INTERNATIONAL GCSE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(9270)
Non-exam assessment (NEA)
Teaching guidance

For teaching from September 2016 onwards
For GCSE exams in June 2018 onwards

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Contents

Introduction

The Oxford AQA International GCSE in English Language offers a different model of teaching, learning and assessment from the GCSE specifications designed to assess the National Curriculum in the mainstream UK sector. The specification has been designed to be relevant and appealing to international students and reflects a deep understanding of the needs of teachers and schools around the globe.

A distinctive approach to study and assessment: the non-exam assessment option

The non-exam assessment (NEA) option is an alternative to Paper 2 source-based reading and directed writing examined option. Students present a single piece of researched writing on a topic of their choice, supported by two commentaries. This option is teacher-assessed and subject to external moderation. Teachers decide on the time allowed for the task, including work in lessons and out of lessons, and are able to provide ongoing advice on drafts as the work progresses. It is essential that teachers and students are aware of the difference between advice and correction, and of the penalties for plagiarism (see Section 2 Requirements and expectations).

The advantages of the NEA option are:

- promotion of individuality and independence in teaching as well as in learning

- promotion of self-appraisal of purpose, procedure and results in commentaries

- task choice and focus agreed by teachers and students

- 40% teacher-assessed (subject to external moderation).

Assessment Objectives and parity with Paper 2

The source-based examined option (Paper 2) is based on at least five provided source texts.

The NEA option is based on at least five student-selected source texts.

The source-based examined option (Paper 2) and the NEA option have the same 40% weighting of the overall marks for the qualification.

The examined and NEA options are directed towards the same Assessment Objectives.

AO1: Reading

R1: Read and understand texts, selecting and utilising material appropriate to purpose.

R2: Collate and synthesise detail from one or more sources, making cross-references and comparisons as appropriate.

R3: Develop and sustain interpretations of writers' ideas and perspectives.

R4: Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.

AO2: Writing

W1: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively; use and adapt forms and select vocabulary appropriate to task and purpose in ways that engage the reader.

W2: Use a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect.

W3: Organise information and ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts; use a variety of linguistic and structural features to support cohesion and overall coherence.

W4: Demonstrate technical accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

The NEA marking criteria

The NEA option marking criteria differs from the examined Paper 2 option marking criteria in ways that reflect the different conditions and outcome of study and response. The main difference is that the reading marking criteria includes a descriptor for the commentary on the reading **and research** process, and the writing marking criteria includes a descriptor for the commentary on the writing process. It is helpful for students to know the key terms distinguishing performance within the mark bands.

Key terms in the marking criteria

Band 6 'sophisticated, impressive, independent'

Band 5 'substantial, assured, independent'

Band 4 'clear, effective'

Band 3 'appropriate, aware'

Band 2 'some'

Band 1 'little or no'.

Practical advice

Give students practice in reading and answering questions on the source materials of the examined Paper 2. This will establish the idea of managing different kinds of sources and also establish the different kinds of challenge leading to different kinds of reading and writing responses.

Teachers will be able to judge from performance on timed Paper 2 questions whether students are individually better suited to a 100% exam route or a route with a combination of exam and non-exam assessment. Decisions about entry do not have to be taken until early in the year of submission.

Linking the speaking and listening (optional endorsement) can be a useful way of orally drafting a response which becomes the written NEA. It also provides scope for dialogue between teacher and student, with questioning used to probe, extend and develop the student's response.

Requirements and expectations

There is no limitation of the time allowed or the nature of drafting for the NEA project option. These are a matter of students' most effective mode of working and of teachers' professional judgements of how to support them. The time given to the production of the NEA project will reflect teachers' course planning and students' individual needs but **the unlimited time allowed will be expected to result in deeper and wider reading and in more developed and finished writing**. The more favourable conditions of the NEA justify the expectation of more substantial work than could be produced in the equivalently-weighted Paper 2 examined option.

The choice of source texts should be at least as diverse and challenging as those provided for the Paper 2 examined option. Whereas the Paper 2 option assesses reading and writing, the NEA option assesses reading **and research** and writing. This means students have to show awareness of research as a process involving selection and rejection of sources, interpretation of data and viewpoints and understanding of principles or relevance, reliability and validity.

It is important to note that students understand that 'utilisation' of source material means something more active than copying or paraphrasing information. Simple content transfer is a relatively low level skill demonstrating the ability to select and retrieve. It is the **manipulation, application, development** and **transformation** of source material that demonstrates a higher level of skill appropriate to research-based study and response.

