

GCSE subject criteria for English literature

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Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in English literature. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293)
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
 - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
 - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
 - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the national curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and facilitate progression to higher level qualifications in English
 - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders, such as learners and parents/guardians, know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of English literature must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

Aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in English literature should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study. They should extend learners' interest in and enthusiasm for literature as they develop an understanding of the ways in which literature is rich and influential. They should prepare learners to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices.
6. GCSE specifications in English literature must enable learners to:
 - understand that texts from the English, Welsh or Irish literary heritage have been influential and significant over time and explore their meaning today

- explore how texts from different cultures and traditions may reflect or influence values, assumptions and sense of identity
- connect ideas, themes and issues, drawing on a range of texts
- become critical readers of fiction and non-fiction prose, poetry and drama
- experience different times, cultures, viewpoints and situations as found in literary texts.

Subject content

7. The content of GCSE specifications in English literature must reflect the learning outcomes.
8. GCSE specifications in English literature must be consistent with the national curriculum key stage 4 programmes of study requirements in the orders for England and Wales, and the statutory requirements for key stage 4 in Northern Ireland.
9. GCSE specifications in English literature must require learners to study a minimum of six texts, at least three of which are from the English, Welsh or Irish literary heritage. Texts must include prose, poetry and drama (in England this must include a play by Shakespeare), and be sufficiently rich and substantial to engage readers intellectually and emotionally.
10. The range of texts studied must include:
 - texts from the English, Welsh or Irish literary heritage
 - texts from different cultures and traditions
 - texts by contemporary writers.
11. GCSE specifications in English literature must allow learners to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding specified below.
12. GCSE specifications in English literature must require learners to:
 - develop and sustain independent interpretations of whole texts, supporting them with detailed textual references
 - analyse connections between texts, comparing features and qualities that connect and contrast the presentation of themes, characters and settings
 - analyse the impact of style, language, structure and form

- relate texts to their social and historical contexts, and to the literary traditions of which they are a part
- understand how texts from the literary heritage have been influential and significant over time.

Assessment objectives

13. All specifications in English literature must require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

Assessment objectives		Weighting (%)
AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations 	25–35
AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings 	25–35
AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ make comparisons and explain links between texts, evaluating writers' different ways of expressing meaning and achieving effects 	15–25
AO4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts; explain how texts have been influential and significant to self and other readers in different contexts and at different times. 	15–25

Scheme of assessment

14. GCSE specifications in English literature must allocate a weighting of 75 per cent to external assessment and a weighting of 25 per cent to controlled assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.
15. The external assessment may include questions on texts that have not previously been seen by candidates. A maximum weighting of 20 per cent may be allocated to questions of this type.
16. Question papers in English literature must be targeted at either foundation or higher tier.

17. Texts used in external assessments must not be annotated.
18. Candidates must be assessed on at least four texts in the external assessment and on at least two texts in the controlled assessment.

Grade descriptions

19. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.
20. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.

Grade	Description
A	Candidates respond enthusiastically and critically to texts, showing imagination and originality in developing alternative approaches and interpretations. They confidently explore and evaluate how language, structure and form contribute to writers' varied ways of presenting ideas, themes and settings, and how they achieve specific effects on readers. Candidates make illuminating connections and comparisons between texts. They identify and comment on the impact of the social, cultural and historical contexts of texts on different readers at different times. They convey ideas persuasively and cogently, supporting them with apt textual references.
C	Candidates understand and demonstrate how writers use ideas, themes and settings in texts to affect the reader. They respond personally to the effects of language, structure and form, referring to textual detail to support their views and reactions. They explain the relevance and impact of connections and comparisons between texts. They show awareness of some of the social, cultural and historical contexts of texts and of how this influences their meanings for contemporary and modern readers. They convey ideas clearly and appropriately.

F	Candidates make an involved, personal response to the effects of language, structure and form in texts, showing some awareness of key ideas, themes or arguments. They support their views by reference to significant features or details. They make straightforward connections and comparisons between texts and suggest how this contributes to readers' understanding and enjoyment. They are aware that some aspects of texts relate to their specific social, cultural and historical contexts, and suggest successfully why this may be significant with reference to some texts.
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