

# 2023 VCE English external assessment report

## General comments

In 2023 approximately 40,000 students sat the VCE English examination. Many of these students were able to demonstrate appropriate skills and knowledge in all three sections of the examination.

Section A offered students the opportunity to respond to one of two analytical interpretation topics for each of the 20 texts on the 2023 VCE English and EAL Text List.

Section B offered students the opportunity to compare and contrast the ideas presented in a selected pair of texts. Students were invited to respond to one of two questions for each of the eight comparative pairs listed on the 2023 VCE English and EAL text list.

Section C invited students to analyse the argument and language used by a group of young people in an open letter to their community seeking support for their proposal for a way to revamp a garden festival in the local area by combining it with a music festival.

Assessors used the relevant expected qualities to globally assess student responses. The criterion-based descriptors were applied holistically, and assessment was norm-referenced. This means that assessors were not looking for a 'right' answer. While each section of the examination requires students to write an extended response essay, the internal structure, arguments and evidence is up to the student's interpretation. The VCAA does not endorse any one correct response. Instead, assessors rewarded the skills and knowledge that the student demonstrated as they crafted responses addressing the topics and tasks. Assessors were cognisant of the fact that the work was produced under exam conditions and took this into account in their marking.

Most students presented three complete responses, although there were instances of incomplete responses or no response at all. Furthermore, students tended to write lengthy responses for all three sections. While forming and sustaining decipherable handwriting was a challenge for some students, most students were able to communicate their ideas effectively. It was obvious that the majority of students understood their Section A and B texts, the requirements of the tasks and how to balance their time within the examination.

Some general observations for improvement are:

- While most students recognised the key terms of the topics in Section A and B, a number were unable to identify and respond to those elements of the topics that narrowed the scope of the task. Instead, they wrote a response that pertained in a general way to a key idea in the topic. Students are encouraged to focus on the specific aspects of the topic they select.
- Many students were able to identify ideas the authors were conveying and to use these as a basis for their paragraphs, but some students struggled to explain how they had developed this reading of the text. Students are encouraged to explain how they have interpreted textual elements to create a 'reading' of the text and how the interplay of these elements adds complexity to their understanding of the ideas and values the author was presenting.
- Fluency and precision were highly valued. Dictionaries were a useful tool for students, especially in reading time.
- In Section C students understood the need to analyse the argument presented by the writers, but many struggled to see the ways in which language (written, spoken and visual) were used to support and

reinforce the ideas presented by the writers. Some students appeared to see argument and language as separate elements of the text rather than as interconnected elements. Students are encouraged to discuss the purposeful interconnections between the text's elements and the ways in which these are designed to impact the readers.

## Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers, or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding, resulting in a total of more or less than 100 per cent.

## Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	3	7	14	21	22	16	9	4	2	5.6

Section A required students to complete an analytical response to a specific topic. In general, students knew their texts well and understood the need to present a detailed and complex response; however, the quality of these responses varied.

Some students saw the topic as a contention. Even when a question specifically asked students the 'extent to which' they agreed with an idea, there were students who saw a need to 'prove' an idea presented in the topic, rather than engage thoughtfully with the task. For example, some students, when asked 'to what extent are the characters in *Nine Days* sustained by optimism?', responded with a series of paragraphs outlining how characters' optimism manifested itself, rather than considering the extent to which the characteristic sustained them. Stronger responses recognised a text's complexity and were able to take a position in relation to the topic as shown in the example below.

In response to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Question 8ii. – "The women in the play have little influence over what happens to them." To what extent do you agree? – a student wrote '... Ultimately, the playwright celebrates the efforts of females to obtain some semblance of control, but evinces that in a hegemonic society, it is the men who retain near absolute power.' Such a contention indicates an understanding of both text and topic.

