



Principal Moderator's Report on Write 1 Portfolios May 2022

Commendations:

This year's portfolios were characterised by a high level of personal engagement from the students, in the most part revealing great enthusiasm and commitment. They were varied and interesting, which made them a joy to moderate. It is always heartening to see young writers in the top bands take risks with their writing and this year proved no exception in this area. Candidates were inventive, especially in the genres of prose-fiction and screenplay, producing varied work from dual-voice narratives to magic realism and gritty realism. The best portfolios revealed evidence of young writers immersing themselves in the creative process.

Poetry:

The best candidates produced poetry which was subtle, characterised by richly developed technique and emotional integrity. The best were punchy and powerful, or lyrical and reflective. There were fewer poetry submissions at Specialism level this year, but centres should be commended on the fact that there was much less forcing of content into an inappropriate form, or evidence of rhyme constraining meaning.

Drama:

There were many versatile and engaging scripts, screenplays proving especially popular. The moderator enjoyed the varied scenarios: from a tense and well-plotted old school reunion to a surreal exploration of hell and a satirical sketch of politicians' Question Time featuring a talking fish finger.

Prose Fiction:

The subject matter was less focused on dystopias this year, though there was some very convincing writing in this area. The best prose used a motif, or repeated technique, to structure a tense, well-paced narrative arc, such as the inventive story *Dictionary of Death*, which used psychological definitions to structure the unfolding mystery.

Non-fiction:

There were fewer non-fiction/opinion pieces this year, however the best were stunning, such as a discursive piece on Epicurus, the candidate challenging themselves, yet showing complete control of the subject matter and linguistic technique. Also thought-provoking was an opinion/memoir piece on *Compulsory Heterosexuality*, which was adept and professional.

Commentaries:

The best commentaries blended Assessment Objectives 3 and 4 seamlessly, revealing a mature reflection on process. Exemplary commentaries, at the top of the mark band, were balanced, with equal time spent reflecting on what has been learned from published material and on the candidates' own writing process, including an evaluation of their own editorial decisions.



Considerations for future portfolio submissions

Word Length and Number of Shorter Pieces:

Candidates should be reminded that two short poems for a poetry submission, or prose offerings which fall much below the advised 600 words for Explorations, could limit the range of linguistic skills that the candidates can showcase. Therefore, it is in their interests to extend the length to the Specification's advised word count, or to produce "a collection" of poems for such submissions. Although the advice in the Specification indicates that word length for the Specialism should not exceed 3,000 words, candidates should be advised that three very short poems, or flash fiction pieces, or a prose offering which is very short do not, in most cases, allow for the showcasing of professional level structuring, language techniques, pacing, characterisation, voice and viewpoint or variety.

Rubric Details:

Candidates should be reminded that submitting two non-fiction pieces for the Exploration section, even if they are different forms within this genre, such as a memoir and a travel piece, is an infringement of the Specification rubric. Candidates should be reminded of the following Specification wording: "Students must choose *three* forms in which to submit creative writing for this section of their portfolio".

The Importance of Titles:

Candidates should be advised to study the role of titles in the creation of meaning and to see how they set the tone for the writing. This year there were some submissions which were, unintentionally, untitled, the candidate assuming that the description on the PCS sheets is enough. However, a title is a powerful tool, to catch a reader's eye and to help structure the writing, adding richness to the message it is attempting to convey.

Use of Specific Form Definition within Titles:

In future, candidates should be advised to indicate the specific form within which they are working, such as non-fiction memoir, or non-fiction travel writing; or opinion piece; or within script writing, indicate the media for which the work is intended, e.g. radio play. This can act as a prompt and reminder, especially for mid-band writers, of the conventions within which they are operating. It can also act as a prompt for their evaluation of how successfully they have sustained the form, helping them to produce better commentaries, but also acting as an impetus for editorial decision making.

Prose-fiction:

Though there were some very engaging first-person narratives, less successful pieces became limited in viewpoint, with too much internal focus, which was not balanced by action or dialogue, sacrificing the very important element of surprise. Less successful use of description tended to be a little over-rich and cluttered. Such pieces would benefit from more management and selection of detail to maintain pace and reader interest. They would also benefit from a variety of tense scenes and reflective scenes.



In some cases, it was clear that the candidate would have benefitted from reading a wide range of novels, in varied forms, such as epistolary, multi-voice narrative, and different genres, before choosing the form that they wished to pursue. Candidates should be advised that it is essential to read material in their chosen form to increase the professionalism of their writing.

Less successful pieces found it difficult to maintain the diary form, for example, as there was no direct voice, or sense that the protagonist was talking to a diary, without consideration of how the dates structure the piece or of verb tenses. Candidates would do well to ask themselves why they are choosing to use a particular form, and what they wish to achieve within it. Then they should consider the form's conventions. If the form is not going to add any depth or resonance to the piece they would be better to rethink their choice of form.

Candidates should be reminded of the importance of blending characterisation and world building within fantasy pieces. The various ways of presenting character and action through dialogue should also be explored in order to inform the candidate's own writing, to maintain pace, tension and interest.

In many cases, candidates should consider removing the bulk of adverbs, and some adjectives, from their writing, asking themselves whether a well-chosen verb could do the job better.

Candidates should be encouraged to explore both first- and third-person narratives and the various effects that writers achieve with each. It is often helpful, especially in third-person narratives, to utilise some cinematic techniques, whereby the writer pans out to place the character in time, and place, then with a closer angle shot follow their actions and relations to others within that environment, finally zooming in close to the protagonists' feelings, senses, thoughts and perceptions.

