



Working with the text

Meeting the Assessment Objectives

The four key English literature Assessment Objectives (AOs) describe the different skills you need to show in order to get a good grade. Regardless of what texts or what examination specification you are following, the AOs lie at the heart of your study of English literature at AS and A2; they let you know exactly what the examiners are looking for and provide a helpful framework for your literary studies.

The Assessment Objectives require you to:

- articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression **(AO1)**
- demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts **(AO2)**
- explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers **(AO3)**
- demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood **(AO4)**

Try to bear in mind that the AOs are there to support rather than restrict you; don't look at them as encouraging a tick-box approach or a mechanistic reductive way into the study of literature. Examination questions are written with the AOs in mind, so if you answer them clearly and carefully you should automatically hit the right targets. If you are devising your own questions for coursework, seek the help of your teacher to ensure that your essay title is carefully worded to liberate the required Assessment Objectives so that you can do your best.

Although the Assessment Objectives are common to all the exam boards, the specifications vary enormously in the way they meet the

requirements. The boards' websites provide useful information, including sections for students, past papers, sample papers and mark schemes.

AQA: www.aqa.org.uk

EDEXCEL: www.edexcel.com

OCR: www.ocr.org.uk

WJEC: www.wjec.co.uk

Remember, though, that your knowledge and understanding of the text still lie at the heart of A-level study, as they always have done. While what constitutes a text may vary according to the specification you are following (e.g. it could be an article, extract, letter, diary, critical essay, review, novel, play or poem), and there may be an emphasis on the different ways texts can be interpreted and considering the texts in relation to different contexts, in the end the study of literature starts with, and comes back to, your engagement with the text itself.

Working with AO1

AO1 focuses upon literary and critical insight, organisation of material and clarity of written communication. Examiners are looking for accurate spelling and grammar and clarity of thought and expression, so say what you want to say, and say it as clearly as you can. Aim for cohesion; your ideas should be presented coherently with an overall sense of a developing argument.

Think carefully about your introduction, because your opening paragraph not only sets the agenda for your response but provides the reader with a strong first impression of you — positive or negative. Try to use 'appropriate terminology' but don't hide behind fancy critical terms or complicated language you don't fully understand; 'feature-spotting' and merely listing literary terms is a classic banana skin all examiners are familiar with. Choose your references carefully; copying out great gobbits of a text learned by heart underlines your inability to select the choicest short quotation with which to clinch your argument. Regurgitating chunks of material printed on the examination paper without detailed critical analysis is — for obvious reasons — a reductive exercise; instead try to incorporate brief quotations into your own sentences, weaving them in seamlessly to illustrate your points and develop your argument. The hallmarks of a well-written essay — whether for coursework or in an exam — include a clear and coherent introduction that orientates the reader, a systematic and logical argument, aptly chosen and neatly embedded quotations and a conclusion which consolidates your case



Working with AO2

In studying a text you should think about its overall form (novel, sonnet, tragedy, farce etc.), structure (how it is organised, how its constituent parts connect with each other) and language. In studying a long novel or a play it might be better to begin with the larger elements of form and structure before considering language, whereas analysing aspects of a poem's language (imagery, for example) might be a more appropriate place to start. If 'form is meaning', what are the implications of your chosen writer's decision to select this specific genre? In terms of structure, why does the on-stage action of one play unfold in real time while another spans months or years? In terms of language features, what is most striking about the diction of your text — dialogue, dialect, imagery or symbolism?

In order to discuss language in detail you will need to quote from the text — but the mere act of quoting is not enough to meet AO2. What is important is what you do with the quotation — how you analyse it and how it illuminates your argument. Moreover, since you will often need to make points about larger generic and organisational features of your chosen text such as books, chapters, verses, cantos, acts or scenes which are usually much too long to quote, being able to reference effectively is just as important as mastering the art of the embedded quotation.

Working with AO3

AO3 is a double Assessment Objective which asks you to 'explore connections and comparisons' between texts as well as showing your understanding of the views and interpretations of others. You will find it easier to make comparisons and connections between texts (of any kind) if you try to balance them as you write; remember also that connections and comparisons are not only about finding similarities — differences are just as interesting. Above all, consider how the comparison illuminates each text. It's not just a matter of finding the relationships and connections but of analysing what they show. When writing comparatively, use words and constructions that will help you to link your texts, such as 'whereas', 'on the other hand', 'while', 'in contrast', 'by comparison', 'as in', 'differently', 'similarly', 'comparably'.

