

2012 HSC Notes from the Marking Centre – English Extension 1

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Introduction

This document has been produced for the teachers and candidates of the Stage 6 course in English Extension 1. It contains comments on candidate responses to the 2012 Higher School Certificate examination, indicating the quality of the responses and highlighting their relative strengths and weaknesses.

This document should be read in conjunction with the *Stage 6 English Syllabus, English Stage 6 Prescriptions: Area of Study Electives and Texts – HSC 2009–2014*, the 2012 Higher School Certificate examination, the marking guidelines and other support documents developed by the Board of Studies to assist in the teaching and learning of English Extension 1.

General comments

Candidates need to be familiar with the Board’s [Glossary of Key Words](#), which contains some terms commonly used in examination questions. However, candidates should also be aware that not all questions will start with or contain one of the key words from the glossary. Questions such as ‘how?’, ‘why?’ or ‘to what extent?’ may be asked, or verbs that are not included in the glossary may be used, such as ‘design’, ‘translate’ or ‘list’.

Candidates must prepare thoroughly for the examination, but they need to demonstrate flexibility in applying their knowledge and understanding to address the questions they encounter in the examination. Candidates who reproduce generic responses that they have learnt by rote regardless of the question, or who make some perfunctory modifications to refer to the question in their introduction and conclusion, cannot access the higher marks.

Module A: Genre

Question 1

General comments

In better responses, candidates engaged with all elements of the question through a succinct, clear and sustained thesis that related directly to the terms of the question. Many candidates interpreted the question by linking ideas of context or specific readings of a text to the notion of different perspectives and by discussing a text's values as the stimulus for it to gain enduring popularity. In many of these responses, candidates also considered differing perspectives not simply between texts, but within them, leading to a highly sophisticated analysis of the question's terms.

In better responses, candidates offered an insightful and balanced treatment of the texts, offering equal length and depth of textual exploration for each. This was facilitated through the selection of varied and sophisticated supplementary material, promoting a fluent and clear discussion of the nature of genre. In these responses, candidates also acknowledged connection between their texts, considering similarities and contrasts between them in a highly synthesised manner.

In weaker responses, candidates did not engage with the terms of the question, in particular neglecting the popularity element. These responses were often a prepared recount, rather than analysis, of texts and the history of the genre. Candidates needed to address the values and context of their texts, instead of discussing only the conventions of the chosen genre and their expression in the chosen texts.

In these weaker responses, candidates often used repetitive language and treated the texts unevenly, frequently relying heavily on set texts at the expense of texts of their own choosing. Such treatments offered little sense of unity within the genre or connection between the texts. In some responses, candidates attempted to use too many texts, detracting from the overall depth of analysis for each.

Specific electives

Elective 1: Life Writing

In better responses, candidates displayed an awareness of the relative popularity of the genre and accounted for this through analysis of texts. In these responses, candidates tended to deal elegantly with notions of differing perspectives and they selected a broad range of biographical texts to support their discussion.

Elective 2: Crime Writing

In better responses, candidates used supplementary texts that subverted the traditional generic features or made strong social commentary, rather than 'Golden Age' novels that established the conventions of the genre through repetition of its tropes. In these responses, candidates also had a sense of why Crime Writing remains popular and linked this to the context of their texts.

Elective 3: Science Fiction

In better responses, candidates offered powerful considerations of the ways in which contextual concerns influence texts in the genre, affecting their perspective and popularity. In a number of weaker responses, candidates used films released in the past year, such as *Prometheus*. Supplementary material must be considered in the same depth as the set texts, a task made difficult when said material is not readily available.

Questions 2, 3 and 4

General comments

In better responses, candidates used the given concept and the specific element in engaging, seamless and purposeful writing. These responses were well structured and cohesive, displaying a highly developed control of language. Many candidates were judicious in their choice of narrative devices in exploring the key issues, ideas and conventions of their respective electives. While many candidates skilfully appropriated aspects of well-known texts, better responses used conceptual approaches such as subversion, parody and irony in responses that were imaginative and original.

In weaker responses, candidates tended to deal with the element literally and often did not develop the concept throughout their writing. Their responses lacked originality. Although many wrote lengthy responses, they did not develop complexity in the work. There were some disjointed and poorly structured responses that were not able to engage the reader. These responses demonstrated limited understanding and knowledge of the elective, relying on clichéd scenarios and confusing or convoluted narratives. They also demonstrated poor control of language to express ideas.

Specific electives

Elective 1: Life Writing

In better responses, candidates developed complex and clever pieces that demonstrated imaginative employment of the Life Writing conventions. These candidates clearly understood how to employ the idea of complexity in family life within their pieces in imaginative and sophisticated ways.

In weaker responses, candidates relied on a literal interpretation of the 'ticket' and often did not engage with the concept, tending to write introspective personal responses. These candidates did not demonstrate complexity in ideas or language.

