a discussion of literary features. Authors choices may involve small details such as the use of particular words or be as broad as choice of genre. Analysis of a work should lead to an evaluation. Evaluation can be seen as a discussion of effects that gets at why the question or issue might actually matter in the works at hand. Evaluation can, in this way, be seen as a type of “evaluative interpretation” as opposed to a simple statement of comparison such as “Plath’s imagery is more effective than Frost’s”. There are, however, candidates who may offer aesthetic evaluation that is more effective, that suggests some sense, for example, of why this imagery might “work.” It is also important to note that a candidate may never use statements with explicitly evaluative language, but still offer the kind of interpretation that gets at what is at stake in these stylistic and interpretive queries about works.

Criterion C: focus on the question and the argument being made is important. It is also important to try to build an argument and connect elements of an argument. In this way, even connective statements can help. Balanced attention to the works is also important. Finally, examiners are not looking for any one type of organization (a three-part thesis, organization by idea versus organization by text, a particular type of conclusion), but are looking for a clear, focused argument with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Criterion D: while language should be formal—even if only to remain clear and precise—individual variations in style and voice are acceptable and expected. Different parts of the English-speaking world have different stylistic conventions and examiners are open to these. The use of first person, for example, is perfectly acceptable. Language that does not work is language that is repetitive, strained, awkward or unclear as opposed to language that may have errors but is authentic and communicative.