



National 5 and Higher English

Prelim guide

This document provides guidance for teachers and lecturers who want to create their own prelim papers. The guidance will help in the creation of assessments that mirror SQA question papers.

Assessments, and the language used in questions, should be accessible for all candidates. Where appropriate, questions and marking instructions should allow for a higher level of performance from grade A candidates. Assessments must be at the correct level of demand for the SCQF level and not include barriers that make them unnecessarily difficult.

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National 5

Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

In a Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAE) assessment, candidates are expected to:

- ◆ read and understand one unseen non-fiction text
- ◆ answer a series of approximately nine questions that focus on their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills
- ◆ show ability to infer meaning and to summarise

Total marks: 30

Texts

You may source texts from a variety of publications including newspapers, magazines, online publications, public information documents, full length non-fiction books, and other material that is publicly available. In recent years, SQA created National 5 RUAE passages from articles in *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, and Literary Hub.

You must ensure that the topics and texts you choose do not cause distress, offend or disadvantage any candidate.

Suitable topics could include, for example everyday operations of society, geographical, historical, scientific, technological, environmental or sociological topics, travel, sport and famous lives.

You should select topics that are relevant and of interest to candidates at SCQF level 5 and be appropriate to their stage of development.

Level of language

Language should be appropriate to the level and allow candidates at all four grades (A to D) to perform to the best of their ability. This means that the language should provide some challenge for stronger candidates without disadvantaging weaker candidates. Texts should allow weaker candidates to gain a holistic view of the information and ideas presented. An expression might provide different levels of challenge: weaker candidates may be able to handle part of a given expression but not be able to explain or paraphrase the expression in its entirety. This allows for discrimination between different levels of performance.

It is easier for candidates to process information that is presented in a sequential manner, for example in a narrative. You should select texts that are coherent, link ideas appropriately, and present the argument within the text in a logical manner.

Adapting and/or editing texts

You may adapt texts for a variety of reasons, for example to:

- ◆ reduce length
- ◆ remove inappropriate or irrelevant information
- ◆ adjust language for appropriacy and accessibility

However, excessive editing may have a negative impact on the cohesion of the text. You should ensure that edited texts maintain the feel and approach of the original text and are coherent. It is often best to choose passages that can be used in an 'almost complete' state. The length should be approximately 1,000 words.

Questions

In National 5 RUAЕ, you assess candidates in the following skills:

- ◆ understanding of the writer's ideas: showing understanding of the writer's ideas by recasting expressions from the passage in their own words, for example glossing. At National 5, the attention should be around focused areas of the passage
- ◆ evaluation of overall impact of the text or writer's techniques
- ◆ inferring meaning from what is implied by the writer
- ◆ summarising: showing understanding of the writer's ideas through summarising using their own words and identify and isolate the writer's key points or main ideas. Questions should specify the number of points needed
- ◆ analysis of language, for example text structure (opening, conclusion, links), word choice, imagery, sentence structure, punctuation
- ◆ vocabulary in context
- ◆ text structure

Command words

You should use these command words in the National 5 RUAЕ question paper:

- ◆ explain: the main command word for both understanding and analysis questions
- ◆ summarise: if you are asking candidates to consider, and to get the essence from, a whole paragraph or series of paragraphs within texts
- ◆ identify: if you want candidates to pick out clear points

You should direct candidates to specific areas of the passage for each question by using the following construction, for example 'Look at lines 1–8.' This should appear on the line above the question.

The number of points required should appear in bold, for example 'By referring to **two** examples...'

If it is not possible or appropriate to state the number of expected points within a question, it is good practice to add a statement at the end of the question, for example 'You should make **four** key points.' This applies especially to understanding-type questions.

Example of understanding-type question

2022 RUAE, question 1:

Look at lines 1–8.

Using your own words as far as possible, explain why it was strange that the writer liked to play Diner Dash.

You should make **two** key points in your answer.

