

GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for English Language

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About this document

The criteria set out in this document were originally published¹ by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. AS and A level specifications in English language should encourage students to deepen their interest and enjoyment in the use of English as they:
 - develop and apply their understanding of the concepts and methods appropriate for the analysis and study of language;
 - undertake independent investigative work related to language in use;
 - engage creatively and independently with a varied programme for the study of English from the past to the present day;
 - develop their skills as producers and interpreters of language.

Subject content

2. AS and A level specifications in English language should build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established at GCSE, introducing learners to the concepts and methods of the discipline of linguistic study in relation to a wide range of spoken and written forms of English, including electronic and multimodal forms.
3. Students' contextual study of language should be based on sound theoretical knowledge developed through a coherent course of study.

¹ QCA publication reference: QCA/06/2849

4. All AS and A level specifications must ensure that the combination of materials and the tasks set on them are of sufficient challenge for advanced level study.

Knowledge and understanding

5. AS specifications should require candidates to show broad knowledge and understanding of some of the key constituents of language and how they contribute to meaning in spoken and written English, including:
 - the characteristic speech sounds and intonation patterns (phonetics and phonology);
 - the vocabulary of English, including the origins, meanings and usage of words (lexis);
 - the forms and structures of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and texts in speech and writing (morphology, grammar and discourse);
 - how meanings and forms in language are influenced by variations in mode (spoken and written, including multimodal and electronic forms) and context, including personal, cultural and social factors.
6. In addition, A level specifications should require students to show deeper knowledge and understanding of:
 - how some of the following frameworks can be applied to the systematic study of meaning in language:
 - phonology and phonetics, lexis, morphology, grammar, discourse
 - the influence of mode and context, including time and place, on the meanings and forms of English;
 - connections between different areas of study in their course as a whole.

Skills

7. AS and A level specifications should require learners to:
 - apply linguistic concepts and methods of analysis appropriately and systematically to the study of meanings and topical issues in language;

- describe, explain and interpret variation in and between spoken and written texts, including multimodal texts;
 - develop their skills in using spoken and written English accurately and creatively for a variety of different audiences and purposes;
 - use linguistic terminology and concepts appropriately and accurately in discussions of language;
 - make accurate references to texts and sources.
8. In addition, A level specifications should require learners to:
- sustain informed, critical judgements about issues raised through the study of language;
 - undertake independent investigations of language, selecting appropriate linguistic methods and techniques;
 - draw on their knowledge of the forms and structures of spoken and written English to create imaginative and informative texts for different audiences and purposes;
 - synthesise and reflect on linguistic knowledge and understanding drawn from different areas of their studies of English language.

Assessment objectives

9. There are four assessment objectives (AOs) covering both AS and A level specifications. They aim to describe the areas in which evidence for knowledge, skills and understanding should be collected.
10. Knowledge, understanding and skills are closely linked, as are the individual assessment objectives.
11. Differences in demand between AS and A level specifications may be shown through the choice of different weightings for assessment objectives either singly or in combination to reflect the differences in the depth and breadth of the requirements of the specifications.
12. The weightings of assessment objectives in each part of the course must in combination offer a balanced approach to the assessment of

knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to advanced level literary study.

13. Specifications must require that all learners meet the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

Assessment objectives		Weighting		
		AS level	A2 level	A level
AO1	Select and apply a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO2	Demonstrate critical understanding of a range of concepts and issues related to the construction and analysis of meanings in spoken and written language, using knowledge of linguistic approaches	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO3	Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language, showing knowledge of the key constituents of language	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%
AO4	Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study	15–35%	15–35%	15–35%

Scheme of assessment

Internal assessment

14. All A level specifications in English language must have internal assessment with a weighting of between 15 and 40 per cent.
15. No more than 40 per cent of either the AS or the A2 may be internally assessed.

16. Specifications must make clear how reliability and fairness are secured, by setting out requirements that ensure the robustness of each stage of the internal assessment, i.e.:
 - the specific skills to be assessed;
 - setting of tasks;
 - extent of supervision in carrying out of tasks;
 - conditions under which assessment takes place;
 - marking of the assessment and internal standardising procedures;
 - any moderation process.

Synoptic assessment

17. Courses as a whole should develop learners' understanding of methodologies for describing and studying spoken and written language, and enable them to make connections between components of the specification, including the requirement to produce a range of writing. The A2 assessment units will require candidates to draw together some of the key insights from their work overall and make purposeful use of these in undertaking assessment tasks.
18. Synoptic assessment in English language includes:
 - synthesis of insights developed through the application of linguistic knowledge to the study of speech and writing, including multimodal texts;
 - evidence that critical understanding of meaning and variation in language is informed by the appropriate use of linguistic analyses;
 - skills of interpretation and expression in insightful, accurate, well-argued responses.

