Edexcel English Literature GCSE

A Guide to Edexcel English Literature GCSE: Paper One

This work by PMT Education is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Introduction to Component 1

The written exam takes **1 hour 45 minutes** in total and is worth **50%** of your entire English Literature GCSE and is worth **80 marks**.

Section A
Shakespeare Play

Section A of paper 1 is worth **40 marks**. This section is split into two parts, **part a)** and **part b)**.

You will be given an **extract** from your chosen **Shakespearean play** which you must refer to within your response;

- In **Part A**, you must respond to the question by focusing on a **close language analysis** of the **extract**. AO2
- In **Part B**, students are expected to focus on how a **theme** from the extract is explored **elsewhere in the play**. AO1 and AO3

The written exam takes **1 hour 45 minutes** in total.

Therefore, it is recommended that you spend around **25 minutes** each on both part a) and b), including up to **5 minutes spent planning for each**, leaving the rest of the time to **write your essay**.

Remember that **planning is essential** as **examiners** found that a plan frequently led to a well-constructed answer, and **lack of planning proved an issue**.

Section B
Post-1914 British Play or Novel

Section B of paper 1 is also worth **40 marks**, but students will be required to answer **one question** from a **choice of two**.

Each question will be followed by a **short quotation** from the text to spur on your own response.

In this section, marks will **also be given for accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar** AO4 but AO2 **will not be assessed**.

Therefore, the assessment objectives covered are AO1, AO3 and AO4.

Again, it is recommended that you spend **50 minutes on this section**, including **5 to 10 minutes spent planning**.

Assessment Objectives 4.2

Assessment objectives **(AOs)** are the **same across all GCSE English Literature exam boards**, they are used by the examiner to mark and **evaluate** how well you have constructed your essay.

Paper 1 will measure **how you have achieved the following AO's** in order to give you your final mark:

AO1 (38.8% of marks)

This will measure how you **read, understand and respond to texts** and includes your use of **quotations** to support and illustrate your interpretations.

Tip – to score highly in this AO students are expected to **maintain a critical and judicious writing style** throughout their whole essay. **DO NOT** just employ loads of quotes just because you have memorised them all, make sure that it is **relevant** and that you **analyse** it instead of just simply placing it there.

AO2 (25% of marks)

This will measure how well you **analyse language, form and structure** to create **meanings** and **effects** using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Tip - For top grades, examiners are looking for students to **avoid** identifying nouns or verbs used by the writer in an attempt to demonstrate an appreciation of their work but rather the top students are expected to demonstrate a **fluent and confident** discussion of the writer's methods.

AO3 (26.3% of marks)

This will measure how students understand the **relationships between the texts and the contexts** in which they were written. This includes relevant **historical, social and biographical** information. Note that the key word here is **RELEVANT**.

AO4 (10% of marks)

This will only be assessed in **Section B** of Paper 1. AO4 will measure how accurately you are able to **spell and use punctuation**. To reach the top marks in this AO students are expected to use a **range of vocabulary and sentence structures**.

CC BY NC ND

Grade Boosters!

To reach the **top marks** for the most important AO's here are a few tips that will come in handy for Paper 1:

AO1 GRADE BOOSTER

DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

If you are looking to get a **grade 7 or above**, examiners are looking for you to show a **development in your ideas** as you write each paragraph.

You can **show this development through your argument**. For example, if the question you are given is about the theme **love**, you could state at the beginning of your second paragraph that the theme of love **develops** and becomes **increasingly potent** at a later stage in the text, and then in your final paragraph you could state that this particular section of the text is where love is **arguably the most potent**.

This clearly shows that you are writing about how the particular character or theme **develops** within the play by simply changing a few words at the beginning of each of your paragraphs!

AO1 GRADE BOOSTER

RELEVANT QUOTES

Try to avoid remembering **large chunks of text** because not only does this **waste time**, but it also makes your writing look messy and decreases the fluidity of your essay.

Instead, examiners are looking for you to **employ relevant quotes** that are not **too lengthy** to increase the effectiveness of your response.

AO3 GRADE BOOSTER

RELEVANT CONTEXT

The contextual factors that you employ must be **relevant!** Therefore, you must try to avoid bolting on **irrelevant contextual information** that does not correlate with your **argument** or the **question**, as this will decrease your essay's level of **sophistication**.

AO2 GRADE BOOSTER

AVOID IRRELEVANT TERMS

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** simply identifying Shakespeare's nouns or verbs, as this may limit the effectiveness of your analysis. For example, the 2017 **examiner's report** urges students to compare:

*"Shakespeare **uses the verb** "bite" in "bite my thumb" to…"*

with

*"Shakespeare creates an **aggressive tone** through the insult "bite my thumb" to…"*

The report states that it is the **quality of your explanation** which determines your level, rather than the inclusion of a 'term'.

AO3 GRADE BOOSTER

AVOID GENERALISATION

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** making sweeping generalisations such as "**all Elizabethan women** were controlled by men".

