Advanced Higher English Project–dissertation

Overview of Understanding Standards resources

This document provides an overview of Understanding Standards resources that are available for Advanced Higher English project–dissertation, which may be useful in supporting marking and moderation.

You can find the resources on the [Advanced Higher English Understanding Standards](#) page of our website.

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Band range	Mark	Genre and texts	Reference	Comments
10–6	8	Prose fiction *The Cement Garden* *Atonement*	2016 Candidate 8	The topic, 'the theme of growing up', and the texts are appropriate for this level. Yet, there is a limited range of knowledge shown and an inconsistent approach to the task, the analysis has weaknesses in depth and relevance, the evaluation is repetitive and assertive, and the expression has weaknesses throughout. This dissertation does not fully meet the descriptors of the 10–6 range, so cannot be awarded the top of this range, neither does it just meet the descriptors of this range, so is awarded the middle mark in the band range.
10–6	10	Prose fiction *The Secret History*	2022 Candidate 1	While the choice of text is appropriate for this level of study, the choice of theme is less helpful, 'an exploration of narcissism'. The dissertation shows some knowledge and understanding of key elements of the early part of the novel; however, the main elements of the novel are not mentioned. The approach to the task has many weaknesses in relevance and there is only limited supporting textual evidence. There is some attempt to analyse a limited range of literary techniques, but this is weak and often inaccurate. There is an implied evaluative stance with respect to the text and the task, but it has some weakness in relevance. There is some weakness in expression, but it does not impede understanding. This dissertation fully meets all the descriptors in the 10–6 range and is therefore awarded a mark of 10.
14–11	12	Prose fiction *Dracula* *Interview with the Vampire*	2024 Candidate 1	The texts selected here are texts suitable for this level of study. However, the issue with the task is its intention to look at how these two novels 'changed the representation of vampires in English Literature'. Overall, the candidate has a degree of understanding about some aspects of the novels, yet their selections show an insecurity in their knowledge and understanding of the novels, especially as they pertain to the task they have set themselves. There is some attempt to analyse literary techniques but with weakness in the depth and relevance of the analysis. The candidate has an implied evaluative stance with respect to the texts and task. Holistically, this dissertation neither fully meets, or just meets the standard described in the 14–11 range, and is awarded a mark from the middle of the band range.

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14–11	14	Prose fiction *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* *Far from the Madding Crowd*	2021 Candidate 4	The chosen texts offer a suitable level of challenge at this level, and the topic of the 'condemnation of the treatment of women in the Victorian era' is an appropriate one. There are some examples of insecurity in terms of knowledge and understanding of the texts, some weakness in relevance, and the textual evidence is often superficial in its deployment. Analysis is attempted throughout, but there are some weaknesses in the depth of analysis, evaluation is mainly implicit, and the expression has some weaknesses. This dissertation fully meets every aspect of the 14–11 range and is a good example of a dissertation that just misses moving into the 18–15 band range.
18–15	15	Prose fiction *Trainspotting* *A Clockwork Orange*	2016 Candidate 5	These texts have been popular for many years and the focus on 'a comparative study of the characters' is appropriate, albeit straightforward. The approach is relevant, and there is an understanding of both texts, although the focus on *Trainspotting* is narrower than that of *A Clockwork Orange*. The analysis is primarily character-focused and based on long quotations, but it remains a relevant analysis of literary technique. The evaluation is discernible but the comment on *Trainspotting* is less securely justified by reference to the text. Technical accuracy is fine and there is a comparative approach as defined in the task. This dissertation just meets the descriptors of the 18–15 range and is a good example of a dissertation that is just on the better side of this boundary between band ranges.
18–15	15	Poetry Sylvia Plath	2016 Candidate 6	This poetry dissertation, on five poems by Sylvia Plath, offers a serial treatment of these five poems as the candidate attempts to link them to 'the varying moods of Sylvia Plath' as defined in a rather vague task. The candidate does show their knowledge and understanding in terms of the moods of Plath, with a focus on three poems about motherhood and two darker poems. The analysis is relevant but there is an inconsistent quality to the analysis, and the evaluation is generally discernible although quite simplistic at times. The evaluation of each poem could be better integrated to show an appreciation of the wider aspects of the poetry. This dissertation just