Another way in which a student's capacity to read a topic was revealed was in their ability to see how the topic invited a consideration of the idea being discussed. A number of students read Question 15ii. – "*Sunset Boulevard* shows that the pursuit of fame is a perilous journey." Discuss.' – as being an invitation to discuss only the perils of experiencing fame as opposed to the 'perilous journey' undertaken in the 'pursuit' of fame. Equally, a number of students read Question 17ii. – "There is no happiness. The lucky ones are dead." To what extent is the audience and/or reader of *The Women of Troy* left without hope? – as asking whether the women of Troy were left without hope. Higher-scoring responses focused on the topic, as shown by the extract below:

*As their traditional male protectors are killed, Euripides suggests that the women are left utterly vulnerable to the perverse desires of self-serving men. Declaring in the prologue that the Greek men will have 'drawn lots' and 'got their slave', the language of the marketplace here relegates the defeated women to commodified goods that are readily exchanged with complete emotional apathy. Such cold punishment inflicted by 'the Greek war machine' – evoking an image of a mechanical robot, thereby suggesting the systematic dehumanisation that the victorious Greek men enact on their victims. In so*

*doing, Euripides confronts his all-male Athenian audience with the disturbing consequences of plundering. ... Thus as the surviving women are readily objectified then stripped of their humanity, Euripides implicitly leaves the audience very little room to explain the horrible loss of life and hope the Greeks engender.*

By way of illustrating the point that there is no expected response to an essay topic, and that students are invited to present their own reading of the text, below is an example of a student response that explored this topic in a very different way.

*Despite the suffering that comes from those who lose a battle, Euripides displays a glimpse of hope in the rebellious nature and power of the defeated ... Euripides utilises Cassandra and the flame she holds to showcase moments of human strength. Fire, when in the right hands, symbolises power and justice – Euripides employing this to outline how, despite being ‘dragged’ and her innocence ruined, Cassandra was still able to ‘hold [the torch] up’ and rebel against the environment she was thrust into. Thus, Euripides is able to build the women’s identity ... along with this, the women are forced to ‘flow with the stream’ in regards to their suffering. Euripides often utilizes nautical imagery to describe the extent of the women’s suffering and by linking it to the women’s endurance Euripides is able to ... highlight the ... willingness of the women to deal with their fate and strengthen themselves. Finally, Euripides highlights how the women ‘won’t fall’ and ‘march down’ unified as one, ultimately describing their sense of unity and power despite the pain they must endure. Therefore, Euripides showcases how despite the suffering endured from those who fall in war, hope is a quality that can be extracted [from the very worst situations].*

When offering evidence to support their reading of the text, some responses drew on a text's characters as their only evidence. Such responses often implied that characters were used by the author simply to personify a particular static belief or idea. For example, when responding to Question 10i. – “Austen demonstrates the necessity of marriage but also its constraints.” Discuss.’ – such a response might devote body paragraph one to a discussion of Charlotte Lucas’s belief that any ‘suitable’ marriage was preferable to life as an indigent spinster, and body paragraph two to a discussion about Lydia’s experience of being required to marry the man who had ‘compromised her virtue’ before she could be ‘readmitted’ into society. Such an essay might finish with an exploration of Lizzie expecting to find much freedom from financial constraint and social advantage in her marriage to Darcy. While an essay such as this was clearly a response to the topic, it limited discussion of the many ways in which Austen conveyed ideas and values and was unable to explore the ways in which the authorial voice challenged or endorsed the characters’ beliefs or behaviour, or the ways in which other textual elements conveyed ideas. Thus, while such a strategy for structuring a response offers a straightforward way to respond to the topic, it could also limit their capacity to demonstrate an understanding of the complex ideas that were communicated in many ways by a writer.

In 2023 responses on film texts, referencing cinematic evidence was effectively used in support of a reading of the text. For example, one response on the film *Sunset Boulevard*, presented the following:

*Joe had held a desire for fame since the inception of the film ... However, he admits in the end ‘the price ended up being too high’ which serves as a wry reference to the fact that in order to achieve his ambition of reaching fame he had been forced to pay with his life. The midrange shot of Joe in the pool reveals a series of photographers fighting to get a glimpse of his corpse, this serves to show that only in death was Joe able to achieve his pursuit of fame, presenting the journey as ... having an unfortunate ending.*

Another response presented a more complex reading of this scene that focused on a different aspect of the concept of ‘journey’ in the topic, using powerful cinematic evidence:

*Following the sirens Wilder utilises an underwater shot, looking up at Joe Gillis’ slayed dead body, behind him in the background and the array of photographers fighting for the same ... shot of the dead man. Thus [Wilder] portrays the commercialisation of the industry, that no one actually cares who died. Wilder depicts a lack of artistic integrity ... where originality has been thrown out in favour of what ‘sells’ rather than what ‘says a little something’ ... In this way he portrays that attempting to climb the ladder to fame in*

*Hollywood, a personal and spiritual aspect that is proven perilous is retaining artistic desire and integrity, something he suggests that is easily lost in such a dirty society.*

Such detailed considerations of the elements of the film suggested a close and perceptive 'reading' of the text and thus were rewarded.