Instead, examiners are seeking for students to make **sophisticated links** between **relevant contextual factors and the question**. For example, if you were speaking about Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet' you could say instead that "it **perhaps** wouldn't be surprising for Shakespeare's audience to see that Juliet's father attempts to gain control over her, as **usually** within Elizabethan England most women were seen as properties of their husbands and fathers".

Types of questions and how to approach them

The **types of questions** you could get asked in the exam are:

Character

Example **character** question -

'Explore how Shakespeare presents Juliet'

Relationship

Example **relationship** question -

'Explore how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Romeo and Juliet'

Theme

Example **theme** question -

'Explore how Shakespeare presents the theme of love'

Context

Example **contextual** question -

'Explore Shakespeare's attitudes towards the treatment of women'

Alternative Interpretations

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to be able to write their responses in a **sophisticated manner**, showing the examiner that they have **understood the text thoroughly** and that they are able to write about **multiple, alternative interpretations** in regard to expressing their thoughts about the writer's craft.

Alternative interpretations show the examiner that you are a top student who has really **engaged with the text** at hand as it shows that you have a **sophisticated and broad understanding** of the writer's **purpose**.

Some **example sentence starters** that you could use to show the examiner that you are engaging with multiple interpretations are:

"Alternatively..."

"In one way this could show... In another way this could also show..."

"On one level the writer could be revealing that...Yet, on another level it could be that the writer is trying to show the audience that..."

"Explicitly, the writer is trying to show us that...however implicitly the writer could be showing us that..."

What you should be thinking about when responding to a character question:

Brainstorm different words to describe this character. What type of person are they?

Any key quotes

How does the character change and develop as the text progresses?

What type of relationships do they form with others? Are they a product of their contextual circumstances?

What is the writer's purpose for constructing this character?

Do they behave in a way that contradicts the context of the time or do they behave unconventionally in regard to societal expectations of the time period?

Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this character.

Example of a character question - Juliet

Independent, adamant, unfortunate, doomed, submissive

"My only love sprung from my only hate"

"I'll no longer be a Capulet"

As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Juliet does not conform to societal expectations because she goes against her father's will to marry Paris. This would have been seen as an outrage to Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience as a daughter was seen as her father's property and thus, she was expected to obey her father's commands or suffer the consequences.

As the play progresses, Juliet becomes increasingly independent. Due to Juliet's intense love for Romeo she begins to take charge of her own life, disobeying her fathers' commands, in order to pursue the passionate relationship that she shares with Romeo.

Shakespeare may have employed the character of Juliet to explore the consequences of going against family honour within the Elizabethan era. Through Juliet's demise the audience are able to witness the possible consequences that may come about when one disobeys their family.

Main Argument

Shakespeare presents Juliet as a character who becomes increasingly independent as the play progresses. Although to Shakespeare's contemporary audience this may be positive, perhaps it is clear to Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience that Juliet has no other choice but to die as she had gone against family honour to pursue an unconventional form of uncourtly love.

CC BY NC ND

What you should be thinking about when responding to a theme question:

Brainstorm different synonyms for this theme so your work doesn't sound too repetitive

How does this theme engage with any relevant contextual factors?

How does this theme change and develop as the play progresses?

How important is this theme in the text?

Key moments where this theme is most evident

How does this theme contrast with other main themes?

Any key quotes

Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this character.

Example of a theme question - Love

Romance, love, fondness, tenderness, passion, ardour, desire, attachment

This theme accentuates the Elizabethan idea of courtly love. This is because, Romeo and Juliet's passionate love goes against the Elizabethan idea of courtly love which was expected to be polite and mostly passionless.

As the play progresses the theme of love becomes increasingly potent as Romeo and Juliet fall more deeply in love. We are able to see different interpretations of love through Mercutio's views and also the Nurse's.

love

Love holds great thematic weight within the play, perhaps because Shakespeare uses this theme as a platform to explore various issues such as disobeying family honour, male violence and the treatment of women.

"Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs: Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes" - Romeo

This theme heavily contrasts with the theme of violence within the play.

"That I must love a loathed enemy" – Juliet

CC BY NC ND

What you should be thinking about when responding to a **relationship question**:

Brainstorm different words that describe the relationship

Any relevant contextual factors that may influence the relationship

How does this relationship change or develop as the text progresses?

What is the writer's purpose for allowing these individuals to have a relationship?

Key moments of interaction. Are their views similar or different?

What kind of relationship is this? Is it particularly important? Is it insignificant? Do the individuals rely on each other?

Any key quotes

Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this character.

Example of a **relationship question** - **Romeo and Juliet**

Loving, caring, passionate, intense, ardent, gentle

The relationship between Romeo and Juliet becomes increasingly intense and complex as their love becomes progressively passionate. The more intense their feelings are for each other, the harder it becomes to hide their love from their families which is what eventually leads to their deaths.

Elizabethan treatment of women, love, family honour.

The relationship is intense but secret.