Practical advice

Timing

Much depends on whether the specification is taught as a one year or two year course. In both cases students need some prior experience of researching a topic and time to develop a suitable source-base to work on. In a two year course there is scope for a first and second attempt at a NEA project, possibly allowing a trial common project as an individual or group work exercise to establish key features of assessed individual attainment.

Drafting

Most professional writing depends on a developmental process of drafting, starting with a brief list of categories of the topic to cover, through a few details of what may be part of each section, with some questions to be followed up and some indication of where complexity requires the management of practical implications and resolution of conflicting data and viewpoints. It is specifically to support this evolving and developing of thinking and writing that the NEA option has been designed. Professional feedback on the content and style of drafts is a normal part of the dialogic process of the teacher-student relationship. Feedback to students must be in line with the requirement that the submitted work is entirely the student's own. Providing a first draft of a response for teacher comment and general guidance before final submission is therefore appropriate, but teachers should avoid multiple drafting of non-exam submissions.

Teaching research method

This means more than accepting the first five entries generated by an internet search engine! There needs to be a developed awareness of the kinds of sources which will develop and enhance the student's knowledge and understanding – compiling a source-base from the different sources from a potential range of biography, journalism, polemic, textbooks, political tracts, statistical accounts and historical material. There needs to be evidence of reading, selecting and rejecting various sources, and for rationalising the selection for range, variety and representation of conflicting data, interpretations and viewpoints. Students need to be able to justify their reading sources by reference to criteria of relevance, reliability and validity.

They also need to be aware of the means of generating data and ways in which data can be variously interpreted. Students can be helped to understand basic research method by designing their own research by questionnaire or interview. This gathering of data and display of interpretation can be a very useful one of the five selected sources – and one that successfully demonstrates individuality and independence.

Task setting

Although there is freedom to choose topics of interest to the student, teachers need to ensure that tasks are framed to meet the Assessment Objectives for reading, research and the writing that is generated by such study. There needs to be some prior consideration of the nature of the task and its suitability to meet the requirements and expectations of this specification and alternative NEA option.

Whilst the learning process may be effectively supported by providing students with a common task, it is unlikely that the same task will be of equal relevance to the needs, abilities and interests of all students. A common task may be a useful form of practice early in the course but it is unlikely that a common task will result in a display of originality and independence. Consequently, students should take responsibility for selecting a task that is suitably challenging as well as engaging their interests or arising out of their experience. Choosing topics based on favourite hobbies or activities is unlikely to meet the requirement of challenge, partly because the result may be limited to descriptive or illustrative statement, but mainly because the purpose of the NEA option is to show how a student's knowledge and understanding have been extended, challenged, developed and enhanced by reading beyond their existing knowledge and experience. If the NEA project could have been written without reference to reading and research, it fails to meet the expectations arising from such favourable conditions of study and response. Some students may need to be steered away from writing about their interests in skateboarding, football, pets, music preference or holiday memory (for example). Of course, any of these can be potentially treated in complex and sophisticated ways, but students would need to be guided towards complexity and sophistication if aiming for marks in the upper range.

Task focus

Students should be advised that the NEA option is best approached through the mode of discursive writing in a formal presentation of evidence and interpretation, with a focus on the wider contexts of the chosen subject as well as its relevance and importance to the student.

It is usually helpful to students to know that the handling of different data and interpretation is most easily done in writing that negotiates complexities and conflicts. Hence the mode of argument is likely to prevail, with some scope for personalised persuasion. There are implications here for reading and writing: using merely informational sources to produce an informational NEA piece is likely to limit the reading demand and also the writing demand. Informational writing requires a relatively limited communicative repertoire favouring exposition and statement: the writing criteria assume a wider communicative repertoire for a focused and developed addressing of audience and purpose.

Individuality

Whilst the skills of discriminating reading, purposeful research and focused writing can be commonly taught, the NEA option should be seen as a student's opportunity to apply, develop and modify the commonly taught skills.

Multiple tasks

Just as students are likely to gain from a developmental drafting approach to their NEA, some may gain from a second attempt based on a different subject. In a two year course, it is likely that significant maturation may result in a developed ability or interest which makes a second attempt a valid part of the ongoing educational process embedded within the English curriculum.

Sample tasks

The following titles are examples of the types of task that have been framed to help students engage with topics in the context of conflicting ideas and viewpoints.

