

SUBJECT AREA: LANGUAGE A-1

Language is the focus of this subject area. Therefore, the “language” of the literature being investigated should be the major consideration when producing an extended essay in literature. Basically, you will be expected to compare and contrast two works by the same author, or two works by two different authors focusing on a particular aspect that is common to both works. Literary elements should be presented as points in the argument. Such things as period, genre, mood and setting, plot, characterization, themes, motifs, and literary devices used by the author(s) should be compared and contrasted. You will need to choose one of two categories for your Language A1 essay.

For Essays in Category I Both works must have been written originally in English.

For Essays in Category II Only one of the two works compared needs to have been originally written in English, while the second work (such as Dante’s Inferno) is written in a foreign language (other than English). In this case the second work is probably studied in the form of a translation.

Note: Avoid comparing two works originally written in a foreign language. Essays that do this will receive significant penalties in scores.

You will be graded on your ability to show the following three things:

1. An **in depth study** of a literary topic: Going beyond simply just telling the stories and describing the characters.

Keep in mind this is more than a “book report”. You should explore the language and structure of the piece-- (how it works as literature).

2. **Personal judgment** about a piece of literature with a comparison to appropriate established critical comment.

It’s important to keep a balance between expressing your own views and enlisting the support of the views of acknowledged experts, when comparing your views with established critical comment.

3. The quality of language you use in expressing your personal views will be a part of your score. (That is, the structure of your writing, as well as your fluency, coherence, conciseness and clarity of the ideas.)

Choosing your topic:

The topic you choose must be **literary** and should be about a particular aspect employed as part of the author's work, (such as the subject of death in selected poems by Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson). Or it could be focused on nature, or imagery and themes in some selected works of one author, (such as religious imagery in Wuthering Heights) compared with another of this author's work, or a comparative study of works on the same subject by more than one author (such as a contrast of presentations of Joan of Arc as offered in plays by Shaw and Anouilh).

Examples of topics used on previous essays:

- * *Similar kinds of characters in two or more books by the same author. (i.e. Clergymen in Jane Austen's novels.)*
- * *Ways male authors present female heroines (Or vice versa)*
- * *A comparison of two similar works i.e. "The Beggar's Opera" vs "Threepenny Opera".*
- * *Portraits of innocence, poverty, etc. in selected works.*
- * *Racial conflict as portrayed in works by Richard Wright and James Baldwin.*
- * *Color and Time symbolism in selected works. (i.e. Great Gatsby)*
- * *Themes and stylistic devices in selected works.*
- * *Ideals such as the American Dream. (i.e. Great Gatsby)*

Range and Variety of Sources:

Basically it is **safer to use printed materials**, such as traditionally published books, poetry and plays.

The IB manual warns us to use **online sources** sparingly. Though the Internet may seem more convenient, IBO stresses the importance of being careful about the quality of information found there. Frequently this information lacks accuracy, authenticity and reliability. Also occasional piracy exists in some websites. This could put your diploma at risk for malpractice penalties. Unless you are prepared to question and evaluate ideas found on the web as you present them in your essay, it is wise to stick with printed materials which respect copyrights and which have been examined for literary quality.

Generally using secondary sources can enhance the quality of analysis and interpretation in your essay. However, IBO recommends you consider the **"Twin Pitfalls"** which have presented problems in the past. Bear in mind, it's wise to temper the amount of secondary sources you use.

1. Too little use: Lack of any secondary sources leaves you commenting on literature without knowing what has been said about it. This could affect the examiner's perception of the accuracy and reliability of your essay.

2. Too much use: Depending too heavily on what other people say can also lower your score because it gives the examiner little chance to evaluate you on your ability to express your own personal judgment about the piece.

IBO suggests its best to use a good modern edition of a classic text with introduction and notes that give additional insight into the writer's product. *Best essays presented firm **personal views** backed up by persuasive **"close reading"** of primary sources and carefully selected reference to secondary sources. Secondary sources should be used to **support and deepen** a personal response-- not to replace it.

Other sources that have been used:

Films: These may be incorporated within the essay to be contrasted with written versions, but make sure the **focus** of the essay is on the **written version**.

Contrasting English and Foreign versions is also acceptable. But scores are penalized severely if an essay is exclusively analyzing foreign literature. (That is, comparing two or more texts written originally in a foreign language) IBO feels that relying solely on a translator removes you from the language of the original writer.

Treatment of the Topic:

1. Focus on the author's language and writing style over content: Literature often addresses questions in society--philosophical, political or social. When exploring topics such as these it is important to maintain the major focus of your essay on the language and structure of the author's writing style and the literary devices used, rather than the content of these questions. Avoid turning your essay into an interdisciplinary study focusing on things like psychology and history.

2. Avoid over use of historical, biographical, or narrative information. Many essays are penalized for concentrating on the biography of the writer. (For example, understanding the writer's art as reflecting his life.) IBO says this sort of thing leads to making assumptions that cannot be substantiated. Use only biographical information that is directly relevant to the literature, and restrict it to your introduction. For the argument make sure the focus of the essay is on the language of the writing, not on the writer himself.

3. Balance a number of different perspectives on the literature being discussed: Include careful analysis of the author's ideas and if possible, include any writings by the author about his own work. Don't forget to showcase your own views on how the author has treated his topic; and compare examples of support or disagreement as offered by the wisdom of more experienced critics with your own views.

