



**WEB**

writing courses for and by writers

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AFA

# Creative Writing

WRITE-2 Commissioned Writing

Report on the Examination

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CWI9

May 2019



## General Overview

The purpose of WRITE-2 is to test the ability of candidates to write to a commission imaginatively and creatively within timed conditions, and that's what this paper sets out to examine. The spirit of the AFA examining process is to reward candidates for work that is imaginative, creative, and crafted, and that was my guiding principle when marking the work of this cohort.

This is the first year of the AFA qualification, and while many centres will have been familiar with CREW-1 from the AQA Creative Writing A Level, there are slight but important variations between its mark scheme and that of WRITE-2. So, it was to be expected that some centres are still finding their feet with this, and it's hoped that this report will address any ambiguity of the mark scheme.

It was pleasing to see that all commissions had been attempted across the cohort. Inevitably some were more popular than others, with commissions 3 and 5, respectively, proving the most popular, though not always yielding the most imaginative and playful responses.

Non-fiction seemed to be the most popular form across the cohort. I was slightly surprised to see so much non-fiction, particularly as some of the commissions lent themselves quite nicely to other forms; however, there were some excellent examples of this, particularly in response to Commission 1. In some cases, however, non-fiction was a poor choice as it did not seem to allow candidates to fully showcase their sense of craft and technique; it might be argued, in fact, that it's harder to impress using non-fiction.

The majority of responses fell into Bands 3 or 4, with most candidates able to respond to the brief confidently and in a convincing manner. Work which fell into the lower bands failed to fully grasp what the commission was asking of them. There is no substitute for reading the brief carefully, and planning an answer. Moreover, I'd rather see candidates spend longer planning and writing a better more concise piece, than the alternative.

Overall, however, it was a privilege to read such a variety of responses to the commissions I'd written.

### **AO1:**

This is a challenging paper, and professional, publishable writing is hard to achieve under timed conditions, so it has to be expected that only a small number of the cohort will meet the requirements of Band 5. Responses which gained these marks had to show a vibrancy and playfulness of language, showing that they were totally in control of the piece they were writing, producing a richly developed response, focused on the commission from start to finish.

### **AO2:**

The level of technical accuracy across the cohort was pleasingly high, and on the whole it was clear that candidates had been taught how to structure and craft a piece of writing under



timed conditions. On the whole, the band the candidate achieves for AO1 usually matches the band they achieve for AO2 – i.e. if a student fails to meet the brief or communicate ideas effectively for AO1, this impacts on AO2. In other words, how can a piece of writing be crafted, if it fails to communicate its aims and ideas?

## **Word Count:**

The word count of 500 words is 200 more than candidates would have been allowed for CREW-1 under the former AQA qualification, and provides candidates with ample scope to gain full marks. The idea of an approximate word count is not to stymie creativity but rather to place an emphasis on craft, and on careful choice of words and form. In too many responses the word count was ignored, and it should be emphasised that responses which are significantly shorter or longer than 500 words will be self-penalising. The only exception to this rule will tend to be from poetry (in which case 500 words will not be needed if the response has been well crafted and drafted). Script, on the other hand, might naturally require more words due to stage directions and characters' names. Where possible, and without wasting time on counting every word, candidates should try and adhere to approximately 500 words per commission.

## **Commission 1**

*Food Glorious Food*, a best-selling food magazine with a broad readership is seeking contributors to write about the food that has shaped their lives. This may be based upon one meal or one specific food memory; or it may discuss a type of cuisine that matters to them.

The editors have commissioned you to respond in the form of prose non-fiction. You should aim to write approximately 500 words.

Only attempted in non-fiction form, this commission yielded some of the most vivid and vibrant responses, but also some of the most pedestrian. The vivid and vibrant responses showed a keen sense of structure and thoughtfulness in word choice, and the most pedestrian simply described their favourite meal at a level more in line with the standards of GCSE.

## **Commission 2**

*Young Voices*, an organisation which aims to engage 16-25 year olds in politics, is seeking contributions to a new section of its website on the theme of 'So Near, Yet So Far: Our Divided World'.

You have been commissioned to respond with a piece of writing. You may choose any of the four forms, and should write approximately 500 words.



Not as popular as I thought it might be, the best responses to this showed an original and inventive interpretation of 'so near, yet so far'. A number of candidates used the brief to bemoan the current state of politics which, while relevant and personal, did not always showcase their originality and playfulness with language to the full. One of the best responses to this commission was a story focused around two characters either side of the Berlin Wall, showing the kind of inventiveness needed for band 5.

### **Commission 3**

*Talk It Out* is a charity which offers a free online and telephone counselling service to people of all ages who face challenges to their mental health. Their new campaign, 'Man Up and Talk', is aimed at getting males of all ages to talk more openly about their troubles, anxieties, and mental health.

You have been asked to produce a piece of creative writing in response to this brief. You may write in any of the four forms. You should write approximately 500 words.

The most popular choice by far, this commission yielded an array of responses in a range of forms, to varying degrees of success. Several responses had 'man up and talk' inserted at the end, or weaved into narratives. I also encountered a lot of responses which included "Dad always said men don't cry..." scenarios. Few took the opportunity to write a poem or script, non-fiction prevailed, and only a handful of responses to this commission made it into Band 5 by showing inventiveness and playfulness of language and form.

### **Commission 4**

In a drive to promote tourism and boost the economy, the British Government has issued grants to every local council across the nation to help them market themselves as places to visit and in which to live. The scheme aims to celebrate every region of the UK, thereby emphasising the diversity, creativity, and appeal of the nation.

You have been commissioned by your local council to write a piece which promotes your local area. You may respond in any of the four forms. You should write approximately 500 words.

Several candidates chose this question, with the most successful thinking carefully about the form they chose in order to place them in the higher bands. The best response to this question was an imaginative radio script, using a playful use of language while tackling the brief. The more pedestrian responses simply listed the sights and landmarks of the chosen place. Some answers even included criticism of their towns, which showed a failure to meet the brief.

### **Commission 5**

*Digital Life*, a monthly journal which focuses on advancements in digital technology, is planning a special edition focusing on the internet. It is seeking submissions from creative writers on the topic 'The Day the Internet Died', imagining a day when the internet crashed across the world.



You have been commissioned to respond, and may write in any of the four forms. You should write approximately 500 words.

I very much enjoyed reading the responses to this question, and it felt like the most successful commission at yielding the best responses. While the commission did invite lots of apocalyptic dystopias, it was interesting to note how many of the characters included in the fictional narratives seemed much more relaxed without the internet; several stories ended with the protagonist resolving to read a book. On the whole, life without internet was made to seem very appealing indeed by this cohort.

## **Conclusion**

It's been a pleasure to read such a range of work in response to the full range of commissions available on the paper. It was heartening to see such a sense of enthusiasm and enjoyment in the majority of responses. The best work tends to have been well planned, concise and creative in its approach to the commission. Candidates who have practised responding to commissions under timed conditions over the course of their two years inevitably will perform better than those who have had fewer opportunities, so I'd encourage centres to remember to plan in checkpoints throughout the two years where WRITE-2 is practised, and the skills of crafting a piece of writing under timed conditions is honed. I'd also recommend that candidates think imaginatively about their choice of form in relation to the commission as this is sometimes the most effective way of demonstrating a 'playful and inventive use of language': e.g. could a poem or play script be used where prose may have seemed like the easy option?

I'd like to thank centres for preparing their students for what is a challenging task, and it's been rewarding to see such a host of crafted work under timed conditions.