Band range	Mark	Genre and texts	Reference	Comments
				manages to do enough in each of the descriptors to be placed at the lower end of the 18–15 band range.
18–15	18	Prose fiction Edgar Allan Poe Short Stories	2021 Candidate 3	This dissertation looks at three Edgar Allan Poe short stories and focuses on the 'exploration of madness'. The texts and the topic are appropriate for this level of study. The candidate shows an appropriate knowledge and understanding of all three stories, has a relevant approach, and uses textual references that are relevant to the task, yet there is a limitation in terms of the breadth of selection. The analysis is relevant and covers a range of literary techniques. A strength of this dissertation is its consistent focus on the task and its consistent attempt to be comparative as defined in the task itself. The evaluation is discernible in each of the stories and is based on evidence. This dissertation meets the standard for each descriptor in the 18–15 band range and is given the highest mark. This is a good example of a diligent and focused approach to the task with supporting evidence, which is then brought together at the end.
22–19	19	Prose fiction *Wuthering Heights* *Jane Eyre*	2016 Candidate 4	This dissertation looks at 'the Gothic convention of the Byronic hero' in two novels by the Brontës, and both topic and texts are good choices for this level. This is an interesting dissertation in that the candidate does better in terms of displaying their knowledge and understanding, and analytical comment, with their work on Rochester, which places it in the 22–19 range; whereas the work on Heathcliff is not as strong, and that work is in the 18–15 range. Yet there is enough in the dissertation that it just meets the standard of the 22–19 band range. This is based on the stronger work on Jane Eyre, which moves it, holistically, into this band range.
22–19	20	Drama *Hecuba* *Medea* *Electra*	2016 Candidate 1	This dissertation looks at 'the theme of vengeance' in three classical Greek tragedies, and the approach and texts are appropriate for this level of study. The candidate shows they have a broad knowledge and understanding of the central concerns of all three texts — although there are small moments of uncertainty as to whether the candidate understands some aspects fully — and they use relevant textual evidence to support the demands of the task. There is a relevant analysis of a range of literary techniques, which supports

Band range	Mark	Genre and texts	Reference	Comments
				the candidate's line of argument, but a small number of these techniques do not fully engage with the idea of vengeance. There is a relevant evaluative stance apparent throughout and the candidate at times makes comparative statements to highlight the effectiveness of the techniques. This dissertation has clear indicators over two band ranges (22–19 and 18–15) but when looked at holistically, the strengths of the dissertation place it in the 22–19 range, but not just in the band range, so the mark of 20 recognises this.
22–19	21	Prose fiction and prose non-fiction *Down and Out in Paris and London* *The Road to Wigan Pier* *Nineteen Eighty-Four*	2016 Candidate 10	Often, a mixed genre approach can be problematic for many candidates, but this task, looking at connecting 'social injustices' in the first two texts and how this 'resonates' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a considered approach, which works well for this candidate. The candidate shows a broad knowledge and understanding of all three texts, but the textual evidence has limitations in the breadth of selection, especially in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and at times some of the quotation is not used to generate analysis but instead assists the candidate in summarising the narrative. The candidate does analyse a relevant range of literary techniques, and the analysis does support the line of argument with an evaluative stance, which is relevant and based upon evidence presented in the dissertation. Most of the work done places this dissertation firmly in the 22–19 band range, yet the issues with the limitations in the breadth of selection of quotation means that the dissertation does not fully meet the standard described to gain 22 marks and is instead awarded 21 marks.
22–19	22	Prose fiction *Nineteen Eighty-Four* *The Handmaid's Tale*	2021 Candidate 2	The selected texts, and the topic 'psychological impacts resulting from life under totalitarian rule' are appropriate for this level of study. The candidate's exploration of the texts shows a broad knowledge and understanding of the texts and a broad consideration of the implications of the task with appropriate quotation from across the breadth of the texts. The candidate analyses a range of techniques to support their line of argument, and the evaluation is relevant and based upon evidence they have presented. The candidate's expression is consistently accurate (despite the occasional awkward turn of phrase) and as they define their analysis as being 'comparative' in their task,

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				they adhere to this approach throughout the dissertation. This is a good example of a dissertation that fully meets every descriptor in the 22–19 range and is awarded the highest mark in that band range.
22–19	22	Prose fiction *The Color Purple*	2019 Candidate 1	This is a single text dissertation that looks at themes of 'oppression and empowerment'. Both text and topic are suitable for a dissertation at this level and the candidate displays a broad knowledge and understanding of the text and a relevant approach to the task. The candidate's line of argument is supported throughout by relevant textual evidence from across the breadth of the text. They then analyse a range of literary techniques, such as the epistolary form, voice, tone, use of non-standard English, symbolism, characterisation and minor characters, all of which supports the line of argument. The evaluative stance is relevant and supported by the evidence within the dissertation, and expression is consistently accurate. The dissertation fully meets the standards outlined in the band range and is awarded the highest mark in the range. This is a very good example of the use of a single text to gain a good mark: there is no disadvantage in using a single text as long as the candidate can satisfy the standards outlined in the 22–19 band range, as this candidate does.
26–23	26	Prose fiction *The Edible Woman*	2019 Candidate 3	This candidate has chosen the 'exploration of identity' in this single text dissertation, and the approach and text offer an appropriate level of challenge at this level. The dissertation displays a secure knowledge and understanding of the text, and it is obvious the candidate has some insight into the issue of 'identity'. Their exploration of the novel is relevant and there is a secure consideration of the implications of the task. The analysis of a range of literary techniques helps to strengthen their line of argument, which leads on to their clearly identifiable evaluative stance, which is securely based on evidence from within the dissertation. The candidate's expression is skilful and the tone throughout is academic (with the odd lapse). There is the rather rigid structure of each analysis paragraph, but this helps the candidate securely address the task and provide the level of analysis and evaluation needed for this