"For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo"

"O Romeo O Romeo, Wherefore art thou Romeo?"- Juliet

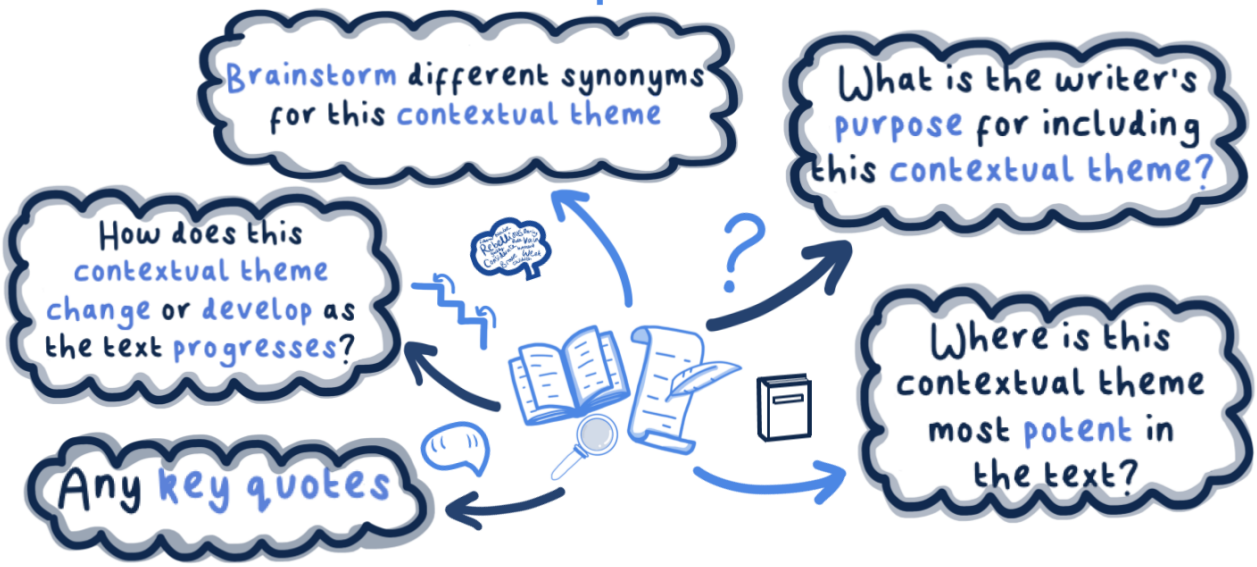
"O happy dagger" - Juliet

Main Argument

Shakespeare allows Romeo and Juliet's relationship to act as a platform that he can use to broadcast his views on family honour, love and violence.

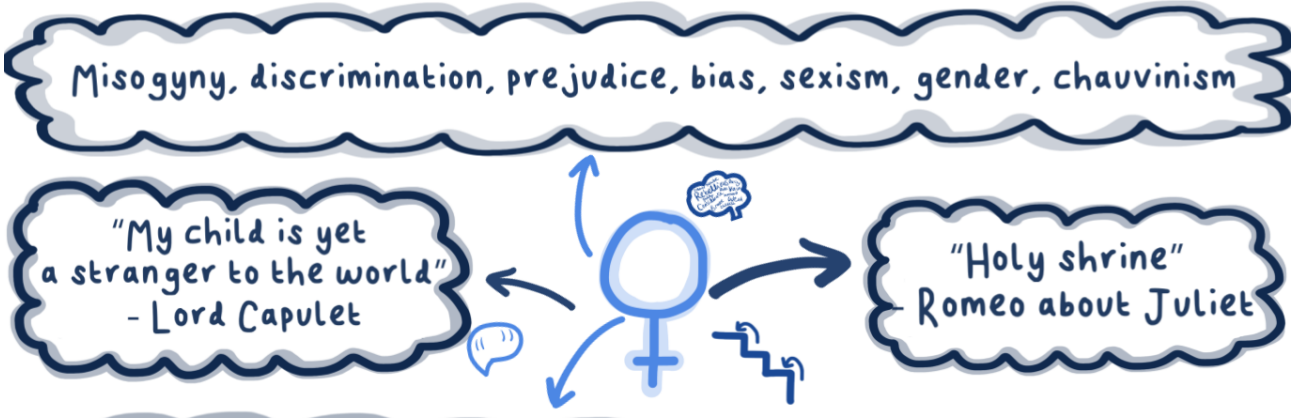
CC BY NC ND

What you should be thinking about when responding to a **question based upon context**:



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this character.

Example of a **context question** - **Shakespeare's attitudes towards the treatment of women**



Throughout the play, the audience are able to witness how Lord Capulet treats Juliet as an object, as he believes that he should make her decisions on who she should marry and views her as his property.

Similarly, one could argue that Romeo views Juliet as an object as well as he objectifies her as a "holy shrine". Yet, Romeo is mostly gentle towards Juliet and perhaps uses this religious metaphor to worship her and to reveal his love for her.

Main Argument

Clearly, Shakespeare explores different attitudes towards women within his play to highlight the discrimination and the consequences of living within a misogynist society.

CC BY NC ND