To access the second half of AO3 effectively you need to measure your own interpretation of a text against those of your teacher and other students. By all means refer to named critics and quote from them if it seems appropriate, but the examiners are most interested in your

personal and creative response. If your teacher takes a particular critical line, be prepared to challenge and question it; there is nothing more dispiriting for an examiner than to read a set of scripts from one centre which all say exactly the same thing. Top candidates produce fresh personal responses rather than merely regurgitating the ideas of others, however famous or insightful their interpretations may be.

Your interpretation will only be convincing if it is supported by clear reference to the text, and you will only be able to evaluate other readers' ideas if you test them against the evidence of the text itself. Worthwhile AO3 means more than quoting someone else's point of view and saying you agree, although it can be very helpful to use critical views if they push forward an argument of your own and you can offer relevant textual support. Look for other ways of reading texts — from a Marxist, feminist, new historicist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, dominant or oppositional point of view — which are more creative and original than merely copying out the ideas of just one person. Try to show an awareness of multiple readings with regard to your chosen text and an understanding that the meaning of a text is dependent as much upon what the reader brings to it as what the writer left there. Using modal verb phrases such as 'may be seen as', 'might be interpreted as' or 'could be represented as' implies that you are aware that different readers interpret texts in different ways at different times. The key word here is plurality; there is no single meaning, no right answer, and you need to evaluate a range of other ways of making textual meanings as you work towards your own.

Working with AO4

AO4, with its emphasis on the 'significance and influence' of the 'contexts in which literary texts are written and received', might at first seem less deeply rooted in the text itself but in fact you are considering and evaluating here the relationship between the text and its contexts. Note the word 'received': this refers to the way interpretation can be influenced by the specific contexts within which the reader is operating; when you are studying a text written many years ago, there is often an immense gulf between its original contemporary context of production and the twenty-first century context in which you receive it.

To access AO4 successfully you need to think about how contexts of production, reception, literature, culture, biography, geography, society, history, genre and intertextuality can affect texts. Place the text at the heart of the web of contextual factors that you feel have had the most



impact upon it; examiners want to see a sense of contextual alertness woven seamlessly into the fabric of your essay rather than a clumsy bolted-on rehash of a website or your old history notes. Try to convey your awareness of the fact that literary works contain embedded and encoded representations of the cultural, moral, religious, racial and political values of the society from which they emerged, and that over time attitudes and ideas change until the views they reflect are no longer widely shared. And you're right to think that there must be an overlap between a focus on interpretations (AO3) and a focus on contexts, so don't worry about pigeonholing the AOs here.

The four most important contextual frameworks in the novel have been Freudianism, Evolution, Marxism and Existentialism so these are useful tools for the student of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It is often helpful to see language as the map of a character's mind. Therefore A-level candidates who explore the language used by the characters (the direct speech a writer allocates them) as well as the writer's descriptive language outside of the speech marks enjoy far more success in exams than candidates who relay narrative without utilising text or who merely decorate the narrative with text. The following essay represents how a student may progress towards being able to write about the whole text by analysing smaller sections of the text. This sort of task is very useful practice for the kind of skills candidates are asked to demonstrate in practical criticism exams. The Assessment Objectives being examined via this task are AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Examination essay questions

More student essay answers are given as downloads on the free website at www.philipallan.co.uk/literatureguidesonline, including a comparative essay (for AO3).

Question 1

Sample question

Analyse Fowles's presentation of Charles and Sarah in Chapter 47 through a close exploration of their language on the first two pages.

Student answer

A close analysis of Charles's and Sarah's language in Chapter 47 reveals to the reader many clues about their psychological state at this point in the novel. Charles's first words in the chapter after 'the radio-activity of guilt had crept through his nerves and veins' is to compare himself with both another

man and his own high standards of behaviour: 'I am worse than Varguennes.' In Freudian terms his super-ego is evidently appalled at the behaviour of the id. Sarah on the other hand appears to exhibit no such moral qualms as she attempts to 'deny and hush him' with 'I cannot think beyond this hour.' She evidently feels that in a sense Time is standing still and her evident satisfaction at what has just happened is demonstrated through her acknowledgement that sex with Charles was a willed act — 'I wished it so.' Fowles reinforces her satisfaction at the sexual contact with the use of reiteration: 'I wished it so.' Her behaviour is of being Existentially happy within the moment, neither looking forward nor back: she first 'embraces' his hand and then 'presses it' to calm his rising guilt and so once again the novelist gives the impression that she is in control both of herself and of the situation.

