

OxfordAQA

International A-level English Language NEA guidance

Language exploration Non-exam assessment EN04B

For teaching from September 2017 onwards
For International A-level exams in May/June 2019 onwards

The NEA task

The non-exam assessment option allows students to work more independently and over a longer period of time than an examined assessment. For OxfordAQA A-level English Language, the task is an investigation into an aspect of language use that students can explore in detail.

When selecting the type of language use, this could arise from an area of study from the course. For example, students could decide to explore ways that power is exerted in spoken language, or consider children's language development when engaged with playful activities with caregivers, or examine international varieties of language use.

However, students are not limited to topics studied as part of the course and could choose to explore any aspect of language that they find particularly interesting. For example, they may wish to examine language used within sports commentaries, or ways that players establish their roles within online gaming. As long as there is a clear focus on language use, most topics would be suitable for study.

Why do it?

The language investigation allows students to engage in an extended research project where they can devise their own focus for investigation, collect their own data, apply analytical methods to explore their data in detail, link their findings to other research or theories surrounding the topic, and arrive at some conclusions about language usage.

Whilst carrying out their study, students will build on and extend research skills to consider both primary and secondary data. They will also develop their analytical skills and learn how to write up their findings in a report format.

Different approaches to the investigation

The investigation can take different forms:

- Detailed study of an aspect on language use within a single piece of data.
- Comparative study of texts driven by contextual factors.
- Testing and evaluating existing research.

Planning a language investigation

When investigating an aspect of language, students should consider:

- What the main focus and aims for the investigation will be.
- Which concepts, issues or scholarship might be useful to explore the investigation focus.
- What data types will be most useful in exploring the topic.
- How they might be able to collect this data.
- Which language methods and features might be most useful in analysing how language is used within the data sets.

The investigation focus

The language investigation should aim to find out something about how language is used. Data collected by students to analyse and explore language usage is central to the language investigation. While it may be useful to consider other research or scholarship in light of the data collected, the main focus should be on students' own data, not on research findings by other linguists.

It is important to devise a title or research question at the beginning. This makes it easier to clarify exactly what the investigation focus and aims will be. Students can refine their title or research question later in the process, but a clear focus at the start will help students to focus on specific ideas, concepts and research approaches.

The title should aim to highlight specific areas of language usage. For example:

- 'An investigation into power strategies used by politicians during an election campaign'.
- 'An examination of a child's writing aged 6, 7 and 8 years old'.
- 'An exploration of male and female language use within social media communication'.
- 'How do three generations within one family adapt their language when communicating with each other'?

Data types

A data set is at the very heart of the investigation. Students can examine a wide variety of data types, as long as the main focus remains on language use. The students have a great deal of freedom and independence in selecting and collect their data. The teacher's role should be to help guide them to select the data which is richest for analysis.

It is useful to think about the different types of data students have already encountered, particularly as they prepared for the AS units. The variety of modes and genres for these units show the diversity of data types that students could choose to work with for their investigation. Students commonly select data from across the range of written, electronic and spoken sources.

- **Written data sets** can be extremely diverse, such as letters, diaries, advertising, newspapers, political campaign literature, leaflets and many more.
- **Electronic forms of communication** have expanded what might be regarded as traditional forms of communication, meaning we now see datasets that include blog posts, emails, instant or direct messaging via social media or phone, and so on.
- **Spoken data** can focus on prepared spoken language such as speeches, formal interviews, radio broadcasts, stand-up comedy routines, etc, or it can be spontaneous, such as casual conversation between friends, children using language with their caregivers, interactions with strangers or shop staff, etc. Spoken data needs to be transcribed to present an accurate account of the language used.

Data can be used for qualitative or quantitative analysis. Qualitative approaches allow for a deeper understanding of how language is being used. However, the sample size is likely to be small so research findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. Quantitative approaches allow for focus on larger data sets and this can be useful for examining patterns of language usage. However, very large data sets can be difficult to work with, and a purely

statistical approach can make it difficult to engage with how meanings are constructed within the language contained within the data.

Interviews and questionnaires can be useful ways of examining how people may use language. Devising suitable interviews and questionnaires can be difficult: closed questions can lead to limited examples of language use as participants may offer very short responses that make it difficult to analyse how they are actually using language. Questions should be carefully structured so that they are tied to the investigation focus and that allow participants to offer extended comments which can be analysed in depth. Although understanding people's attitudes to language use can be very interesting, what we are interested in here is the language people use (perhaps to display those attitudes).