- *The dirty truth on food marketing and our children.*

- *Solo sadness or mental stimulation? – Boys and video gaming.*

- *Space exploration: why it's worth every penny.*

- *Global warming – what can be done?*

- *Is the American dream over?*

- *Public interests versus the rights of privacy.*

- *Understanding teenagers: a guide for parents and teachers (social, emotional, physiological and psychological aspects).*

- *The ethics and implications of stem cell research.*

- *The influence of the fashion industry on girls' body image.*

- *Team sports – character building or not?*

- *The dangers of a Disneyfied view of the world.*

The reading (and research) and writing processes

Reading

Students will be helped by understanding that purpose and audience should show some ambition matched to the favourable conditions of the NEA option. The purpose of reading and research should mean more than finding, comprehending and repeating printed informational content. It should be seen as a probing of published content for ideas, attitudes and feelings, and for implications for self and others in a wider context of social, political or ideological significance. Hence reading should be seen as an interactive process of interrogating texts, writers of texts and publishers of texts. Students' annotation of reading should demonstrate this interaction, and a sample of this is required as part of the submission.

Research

The nature of the five sources is important. The sources should show purposeful, independent selection of a range of material yielding different kinds of evidence and different kinds of ideas, attitude, values, interpretations and opinions. The management of these will demonstrate the student's ability to reconcile conflicting evidence and negotiate the conflicting interpretations and priorities of texts which may not be neutral. A selection of similar, undemanding informative sources is unlikely to prompt depth and challenge in reading. Teachers need to ensure that students do not limit themselves by a naïve choice of materials. The essential feature is that students should show that they have tackled material which has extended their own knowledge and enriched their understanding in a chosen area. **If the work produced appears little more than a student may have already known, it will be very unlikely that marks in the upper bands will be appropriate.**

The purpose of writing should be understood to mean more than recording knowledge. It should be seen as a management and manipulation of ideas, attitudes, feelings and opinions, with choice of vocabulary, sentence structures and whole-text shaping to support purpose and to address the needs of an audience. The audience should be assumed to be educated and possessed of ideas, attitudes and feelings of its own. This will help students to show craft in audience address –anticipating opposition, dealing with lack of familiarity, maintaining interest by varying tone and approach, appealing to different faculties of humour, logic, need and taste. The writing needs to show understanding that readers need stimulus, relevance, entertainment and respect, and that the most committed readers will need occasional reminding, re-focusing, emphasis and summary. This should help students to anticipate reader response rather more discerning and sceptical than may be expected of (eg) an audience of congenially supportive peers. It should also help to make the communicative repertoire more suited to assessment of a formal written register than one suited to an informal talk.

Practical advice

Reading

Students should be encouraged to make notes on the articles and references they work through in their selection of five sources. Notes can include comments on relevant ideas or data, the authority of the author or publisher, the kind of audience addressed and any aspect of the writing which indicates a personal or cultural bias.

Writing

Students should be encouraged to track the progress of their writing, including details of vocabulary substitutions, alterations of sentence structure and shifting of paragraphs to sequence the development of ideas. They should also note paragraph choices designed to make the whole text varied and to sustain appeal to the reader. Significant changes to drafts following guidance should also be part of the self-monitoring.

A choice of a topic close to the student's interest and experience can be productive. Personal enthusiasm and personal experience can give an added zest to the writing where it is subtle, forceful and challenging when considering conflicting ideas, evidence and values. Vigorous expression and personal experience alone are not, however, enough for success in the NEA project as a whole. The project was designed to allow students scope to develop their knowledge, understanding and insight by reading and research. Where students are able to show how their reading and research has added to their knowledge, improved their understanding and resulted in developed insights, the writing as well as the reading and research will benefit.

Commentaries

Reading

There is explicit direction on the Candidate record form:

For example, 'Explain why you selected these sources, and why you chose to select or reject parts from them eg similarities/differences in range of attitude, opinion, argument, evidence.'

Writing

For example, 'You will be assessed on your ability to reflect on and explain your choices of language and presentation. You should show your understanding of audience and purpose, and choice of form and style to match.

You should explain:

- reasons for including and/or rejecting specific details (eg explain and justify)
- how and why you organized your writing as you did (eg paragraph structure, display, and devices to engage, appeal and influence your audience/readers)
- choice of language and tone for audience and purpose (eg to engage, appeal to and influence).

Note that each band in the marking criteria includes a descriptor for the commentaries and source annotation provided to support the project. The attainment defined in these is as follows:

Band 6	Explanation, example and commentary show sophisticated and independent understanding of the reading and research/writing process.
Band 5	Explanation, example and commentary show assured and independent grasp of the reading and research/writing process.
Band 4	Explanation and commentary begin to show clear understanding of the reading and research/writing process.
Band 3	Explanation and commentary show awareness of reading and research/writing as a process.
Band 2	Some attempt at explanation or commentary on reading and research/writing as a process.
Band 1	Some attempt at explanation or commentary on reading/research/writing.