In contrast to Sarah's low 'murmur' Charles's language is increasingly peppered with imperatives of duty, which illustrate his increasing anxiety: 'I must' is repeated twice when he considers his decision to break off his engagement with Ernestina. Sarah calmly tells him that she has 'been wicked. I have long imagined such a day as this', but when she tells him she is 'not fit' to be his wife the reader can detect Charles's confusion. She has seduced Charles yet he does not realise this and when she uses the term 'wicked' from the semantic field of morality the reader may begin to concede that even the enigmatic Sarah measures her life against conventional Victorian moral yardsticks. However, this is not the only analysis: an alternative interpretation is that she uses the term to communicate with the still-conventional Charles in the language he will understand and that her reference to her own wickedness is to provide him with a balm for his conscience, not to create a spike for her own. It is entirely possible that she may believe that she has not been wicked. She has lied to Charles continuously up to this point in the novel and the careful reader may assume she is still doing so now. Her reference to her imagination is significant if the reader analyses it in either its Freudian or Existentialist contexts: her imagination represents her hitherto repressed sexual desire for Charles, now achieved, the alignment of her id with her ego, or can be seen as an Existentialist outcome of free will and action. Her comment that she is 'not fit' to be his wife can be viewed in terms of the ongoing discourse within the novel concerning evolution: she is essentially a different species to Charles and cannot or will not fit herself into a convenient new form for him. She will not adapt to fit Charles's environment.

When Charles reverts to one of his stock phrases usually employed when he wants to patronise Ernestina 'My dearest —', the reader can see that



Top ten *quotation* >

in Marxist terms he is still assuming the bourgeois position of superior male to inferior female. Fowles's use of the dash makes it clear that Sarah interrupts him to tell him that marriage was impossible due to his 'position in the world', which reinforces the importance of Marxist class-consciousness, but, again, whether Sarah truly believes this is debatable. She may just want to get rid of him now that she has had her way with him and appeals to his self-interest. His references to his 'engagement', to 'blame' and to 'obligations' still show him to be a conventional Victorian man struggling in a moral vortex of trying to reconcile Desire with Duty. His cloying sentimentality is indiscriminate, as shown by the language he chooses to try to communicate affection: 'Sarah...it is the sweetest name.' He met a prostitute called Sarah only a few days ago in Chapter 39 and he did not find the name 'sweet' when he was vomiting into her pillow in Chapter 40. Charles lacks an adequate vocabulary for sexual love with a social equal and it is possible that Sarah finds all of these features of Charles's behaviour unappealing now that she has fulfilled her own sexual longing. Charles lacks the philosophical apparatus to comprehend that a woman may find a man sexually attractive but unappealing on an emotional level and the reader is reminded of the authorial observation made in Chapter 9 that Sarah 'was born with a computer in her heart' and that even here in bed with Charles her eyes are on 'some dark future'. The adjective is ominous for Charles. When Sarah continues to insist that she is not fit to marry Charles he grows increasingly baffled asking 'You cannot mean I should go away — as if nothing has happened between us?' but Sarah replies 'Why not, if I love you?' The careful reader will note that Sarah's 'declaration' of love is couched in a conditional phrase and, yet again, may not be true.

We are therefore left to conclude that Sarah has achieved what she has wanted since almost the first time that she saw Charles and has fulfilled a deep sexual longing and furthermore unlike Charles, still a 'fossil', she has evolved into a new species of Victorian woman: an active Existentialist schemer who has taken control of her own sexual life and successfully reconciled her id and her ego.

Examiner's comments

This is an outstanding essay. For AO1 the candidate demonstrates an excellent command of English. The terminology is always highly appropriate and used to support the candidate's exceptionally well-informed interpretations. The argument that Sarah is now existentially fulfilled due to her successful seduction of Charles but that he is still a 'fossil' is both sophisticated and compelling. References to Chapters

9, 39 and 40 show that the candidate has a sophisticated overview of the whole novel. Analysis of language (AO2) begins immediately and continues all the way through an essay which utilises 26 direct quotations in a succinct, integrated manner, never breaking up the candidate's smooth writing style. The essay is thoroughly convincing in demonstrating a perceptive understanding that language is the map of a character's mind; and the candidate displays a fine understanding of Fowles's techniques such as reiteration, Charles's use of imperative forms of verbs and his vapid reliance on patronising stock phrases to express what he imagines is genuine sentiment. The candidate is so aware of the nuances of language that she even analyses Fowles's use of the humble dash to indicate that Sarah is so in control of the situation and of herself that she feels confident and equal enough to interrupt a man. The candidate's abilities to contextualise the text are remarkable: Freud, Darwin and Marx are all here, as is a thorough knowledge of concepts such as Victorian notions of duty and obligation. Beyond all, the candidate shows mature understanding of the all-important context of Fowles's exploration of Existentialist freedom. This essay would be awarded full marks at A-level and is therefore the very highest grade A.