Collecting data

Students should consider how easily they might be able to collect data. If they wish to focus on children's language use but they don't know any young children, this will make it very difficult to record and transcribe data. Similarly, if a student wishes to explore how a topic has been presented in the news over a large period of time, eg. from 1920, 1960, 2000 and 2020, but they don't have access to the older texts, then that would make it very difficult to collect this data.

Students should be guided to think about language used within their own environments. This will make it easier for them to consider how language is being used within contexts they have detailed understanding of. For example, examining the representation of local sporting events, or focusing on local advertising campaigns can be more useful than exploring the language used within UK or US sporting events or advertising where contexts may not be fully engaged with.

How much data?

This is a very difficult question to answer as different investigations will require different amounts of data. The important thing is to have a high-quality data set of appropriate length to analyse.

A qualitative investigation into a specific person's language use may only need transcripts covering a few minutes of conversation. Similarly, exploration of a child's writing may only need 5 or 6 extended pieces of writing, and focus on political speeches may only require a couple of speeches. If focusing on sports commentary of a football match, transcribing the full 90 minutes would be far too much data and would make it very difficult to focus on specific detail for close analysis.

A quantitative investigation into lists of words, or focus on someone's twitter communication will require a substantial list or a large number of tweets so that there is enough data to explore patterns and meanings across the data set.

A useful guide is that there needs to be sufficient data to allow for meaningful analysis, but not so much that they get overwhelmed. If students are running out of interesting things to say about their data, then it is likely that they don't have enough data to work with. If they are making very broad comments about general trends within language use, it may be that there is too much data to work with.

Structure

Once students have decided on their topic and carefully selected their data, they will need to analyse it linguistically, drawing conclusions that will help them answer their research question(s). The work is then written up as a report, using the following sections and any suitable subsections and subheadings to help structure the report:

- **Introduction**
Students outline their aims and offer some indication of why they have chosen this particular topic.
- **Methodology**
Students explain how they selected their data and the process of collecting it. They should also outline how they intend to use this data to answer their research question(s). They should also comment on any wider reading they will use to help inform their understanding of the data they have selected.
- **Analysis**
This should be the longest section of the investigation. This is where students write up their findings. It is often useful to split this into sub-headings to reflect the different findings in the data.

Students are expected to label and explain what language choices have been made and make links to contextual factors and wider reading where appropriate to demonstrate an understanding of why these language choices have been made.

- **Conclusion**
Students provide a summary of the main points from their investigation. They should consider how their findings have answered their research question(s). It is also important to evaluate the whole process, considering how effective and valid their findings are, with reasons why.
- **References**
A list of primary and secondary reading which has been referenced within the report. References will include both the sources of the data set and also the wider reading done to aid understanding of the data. This must be presented using appropriate academic referencing.
- **Appendices**
Copies of the data set needs to be included in the final report. This will include copies of any written data, transcripts of spoken data, and screen shots of webpages or online sources. The data should be annotated to show the students' thought processes when approaching their data. They may also chose to include any notes and annotations they have made around their research of the topic.

The word count

The written report should be between 2500 and 3000 words. This word count is for writing up the findings from the data. References and Appendices are excluded from the word count. Copies of the data itself will be placed in the appendices for moderators to be able to reference.

The best investigations will:

- Have a clear language focus.
- Have well-selected data.
- Aim to find something out about language use.
- Quote extensively from the data.
- Use accurate and precise terminology when referring to the choices in the data.
- Use scholarship to inform a detailed understanding of the choices in the data.
- Always consider the importance of contextual factors in analysing why language choices have been made.
- Be clearly written and organised.

How much support can I give my students?

Your role as a teacher is guide and support your students in their investigations. This will involve discussions with students at the early stages of the investigation to discuss the suitability of their investigation. It can be useful for teachers to guide students towards suitable secondary reading which will support their investigation focus.

When students have collected their data, it is useful to discuss this with students to determine how they will use the data, which language methods they intend to use to and to reflect on which concepts and theories are useful to the study.

It can be helpful to construct a diary of activities and meetings to review your students' progress so that they are completing different aspects of their investigation in stages.