Quality of written communication

19. These aspects of learners' skills will be assessed through assessment objective 1, which includes assessment of learners' overall competence in using language accurately and effectively in constructing well-argued responses to assessment tasks in English language.
20. Where learners are required to produce written material on paper or on screen in English, the assessment arrangements in AS and A level English literature must require learners to:

- ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear;
- select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and to complex subject matter;
- organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate.

Resources in examinations

21. Where a scheme of assessment includes access to open-book or pre-release material in examinations, a clear rationale must be given for its use.
22. Only clean texts will be allowed in examinations, and awarding organisations must prescribe editions for use in examinations that are free from editorial material or commentaries.
23. The amount of annotation allowed by learners on pre-release materials prior to the examinations must be clearly prescribed and kept to a minimum. Pre-release materials brought into the examination room must also be free from annotation.

AS performance descriptions for English language

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Select and apply a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression.	Demonstrate critical understanding of a range of concepts and issues related to the construction and analysis of meanings in spoken and written language, using knowledge of linguistic approaches.	Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language, showing knowledge of the key constituents of language.	Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	Learners characteristically: a) communicate relevant knowledge and understanding of the methods of language study b) consistently use appropriate terminology to support interpretations when applying this understanding c) structure and organise their writing well	Learners characteristically: a) communicate relevant understanding of linguistic approaches, concepts and issues b) explore the significant features of linguistic variation that create meaning in spoken and written language c) generally use specific references to support their responses	Learners characteristically: a) explore the relationships between spoken and written language and the contexts in which both are used b) communicate a practical understanding of issues relating to language in use	Learners characteristically: a) write effectively in a form and style matched to audience, purpose and genre b) select and order relevant content c) identify where, and suggest how, key linguistic features are used in their writing to create specific effects.

	d) communicate content and meaning through expressive and accurate writing			
E/U boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate some understanding of the methods of language study</p> <p>b) apply this understanding to support interpretations</p> <p>c) communicate content and meaning in writing using straightforward language.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate some understanding of linguistic approaches, concepts or issues</p> <p>b) identify features of linguistic variation that create meaning in spoken and written language</p> <p>c) make some related references to texts to support their responses.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) note some relationships between spoken and written language and the contexts in which both are used</p> <p>b) communicate some understanding of issues relating to language in use.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) demonstrate some ability to write in a form or style matched to audience, purpose or genre</p> <p>b) select and order content</p> <p>c) identify where some linguistic features are used in their writing to create effects.</p>

A2 performance descriptions for English literature

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Select and apply a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression.	Demonstrate critical understanding of a range of concepts and issues related to the construction and analysis of meanings in spoken and written language, using knowledge of linguistic approaches.	Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language, showing knowledge of the key constituents of language.	Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	Learners characteristically: a) communicate extensive knowledge and understanding of the methods of language study b) create and sustain well organised and coherent arguments, using appropriate terminology to support informed interpretations c) structure and organise their writing using an	Learners characteristically: a) communicate critical understanding of linguistic approaches, concepts and issues b) distinguish and describe a range of significant features of linguistic variation that creates meaning in spoken and written language c) consistently make reference to authorities, texts and	Learners characteristically: a) explore and comment on the significance of the relationships between spoken and written language and the contexts in which both are used b) communicate an informed understanding of concepts and issues relating to language in use.	Learners characteristically: a) write effectively in a form and style matched to audience, purpose and genre b) select and order complex and relevant content c) identify where and explain how key linguistic features are used in their writing to create specific effects.

	<p>appropriate linguistic register</p> <p>d) communicate content and meaning through expressive and accurate writing.</p>	<p>sources to support their responses.</p>		
<p>E/U boundary performance descriptions</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate knowledge and some understanding of the methods of language study</p> <p>b) present responses making some use of appropriate terminology to support interpretations</p> <p>c) communicate content and meaning using straightforward language accurately.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate an understanding of linguistic approaches, concepts or issues</p> <p>b) identify features of linguistic variation that create meaning in spoken and written language</p> <p>c) make some reference to authorities, texts or sources to support their responses.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) comment on the relationships between spoken and written language and the contexts in which both are used</p> <p>b) communicate some understanding of concepts and issues relating to language in use.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) demonstrate some ability to write in a form or style matched to audience, purpose or genre</p> <p>b) select and order relevant content</p> <p>c) identify where key linguistic features are used in their writing to create specific effects.</p>

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