

AQA GCSE English, English Language & English Literature Specification Guide

By **Steve Davies**, an Assistant Principal Examiner for GCSE English, Head of English at South Wilts Grammar School and Series Editor of Hodder Education's [AQA GCSE English Language & Literature](#) course.

2010 sees major changes to all English and Literature GCSEs. Specifications that have been in place for a decade have been re-written, with teachers now needing to ready students for one English examination when there had been two, with two Literature exams when there had been one, and – most significantly – the replacement of teacher-set coursework with AQA-set annually released Controlled Assessment Task Banks.

Controlled Assessment – Reading and Writing

What is it?

Written controlled assessment is most easily understood as a half-way house between formal examination assessment and coursework:

- It carries a weighting of 40 per cent for English and English Language, and 25 per cent for English Literature (for English and English Language a further 20 per cent is available for three assessed Speaking and Listening activities).
- Students are assessed in silence, in an invigilated location.
- Teachers decide when students take Controlled Assessment and – with AQA guidelines in mind – determine how long students work on a particular task.
- Tasks are set annually by AQA, although some can be customised by teachers.
- Work undertaken for Controlled Assessment cannot be guided, coached or commented upon once the assessment is underway, though teachers are permitted to make the tasks known to students well in advance of the assessment, and are free to prepare students for them.
- Students are permitted to bring limited notes into the assessment situation, although they cannot be added to if a Controlled Assessment Task has to be split across more than one sitting.

What must students do to fulfil AQA Controlled Assessment requirements?

AQA annually releases three Task Banks that set the tasks from which teachers choose for that year: a bank for GCSE English, one for GCSE English Language, and a further bank for GCSE English Literature. Tasks are common to all students regardless of their eventual tier of entry.

Reading: Although the Task Banks initially appear very similar there are differences that make it necessary to look more closely at them, and to make sure the right one is used, and the specific text requirement of each is met. Even though the Reading Task Banks for English, English Language and English Literature share the same overall conceptual headings (*Themes and ideas* and *Characterisation and voice*) each has a particular demand to meet:

- English requires students to write for up to four hours of assessment time, writing about a Shakespeare play, one text from a different culture and one text from the English Literary Heritage. The latter two texts here must see students responding to poetry and prose.
- English Language students, however, in writing for up to four hours, have freedom to choose from any genre (and can even write about a text they are being examined on in English Literature).

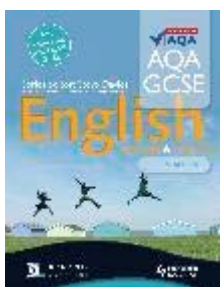
- English Literature students, presuming the school has opted for Unit 3, again using a Task Bank with the same conceptual headings, must write about two linked texts selected from the English Literary Heritage, at least one of which must be a Shakespeare play – once more in up to four hours.

Writing: Similar shades of difference exist between the Writing Task Banks for English and English Language (**Producing creative texts**) despite initial similarities. Although each specification requires students to produce two pieces of writing in up to four hours, the specific Tasks set for each cohort is different:

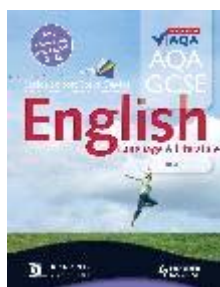
- English offers a choice of two outcomes from three task types: *Moving Images*, *Prompts and Re-creations* and *Me. Myself.I.* where the moving image-based outcome tends towards a more imaginative piece.
- English Language although again offering a choice of two outcomes from three task types has different headings, with different Tasks beneath them: *Moving Images*, *Commissions* and *Re-creations* where the moving image-based outcome tends towards a more ‘real-world’ outcome, as do the Tasks set as re-creations.

With these substantial shifts in the assessment structure and specification content comes the need for strong, appropriate and flexible support for students preparing for their new exams and their classroom-based Controlled Assessment Tasks – which is where Hodder Education’s [AQA GCSE English Language & Literature](#) course comes in!

How will Hodder Education’s course support your preparation for Controlled Assessment?



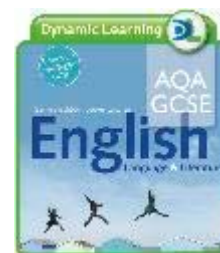
Foundation Student's Book



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Dynamic Learning

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The writing team – comprising teachers, examiners and Heads of English – realised that the fixed-but-ever-changing nature of AQA’s approach to Controlled Assessment meant that resourcing and teacher support had to be similarly fixed and yet ever-changing. Thus, Units 8 to 17 in the Student’s Books each very particularly develops the skills and conceptual awareness needed to better meet the Task Banks’ assessment criteria, providing typically two to three weeks of task-focused learning.

Just as AQA annually releases their Task Banks, so too will we produce and release through [Dynamic Learning](#) 25-plus Task-specific schemes of work, teacher guidance and classroom resources. Each of these units of work will detail a further two or three weeks of Task-specific lessons that fully prepare students for their assessed tasks. Subscribers to [Dynamic Learning](#) will find themselves with over 300 items to support them in their delivery of the Controlled Assessment Tasks across the specifications. See www.dynamic-learning.co.uk for full details for subscribing to Dynamic Learning.

Do you have any queries about the new specifications that haven’t been answered here?

Simply email english@hodder.co.uk and Steve Davies will give you his expert answer!