Many students included quotes from the text; however, not all students were discriminating in the way that they used them. Some students 'tacked' quotes on to the end of a sentence as 'proof' of their opinion. For example, if such a student was making a point about the character Betty in *Sunset Boulevard*, they might have written something such as 'Despite it being an uncommon career choice for a woman, Betty is working hard to become a writer: "I don't want to be a reader all my life, I want to be a writer."' More fluent writers may have been able to embed such a quote more successfully in their sentence. This might read as follows, 'Despite being an uncommon career choice for a woman, Betty did not "want to be a reader all [her] life, [she] wanted to become a writer'.' While the second sentence reads more fluently, it is unclear how the quote adds insight to the point under discussion. Students who had considered the text more carefully, and considered the many ways in which the language conveys ideas, understood the need to select rich elements of the text to present as evidence to support their reading. The following is an extract that uses quotes as powerful evidence to support a thoughtful reading.

*'... After the victory, Menelaus boasts that the Greeks "butchered" the Trojans "with the Gods' help." The description of the Greeks' behaviour after the battle implies their callous disregard for human life. The association of the gods with such behaviour calls into question the respect that they too deserve ...'*

While an understanding of the complexity of a quote may, at times, be presented by implication, responses that included quotes to reveal close knowledge of the language of the text as an element that communicated the author's ideas in complex ways were rewarded.

Many responses included a conclusion that summarised the ideas presented, and this was recognised as an appropriate way to end an essay and rewarded as such. However, responses that could resolve the topic demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of the text and thus were more highly rewarded.

The following extract responds to *The Erratics*, Question 16ii. – "She has her truth and I have mine ..." To what extent do the characters shape their own versions of the truth in order to survive?

*In the end there is a sense that the reshaping and creative construction of fact goes beyond ensuring survival, but also allows one to attain inner peace and 'closure', as Lareau-Harvie transitions into magical realism to vividly illustrate a side she did not know, but hoped, had existed for her mother. She gazes up at the 'millions of stars' no longer able to deny the existence of her children as Napi The Trickster insists she cannot '[take] back what [she has] been given.' With this Lareau-Harvie imparts to us the understanding that to be human is to be in a constant search for enlightenment and hope within the suffering that characterises life – and we all 'do what we can' in order to find this.*

In short, assessors rewarded responses that explored the topic, and its implications, through a sequenced, well-substantiated and fluent explanation of their reading and interpretation of the text.

## Section B – Comparative analysis of texts

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	3	8	14	22	21	15	8	3	1	5.5

Section B required students to explore the diverse ways in which two different, and seemingly unrelated, paired texts explored specified issues and ideas. It was centred on the capacity of students to compare these texts meaningfully, exercising close analysis of one of the eight pairings of texts. As in Section A, students were expected to construct and develop a controlled argument to address the selected unseen topic. The resulting essay was expected to carefully utilise textual evidence which demonstrated the intentional choices made by the writer/filmmaker to convey, examine and communicate core ideas and issues. Students were expected to consider the connections, similarities and differences that arose from such textual comparison through the lens of the chosen topic.

While all eight pairings of texts were attempted by students, three pairings were especially popular statewide, namely: Pair 2: *The Queen and Ransom*; Pair 5: *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker* and Pair 7: *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *The Longest Memory*.

Section B assessment criteria necessitated close textual analysis, centred on thoughtful exploration of the shared focus on major ideas and issues of both texts and, through comparing them, determining how connected, similar or different the key ideas were. Such analysis invoked the need to consider and explain how and why both texts have been constructed to convey these ideas. All of this was reliant upon students carefully dissecting and addressing the chosen topic in its entirety. Some students continued to simply address one key word in a given topic, thereby missing its focus. For example, some students decided to focus on broad issues of 'family', 'remembering and forgetting', 'respect', 'love and hate', 'justice', 'freedom' or 'identity', as mentioned in different questions. This resulted in responses that could not fully respond to either the directional verbs, or indeed, the entire topic. A topic should never be viewed as a fluid prompt.