Band range	Mark	Genre and texts	Reference	Comments
				dissertation to fully meet the standards outlined in the 26–23 range, so is awarded the highest mark in that band range.
26–23	26	Prose fiction *Brideshead Revisited*	2021 Candidate 1	This single text dissertation has a focus on Catholicism. This is a challenging topic alongside a challenging novel, which allows the candidate to delve into complex issues and relationships throughout the novel. The candidate's knowledge and understanding of the novel is secure, and they show some insight into the topic being explored. Their exploration of the novel shows a secure consideration of the implications of the task and their line of argument is supported by selections of quotation from across the breadth of the novel. There is a relevant analysis of a range of techniques, which strengthens the line of argument, and the evaluative stance is clearly identifiable and securely based on the evidence presented. The candidate's expression is skilfully used and helps them in the articulation of a sustained focus on the task. A strength of this dissertation is the articulate expression, which integrates knowledge and understanding, analytical comment, and evaluation in a very concise manner. It possibly reads as a higher mark, but it is the small details concerning the analytical comment and focus that keep this dissertation at the top of the 26–23 range, and not in the highest band range.
26–23	26	Poetry T S Eliot	2016 Candidate 2	This candidate selects a complex range of poems and a complex task, 'existentialism' as the focus of their dissertation and both texts and topic are appropriate at this level. It is obvious that the candidate has a secure knowledge and understanding of all four poems, and they show a relevant exploration of the topic alongside some insight into many of the ideas explored. In support of their line of argument they use extensive textual evidence throughout the dissertation to support the demands of the task and they use evidence from across the breadth of all four poems. The relevant analysis of task-appropriate techniques strengthens the line of argument, and the evaluation is clearly identifiable and securely based on the evidence given within the dissertation. The expression is skilful, and the structure is very effective as the initial serial treatment of the poems becomes more complex as the dissertation progresses and the comparative comments are integrated

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				to bring a cohesive line of argument together. Much of this dissertation points towards being in the highest band range yet it is the, at times, slightly inconsistent nature of the analytical comment, which is not always consistently well-developed that keeps this dissertation solidly at the top of the 26–23 range.
30–27	27	Prose fiction

Small Gods

American Gods | 2016
Candidate 9 | The selection of texts is relatively unusual in that they are taken from the fantasy genre, yet the nature of the task in looking at the 'process and development of religion, belief and worship', points towards a topic which is appropriate for this level of study. The texts are appropriate at this level as they have the potential for the development of a complex and sophisticated literary discourse on the given topic. Overall, the candidate displays a comprehensive knowledge of both texts, and they have a sustained insight into the implications of the task, which is supported by their judicious selection of evidence that is clearly focused on the demands of the task. They present a relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques that strengthens the line of argument. The candidate's genuine connection to the topic and texts is obvious throughout and supports their committed and clear stance. There is some evidence of skilful and considered use of structure, style and language, and the comparative aspect as defined in the task, is always to the fore and is at times precise. There is just enough of the dissertation that can be placed in the standards outlined in the 30–27 range, so it is awarded the lowest mark in this band range. The choice of texts may not be what is normally dealt with at this level, yet the candidate works very hard at focusing on the literary features of the text and it is this focus that places the dissertation in the highest band range. |
| 30–27 | 28 | Prose fiction

Beloved

The Color Purple | 2016
Candidate 7 | The dual focus of the task, 'the importance of community and language in female emancipation from social oppression', is a clear and precise task that allows the candidate to interrogate these two popular and appropriate texts at this level. Their knowledge and understanding of both texts is comprehensive and it is skilfully supported by relevant textual reference (both direct quotation and indirect reference). The analytical comment is relevant, and skilfully |