Practical advice

Students will be helped by making sure that all those features assessed in the Candidate Record Form guidance are evident in the final submission. They provide a useful basis for writing well-focused commentaries.

Effective reading commentaries feature examples of purposeful stylistic borrowing as well as acquired data and ideas.

Effective writing commentaries feature examples of changes in expression made as part of drafting.

The following terms are important elements of a research-based NEA submission:

Criticality – examining argument for weaknesses in use of data, reliance on anecdote, emotional appeal, implied values, unsupported assertions, undeclared assumptions and selective use of statistics.

Reflection – upon the student's own prior assumptions, beliefs and ideas in relation to those shaped by subsequent reading and research. Self-monitoring of developing thinking.

Reconciling differences – managing the oppositional qualities of texts providing different data and interpretations.

Synthesising – finding similarities in unrelated texts and drawing ideas from the mingling of texts.

Extrapolating – testing ideas by exposing them to an application to a different context.

Assessment and annotation

It is a requirement of entry that students' work is annotated to show how internal assessors have arrived at their marks. Marginal annotation should identify specific attainment at the point where it occurs. Much of this will be by reference to banded descriptors, but additional comment may arise in relation to other aspects of students' performance. Summative annotation should show how the mark has taken into account any unevenness in performance, and a match to published standardising exemplars. Evidence of double marking will indicate that there has been a process of comparing work across different teaching groups.

Practical advice

Internal standardising – can be ongoing double-marking throughout the course with departmental double marking at various points in the mark range at the end of the course.

Best-fitting – finding a mark within a band where performance is uneven, possibly matched to descriptors straddling two or three bands.

Referencing exemplars – matching students' work to the marks and commentaries provided on standardising exemplars available and necessary on the website. These are useful classroom resources: if students are familiar with examples of performance at particular levels of attainment, and with the commentaries that identify their merits, they will have a better grasp of what they are aiming at.

Teachers are reminded that annotation of students' work needs to be based on published assessment criteria and represent the strengths and weaknesses in the work. Please refer to NEA Exemplar student responses and commentary guide for examples of good practice.

In arriving at a consistent standard of marking across different topics/students/groups, the following should be considered:

- **Topics** – were they sufficiently demanding to prompt subtlety/complexity/development of response?

- **Tasks** – were they suitably framed to engage students with all the assessment objectives?

- **Reading and research** – were they suitably varied and challenging?

- **Commentaries** – were they appropriately reflective, analytical and specific re audience, purpose and genre?

- **Content** – was it focused on ideas and their implications and applications as well as data?

- **Writing** – was it shaped to the need for explanation, analysis, exploration and evaluation, as well as accurate in presentation?

- **Authenticity** – was the work checked for authenticity, and free from anything likely to be deemed plagiarising?

Speaking and listening

This is an optional component and it is separately certificated. There is no reason why the work involved in preparing the written project should not be directed towards the separately certificated Speaking and Listening task. It is worth bearing in mind that this task is likely to be shorter than the written project and presented with a different focus on communicative strategies for a listening and physically present audience. There will be a very clear difference between any written preparation for a Speaking and Listening task and the writing for the NEA project – just as there are separate criteria for their assessment. Of course, centres may decide that there should be a different topic and focus for speaking and listening assessment if this suits the centre's valuing of students' developing oracy in different contexts.

Administration

The on-line submission of marks system makes it easy for centres to record marks for the whole entry. The system then automatically selects the sample to be sent to the moderator. Please ensure that the *Candidate record form* is completed fully and includes supplementary material such as examples of student-annotated source material. On a practical note it helps if both student and teacher print their name for identification purposes.

Please refer to the NEA Administration Guidance for more information on the administration of non-exam assessment.

Cross-curricular links and preparation for further study

Students may make use of their knowledge and interests related to other areas of study but should be aware that it is not merely the knowledge that matters in this specification: it is the utilizing of knowledge and the utilizing of language to convey ideas, feelings and, attitudes and values that makes for the distinctiveness of an English Language specification.

The specification is clearly of value as a lead in to further study in English as well as in other areas of the curriculum. Centres will find their own way to make this specification not only a conclusion to the first sixteen years of learning, but a preparation for the next stages, through various levels of post-16 study within the centre and beyond it.

Cross-curricular links and preparation for further study

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FURTHER GUIDANCE AND CONTACTS

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at **oxfordaqaexams.org.uk/9270**

You can contact the subject team directly at **english@oxfordaqaexams.org.uk**

Please note: We aim to respond to all email enquiries within two working days.

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