

## English A1

### Overall grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	E	D	C	B	A
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

There was the customary wide range of topics, from the well-worn and unrewarding like dystopian fiction to more adventurous, and more profitable, engagements with drama and contemporary novels, and interesting comparisons between English texts and those from other cultures. There were excellent essays, for example, on the role of music and sound in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, and on Richard III and King Lear as proto-typical villains, while another good essay questioned whether the term 'tragic hero' was a useful way of describing Macbeth and Othello. Historical fiction about Australia, particularly the novels of David Malouf, was the subject of more than one fine essay, and there was a sophisticated analysis of racial oppression and cultural identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and an ambitious comparison of Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, focusing on the relation between symbolism and imagery. Some candidates did well by approaching canonical texts from an unusual angle: one compared the atypical female protagonists in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, while another explored the inextricable nature of love and suffering in *Wuthering Heights* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and a third used Jung's notion of the Shadow Archetype to illuminate Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Other Research Questions that produced first-class essays were:

To what extent does Zusak succeed in engaging his audience by employing an alternative personification of death in *The Book Thief*?

How are dichotomies used to highlight the emancipation of African women in *Purple Hibiscus* and *So Long a Letter*?

How did the New Woman movement influence Bram Stoker in his portrayal of women in *Dracula*?

Compare the representation and significance of fear in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

Less successful essays resulted from research questions that were too broad and unfocused or from attempts to discuss the work of a poet by saying a little about a large number of poems rather than analysing a small number of poems in some depth. Essays on dystopian fiction were invariably mediocre since the subject tends to produce descriptions of the dystopian society rather than an illuminating analysis of how the novel works.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### **Criterion A: research question**

This was generally satisfactory, though some examiners sometimes found a lack of clear focus and a tendency to use ill-defined and ill-understood terms that were too general to produce more than a descriptive account of a work rather than a searching analysis.

### **Criterion B: introduction**

Many candidates failed to achieve full marks for this criterion because they did not make a case for the significance of the research question. They need to consider at the outset why their topic is worth investigating.

### **Criterion C: investigation**

Most candidates realized that the most important sources were the primary texts and the best essays derived their interpretations and conclusions from close study of these rather than from published criticism. Reliance on dubious internet-based sources and basic study guides was the mark of weaker essays.

### **Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Most essays showed a decent knowledge of the primary texts, ranging from adequate to good, but often that knowledge was conveyed in general terms without the detailed examples that are the mark of a good candidate's close critical engagement with the text. Another weakness was the kind of uncritical personal enthusiasm that militates against a deeper understanding of texts.

### **Criterion E: reasoned argument**

This criterion was moderately well-handled, though a common weakness was to dwell on descriptive accounts of texts or plot summaries rather than developing an argument. The use of sub-headings, which may help students organize their thoughts at the draft stage, tended to be unhelpful in the final version, breaking up the flow of the argument and leading to fragmentation and difficulties of transition. The use of quotations as evidence was often perfunctory, and candidates should be made aware of the need to introduce illustrative quotations properly and set them in context.

### **Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject**

This criterion distinguished the best candidates from the average, who tended, as stated above, to slip into description or intelligent précis when they should have been analyzing.

### **Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

Most candidates wrote competently and some extremely well. Only a very few were beneath the standard required for an EE in English A1, and these should have been steered away from this component.

### **Criterion H: conclusion**

Performance against this criterion was only fair: too often the conclusion simply repeated what had already been stated rather than arriving at a new synthesis.

### **Criterion I: formal presentation**

Generally good, though there are still too many essays that do not consistently apply an academic referencing system.

### **Criterion J: abstract**

Performance against this criterion is improving, but there were still too many Abstracts that omitted at least one of the three required elements. A common failing was to summarize the argument of the essay instead of stating how the investigation was conducted. Another was to write the Abstract in the form of an introduction, using the future tense.

### **Criterion K: holistic judgement**

This was where routine essays on texts studied in class scored badly and more adventurous essays could be rewarded for their initiative.

## **Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

Helping define a clearly focused, fruitful and manageable research question is the main challenge for supervisors, and some of the problems outlined above need not have occurred if the supervisor had followed the instructions in the Extended Essay Guide, the careful reading of which is an essential first step in the teaching of future candidates. Supervisors are advised to steer candidates away from biographical topics (e.g. examining a writer's works as reflections of his or her life), as these almost inevitably result in essays that are merely speculative, unanalytical and second-hand. It may help to choose literary texts that are less well-known but of clear literary value. With classic texts it is advisable to find a topic and an approach that will prevent the candidate from having to go over too much well-trodden ground. With such texts, judicious use of secondary sources may enable the argument to begin at a higher level, and it is important for supervisors to guide candidates towards finding a balance between offering their own reading in ignorance of all secondary sources and relying so much on them that that all personal response is smothered. Secondary sources also need to be approached critically. Supervisors also need to strike a balance between encouraging students to follow their passionate interests and pointing out that some texts are likely to be more productive subjects for analysis than others. It is important to choose texts that are complex and demanding enough to sustain extended discussion and analysis. Where a candidate is interested in a comparative topic, supervisors should ensure that there is a substantial basis for the comparison and that an attempt is made to make the texts shed light on each other. Close textual reference should be at the centre of the essay and candidates need to understand that assertions must be backed by detailed evidence from the text. They

should also be taught to integrate their illustrative quotations smoothly into their argument. Too often a few words are selected and commented on at length, but without a proper context the comments mean very little. Where candidates are interested in the historical, psychological, sociological, or philosophical aspects of a literary text, they should be urged to avoid treating that text simply as a source of documentary evidence for a theory in another discipline, but rather encouraged to examine how it works as literature (ie as a novel, play or poem) to throw light on history etc.

Students should be encouraged to look, and think, beyond basic study guides and to treat internet-based sources with caution. Supervisors should bear in mind that it is the student's own research into the text that is most important. Careful proof-reading should also be insisted upon before final submission of the essay.

Finally, it is important to note that many supervisors are fully aware of all this and are to be congratulated on the quality of the essays submitted. The best essays were intelligent, incisive, illuminating, well-written and a pleasure to read – a credit both to the candidates and to their supervisors.