Elective 2: Crime Writing

In better responses, candidates were innovative and clever in using the conventions of Crime Writing to engage the reader. The integration of the ticket was often metaphorical or symbolic, and the concept of ambiguity was clearly explored in highly developed and controlled language.

In weaker responses, candidates often employed predictable conventions, using clichéd dialogue, hackneyed storylines and pedestrian language.

Elective 3: Science Fiction

In better responses, candidates used highly developed and imaginative plots and employed the ticket in clever and original ways. These candidates understood the conventions of their elective and demonstrated highly developed knowledge in their exploration of the possibilities of the unknown. The responses were written in highly controlled and complex language and candidates developed their plots in a sophisticated manner.

In weaker responses, candidates were limited in their engagement with the ticket and did not produce imaginative plots. The narratives were often undeveloped and they employed the concept in a limited and predictable way. Control of language was also limited and predictable.

Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking

Question 5

In better responses, candidates stated a clear conceptual thesis in their introduction, and continued to develop and sustain that thesis with detailed and judiciously selected textual analysis and evaluation. In these responses, candidates showed evidence of extensive research into the historical periods and ways of thinking, which helped communicate a deep understanding of the historical periods and how composers provided diverse perspectives on those times and paradigms. The responses, when discussing the diverse perspectives present in the texts, often reflected on how textual forms and features were shaped by, and were a response to, the period and its ways of thinking. Some of these better responses integrated discussion of theorists and critics to support contextual understanding that provided a spine for the argument being developed.

In better responses, candidates also analysed and evaluated their texts in the light of the module and elective in a detailed and sustained fashion. These candidates highlighted elements of the texts that demonstrated an interaction with historical ways of thinking, as well as knowledge of the relationship between textual features and meaning. Their responses explored a variety of sections from the prescribed texts and, when discussing the work of a poet or short story composer, often explored a common conceptual thread between the chosen two poems or short stories that helped to strengthen the argument being made. In these responses, candidates also demonstrated extensive and apt usage of texts of their own choosing, integrating discussion of those texts and their features into the argument.

In weaker responses, candidates answered with a lack of balance in their exploration of the provided statement. They often did not consider the provided statement, or gave a superficial consideration that was not sustained through the response. Some candidates wrote at length about the historical period, using the texts more as a support for the argument rather than analysing them in detail. Other candidates demonstrated an understanding of the texts without the necessary reference to the ways of thinking in the historical period. They often analysed texts in isolation, rather than as part of a synthesised whole discussion. These candidates used prescribed texts and texts of their own choosing in a limited fashion. In some weaker responses, candidates featured texts of their own choosing that limited the ability of the students to support an in-depth discussion of the ways of thinking in the historical periods of the electives.

Specific electives

Elective 1: After the Bomb

In better responses, candidates balanced the key ways of thinking of the historical period with a sophisticated understanding of the impact of those ways of thinking on the texts of the period. In these responses, candidates often featured a reflection on the impact of the paradigms on the forms and features of texts from the period and the diversity of those impacts.

In weaker responses, candidates often featured an explanation of the historical events and/or ways of thinking and/or movements of the period. These candidates used texts only to explain the impact of the period on the texts, with often unrelated discussion of textual forms and features.

Elective 2: Romanticism

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a detailed understanding of the relationship of texts produced as a part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romanticism

movement with the ways of thinking in the historical period. There were often clear references made to how texts reflected the shift from Enlightenment and Augustan thinking, as well as to distinct periods within the movement. In better responses, candidates made discerning use of suitable related texts from a range of times, contexts and media that reflected the ways of thinking of the historical period of the elective.

In weaker responses, candidates often relied on explaining how individual elements of Romanticism, such as a belief in Imagination or Nature, were reflected in the texts, rather than a broader view of the ways of thinking present in the historical period. In many weaker responses, there were also references to texts of the students' own choosing that did not reflect or engage with the values present in the Romantic period as defined in the elective's rubric.

Elective 3: Navigating the Global

In better responses, candidates demonstrated an approach that explored the concept of navigating through varied global voices and a growing diversity of textual features and values. In these better responses, candidates explored the richness and complexity present throughout the prescribed texts. In many of these better responses, candidates engaged with key theorists from the period, in order to support their thesis.

In weaker responses, candidates often focused on the idea of exploring globalisation, rather than exploring the idea of 'navigating' and looking at the diverse perspectives present in that navigating. In many weaker responses, candidates also discussed the theories of the historical period at length, using the texts only as a way to support what was being argued about the period.

Questions 6, 7 and 8

In most responses, candidates presented a piece of imaginative writing that reflected the ideas, values and/or events of a particular historical period, as directed by the syllabus rubric for Module B and the examination questions. However, there were still a number of candidates who either set their responses outside the specified period or whose context was not readily identifiable.

