

General introduction

This course of lessons will prepare you for English GCSE syllabus set by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), with the first examinations taking place in 2004.

You and GCSE English

Above all, your GCSE examination is designed to assess the following:

Writing

You will need to communicate clearly and imaginatively, using and adapting forms for different readers and purposes. You will also need to be able to organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts using a variety of linguistic and structural features. Finally, you must be able to use a range of sentence structures effectively with accurate punctuation and spelling.

Reading

You will be required to demonstrate your ability to:

- read, with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts and developing and sustaining interpretations of them;
- distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented;
- follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies;
- select material appropriate to your purpose, collate material from different sources, and make cross references;
- understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects, and comment on ways language varies and changes.

Speaking and listening

Your oral test or examination will also be assessing your ability to speak fluently and confidently. You may talk about one or more of a range of topics, perhaps putting over a point of view, or perhaps

describing your own responses in, or experience of, a situation. You may also be expected to converse with your examiner, or other members of the group. Module Five will help you with this part of the course. You must understand that it is difficult to prepare you for this part of the examination through a distance learning course.

There are, of course, other aspects of the course, for instance the literature requirements, but you should not be concerned too much at this stage with any further detail. Particular lessons will give you more precise information as the need arises.

The Structure within each Lesson: How to Study

Front Page

The front page of each lesson shows:

- **The title.**
- **Aim(s)** for the lesson. These set out the position that you should reach after working through the lesson; keep these in mind while reading the lesson material.
- **Context.** This gives a very brief summary and shows how the lesson fits in with the rest of the course.
- **Note.** This indicates specific reading or writing materials needed for the lesson.

Lesson Notes

There then follow the notes; these present the subject material to be studied in the lesson. Read these through carefully several times until you feel that you have understood the broad outline of the theory involved, and then tackle any reading references.

Activities

For most of this course the work that you will be doing will not be sent to your tutor; it will consist of Activities; these will aid your learning and allow you to check that you are taking in what you have been reading. The important thing to remember is that none of the work that you do in these activities is wasted: all of it will contribute to helping you develop skills, which will later be assessed both in your coursework assignments and in your examination. Your activities will give you necessary practice, and careful work on these will contribute more to your eventual performance and success than any other aspect of the course.

Activities are indicated as follows:

Activity 7

Is the main speaker in this passage a detached, objective narrator of events?

In your answer, you should consider whether this speaker:

- Presents opinion as if it were fact
- Keeps his or her own opinions of people out of the account
- Could have witnessed everything that s/he tells
- Assumes that the listener will agree with his/her views
- Is more sympathetic to some of the people involved than to others.

Decide in what ways this teller is biased, and give examples from the passage. You may also use your knowledge of the first passage in your answer.



The pencil symbol indicates that you should make your own notes in the space provided (though, of course, you may prefer to make them separately).

Where Do I Find the Answers to Activities?

This varies. Some Activities do not have answers at all because they are too open-ended and their purpose is that you should produce a response which is personal to you.

However, most Activities do have 'specimen' answers. These are not the *only* 'correct' answers but they may help you to see how you could improve your own work. Some of these specimen answers are to be found at the end of the lesson and some immediately following the activity.

You may be tempted to peek at the answer to the activity before you have made a proper attempt at it. This is to be avoided at all costs. You must discipline yourself *not* to read the next section of a lesson until you have done the activity. To help you manage this we have put the activities in boxes. Think of these boxes as red lights; do not approach them until you are ready to give the activity your best shot, and do not pass them until you have completed the activity.

Reading the answers too early will be fatal for a number of reasons. The specimen answer tackles the problem in a certain way, and if you have not made your own attempt yet, you will tend to think that that is the only way to do it. There will be other ways, and it is best if you can find one of your own. Remember that the answer is just a 'specimen' or 'suggested' answer.

Self-Assessment Tests

When you feel that you have mastered the topics and completed the activities, tackle any Self-Assessment Tests at the end of the lesson (these are not present in every lesson). The answers to these can be found at the end of each module. Again, do not be tempted to cheat by looking at the answers. This would give you less chance of doing well on the Tutor-marked Assignments and on the coursework.

Tutor-marked Assignments

After every two or three lessons there is a Tutor-marked Assignment. These are presented in a style similar to that of GCSE level examination questions and should be carried out under timed conditions to give you the best chance of examination practice. These tests will thoroughly check your understanding of the previous few topics. You should send your answers to these tests to your tutor, who will return your marked script together with a set of suggested answers.

You will not find Tutor-marked Assignments in Module Five, as this relates to oral skills, or in the Literature Modules (as they relate only to coursework).

