

2018 VCE English (NHT) examination report

General comments

The 2018 VCE English (NHT) examination consisted of three sections: Section A required students to write an analytical essay in response to one text from the four available. Section B required students to write a comparative analysis of one topic on one of two pairs of text. Section C required students to analyse the ways in which argument and language persuade in response to unseen material.

Assessment was holistic, using the published assessment criteria. Assessors related individual student performance directly to these criteria, and their judgments were assisted by the use of the set of expected qualities for each section of the examination. The assessment criteria and expected qualities are accessible via the VCAA website.

Specific information

Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text

Students were required to develop and write an analytical interpretation in essay form on one of four set texts. Two topics were offered for each text. The descriptors used for assessment related to the degree of textual knowledge, including the concepts and construction, the consistency of the essay structure and extent of topic focus and relevance, and the control and appropriateness of the writing skills.

The most popular text responded to was *All About Eve*. Both topics for this text afforded opportunities for students to draw upon their close textual knowledge and demonstrate their essay-writing skills. The highest-scoring responses revealed not only assured textual analysis and close knowledge, but also a willingness to challenge the extent to which the topic was applicable and subsequently to fully resolve it. The most assured responses to the first topic reflected on the abrasive assessment of Eve by Margo expressed in the embedded quotation and explored the extent to which this was justified in the eyes of the viewer. In the case of the second topic, the highest-scoring responses astutely considered to what extent the film truly had a ‘happy ending’, reflecting on the predominant views of Mankiewicz.

In the case of *Medea*, the highest-scoring responses to the first topic recognised the need to reflect on the extent to which Euripides focused on the notion of ‘betrayal’ and how predominant this was in the play. The less popular second topic invited students to meaningfully reflect on whether Medea herself acts ‘only out of self-interest’ and to construct their essay around this discussion.

While all four topics on these texts were attempted, some students had difficulty in approaching a chosen topic with accuracy and thoughtfulness. It is essential that students fully understand all the dimensions of a topic and select the topic that affords them the best opportunity to write a coherent and detailed response.

The highest-scoring responses demonstrated a thoughtful and consistent approach to the chosen topic, with astute use of textual elements and a clear focus on critical ideas in the text, all expressed carefully and precisely. They reliably demonstrated a thoughtful reflection on the selected topic, considered development of a clear contention and a capacity to plan appropriately to develop a consistent essay. These responses presented a sustained and decisive line of argument, as reflected both in the initial contention and sequenced topic sentences, supported by incisive textual analysis. It is essential that students can demonstrate with assurance close textual knowledge, which is prudently utilised to support and substantiate the line of argument being presented and developed.

While most students demonstrated an awareness of, and facility with, the selected text, a significant number revealed a lack of assuredness in the approach taken to constructing the required essay in response to the topic. The wording of the topic should be closely considered so that the whole proposition is fully comprehended and focused upon. Ultimately, it is essential that the whole topic is fully resolved, based upon close textual insights and details. This should never be misconstrued as an invitation to retell portions of the plot or merely describe the attributes of characters. To deal effectively with a topic, a student must consider the intentions of the writer/film-maker, recognising that all selected texts are constructed to convey core ideas and issues through developed structural means. It is essential that students avoid any tendency to memorise a response and then try to apply this to an unseen topic. Topics provide students with an opportunity to apply their textual knowledge and insights in a fresh and thoughtful manner, not in a pre-learned, semi-relevant manner.

Students should carefully consider the calibre and suitability of their expression when responding to essay topics. A formal tone should be used to convey considered and carefully reasoned arguments about the text in response to the chosen topic. Since analysis requires explanation, rather than mere description, students should consider the most appropriate means by which to achieve this.

Section B – Comparative analysis of texts

Students were required to develop and write a comparative analysis in essay form on one of two pairs of set texts. Two topics were offered for each of the paired texts. The descriptors used for assessment related to the degree of textual knowledge of both texts, focusing on the ideas and issues they present, the degree of examination of connections, similarities and differences between the texts, the degree of topic focus and relevance, and the control and appropriateness of the writing skills to aid comparison.

All four topics were attempted by students. In each case, the topic required students to closely examine the ways in which a central idea or issue was presented in both texts, and to compare pertinent similarities and differences. In Pair 1, students were invited to compare the ways in which the ‘influence of the past on the future’ was apparent, or to compare what the two texts conveyed about ‘the use of power’. In Pair 2, students were asked to consider how victims of cruelty still had ‘a capacity for love and compassion’ or to explore what the two texts revealed about ‘the importance of names’. Students were expected to focus on the entire topic and to ensure that it was fully resolved through the ensuing discussion. When there are two contrasting elements, as was apparent in the first topic of both pairings, the inherent tension between the two contrasting elements must be carefully considered and reflected in student responses, just as for Section A essays.

Since this task requires a comparative analysis of paired texts, there is an expectation that students are able to construct their essay in such a way that this is readily facilitated and enabled. This should be reflected in the type of metalanguage used, as well as the nature of textual elements compared. Students should, if appropriate, consider and refer to the forms of the two

texts under consideration, if this aids their comparison. For example, in the case of *Black Diggers* and *The Longest Memory* it may have proven wise to consider the impact of the non-linear and fluid sense of time that pervades both texts and emphasises the marginalisation of non-white characters. The highest-scoring responses were, through the comparison of the paired texts, able to examine the core ideas and issues with confidence and to conceptualise about them meaningfully. However, students need to guard against making loose references to broad themes in a very imprecise and vague manner. Students should not write in a generalised manner about the context in which a text is set or the background of the writer. The focus of the comparison must always clearly be the idea or issue that is at the heart of the topic, and never mere comparison of major characters or the divergent plot of the texts in the pairing. Given that two texts are to be examined comparatively, it is essential that students carefully regulate the textual detail to which they refer.

Section C – Analysis of argument and language to persuade

The unseen task material consisted of a feature article voicing concern about the ways in which robots could potentially adversely impact upon ‘our society’ and a letter in response to this article that adopted the opposing line of argument, viewing the use of robots as a positive change. The feature article included an embedded visual image of a robot in a hard hat, and this image sought to exemplify and strengthen the line of argument being presented by the writer. The topic, language, length and style of the two pieces readily offered opportunities for all students to demonstrate the skills required. The descriptors used for assessment related to the extent to which the arguments presented were understood, there was insight into the ways in which written and visual language persuade and a capacity to use language fluently and adeptly.

This task required students to closely consider the given material, including the visual, and examine the ways in which argument and language operate together to persuade a target audience to share a specific point of view. While two divergent views were presented with respect to the social impact of the use of robots, no comparison of these two texts was sought or required. There was no requirement or opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of either text in persuading. Rather, students were expected to approach each piece in a holistic manner, asking how it persuades its audience through a combination of argument and language.

Students needed to focus on the ways in which each writer structured and sequenced their arguments and carefully used language to persuade their readers. The highest-scoring student responses demonstrated a capacity to explain the persuasive impact of these interrelated elements in such a way that this could be substantiated from the media text in question and that showed an awareness of the intended impact on the target audience. They also needed to consider and explain why the image was placed within the body of the feature article, and to comment on how this directly supported the argument of the writer and thus was an integral part of the persuasion.

It is important that students avoid merely labelling and identifying argumentative devices and forms of persuasive language. They should not simply describe what is shown in a visual image. Rather, this task required students to explain why such forms of argument and language are used by the writer to fulfil the persuasive intent of the piece. To this end, it is essential that the written expression used is non-judgmental in tone, in the third person and employs appropriate metalanguage that facilitates succinct explanations.