Students were required to reflect upon the intentional topic wording in its entirety and not to approach the task with, for example, 'forgetting is a theme that both texts utilise ...'. Since this was a comparative task, there was an expectation that by comparing and contrasting the two texts under consideration, insights about conceptual complexity could be explored. Consider the following excerpt from an introduction of a high-scoring response to Pair 7, ii:

*Both post-colonial texts asseverate that Western oppression of disenfranchised communities engender memories entrenched in grief that individuals may attempt to forget, potentially through surrender and compliance to the status quo. Ultimately, however, transformative change to ensure that the future is not just 'more of the past waiting to happen', is founded upon the social desire to remember and act upon collective memories of inescapable agony.*

Here, the response skilfully established a complex and assured basis from which to argue, and it was articulated with precision.

Those students who most effectively approached this task reliably recognised that they needed to establish a clearly discernible contention, and then to develop this contention through thoughtful and sequenced topic sentences and to subsequently connect all of these argumentative elements in a unifying conclusion.

This was apparent in the following introduction from a perceptive and cogent essay in response to Pair 5, ii – 'Compare the extent to which justice is achieved in both texts':

*... the extent to which justice is achieved is depicted as ultimately determined by the retributive whim of the exactor. In both the 1953 play and the 2000 gothic, this is expressed in three main regards: Messianic allegory, intolerance to external forces and uprisings against patriarchal institutions.*

Students were expected to structure their responses to enable meaningful and revealing comparison.

This was shown in the following thoughtful introduction to Pair 1, i:

*Identity, or how one perceives themselves, is a product of a multitude of factors and personal values, and arguably at the forefront is culture. Beneba Clarke and de Heer support this notion through their respective texts ... Through their protagonists, Maxine and Charlie, they convey that living in a country which does not celebrate their cultural variance hinders the characters' connections with personal identity. As they follow through the self-progression of Charlie and Maxine, the creators reinforce the importance of self-growth and cultural connections as aspects of identity.*

This was further enhanced through the topic sentences utilised:

*Both protagonists struggle to feel culturally and historically connected, as a result of cultural convergence ...*

*Both Maxine and Charlie undergo periods of self-destruction and isolation, as they lose touch with their identity, both culturally and personally ...*

*However, as the texts progress, the protagonists adopt more profound responses to their struggles, allowing them to navigate cultural connection in a modern day setting, and regain a sense of identity ...*

And the following logical and validated conclusion is offered:

*Both Maxine and Charlie do not live in communities which champion their cultural identity, but rather ones that reject it. As a result, they both struggle to feel connected to their heritage, and their sense of personal identity is limited. Yet, both de Heer and Beneba Clarke similarly convey the necessity of the connection to heritage and culture their protagonists eventually achieve as necessary and insurmountable aspects of their personal identity.*

Some responses recycled ideas and elements from the topics of previous years, for example 'intergenerational grief' (Pair 7) or 'public versus private leadership' (Pair 2). All parts of the exam invite students to address previously unseen topics and were carefully constructed to invite students to compare and contrast the related pair of texts through this new lens.

Furthermore, the links and connections explored through the topic needed to be sharply focused. The following excerpt from a high-scoring response to Pair 3, i – 'Compare how the two texts suggest that adaptation is at times more practical than resistance' – reveals a complexity of thinking arising from the implications of the topic:

*Both authors, by magnifying how powerful authorities inhibit knowledge about exploitation, suggest that adaptation and resistance are equally impractical. The biopolitical setting of industrial cloning, contrasted with the post-apocalyptic setting of a 'large and complicated world', serves as a microcosm of cruel human disregard, oppressing individuals such that they live lives where they have to constantly adapt or resist towards authorities. It is only by dismissing clones as 'less than human', antithetical to the collective understanding in 'The Profit Motive', that 'everyone here is lucky', that the 'normal' of Ishiguro's society are able to withstand 'students being raised in deplorable conditions', highlighting the ramifications of power, a corrupt pestilence ... Thus, both authors initially suggest that adapting and revolting in dystopian worlds can be equally impractical if individuals cannot ever perceive the need to do so.*

Overall, responses that closely analysed and compared both texts, using precise textual evidence as substantiation, as shown above, were best able to support their arguments in response to the chosen topic. When combined with an insightful grasp of key ideas and ongoing conceptual complexity and a cohesive and coherent structure, high-calibre and high-scoring responses were achieved. In this section, as in all sections, the assessors looked to reward the skills and knowledge (relevant to the topic) that the students displayed.