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Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates: 'Look at lines 1–8'.
- ◆ Own words are always required for understanding-type questions. This instruction is highlighted for candidates using bold text.
- ◆ The end of the question clearly states, using bold text, the number of points that candidates must make to gain full marks: 'You should make **two** key points in your answer'.

Example 1 of analysis-type question

2022 RUAE, question 2:

Look at lines 9–14.

By referring to **two** examples of language, explain how the writer highlights the negative effects of losing her job.

4

Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates: 'Look at lines 9–14'.
- ◆ This is an 'open' analysis question, meaning that candidates can offer analysis on any relevant language feature they want, for example word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, imagery.
- ◆ The beginning of the question clearly states, using bold text, the number of examples candidates must give to gain full marks.

Example 2 of analysis-type question

2022 RUAE, question 7:

Look at lines 46–53.

By referring to **two** examples of word choice, explain how the writer makes it clear that many new video games **do not** contribute to stress or anxiety. 4

Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates: 'Look at lines 46–53'.
- ◆ This is a 'closed' analysis question, meaning that candidates can only offer analysis on the stated language technique: in this question it is 'word choice'.
- ◆ The beginning of the question clearly states, using bold text, the number of examples candidates must give to gain full marks.

Marking instructions

You should refer to the way that the marking instructions are set out for National 5 RUAE for the most recent past papers on [SQA's past paper website](#).

The 'Additional guidance' column should include advice to markers about which answers are acceptable, and how marks are awarded. Each answer should begin with 'Possible answers' to indicate that these are not comprehensive. Markers should apply their own judgement when candidates offer comments and/or interpretations that are not in the marking instructions.

Possible answers should be listed in the order they appear in the text.

The number of marks should be indicated as: reference (1) comment (1), as appropriate.

In the marking instructions of an understanding-type question, it is helpful to quote the relevant words from the passage, and then to offer a suggested own-words gloss, for example:

Possible answers:

- ◆ 'stopped a stranger' glossed by, for example, she approached someone she didn't know/someone random (1)
- ◆ 'compliment (her outfit)'/ 'she was dressed in such a lovely way and I just had to tell her that' glossed by, for example, she said something nice to the woman/she said she had nice clothes (1)

Critical Reading

Scottish text section

Text or extract

This should be either a whole text (most of the poems on the list), or an extract from a longer poem, short story, prose text, drama text. Extracts must contain material that allows candidates to demonstrate skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation, for example there should be clear opportunities for candidates to analyse characterisation, conflict, theme, word choice, imagery, as appropriate.

For accuracy and consistency, it is best to use SQA's recommended editions listed on the back page of the National 5 past papers on [SQA's past paper website](#).

Questions

Questions should aim to capture the main (not secondary or minor) aspects of an extract or poem that candidates are likely to have covered during the course (the marking instructions should reflect this too).

Command words

You should use these command words in the National 5 Scottish text section:

- ◆ explain: the main command word (for both understanding and analysis questions).
- ◆ summarise: if you are asking candidates to consider, and to get the essence from, large chunks of text.
- ◆ identify: if you want candidates to pick out clear points.
- ◆ show: for the final question.

You should direct candidates to specific areas of the text or extract for each question by using the following construction, for example, 'Look at lines 1–8 .' This should appear on the line above the question.

The number of points required should appear in bold, for example 'By referring to **two** examples...'

If it is not possible or appropriate to state the number of expected points within a question, it is good practice to make a statement at the end of the question, for example 'You should make **four** key points.'

- ◆ There should be four or five questions on each extract.
- ◆ Marks should be 2 or 4, with 8 for the final question.

Final question

This question must be open-ended and accessible to allow candidates to demonstrate their learning of the whole text or group of texts. It should focus on one aspect only, but this aspect should be reasonably wide-ranging and be of central importance to the text(s), for example theme, characterisation, setting.

Example of final question

2022 Critical Reading, Scottish text section 1, part C:

By referring to this poem and to at least one other poem by Duffy, show how the poet explores important experiences.