Students may submit a draft of their investigation to you for review. When checking drafts you can discuss their approach to the task with your students, and you can direct them to the assessment criteria to focus their investigations. However, you should not provide comments or specific suggestions for improvement. The NEA is a piece of independent and whilst you can guide and advise your students, the work should remain their own.

Understanding the assessment criteria

The NEA is marked out of 50 and will contribute 30% of the overall A level mark.

The 50 marks are divided between the three assessment objectives with each being marked discreetly.

AO1: Demonstrate understanding of methods, terminology, concepts and issues in English language (20 marks)

There are three key strands to AO1. Students are awarded on their ability to:

- devise a clear focus for their investigation, with some clearly stated aims, discuss the methodology for their research and carefully select language methods for analysing their data set
- use concepts and linguistic research to illuminate language use in light of their investigation focus and in their data set
- apply linguistic terminology to the findings in their data set.

AO2: Analyse how meanings are shaped in a range of texts and data (20 marks)

This is where students really need to focus on their analysis. Students are awarded for their ability to:

- discuss and analyse why language choices have been made in their data set
- explore the meanings that are created by specific language choices
- consider relevant contextual factors to help demonstrate their understanding of why choices have been made.

AO3: Demonstrate ability to use English in different ways (10 marks)

Students are awarded for how well they have organised each section of the report and how clearly they have expressed their findings. The investigation as a whole should be cohesive, maintaining a clear focus on the investigation aims and research question(s) throughout.

Centre marking

This work will be marked internally by teachers in centres using the criteria above. A copy of the mark scheme is available in the specification.

When marking, it is essential that teachers offer detailed summative comments which outline the rationale behind the mark awarded. This should acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the student's work.

Where there is more than one teacher teaching the unit, it is important to undertake some internal standardising, using both T-OLS and the assessment criteria.

Once marked, the work will be sampled by a moderator from AQA to ensure the standard has been applied appropriately. If marking has been too harsh or too generous, the cohort's marks will be adjusted. This is to ensure parity and fairness across all centres taking the NEA route.

Where can I find examples of previous Investigations?

Teacher Online Standardisation (T-OLS)

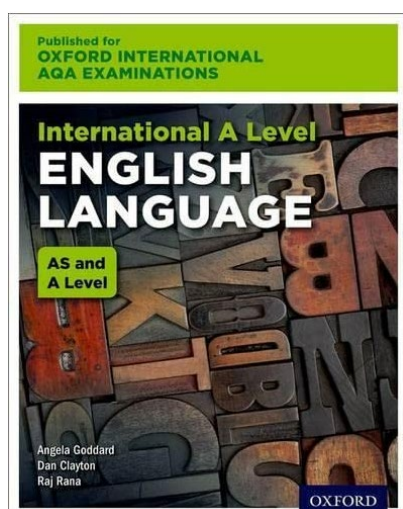
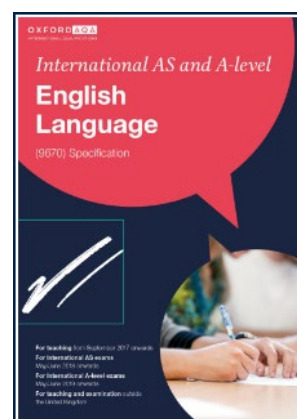
You can find examples of student projects on the Teacher Online Standardisation (T-OLS) website via [Centre Services](#). These exemplar folders demonstrate different approaches to the NEA task and cover a range of marks across all the different Assessment Objectives. They are updated annually so you can see a wide range of investigation types.

These folders should be used by teachers to consider the marking standards for the NEA and used to benchmark marking of your own students' work. If several teachers are marking the NEA, it is important that the standard for marking is consistent across the centre. Internal moderation is mandatory and the T-OLS folders should be used to ensure fairness and consistency for all students.

Additional support

Centres have access to an NEA advisor who will be available to offer guidance and support. They will answer any questions you may have about the investigation, including task setting and data selection. If you would like to set up a call with an NEA advisor, contact your local OxfordAQA rep.

Further guidance for teachers can be found on the OxfordAQA website: oxfordaqa.com/qualifications/international-as-a-level-english-language/



The Oxford University Press course textbook contains a useful chapter that explains approaches to the non-exam assessment task. It includes examples of different data types that may inspire students with their own data collection.

International A Level English Language (2016)
Goddard, Clayton and Rana *Oxford University Press*