



VCE Exam Advice – Unit 3 & 4 Literature

The VCE Literature examination is certainly challenging. Your task is to produce two sustained pieces of writing: one for Section A and one for Section B, using a different text for each.

The texts are divided into five categories and the two texts you choose to write on must be from different categories. If you answer on two texts from the same category, one of the pieces will be awarded zero marks. The categories are:

- Novels
- Plays
- Short Stories
- Other Literature
- Poetry

Section A requires you to respond to a set topic while drawing on one literary perspective to inform your views.

In Section B, there are no questions and there are no topics. Instead, you are expected to use at least two of the three passages taken from the text that you have studied as the basis for your close analysis response.

You have fifteen minutes of reading time and two hours of writing time to complete the examination. You don't have to do the sections in order. You may start with Section B if you wish.

Most students make their choices about the texts that they will write on well prior to the commencement of the examination and this allows them to undertake thorough revision. There is no need to spend time revising a third 'just in case' text.

For your Section A response, you will need to memorise important quotes from your text as well as some from the literary critics whose perspectives you have studied. Quotes should be brief and selected carefully, but there should be a good number of them. A key word to keep in mind is "interpretation." Assessors want to see that you are able to not only read a text, but also to process its ideas and to interact intelligently with them as well.

Your choice of texts should be guided by your knowledge and understanding of the texts, as well as being based as far as possible on your own enjoyment of them. It is wise to choose texts that you have formed strong opinions about. Reviewing your SAC responses and practice essays about your texts may also help you to make this decision. Your teacher will be able to offer you advice about what texts to prepare for the examination.

The examination is a chance to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the texts, and your capacity for intelligent analysis and articulate synthesis. The instruction on the examination paper for Section B is: "Use two or more of the passages selected as the basis for a discussion of [name of text]. The passages will allow you to set a focus and will guide your discussion of the texts. Keep in mind that the passages will have been carefully selected and the combination will allow you to write about significant features of the text. Don't be so fixated on discussing (or even worse "proving") one idea that you force the passages to fit your predetermined discussion, or that you become oblivious to the key features and significance of the passages. The passages for each text will appear in the sequence in which they occur in the text.

Make sure you have read over the VCAA Assessment Report for the previous year and take note of the advice provided by the Chief Assessor which will match and reinforce what you teachers have told you as well as endorse the information provided herein.

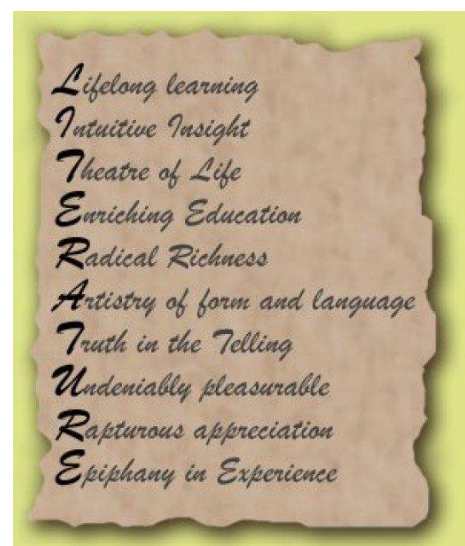
The nature of your discussion should be guided by the examination assessment criteria. You should be very familiar with the two sets of criteria:

Section A will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Development of an informed, relevant and plausible interpretation of the text
- Understanding and analysis of the text, demonstrated through the use of textual evidence
- Analysis and evaluation of the views and values foregrounded in the topic and underlying one literary perspective of the text, and awareness of how these views and values relate to the text
- Expressive, fluent and coherent use of language and development of ideas

Section B will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Understanding of the text, demonstrated in a relevant and plausible interpretation
- Ability to write expressively and coherently to present an interpretation
- Understanding of how views and values may be suggested in the text
- Analysis of how key passages and/or moments in the text contribute to an interpretation
- Analysis of the features of the text and how they contribute to an interpretation
- Analysis and close reading of textual details to support a coherent and detailed interpretation of the text



There is no set length for either Section but responses shorter than 750 words are unlikely to produce the requisite detail and would therefore not have the potential to score at the top level. Many of the strongest scripts exceed 1,000 words.

During your 15 minutes of reading time, you will need to give most of your attention to the passages in Section B which can sometimes take a fair while to read. The topics in Section A will be designed to make a lot of sense to any student familiar with his or her chosen text. It would be wise to start putting together a basic essay plan in your head so that you are ready to hit the ground running when your writing time commences.

For Section B, you should read carefully the key passages from your nominated text. While the passages will be familiar to you, the actual combination of passages may prove surprising. You might see things that you had not noticed before or certain features that may seem more significant than you expected. When you are allowed to begin writing, spend some time highlighting and annotating the passages. Then, jot down a brief plan which you can refer back to as you write your interpretation.

Given that Section B requires you to make a close reading of the passages, the best starting point for each response may be to quote from a passage or to dwell on a particular moment from a passage. The body of the interpretation should continue to develop the focus established in the introductory paragraph by drawing on direct and indirect evidence both from the passages and other parts of the text. Using the passages to shape your interpretations is a skill that you will have achieved by completing passage-based interpretations throughout the year.

Remember that Literature students are particularly interested in showing how language shapes meaning in a text.

It is essential in both Sections of the examination that your paragraphs are placed in a logical sequence and are linked in some way. Your responses should demonstrate clear development, a strong sense of cohesion and consistent control of language.

When you have finished writing each response, spend a few minutes proofreading. Look for careless errors that may be the consequence of haste. You should know how to spell the titles of the texts, the writers' names, and the names of places and characters. Dictionaries are not permitted in the Literature examination.

You should continue to plan and practise examination tasks during Term 4 and in the study period prior to the examination.

Reread your examination texts. Constant reading is invaluable. Often features that have appeared difficult or obscure may suddenly become clear. Reading reviews, critical essays and commentaries offering alternative viewpoints about your examination texts is another useful revision strategy. Discuss practice passage-based interpretations with your classmates and spend time writing these interpretations under examination conditions. You need to immerse yourself thoroughly in your chosen texts so that you develop real expertise in interpreting and analysing them.

Your aim should be to have become so familiar with your texts and the techniques involved in writing about them that the VCAA examination will feel very comfortable and do-able to you.

Assessment reports and past examination papers can be found on the VCAA website at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>.

The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) publishes a practice Literature examination, as do other private companies. Your Literature teacher should have copies of these practice examinations. Also, read as many sample responses as you can. Your teacher will usually have copies of interpretations that students have written in previous years.

On the day before the Literature examination, spend time calmly reviewing your notes on both of your examination texts. You may also wish to do some writing: even just a few paragraphs to keep your ideas "live." Eat sensibly. Take a walk. Go to bed at a sensible time. On the day of the examination, get up at a sensible time, eat sensibly, make sure you have a good pen and don't get too caught up talking to other students outside the examination room unless you feel that this may relax rather than distract you.

More subject specific advice will be issued to students at our "VCE Exam Revision Lectures".

Good luck with your exam preparations!
TSFX

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COMPREHENSIVE EXAM REVISION LECTURES

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