8

Notes

The focus of this question is thematic ('important experiences') and it is wide in scope. You should avoid a focus that is too narrow.

You must always use the command word 'show' in the final question of the National 5 Scottish text section of the Critical Reading question paper. It conveys the sense of 'demonstrate using detailed evidence.'

Marking instructions

You should refer to the way that the marking instructions are set out for the National 5 Scottish text section for the most recent past papers on [SQA's past papers website](#).

The 'Additional guidance' column should include advice to markers about which answers are acceptable, and how marks are awarded. Each answer should begin with 'Possible answers include' to indicate that, especially for literature, these are not comprehensive. Markers should apply their own judgement when candidates offer comments and/or interpretations that are not in the marking instructions.

Possible answers should be listed in the order they appear in the text.

The number of marks should be indicated as: reference (1) comment (1), as appropriate.

In an understanding-type question, it is helpful to quote the relevant words from the extract or poem, and then to offer a suggested own-words gloss, for example:

Possible answers include:

- ◆ 'let me speak' (1) suggests he wants her to be quiet/listen (1)
- ◆ 'It doesn't matter'/'It doesn't matter now'/'out of our hands' (1) suggests insignificance of the other/previous issue (1)

Final question

The generic instructions for the 'Additional guidance' column is in the marking instructions, available on [SQA's past papers website](#). You should adapt these to include the name of the writer (for example 'at least one other text by Donovan').

Advice for markers should appear in the 'Expected response(s)' column. This should follow this pattern, for example:

Extract:

Massimo's love for Rosinella, for example trying to break the news to her, for example affectionately calling her Rosie, trying to calm her down.

Elsewhere:

Romantic/forbidden love — Rosinella and Massimo, Lucia and Hughie, Bridget and Franco.

Critical essay

In the critical essay, candidates apply their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills to previously studied texts and write a critical, discursive essay in response to one of the questions.

The questions focus on the following genres: drama, prose, poetry, film and TV drama, and language. For each genre, candidates have two questions to choose from. The questions for 'prose' should always include both fiction and non-fiction prose texts.

The essay should be relevant to the question and achieve minimum requirements for technical accuracy. There may be a few errors, but they should not impede understanding.

Questions

You must ensure each question comprises two elements: a statement introducing the task and a question for candidates to address. These are worded as instructions rather than taking a question form.

Questions often focus on the following elements:

- ◆ characterisation
- ◆ themes
- ◆ settings and how they contribute to the overall effect
- ◆ a scene or sequence (of play or TV drama)
- ◆ language use

Questions must be broad enough in their approach to be accessible and allow candidates to apply them to a variety of texts within a genre, but specific enough to allow for marking and discrimination purposes. Therefore, questions must ask candidates to focus on specific techniques and examples from the selected texts to support their responses.

'Explain' is the main command word used in critical essay questions.

Example of critical essay question

2022 Critical Reading, section 2:

Choose a novel **or** short story **or** work of non-fiction in which there is an interesting character.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the writer makes the character interesting.

Notes

The question is deliberately very open, and allows for all types of fiction: novel, short story, non-fiction. This allows for the complete freedom of text choice in the critical essay. You must include the expression 'By referring to appropriate techniques' to remind candidates to demonstrate their skills of analysis.

Marking instructions

The marking instructions for the National 5 Critical essay section are generic and you can use the most recent ones on [SQA's past papers website](#).

Higher

Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

In a Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAE) assessment, candidates are expected to:

- ◆ apply the reading skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation to two unseen non-fiction texts connected by theme
- ◆ identify key information and ideas from the texts
- ◆ explain relationships between ideas
- ◆ analyse features of language and discuss their relationships with the ideas of the texts as a whole, for example text structure (opening, conclusion, links), word choice, imagery, sentence structure, punctuation
- ◆ evaluate the effect of the language and/or ideas of the text(s)
- ◆ demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the ideas between the two texts

The prelim questions should give candidates detailed and complex questions on the first text, which requires them to understand, infer and summarise the main ideas, in addition to analysing the language of the text.