## Section C – Argument and persuasive language

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0.5	0.5	2	6	14	25	25	16	7	3	1	5.6

Section C required students to analyse an unseen persuasive text, exploring how argument and language have been used to persuade an intended audience to share the point of view expressed.

This year the text was an upbeat proposal, in the form of an open letter, by a group of young musicians who addressed their community with assurance and a sense of agency. The letter proposed that the community host a music festival and was presented as a series of ideas that were sequenced into an argument in support of this change. The accessibility of the material ensured nearly all students were able to identify the text's contention and discuss at least one visual and an aspect of the argument.

There were levels of complexity built into the material that allowed students to demonstrate their different capacities for analysis. All responses were able to discuss the writers' proposal of a music festival. More capable responses recognised that the proposal was likely to impact on the community's Garden Festival and careful reading enabled insight into how the proposal suggested that the two festivals be blended. Other responses were able to see that this might be perceived by some community members as diminishing the focus on the existing festival. A very insightful reading of the text noted the way in which figurative language, associated with gardening and music, was used to reinforce ideas that the two festivals would naturally complement one another.

It is important that students consider the background information presented. This material offered the students information about both context and audience. It was very apparent that young musicians (and teachers) from a group of local schools were behind the proposal and that the readership was the Narrow Valley community. However, students who read the information closely were rewarded with more insight. For example, that the open letter had been published on social media and in the local newspapers was easily understood by all. A thoughtful reading of the material inferred that the letter, also being displayed by local shops and businesses, implied at least some business's support for the proposal. Students who considered this were able to explain that this could be perceived as offering credibility to the letter's claim of the economic benefits associated with the music festival. Students who read the information with careful attention to detail, and who made connections between the elements, were rewarded for their acuity. Equally, while the background information presented the audience as a single group, 'the Narrow Valley community', insightful readers reflected on the tension inferred in the letter between the proposers of the new festival and the supporters of the old festival, as well as the intergenerational rivalry that was implied through the letter, and arrived at the informed understanding that within the community (the 'young and old', business owners and supporters of the traditional garden festival), views and values were unlikely to be universal and hence readers might be expected to respond to the text in different ways.

One student included the following astute observation about the readership:

*The letter's intended audience would predominantly consist of members of the narrow valley community, especially those older who may be sceptical of the benefits of a music festival, as well as key decision makers and officials within the community.*

Another response included this insightful observation as part of their analysis:

*By praising the 'remarkable job' done by the Garden Festival organisers the group aim to quell dissatisfaction and possibly animosity between the two bodies as they urge for unity and a sense of community. By employing a metaphor linking the proposal as 'festival fertiliser' that will 'regerminate' interest, the group emphasises the nourishing and rejuvenating effects of this plan drawing on connotations of plant growth and new life to position community members to see the plan as complementing... [the old festival].*

This consideration of the text was particularly effective as the response linked the insightful analysis to the text's purpose.

When completing this task students needed to frame their analysis with a consideration of the text's context, audience and purpose. There are many ways that this can be achieved. Below is an example of a successful introduction.

*Recently a group of High School musicians have sought to achieve greater opportunities to perform in their local community of Narrow Valley. Published in various social media platforms, newspapers and displayed in local businesses, the Student Music Leadership Group fervently advocates for this cause, asserting their performances will reinvigorate the sense of parochial community for all. Appealing to a myriad of Narrow Valley residents, from conservatives, economically minded sceptics to proud locals and music enthusiasts, the writers ultimately seek to instil the readers with anticipation and enthusiasm for their musical performances, to reinvigorate the local community for the benefit of all.*

It would seem that some schools have developed acronyms to help students remember the information that could usefully be considered in an introduction. Many of these acronyms were scrawled in margins. Teachers will be delighted with this evidence that students listen to, and act upon, the advice they are given and that these 'tips' help students under the stress of exams.