Question 2

Many examinations offer candidates the opportunity to offer transformational writing as a coursework task. Here is an example.

Sample question

Write Dr Grogan's journal entry following the events outlined in Chapter 53, giving his thoughts on Charles breaking his engagement to Ernestina. You should aim to create an authentic voice for Grogan which builds on Fowles's presentation of character and captures aspects of the novelist's form, structure and language.

Student answer

By God didn't I give him a piece of my mind that young whippersnapper Smithson! Yet I cannot be too harsh on the fellow for he has given up a morsel in Mrs Tranters niece that many men would have devoured in monstrous fashion. So he is not quite the Mr Hyde that the young lady's father will make him out to be should this sordid matter come before the courts as I suppose it might. Rich men with Oxford Street shops do not like it when they feel they have been worsted in a business deal but like it even less when their little cherubs of daughters have been hurt by unscrupulous baronets with a taste for mad women who hang around the Cobb keeping



an eye out for caddish Frog navy types who've had their way and done a bunk back over the Channel. But that's woman for you: not entirely rational creatures when it comes to *amour*. I told Smithson the Woodruff woman was deranged and I even told him about Herr Doctor Hartmann's theories about hysterical girls with melancholia who made stories up to gain attention and as a cry for help. They do it with anorexia as well. Why, I thought the tale of Marie de Morrell would be enough to scare him out of his absurd fascination with la Woodruff. Woodruff was a governess just like that example of perfidious Albion Miss Allen. Poor women! Placed in occupations where they can see domestic bliss and yet not partake in it, not to have a share of it, not to live it. That is a hard punishment. And yet that is why they so often go a little mad. To put Matthei's text into his hand after grog and cigars, to have discussed the eminent Darwin and for Smithson to have spurned the advice burned into the pages in front of his eyes is outrageous! I thought he was one of the intellectual Elect but he was blinded by his desire for a woman who was fit for Exeter asylum more than to become the mistress of an ancient estate like Winsyatt.

I said I would horsewhip Smithson if he didn't get out of town within the hour. I did not mince matters because of the great harm he did to Miss Freeman. That pretty little moppet Mary was blubbering all over the place and I nearly had to give her a sedative so great was the noise that come out of her. Shrieking and balling like a banshee I thought she'd bring the roof in but Mrs Tranter calmed her down with a cuddle. There's three woman upset now because of Smithson so I didn't half give him what for with my barb about the Antinomian heresy: (Greek: anti against; nomos law) the group of early Christian heretics who argued that by faith and God's grace a Christian is freed from all laws (including the moral standards of the culture). Even the Worm of Wurms Martin Luther himself, despite his belief in *Sola Fide* (faith alone will be sufficient to secure Heaven) argued against antinomianism. I gave him my blood and thunder Dante rhetoric too but Smithson defended himself and I must conclude that he has been man enough to acknowledge that to have continued his engagement to Miss Freeman would have been for him to be imprisoned within a cruel lie — cruel for Smithson but doubly cruel for that gay linnet Miss Freeman — who would have no doubt renounced all happiness if she was forced to live with a man not completely devoted to her. There's strong metal in her small frame I'll be bound.

I pass here as a religious little fellow: the smiling Irishmen with a twinkle in his eye but I have never admired the Church of England and their little revolution that was no revolution. I could not have become a doctor without

to be seen playing the game in this seaside backwater and there is more than a mere memory of the old Faith about me — despite my scientific leanings. I believe myself to be a member of the rational and scientific elect and I know that Smithson wants to feel that he belongs to that exclusive Gentlemen's club too. The Elect as a term has links to Christianity. It occurs in the Gospels of Mark and Luke as well as several times in Matthew as a reference to believers in Christ who will be 'captured to Heaven' before the Great Tribulation of Judgement Day. I shouted at Smithson 'You won't be able to be thought of as a member of the elect unless you are able to introduce a finer and fairer morality into this dark world. If you do not you will be a mere despot.' Smithson looked sheepish once or twice as though being told off by his parents but when I told him he must become a 'better and more generous human being' to be 'forgiven' there was a look in his eye which showed he understood. If hunting Miss Freeman leads him into committing other sins I told him he would be 'more selfish...he is doubly damned'. I think he got what I was on about.