Candidates must demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the ideas between the two texts (focusing on either agreement or disagreement).

Total marks: 30

Texts or extracts

Selected texts should be non-fiction prose and should be authentic, though some adaptation may be necessary. You will find further information in the [‘Adapting and editing texts’](#) section.

Non-fiction texts selected for assessment purposes are likely to be opinion-based but inclusive in nature, allowing candidates to interact with the text comfortably and without bias.

Texts may be extracts but it is important that you ensure these maintain their coherence and can stand alone.

The length of the passages should be approximately 900 words for passage 1 and 600 to 700 words for passage 2.

Suitable text types include, though are not limited to:

- ◆ narratives (non-fiction)
- ◆ descriptions
- ◆ critical reviews
- ◆ discussions
- ◆ analysis of problems
- ◆ presentation of, and reflection on, new information

Note: the reading of passage 2 is not supported by its own set of questions.

SQA recently used Higher RUAЕ passages from *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *New Statesman*, and *The Telegraph*.

Level of language

For candidates at SCQF level 6, texts should be at an appropriate level of complexity both in terms of concepts and language (subject matter and reading level) and should contain an appropriate level of detail and complexity to allow for the correct number of questions and marks being set. Selected texts should allow for an appropriate level of challenge for stronger candidates in terms of challenging language and ideas.

Selected texts should not have language that is overly specific to a particular subject area, or be excessively demanding, which may disadvantage some candidates. If words or expressions fall into this category, they should be glossed or rephrased where appropriate, to ensure accessibility without impacting on the content, level of demand and difficulty.

The two texts in this question paper should be thematically linked or linked by content and must allow for the final comparison question. For example, two texts that present two opposing opinions from two writers on the same topic, or two texts that show two writers presenting similar views on the same topic.

Adapting and/or editing texts

You may adapt texts for a variety of reasons, for example to:

- ◆ reduce length
- ◆ allow for the correct number of items being developed
- ◆ remove inappropriate or irrelevant information
- ◆ adjust language for appropriacy and accessibility

However, excessive editing may have a negative impact on the cohesion of the text. You should ensure that edited texts maintain the feel and approach of the original text and are coherent.

Questions

In Higher RUAЕ, you assess candidates in the following skills:

- ◆ understanding of the writer's ideas: showing understanding of the writer's ideas by recasting expressions from the passage in their own words, for example glossing. At Higher the attention should be around focused areas of the passage
- ◆ evaluation of overall impact of the text or writer's techniques
- ◆ inferring meaning from what is implied by the writer
- ◆ summarising: showing understanding of the writer's ideas through summarising using their own words and identify and isolate the writer's key points or main ideas. Questions should specify the number of points needed
- ◆ analysis of language, for example text structure (opening, conclusion, links), word choice, imagery, sentence structure, punctuation, tone
- ◆ text structure

Command words

You should use these command words in the Higher RUAЕ question paper:

- ◆ explain (how/why), or explain fully: use to assess understanding of a writer's ideas, always follow by 'in your own words'
- ◆ analyse: always use for questions that require the skill of analysis
- ◆ identify: use for summarising or to pick out key ideas in a writer's argument

Example of understanding-type question

2022 RUAЕ, question 1:

Read lines 1–6.

Explain fully the writer's reaction to the moon landing.

Use your own words in your answer.

2

Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates:
Read lines 1–6.
- ◆ Own words are always required for understanding-type questions.
- ◆ 'Explain fully', gives candidates an indication of the complexity required in their answer.

Example 1 of analysis-type question

2022 RUAE, question 2:

Read lines 7–11.

By referring to **at least two** examples, analyse how the writer uses language to convey his negative view of the moon landing. 4

Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates:
Read lines 7–11.
- ◆ This is an ‘open’ analysis question, meaning that candidates can offer analysis on any relevant language feature they want, for example word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, imagery.
- ◆ The beginning of the question clearly states, using bold text, the minimum number of examples candidates must give to gain full marks.