In better responses, candidates explored the given concept and seamlessly incorporated the element of the letter. In these responses, candidates reflected a sophisticated and detailed understanding of the module and manipulated elective-specific knowledge in highly creative ways. Context was made explicit through the incorporation of details that displayed historically accurate awareness of personalities, events and/or ideologies. In some instances, these were used to develop credible imagined scenarios. These responses were further characterised by the creation of a sustained and engaging narrative voice. Candidates exhibited flair and precision in their control of language in these better responses.

In weaker responses, candidates addressed the ways of thinking in a generalised or limited fashion. The provided element was used cursorily or unconvincingly; in some instances, it was missing entirely. Storylines were often clichéd and predictable, ideas underdeveloped and settings not within the required period.

Specific electives

Elective 1: After the Bomb

In better responses, candidates engaged with a range of pertinent concerns, such as fear, tension and a questioning of beliefs and institutions. This elective offers a variety of approaches, reflecting the range of issues raised in the prescribed texts. Some candidates

focused on the political realities of the time, while others adopted a more personal perspective and still others took their inspiration from absurdism.

In weaker responses, candidates demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of the ways of thinking in the historical period. Scenarios were sometimes unclear or implausible.

Elective 2: Romanticism

In better responses, candidates revealed an understanding of the concepts embedded in the period, such as the value placed on the aesthetic, the restorative power of nature, and burgeoning industrialisation. The interplay of conflicting ideologies, such as with regard to the second and third of those concepts, was addressed skilfully and perceptively. Again, it was evident in these responses that candidates had drawn on a rich store of contextual knowledge gained through exploration of the relevant political, religious, scientific and/or economic paradigms. Mastery of tone and language characteristic of the period were hallmarks of these responses.

Elective 3: Navigating the Global

In better responses, candidates reflected a sophisticated grasp of the relationship between the local and the global. They engaged with the complexities implied in the term ‘navigating’, often exploring, for example, cultural, economic and/or historical paradigms. A notable quality of these responses was the candidate’s development of fresh, engaging and well-informed perspectives delivered through a distinctive and sustained narrative voice. These ranged from wry and humorous to deeply poignant. Evocative description, particularly of settings, featured prominently.

Candidates need to demonstrate awareness of the elective’s contextual framework in their imaginative response. This was frequently not evident. Simplistic dichotomies that do not reflect the interdependence and complexity of local and global forces should be avoided.

Module C: Language and Values

Question 9

In many responses, candidates used integrated and synthesised theoretical perspectives. They showed an underpinning of theory, using it to explore prescribed and self-selected texts with sophistication and an understanding of authorial intention (where relevant). Candidates used a range of highly sophisticated related texts that were in different forms (such as hypertext, film, multimedia). The balanced and integrated use of self-selected texts was a highlight in many excellent responses.

The direction to evaluate how accurately the statement reflected the study of the module was a key component of the question, and was dealt with in a range of ways. While in many responses candidates engaged critically and intelligently with the terms of the question, the connection with and understanding of the links between the elective and the module was often not explicated or articulated with great clarity. In the best responses, candidates had a clear thesis threaded throughout and closely synthesised and/or linked the texts.

Specific electives

Elective 1: Textual Dynamics

In better responses, candidates demonstrated detailed and skilful interpretation and understanding of text, paradigm and context. They clearly and thoughtfully articulated the

relationships that exist between texts, composers and responders. In many of these responses, candidates engaged with the idea of ‘diverse perspectives’ from the point of view of how different texts challenge, subvert and/or play with the expectations of the responder.

In better responses, candidates also used well-chosen textual evidence and meaningful analysis. This was especially evident with *Orlando*, where responses looked at a wide variety of scenes in fresh and interesting ways.

In better responses for the text *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, candidates examined such things as the manner in which Fowles subverts the reader’s expectations, the textual representations of Sarah, Charles and Ernestina, the artifice and artificiality of authorial intention/control in a modern context, and the layering and layered effect of various image patterns and how they conform to and defy our expectations of the Realist narrative.

In better responses, candidates who engaged with *If on a winter’s night a traveller* fluently developed arguments that detailed a highly sophisticated understanding of how Calvino constantly interrupts and subverts narrative form, often using a strong and coherent understanding of narrative theory as the underpinning principles of their ideas about the text.

In less-developed responses, candidates tended to list techniques employed by the composers without demonstrating a real understanding of the dynamics of language or the subversive nature of the texts beyond the superficial. Typically in weaker responses, candidates did not engage with the ‘diverse perspectives’ aspect of the question beyond outlining that each text written about had a diverse perspective.