Many responses still identified tone in the introduction without any consideration of its purpose, or that the tone may have changed within the text. Identification of a linguistic feature is only the very beginning of analysis. While a consideration of the persuasive intent behind the choice of tone may have been of value, or the use of tonal changes to identify a change in the direction of the argument could have been a useful organisational strategy, the identification of tone per se was of limited value in this task. For example, the identification of a 'bright and bubbly' tone (or less accurately 'an informing and enriching' tone) did not, on its own, offer assessors evidence of analytical insight that could be rewarded. Indeed, if a response only identified a linguistic element (be it imagery, comparison or the infamous rhetorical question) there was little for the assessor to reward.

Responses that explained that 'the writers began by characterising themselves as capable and energetic young people who were "eager to seize [opportunities]" ... able to "explore", "experiment" and "master" in order to instil confidence in the readers of their capacity and ability to organise a festival', or 'that the supporters of the Music Festival were undermined by the writers who mocked them by implying that they were irrationally concerned with music "shattering windows" or "driving ... budgerigars crazy"' were rewarded for exploring the ideas the writers conveyed to the reader and how they conveyed them. Responses that explained how an effect was achieved were rewarded more highly than responses that could only identify that a linguistic feature had been used.

There were many ways in which students sequenced their ideas in the section. Some responses simply discussed the content of each paragraph in the letter. This laborious approach did not offer the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of the way the writers strategically presented ideas. A more effective level of analysis saw responses that used the sequencing of ideas to logically divide their analysis. For example: the ways that the musicians characterised themselves, the proposing of the benefits of the new festival, the discrediting of the old garden festival, addressing community concerns, championing the region and its features and appealing to shared values. In this way, students were thoughtfully considering how the arguments were constructed and developed. More discerning responses noted how the writers broadened the scope of the new music festival beyond music itself and how they were empowering younger residents. Phrases such as 'In order to ...' 'Having established ... the writers build on the readers' understanding of ... with the intention of ...' or 'Finally, intending to ...' were used to convey the purposeful ways in which ideas were sequenced by the writers to shape the readers' response to the proposal.

Below is an example of purposeful analysis:

*To begin the argument in support of the music festival, the Music Group introduce themselves in an enthusiastic manner, in order to have the community mirror their energy in acknowledging a need for change. By constructing themselves as 'eager' and the festival itself as 'dynamic ... energetic and shiny,' the Music Group adopt an effusive tone seeking to elicit a similar positive perception of their argument from the outset. Through the description of the festival as 'inclusive ... [accepting all] ... regardless of age and abilities ... [and] diverse', the Music Group positions the readers to see them as altruistic in their rational desire [to] ... foster the music festival in a community-minded light, a quality that naturally appeals to the readers' innately vested interest in the unity of the community and its people. The referenced 'thousands of followers on social media' also presents the Music Group as an already prominent voice in the community, thus ensuring the validity of their rational argument. The embedded image also further enhances the idea that one can 'explore and foster all types of music' via the festival as it captures various types of instruments. The fact that they are all being held up implies that they are being offered to the community, and thus puts the onus on [the reader] to extend the offering ...*

This example also illustrates the way in which some responses integrated an analysis of the visual within a broader consideration of the writers' ideas. As the visual was purposefully embedded in the text, the stand-alone-visual-analysis-paragraph tended not to support an exploration of the way in which the visual connected to both the writers' ideas and use of language. The capacity to explain the connections between the text's elements is a sophisticated skill and thus was rewarded. The short, sharp nature of the visual analysis also signalled the student's skilful mastery of the material.

Many students relied on particular linguistic features to populate their language analysis. The most popular linguistic feature for comment this year was the use of 'inclusive' language. Certainly, the text was framed as inclusive and offered to 'provide opportunities for all'. However, some responses mistakenly suggested that 'evidence' for such a claim could be found in the use of the pronoun 'we'. It is important for students not to equate the use of such a pronoun with inclusivity. Such a pronoun both includes and excludes. The writers presented themselves as 'we' for much of the text and the readers were denoted for much of the text as 'you'. Thus, a clear distinction was made, via the use of pronouns, between the two groups. While 'we' is an inclusive pronoun, in this instance it could not logically be offered as evidence of an 'inclusive' tone.