Example 2 of analysis-type question

2022 RUAE, question 6:

Read lines 33–47.

By referring to **at least two** examples, analyse how the writer uses both word choice **and** sentence structure to convey his criticism of space exploration. 4

Notes

- ◆ The question clearly identifies the specific part of the text for candidates:
Read lines 33–47.
- ◆ This is a ‘closed’ analysis question, meaning that candidates can only offer analysis on the stated language techniques: in this question it is word choice and sentence structure.
- ◆ The marking instructions must clearly show that full marks can only be achieved if candidates analyse both techniques indicated in the question.
- ◆ The beginning of the question clearly states, using bold text, the minimum number of examples candidates must give to gain full marks.

Final question

2022 RUAE, question 9:

Look at both passages.

The writers disagree on the value of space exploration.

Identify **three** key areas on which they disagree. You should support the points you make by referring to important ideas in both passages.

You may answer this question in continuous prose or in a series of developed bullet points.

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Notes

- ◆ This question should focus on either agreement or disagreement, in terms of key areas and/or ideas from both passages.
- ◆ The question clearly states, using bold text, the number of areas candidates must deal with to gain full marks.

Marking instructions

You should refer to the way that the marking instructions are set out for Higher RUAE for the most recent past papers on [SQA's past paper website](#).

The 'Expected response(s)' column should summarise the general marking approach as appropriate to the questions, for example:

- ◆ understanding-type questions (for example 2 marks):
2 marks may be awarded for detailed and/or insightful comment.
1 mark for more basic comment.
0 marks for reference alone.
Marks may be awarded 2 or 1+1
- ◆ analysis-type questions (for example 4 marks):
2 marks may be awarded for detailed/insightful comment plus quotation/reference.
1 mark may be awarded for more basic comment plus quotation/reference.
0 marks for quotation/reference alone.
Marks may be awarded 2+2, 2+1+1 or 1+1+1+1

The 'Additional guidance' column should include advice to markers about which answers are acceptable, and how marks are awarded. Each answer should begin with 'Possible answers' to indicate that these are not comprehensive. Markers should apply their own judgement when candidates offer comments and/or interpretations that are not in the marking instructions.

Possible answers should be listed in the order they appear in the text.

In the marking instructions of an understanding-type question, it is helpful to offer a suggested own-words gloss, followed by a quotation containing the relevant words from the passage, for example:

- ◆ these lines act as a bridge between China's eco-friendly past ('bicycle was king') and its car-dominated present ('choked with traffic')

In an analysis-type question, it is usual to have a relevant quotation, followed by 'suggests...'
and then a suggested analytical comment, for example:

- ◆ 'love affair...is over', suggests that cars have fallen out of favour with those who were once entranced by them

For the final question, on both passages, please refer to recent marking instructions for [SQA's past papers](#) for a suitable model.

Critical Reading

Scottish text section

Text or extract

This should be either a whole text (most of the poems on the list), or an extract from a longer poem, short story, prose text, drama text. Extracts must contain material that allows candidates to demonstrate skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation, for example there should be clear opportunities for candidates to analyse characterisation, conflict, theme, word choice, imagery, as appropriate.

For accuracy and consistency, it is best to use SQA's recommended editions listed on the back page of the Higher past papers on [SQA's past paper website](#).

Questions

Questions should aim to capture the main (not secondary or minor) aspects of an extract or poem that candidates are likely to have covered during the course (the marking instructions should reflect this too).

All questions on the extract should focus on the skill of analysis.

Command words

You should use these command words in the Higher Scottish text section:

- ◆ analyse: the main command word
- ◆ discuss: for the final question

You should direct candidates to specific areas of the text or extract for each question by using the following construction, for example, 'Look at lines 1–8 .' This should appear on the line above the question.

Where appropriate, the number of points required should appear in bold, for example 'By referring to at least **two** examples...'

- ◆ There should be four questions on each extract.
- ◆ Marks should be 2, 3 or 4, with 10 for the final question.