Now I shall take a drink of strong grog and espy the Nereids on the beach through the telescope should they deign to go perambulating at such an inclement time of year? That will settle my disordered thoughts. I shall puff on one of my Cuban cigars as I consider the folly of youth Tomorrow I shall keep a kindly eye on Miss Freeman and on poor Mrs Tranter, the saddest of all participants in this strange tale and I shall hope that young Smithson can find some joy if he manages ever to find the whereabouts of his mysterious French Lieutenant's Women.

Examiner's comments

The transformational voice here is often convincing. The references to Miss Freeman as a 'morsel' other men would have 'devoured in monstrous fashion', the awareness that Mr Freeman will consider a court case, sympathy with the plight of governesses, the well-placed references to Matthei and Hartmann, the contextualising of Darwin and definitions of the Elect, the references to 'grog', the telescope, the nereids and Dante are all persuasively Groganesque. Referring to Luther as the Worm of Wurms is amusing and could well fit Grogan's private thoughts about Protestantism. Similarly the candidate understands the doctor's sympathy for Mrs Tranter and Ernestina and shows a sensitive understanding of Charles's dilemma as a man who has broken a social code in order to maintain a personal and new-found morality.

Had there been no defects in this response all of the foregoing would have secured this essay a high reward. However, there are insecurities



Pause for Thought



Some candidates overuse technology and this candidate does so on two occasions. She gives the spelling of nereids as *Nereids* because the spell-checker has suggested it. Fowles uses the word with a lower case 'n' and the candidate would have been better advised to use Fowles's spelling. Also the correct biblical phrase describing the elevation of the elect into heaven is 'raptured', an unusual verb certainly; the spell-checker suggests 'captured' and the candidate agrees. So, trust the text not the technology!

and inconsistencies in the response. AO1 is occasionally wayward: the missing apostrophe in 'Tranter's' in line three is infelicitous as is the confusion over 'woman' and 'women' and 'Irishman' and 'Irishmen' at various points of the essay, the unVictorian contractions and modern phrases and terms such as 'done a bunk', 'cry for help', 'get out of town', 'shouted at', 'told off' and 'what I was on about' all jar. Occasionally grammatical errors such as missing punctuation undermine the sense of reliability the reader has in the response, and spelling errors can irritate: 'balled' for 'bawled'; 'hunting' for 'hurting' and 'Marie de *Morrell*' when the candidate should have written 'Marie de *Morell*' all betray an occasional carelessness which is not in keeping with the best A-level responses. The section on Mary would have been better placed in the preceding paragraph and the asides about Antinomianism and Christian interpretations of the Elect are merely bolted-on context (AO4), which would not occur in a *journal* of the Victorian or any other era: why would Grogan need to explain to himself concepts with which he was already extremely familiar? The candidate integrates the 'blood and thunder Dante rhetoric' far more convincingly, demonstrating she can contextualise effectively and seamlessly when she keeps her focus but the focus is not maintained: the examiner questions whether Grogan would use a term such as 'Frog navy types', as even Mrs Poulteney does not use such racist terms.

However, perhaps the most obvious defect with the work is its occasional howling anachronism. The reference to 'Cuban cigars' it could be argued is a little clumsy — Grogan keeps 'Burmah cheroots' in his 'cabin', but may well have Cuban cigars there too. Much more seriously, would Fowles have a character in 1867 refer to a book (*Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) not published until 1886? Fowles refers to Stevenson's novella in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and presumably this confuses the candidate who evidently does not fully understand some of the techniques of Postmodern writing. The candidate also misuses her knowledge of Miss Allen. René Floriot in 1969 unearthed the truth about Miss Allen. Grogan has no way of knowing this in 1867. Though infelicities like these may look AO4 mistakes they are in fact more serious compound errors of AO4 and AO2. For this reason the candidate cannot be said to display much more than straightforward understanding of AO2. AO1 and AO4 are not sophisticated or systematic, due to their erratic profiles in the response, but are sometimes effective and sometimes relevant. On balance this AS response deserves a grade C.