The Course

The Oxford Open Learning English GCSE course is set out as follows (reading references are given within the particular lessons):

Part One: Language Skills

Module One: Personal Experience

Lesson One: Writing about Yourself
Lesson Two: How it is told
Lesson Three: Imaginary Experiences

Tutor-marked Assignment A

Module Two: Poetry and Prose

Lesson Four: Poetic Form
Lesson Five: Real or Imaginary?
Lesson Six: Comparing Different Versions of an Event

Tutor-marked Assignment B

Lesson Seven: Plot and Setting

Lesson Eight: Character and Dialogue

Tutor-marked Assignment C**Module Three: Essay Technique**

Lesson Nine: Persuasion

Lesson Ten: Paragraphing

Lesson Eleven: Planning Essays

Lesson Twelve: Points of View

Lesson Thirteen: Constructing an Argument

Tutor-marked Assignment D**Module Four: Reading and Response**

Lesson Fourteen: Reports and Brochures

Lesson Fifteen: Newspapers and Advertisements

Tutor-marked Assignment E

Lesson Sixteen: Writing from Other Cultures and Traditions

Lesson Seventeen: More Writing from Other Cultures and Traditions

Tutor-marked Assignment F**Module Five: Speaking and Listening**

Lesson Eighteen: Your Speaking Voice

Lesson Nineteen: Giving a Talk

Lesson Twenty: Communication

Part Two: Coursework Texts**Literature Module One: *Macbeth***

Lesson 21: Background and Characters

Lesson 22: The Language and Structure of *Macbeth***Literature Module Two: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre***

Lesson 23: Context and Characters

Lesson 24: *Jane Eyre* – Themes and the Romance Genre

Revision

Tutor-marked Assignment G: Practice Exam Paper

Glossary

In the final part of your course, you will be expected to focus on two works of literature. We have selected *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as suitable texts. You will need to buy your own copy of these books (one easy way of doing this is through our website – www.ool.co.uk). It is possible that you could use different texts, but you would need to check with your tutor first as all coursework texts must meet certain requirements.

Students in Wales and Northern Ireland please note: if you are sitting your English GCSE in Wales or Northern Ireland you need to ensure that you have been entered for the English version of the syllabus rather than the Irish or Welsh versions. Irish and Welsh students are required to study a slightly different syllabus to English ones, and it is important that you receive the correct exam papers.

The AQA Syllabus

You will be taking AQA syllabus B (3701) or B (Mature - 3703), depending on whether you are taking this course as a distance learning student or through a college.

If you taking this course through a college your coursework and oral work will probably be internally assessed by your college tutor and you will be entered for syllabus B.

If you are not enrolled at a college, you will normally take syllabus B (Mature). In this case your coursework will be authenticated by your distance learning tutor and marked by the exam board. You will also take an oral exam, which will also be assessed by the exam board. These are the only differences between the two syllabuses.

Note that the authentication procedure is designed to help ensure that coursework is the student's own work. Distance learning tutors cannot authenticate coursework if the student has not made sufficient contact.

The AQA Syllabuses 3701 and 3703

The AQA syllabus contains a great deal of information on the aims and assessment of the English course, and also includes suggestions for coursework assignments. It is essential that you get hold of your own copy of the syllabus for the year in which you expect to take the examination. Copies are available from AQA at the following address:

AQA Publications
Aldon House
39 Heald Grove
Rusholme
Manchester
M14 4NA

Tel: 0161 953 1170

A copy of the syllabus can also be downloaded from AQA's website (www.aqa.co.uk). Ensure you get the right year and syllabus!

Tiers of Assessment

There are two 'tiers' of assessment and eventually you must opt for one, as far as your choice of examination paper is concerned. Tier F is 'Foundation' and Tier H is 'Higher'. This course assumes that you will be aiming for the top grades and will therefore be taking the Higher Written Examinations.

The AQA Examination

There are three components in your English GCSE syllabus: coursework (which counts for 40%), and the written exams (60%).

The written exam consists of two papers, of different length. They are designed to test your skills in reading and writing, and will ask you to respond to a number of different texts. The two exams are structured as follows:

Paper One (30%, 1 hour 40 minutes long)

Section A

One question testing reading and response to pre-released media texts, and one question testing reading and response to an unseen non-fiction text.

Section B

One question testing writing in response to the 'triplet' argue, persuade, advise.

Paper Two (30%, 1 ½ hours long)

Section A

One question testing reading and response to pre-released and unseen poetry from different cultures.

Section B

One question testing writing in response to the 'triplet' analyse, review, comment.

As part of your preparation for the exams, you will receive, probably in the January of the year of your exam, a 'pre-release booklet'. This

is a booklet of media texts, non-fiction texts and texts from other cultures and traditions on which some of the questions in the exams will be based. The same booklet will be used for both Foundation and Higher Tier candidates.