Final question

This question must be open-ended and accessible to allow candidates to demonstrate their learning of the whole text or group of texts. It should focus on one aspect only, but this aspect should be reasonably wide-ranging and be of central importance to the text(s), for example theme, characterisation, contrast, setting.

Example of final question

2022 Critical Reading, Scottish text section 1, part C:

By referring to this poem and to at least one other poem by MacCaig, discuss how specific experiences are used to explore central concerns. 10

Notes

The focus of this question is thematic ('central concerns') and there is a second aspect involved: candidates have to identify and discuss the use of 'specific experiences' in MacCaig's poems and then link these to themes or central concerns. The question allows candidates to focus on themes or central concerns of their own choosing. You should avoid a focus that is too narrow.

You must always use the command word 'discuss' in the final question of the Higher Scottish text section of the Critical Reading question paper.

Marking instructions

You should refer to the way that the marking instructions are set out for the Higher Scottish text section for the most recent past papers on [SQA's past paper website](#).

The 'Expected response(s)' column should summarise the general marking approach as appropriate to the questions, for example:

- ◆ analysis-type questions (for example 4 marks):
 - 2 marks may be awarded for detailed/insightful comment plus quotation/reference.
 - 1 mark may be awarded for more basic comment plus quotation/reference.
 - 0 marks for quotation/reference alone.
 - Award marks 2+2, 2+1+1 or 1+1+1+1

The 'Additional Guidance' column should include advice to markers about which answers are acceptable. How marks are awarded should be outlined in the 'Expected response(s)' column. Each answer should begin with 'Possible answers include' to indicate that, especially for literature, these are not comprehensive. Markers should apply their own judgement when candidates offer comments and/or interpretations that are not in the marking instructions.

Possible answers should be listed in the order they appear in the text.

The number of marks should be indicated as: 2+2, 2+1+1, 1+1+1+1, 2+1, 1+1+1, 2, 1+1, as appropriate.

Final question

The generic instructions for the 'Expected response(s)' column is in the marking instructions, available on [SQA's past papers website](#). You should adapt these to include the name of the writer.

Advice for markers should appear in the 'Additional guidance' column.

Critical essay

In the critical essay, candidates apply their understanding, analysis and evaluation skills to previously studied texts and write a critical, discursive essay in response to one of the questions.

The questions focus on the following genres: drama, prose fiction, prose non-fiction, poetry, film and TV drama, and language. For each genre, candidates have three questions to choose from. Note: there should be a separate section for prose non-fiction in the Higher Critical essay question paper.

The essay should be relevant to the question and achieve minimum requirements for technical accuracy. There may be a few errors, but they should not impede understanding.

Questions

You must ensure each question comprises two elements: a statement introducing the task and a question for candidates to address. These are worded as instructions rather than taking a question form.

Questions often focus on the following elements:

- ◆ characterisation
- ◆ themes
- ◆ settings and how they contribute to the overall effect
- ◆ a scene or sequence (of play or TV drama)
- ◆ language use

Questions must be broad enough in their approach to be accessible and allow candidates to apply them to a variety of texts within a genre, but specific enough to allow for marking and discrimination purposes. Therefore, questions must ask candidates to focus on specific techniques and examples from the selected texts to support their responses.

'Explain' and 'discuss' are the main command words used in critical essay questions.

Example of critical essay question

2022 Critical Reading, section 2:

Choose a play which deals with a theme of social **or** moral importance.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the theme is dealt with and discuss how it contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

Notes

This question directs candidates towards a theme but allows them to select their own theme of 'social or moral importance.' Other questions could identify a range of themes for candidates to select from (usually three).

The part of the question, 'By referring to appropriate techniques' is standard and emphasises that candidates must demonstrate their skills of analysis.

The command word 'discuss' is the main command word used and encourages candidates to write in a discursive way.

Marking instructions

The marking instructions for the National 5 Critical essay section are generic and you can use the most recent ones on [SQA's past papers website](#).