Confident responses considered the unique persuasive elements of the examination text, rather than looking to spot a limited number of familiar techniques. An extract from such a response is below:

*.... Additionally, the musicians connect the youthful spark that the music festival could bring to the calmer but equally profound beauty of their natural region. They stress Narrow Valley area's beauty and suitability for a music festival, employing language such as 'a natural amphitheatre' and 'cathedral-esque space', invoking connotations of both grandeur and musicality, suggesting to their audience that Narrow Valley is a suitable venue for a music festival. The musicians extend their exploration of the suitability of their proposed music festival by linking music to the physical landscape of the valley, invoking thematic assonance with the region in instances such as 'jazz sizzling into the summer sunset' as illustrating a vibrant grace that they attribute to the combination of music and the valley. In this way the musicians build on their audience's established appreciation for the beauty of the valley they live in by emphasizing the ways in which a music festival would enliven and augment it.*

In 2023, areas for improvement include the following:

- It is important to distinguish between summarising the arguments and ideas in the text with embedded quotations (or descriptions with specific examples of language) and purposefully including quotations to illustrate and explain, in specific detail, the complex ways in which the language was used to position the reader.
- Rather than merely listing arguments, linguistic elements and features of the visuals, it is important to explain the ways in which the elements of the text were constructed to persuade a specific readership to embrace the idea of a music festival.

- Avoid analysing textual elements as if they are independent aspects of the text, and instead explore how the writers had conveyed ideas, the interconnections between the text's elements and how these linked to the writers' purpose.

In 2023, high-scoring responses were able to discuss and explain:

- the way the writers established contrasts between the old garden festival and the new music festival
- the persuasive impact of juxtaposing problems and solutions
- the use of garden metaphors to reimagine the existing festival
- the way the suggestion for 'a change in tempo and style' was used to establish the need for 'generational change'
- the various ways that excitement was stimulated.

The following were some of the overall qualities of high-scoring responses:

- a clear sense of the range of the target audience – the 'young and old', business owners and supporters of the traditional garden festival
- an understanding of the development of the argument and the strategy behind this sequencing and its purpose, to both establish a music festival and empower younger residents to create change
- discussion of connections across the material
- sustained, purposeful analysis.

Assessors in Section C, as in other sections of the exam, looked to reward the students' capacity, and there is no single 'expected response'. In this section assessors rewarded responses that explained how the argument was purposefully constructed to persuade the specified audience and how language was used to reinforce those ideas. Students were free to select for analysis the parts of the text that they saw as being designed to impact the reader, and there was no expectation that within the time constraints of the exam an exhaustive analysis of every part of the text could be completed. Assessors looked, as they do in every section of the exam, to reward the appropriate skills that the responses displayed.

## Text selection and average scores

The following table shows the Section A texts selected by students in 2023 and the average Section A scores achieved by those students, shown as a percentage of the possible marks. The table also shows the average scores achieved by the same students for Sections B and C, again shown as a percentage of the possible marks for each of those sections.

Section A text	% of students	% Average Score Section A	% Average score Section B	% Average score Section C
<i>All the Light We Cannot See</i>	3	60.8	60.2	61.4
<i>Bad Dreams and other Stories</i>	1.4	55.7	56.4	56.5
<i>Born a Crime</i>	2.9	54	53.9	55.5
<i>False Claims of Colonial Thieves</i>	1.8	54.5	50.4	52.5
<i>Film: High Ground</i>	6.6	52.8	50.2	53.8
<i>Flames</i>	2.2	57.4	54.3	54.9
<i>Go, Went, Gone</i>	0.7	55.3	55.6	55.7
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	8.3	59.4	60.8	59.9
<i>Nine Days</i>	7.4	46.9	50.5	51
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	3	64.3	63.9	62.1
<i>Rainbow's End</i>	4.8	52	52	53.1
<i>Requiem for a beast</i>	0	40	30.7	43.6
<i>Runaway</i>	0.9	54.2	53.6	55.5
<i>Station Eleven</i>	13.6	55.8	54.4	56
<i>Sunset Boulevard</i>	14.8	56.7	52.4	55.1
<i>The Erratics</i>	1	54.4	56.3	55.6
<i>The Women of Troy</i>	12.9	57.3	55.1	56.2
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	3.1	59.8	56.1	56.4
<i>We Have Always Lived in the Castle</i>	7.1	53.8	52.6	54.5
<i>William Wordsworth: Poems</i>	3.6	64.9	62.1	61.7
No Text	1	0	22	35.3