Elective 2: Language and Gender

Candidates must ensure that they are fully apprised of the contents of the rubric for this elective, and where it sits within the Module. The elective ‘Language and Gender’ is a study of language, not of gender roles and/or dialogue between characters.

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the conceptual and intellectual underpinnings of language and gender and how the connections can yield interest and significance. In these responses, candidates often took a conceptual understanding of language and used their texts to demonstrate the influence of form (narrative, poetic, filmic, dramatic) on representations of identity, gender and reality in a nuanced and polished manner.

In these better responses, candidates also demonstrated a clear knowledge of relevant critical theory and used this to support an overall thesis or argument. The linking of text and contextual values concerning gender was often pursued in a successful manner, especially when clearly linked to the language of the text.

The Floor of Heaven, while used sparingly, was usually examined through the lens of postmodernism, with some interesting results. In better responses, candidates examined the structure of this poem sequence, the flexibility and fluidity of the language, and the manner in which Tranter manipulates and shifts the reader’s expectations about the possibilities of how language can create or conceal a gendered identity.

Woolf’s *Orlando* was intelligently approached in better responses, using a wide variety of examples from the text to illustrate the role that language plays in constructing the gender of the central character. A variety of approaches were taken, with some interesting analyses of such things as sentence structure and how Woolf uses it to subvert or undermine phallogocentric discourse. In some responses, candidates linked this kind of analysis to an overarching view of the text as a whole, and how Woolf has structured the text. These responses were rewarded accordingly.

In better responses, candidates used Kapur’s *Elizabeth* to reflect upon the context in which it was produced – not the historical context it is depicting – and intelligently explore how this

modern depiction of a British ruler speaks very directly to Western audiences about how the construction of language and gender can be contextually determined. In these responses, candidates avoided examining this text as a series of speeches by a female ruler who is battling a male-dominated society.

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was explored in better responses as a text that is playful, inventive and gender-bending in how it constructs the dramatic identity of the characters. The richly allusive nature of Shakespeare's language was analysed to great effect and, in several better responses, candidates made sophisticated forays into the Elizabethan context of this specific play.

In better responses, candidates moved beyond the limited theoretical terrain of pop-linguistics (exemplified by Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand*). The identification and description of such things as communicational hierarchies within the prescribed and chosen texts have a somewhat limited scope. The depth and breadth of theoretical material accessed and responded to by candidates in Textual Dynamics illustrates a far greater willingness to be immersed in the language and theoretical scope of the Language and Values Module.

In this Module, students must be highly cognisant of the fact that they are writing about characters as constructs, rather than real people.

Questions 10 and 11

There were many engaging and intelligently constructed imaginative responses in this Module. For the most part, students followed the instructions of the question.

A large number of candidates wrote narratives/short stories. While in many responses candidates demonstrated a high degree of fluency, sophistication and clear imaginative intelligence, there still persists in many responses a limited sense of purpose in the narrative. When coupled with poor grammar and punctuation, these kinds of responses were less developed in both scope and form.

Specific electives

Elective 1: Textual Dynamics

In better responses, candidates addressed the key terms of the rubric, demonstrating a knowledge and awareness of the playful nature of language, how form intersects and underpins meaning, and how language shapes and constructs the world of the text/character/reader/author. They wrote fluent and original narratives that had a clear purpose and voice.

There was some playfulness with the form of the imaginative writing, such as lists, scripts and fractured narratives. The use of recurring motifs (language, time) and laterally thinking about the function of the mirror in the story were key aspects of many better responses.

In many responses, candidates relied upon adopting a Calvino-esque second-person voice that directly addressed the audience, an approach that is potentially quite limiting in terms of exploring the range of possibilities that the elective presents to imaginative writing.

In many better responses, candidates also selected writers, iconic figures, and so on and created narratives around these, often refracting and playing with concepts of time, history and language in the process.

Elective 2: Language and Gender

In better responses, candidates focused on the language aspect of this elective and were effective in incorporating the concept (performance) and the object (mirror). In these

responses, candidates manipulated language and demonstrated a clear understanding of the key concepts of this elective through their imaginative writing. In such responses, candidates created imaginative worlds that looked at performance in a highly playful and figurative – but often literal (actors, drama, opening nights, television shows) – manner. The mirror – of the self, of one’s gender and so on – was incorporated in a similarly figurative or literal manner with successful results.

In some responses, candidates struggled to demonstrate an understanding of how language expresses and creates identity. In most responses, candidates focused exclusively on gender roles (particularly with regard to cross-dressing, homosexuality and non-stereotypical gender behaviour), with protagonists in traditional and predictable dominant or subordinate positions.

Many candidates demonstrated a basic understanding of the conceptual nature of the elective. These candidates wrote clichéd responses and showed a limited ability to use the elements of the questions. For many, the exploration of performance was superficial, the characters were clichéd, and the plot development was predictable.