The first paper for both tiers will require close reference to the media texts. These could include news stories, images, cartoons, letters, leaders from tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, and web sites on one issue or news story. The second paper for both tiers will require close reference to the texts from other cultures and traditions.

You are allowed to take your booklet into the exams with you. In 2004 you will be allowed to make your own short notes and markings in the margins of the booklet. Substantial notes or loose inter-leaved sheets of paper are not permitted (including 'Post-it' notes). In 2005, however, the booklet must not be annotated in any way. This is due to a change in examination guidelines. Candidates who do not observe these rules may be disqualified.

Coursework

All candidates for this syllabus have to submit a folder of coursework. Specification B (Mature) is the 'external' syllabus but the only two differences between this syllabus and the main syllabus is in the marking of coursework and the oral assessment.

If you are enrolled in a school or college, you will normally enter as an internal candidate and take the 3701 syllabus. In this case your coursework will be marked by your college tutor. Your college tutor will also assess your oral work.

If you are not enrolled at a school or college, you will normally enter as a private (external) candidate and take syllabus 3703. In this case your coursework will be authenticated by your distance learning tutor and marked by the exam board. You will also take an oral exam, which will also be assessed by the exam board. These are the only differences between the two syllabuses.

Note that a candidate may not enter as both a private candidate and an internal candidate at the same exam centre in the same examination series.

If you are an internal candidate and your coursework is going to be marked by your college tutor, you should discuss this with him or her. You would need to be in face-to-face contact with your college tutor and you would need to be linked to a recognised exam centre. This course does not assume that you are in this position, rather that your coursework will be marked by the exam board. Particularly if you are an external candidate, you will need to find out what the closing date for submission of your coursework file is

so that you can plan your programme of study, etc., to meet this deadline.

Your coursework file needs to contain four pieces of work. These pieces must be as follows:

1. A piece of personal writing which provides opportunities to explore, imagine and entertain (such as a piece of creative writing, a short story, or imaginary diary extract).
2. A piece of personal writing which provides opportunities to inform, explain and describe (such as an essay on something of current interest, an article for a magazine, an autobiographical or biographical piece, etc).
3. A written response to a Shakespeare play. In this course, the play chosen to be studied for coursework is *Macbeth*.
4. A written response to a work of prose of recognised literary value. The work chosen for this part of your coursework is Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

There is no set word limit either for individual pieces of coursework or for the folder as a whole. However, AQA points out that 'excessive length should be avoided'. At least one of your coursework pieces must be hand-written.

Coursework accounts for 40% of the total exam marks available (although if you are an external candidate, the Speaking and Listening will become an exam of sorts). The coursework is divided into three sections: Writing (worth 10% of the total marks available), Reading (also worth 10% of the total marks available) and Speaking and Listening (20%). Pieces 1 and 2, which allow you to demonstrate your ability to construct and convey meaning in written standard English, count towards your Writing score and pieces 3 and 4, which are primarily concerned with your reading, response and analysis skills, count towards your Reading score. The two pieces of personal writing are therefore of equal weighting with the two pieces assessed for Reading. It is essential that you get a copy of the syllabus as this gives you lots of information about how your coursework will be assessed.

This may seem daunting at the moment, but the OOL course is designed to guide you through the coursework as well as the exam element of the syllabus. As you study the relevant sections of the course, we will give you suggestions as to possible coursework pieces you could produce.

Some of the Activities undertaken during the course could be used as the basis of a piece of coursework. However, if you choose to do this you must be careful that the suggested answers and commentaries given in this course do not contribute too much to the piece of work that you produce.

There is a certain amount of paperwork involved in the submission of coursework. Your tutor will be able to help you with this nearer the time.

Linking Coursework in English with Coursework in English Literature

There are a number of connections between the English and English Literature syllabuses set by AQA. Many of the same skills are tested by both syllabuses, and for that reason some of the material in this course is also to be found in the OOL English Literature GCSE course. If you have already studied that course, there is no need to cover the same ground twice so you should skip over any material in Part One which seems to be over-familiar.

If a piece of coursework is relevant to both syllabuses, it can be submitted for assessment for both. The two pieces of literature you will study as part of this course are, however, not named as part of the current English Literature specification.

Indeed, if you successfully work through this course, you would be well placed to take the AQA English Literature examination at the same time (syllabus 3711). If you are interested, you will need to discuss this possibility with your tutor.

Using the Internet

All students would benefit from access to the Internet. You will find a wealth of information on all the topics in your course. As well as the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk), you should get into the habit of checking the Oxford Open Learning site (www.ool.co.uk) where you may find news, additional resources and interactive features as time goes by. If you have not already done so, you may register for your free copy of *How to Study at Home*, our 200-page guide to home learning, or enrol on further courses. Put it on your Favourites list now!

And Finally...

Good luck with the course!

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