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				strengthens the line of argument, with a particular focus on the character relationships at the heart of the texts, but also makes reference to authorial comment, metaphor, language, and structure. Yet the treatment of the texts has an imbalance in that *Beloved* is dealt with a touch more quality, depth and insight than *The Color Purple*. The evaluation is clear and committed and supported by the candidate's own evidence and with the judicious selections from secondary reading, but with, *once again, Beloved* being the stronger text in terms of evaluation. The expression is skilful and considered for *Beloved*, and skilful for *The Color Purple*. The section headings are not always helpful, as at times, the promise of the section heading is not fulfilled as with the 'Power of language/communication' section. Although there is a great deal of excellent work here, the fine judgements made about the balance of treatment prevents this dissertation from being awarded the very top mark as it does not fully meet the standards outlined in the 30–27 range, yet neither does it just meet the standard, so a mark of 28 is awarded.
30-27	29	Prose fiction *Half of a Yellow Sun*	2019 Candidate 2	This is a single text dissertation that primarily focuses on character development. The topic and text offer an appropriate level of challenge at this level. The knowledge and understanding is comprehensive, and the exploration of the topic is full and relevant and demonstrates a sustained consideration of the implications of the task. Throughout the dissertation, the selection of evidence and references is broad and judicious and used in a clear and focused way to support the line of argument in a sustained manner. The analytical comment of a range of task-appropriate techniques such as narrative, characterisation, setting, contrast, foreshadowing, crucial moments, and symbolism is all relevant to the task and is done to skilfully strengthen the line of argument. The committed and clear evaluative comments throughout are skilfully based on the candidate's own evidence and analytical comment. The expression is skilful and considered, but at this level it is the fine judgement being made that brings us to the mark awarded. The penultimate paragraph on Olanna and gender identity is not as cleanly integrated into the

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				overall argument and it is this that places the dissertation at 29 rather than 30 marks.
30–27	30	Prose fiction *Emma* *Pride and Prejudice*	2016 Candidate 3	The two Austen texts selected for this dissertation are challenging choices, and together with a task that deals with the 'theme of seeing clearly', the dissertation is established as having the appropriate challenge at this level. The candidate has a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of both texts. It is clear that their insights are sustained into the theme of 'seeing clearly' and their observation that the reader discovers different layers of seeing, evidences the sort of insight this candidate illustrates throughout the dissertation. The quotations and references used throughout are judiciously selected, and the analysis of the task-appropriate range of literary techniques skilfully strengthens the line of argument. The evaluative comment is discernible, clear, and skilfully based on evidence throughout. In terms of expression, the candidate is articulate in the language used and in their considered structuring of the line of argument, which is sustained, precise and cohesive. This dissertation meets all the standards outlined in the 30–27 range and is awarded full marks.
30–27	30	Prose non-fiction *Bad Blood* *Cider with Rosie*	2023 Candidate 1	This dissertation looks at two prose non-fiction texts, two memoirs, which is an uncommon genre to engage with, but these texts are appropriate for this level of study. The two memoirs selected have the literary quality and depth to allow this candidate to create an excellent piece of literary discourse. It is obvious that the candidate has a comprehensive understanding of both texts, which allows them to fully explore their selected approach, 'theme of childhood' explored through the authors' differing narrative styles. The approach is challenging, but the candidate explores this in a full, confident, and well-considered way and they support this approach with extensive textual evidence from both memoirs. This candidate confidently explores a range of relevant literary concepts and analyses them with some skill and depth and uses appropriate secondary reading to further support their approach to their task. The candidate offers a committed and clear evaluative stance with respect to both texts, and always skilfully substantiates their

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				evaluative comments with precise evidence presented within the dissertation. The candidate has a clear and concise writing style that allows them to succinctly develop their impressive line of argument throughout. This dissertation meets all of the standards outlined in the 30–27 range and is awarded the highest mark from that band range.
30–27	30	Prose fiction *North and South* *Pride and Prejudice*	2024 Candidate 2	The candidate has chosen to write a dissertation on two complex and sophisticated novels, which are appropriate for this level of study. Throughout the dissertation, the candidate shows that they have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts as a whole, which demonstrates sustained insight into the issues explored. The candidate makes a relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques, which skilfully strengthen the line of argument. The candidate is, not surprisingly, focused on the characterisation of Elizabeth and Margaret and their relationships with Darcy and Thornton respectively, but they also touch upon motif, character foil, irony, narrative voice, and symbolism. The candidate has a committed, clear stance with respect to the texts and the task, which is skilfully based on precise evidence presented within the dissertation. The candidate makes skilful and considered use of structure, and their writing follows an impressive line of argument which is consistent with their stated approach in their task. This dissertation fully meets the standard described in the 30–27 range and is therefore awarded the highest mark in that range. It should be noted that a dissertation does not need to be perfect to be awarded full marks.