Non-fiction Prose:

This was an area where the less successful candidates had not read much in their chosen form, leading to some opinion pieces where the tone was strident and aggressive; or others where the humour failed to work as there was an absence of subtlety and irony. The best pieces were fluent, discursive or persuasive; thought-provoking without being unsubtle; amusing and playful. Candidates should be encouraged to keep a record in their reading journal of the variety of tones utilised in opinion columns, in order to choose the tone which best suits what it is they are trying to convey.

Information pieces tended to underperform as it was much more difficult to prevent them slipping into a rather dull, literal piece of writing.

Scripts:

Candidates should be encouraged to explore the various media for potential scripts. They should be very clear about whether their script is for performance, radio or screen and should ensure that they understand the conventions of each. Screenplays were very popular this year and the best of them revealed an in-depth study of screenplay scripts and the conventions used. Less successful scripts were unsure what media they were intended for,



some trying to blend narrative and script; others unintentionally slipping between dialogue and narrative within the directions. Candidates should be reminded that the most successful scripts use dialogue to move the action on, to heighten tension and to deepen characterisation. The least successful screenplays mentioned watching films in the candidate's commentary, but it was obvious that they had not studied a screenplay itself.

Poetry:

There was less of a focus on poetry this year, which was a shame in many ways as the poet's challenge to distil meaning into a concise form is great training for the emergent writer, encouraging a focus on the power of the individual word or image, on technique and a paring down of extraneous vocabulary. However, as stated earlier, this year also saw less strait-jacketing of meaning into forced rhyme and there was an integrity which was revealed in the best of the work.

Less successful candidates tended to slip unintentionally between the conventions of the poetic form and prose. Those candidates tended to reveal a lack of reading of published poetry within their commentaries, often citing prose, music, video game or film as inspiration. While it is, of course, true that there is cross-pollination between different forms and media, it is also the case that published poetry proves a good style guide for the writer, especially when they are developing their craft.

Candidates should also be reminded of the importance of reading poetry aloud to see how it sounds and scans. They should be advised to think of what the most appropriate 'driving technique' is for conveying the message of their poem, whether that is repetition, cohesive metaphor, simile, rhythm, alliteration or layout on the page. Some of the less successful poems this year contained unintentionally long lines amid shorter ones, with no obvious rationale for them. Candidates should also be reminded of how powerful punctuation and line breaks are in conveying their meaning.

Assessment Objective 2 – Crafting and Accuracy:

Centres should be congratulated on the high level of accuracy across many of the submissions this year. In a very minor number of cases candidates decided to use inaccurate spelling and punctuation to reveal the disintegration of a mind. However, candidates should be warned that this is a very difficult thing to achieve and can result in the production of unclear writing. Such candidates should be reminded that equal weighting is given to accurate spelling, punctuation, coherence, organisation and technical skill in the specification.

Candidates who need to improve on their accuracy would do well to follow Bristol University's grammar and punctuation on-line course.

Commentaries

Assessment Objective 4 continues to be an issue for the candidates. Candidates should keep a reading journal from the beginning of the course. Detailed and specific reference to published material is necessary in order to gain the higher bands. Wide reading of current published material will also help to develop the candidates' ideas and crafting skills. As stated earlier, it is advised that candidates should read published material within the form in which



they choose to write in order to learn the conventions; to submerge themselves in the language; and to consider how to apply what they have learned to their own writing.

The best commentaries are balanced, with equal emphasis placed on both Assessment Objective 3 and 4. By ensuring that Assessment Objective 4 receives equal prominence, candidates could achieve Bands 4 and 5.

Candidates should be reminded that an integrated essay is the most successful format for commentaries. Candidates who appreciated this produced professional level reflections, which were informative, analytical, conceptualised and interesting. Sub-headings can lead, on occasions, to a tick-box approach, which can lead to closed comments rather than analysis.

Candidates should be reminded that a brief mention of a similarity between their text and the published material does not allow for the awarding of a Band 4 level, as this is not an 'accomplished' reflection on techniques learned. In a minor number of cases, candidates had obviously not read the text that they cited as an influence.

In order to gain Band 3, candidates need to ensure that their commentary reveals a "Developed reflection on the relationship between the reading of published works and the development of one's own writing." There was some evidence of Band 3 being awarded as a default for less successful reflections on published material when, in fact, Band 2, or in some cases, Band 1 was indicative of the achievement. It is worth reminding ourselves of the Band 3 criteria containing the words 'some effective consideration' and 'developed awareness of one's own writing processes'.

It is important to consider the importance of the specific, evaluative descriptors throughout the mark scheme. Centres should be guided by the key words 'professional', 'convincing', 'developed', 'developing', 'limited'.

Marking and Teacher Comments:

Centres should be congratulated on the detailed comments on the portfolios, which were generally helpful to the moderation process. Where there is more than one teacher delivering the course, evidence of internal moderation is always welcome. Centres are reminded that it is advisable to refrain from indicating on the scripts alternative words that the candidate should have used, or inserting punctuation suggestions, as it is best to allow the candidate's writing to speak for itself, especially when accompanied by detailed, careful annotation and helpful teacher comments.

Portfolio Cover Sheets:

As we have moved from a paper system to on-line moderation, we are all playing catch-up with systems to some extent. Therefore, to date, we have not insisted on signed cover sheets. However, in future, centres should upload the individual candidate's signed PCS sheet along with their portfolio.

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