The mere reiteration of views of literary critics without responding with your own ideas will not result in a successful extended essay.

3. Remember any narrative or descriptive material should be directly related to the research question. Be aware of the purpose of your essay and avoid including ideas that are irrelevant.

4. Compare similar elements of ideas found in two or more pieces of literature. But remember to showcase how each author uses language to present his ideas.

The following are some examples of titles, research questions, and approaches to a topic that have been used in the past:

Title: The place of women in Wuthering Heights and The Awakening

Research question: How do Emily Bronte and Kate Chopin question the place of women in Wuthering Heights and The Awakening, and how do they reveal these ideas in their use of themes, motifs, and symbols?

Approach to topic: Close reading is done to enable identification and description of the writers' styles and use of themes, and symbols. Notes are taken and appropriate quotes are selected with candidates comments and interpretations on the quotes. Additional research will be done using the program, Questia, on secondary sources with notes taken from critical analysis of selected literary experts.

Title: Echos of Madness: Comparing Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" with Lovecraft's "The Outsider".

Research question: How do Edgar Allen Poe and H.P Lovecraft incorporate motifs of solitude, time, and death in their literary works?

Approach to topic: Close reading of both literary works is done. A chart is designed with headings: Solitude, Time, and Death. Specially selected quotes are recorded under the appropriate headings with student responses interpreting and evaluating each quote. Research is done on secondary sources, using various databases including: The Literature Resource Center and Project Muse to draw appropriate quotes from literary reviews and literary journals. Quotes from the experts will be compared with views of the student.

Title: Comparison of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn vs Catcher in the Rye

Research question: How were the characters of Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield similarly portrayed?

Approach to topic: A classic copy of each of the above novels is found with an introduction from a literary expert. Close reading is done. Quotes are selected, interpreted, evaluated and compared with critical analysis from professionals.

**FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA RELATIVE TO
THE LANGUAGE A-I EXTENDED ESSAY:**

CRITERIA A: The research question

The research question should focus clearly on some specific literary aspect(s) which can lead to the comparison of two novels, short stories, poems or plays. It should center on one or more particular literary elements such as themes, imagery, symbolism etc., which can help explain how these works exemplify good literature.

CRITERIA B: The introduction

Context relating to the literary works should be succinct and should not become an excuse for padding out the essay with a lengthy account of the historical or biographical background of the chosen literature or its author. Instead, the introduction should focus on an analysis of the research question itself, the student's reasons for choosing it and, what things the student will do to conduct the investigation of it.

CRITERIA C: The investigation

The range of sources for the investigation includes the primary texts being studied, (and possibly other writings by the author(s) in question, such as essays, diaries and letters). As well, references to secondary sources such as published criticism on those texts should also be made. Proper planning of the essay should involve the student's interpretations of and responses to secondary sources in light of the research question, so that the views of critics are used to support the student's own argument, and not to substitute for it. It is important for a student to challenge a statement made by a critic, instead of simply agreeing with it or going on to another point without any making any response at all. In a literary essay, the data gathered is principally the quoted evidence the student finds in the primary text(s) to support the argument of the essay. All material used from sources must be acknowledged in references. If students make use of internet-based sources, they should do so critically demonstrating a full awareness of the source's potential unreliability.

CRITERIA D: Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Knowledge of the topic studied will come from the primary texts that are the focus of the essay. Most important is the student's own knowledge of the primary texts. Use of secondary sources may be especially helpful in the case of classic texts, enabling discussion to start at a higher level, but it should not replace the student's personal engagement with the primary texts.

CRITERIA E: The reasoned argument

Students should use a sequence of well planned points relative to their chosen text to build the backbone for a developing argument. Personal views should not be stated without support by the reasoned argument in order to persuade the reader of their validity. Straightforward description of a literary text through a simple plot summary or narration of the action does not usually advance an argument and should generally be avoided, (although, where a little known text is under discussion, a brief description may be useful.)

CRITERIA F: Application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Appropriate application of analytical and evaluative skills here is the use of persuasive analysis and argument to support a personal interpretation. Second hand interpretations that are derived solely from secondary sources will lose marks under this criterion, as will purely descriptive essays that list examples of literary motifs, but fail to analyse them.

CRITERIA G: Use of language appropriate to the subject

There is no single acceptable style for essays, which may be well written in different ways-with, for example, different degrees of personal emphasis, some writers, using the first person and others preferring a more impersonal mode of expression. Clarity and precision of communication in a Language A1 essay includes the correct use of language.

CRITERIA H: The conclusion

“Consistent” is the key word here: the conclusion should develop out of the argument and not introduce new or extraneous material. It should not simply repeat material from the introduction either; rather, it should present a new synthesis in light of the discussion. It should include a discussion of what has been learned or shown by the evidence from the argument and any unresolved questions that may have come up during the investigation.

CRITERIA I: The formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards for research papers. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements - title page, abstract, table of contents, page numbers- are deemed no better than satisfactory, (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of these elements are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

Precise recording of the relevant details of all quoted evidence significant to the research question is necessary so that complete references can be provided, including the author's name and page number for each in-text citation of a source. For bibliographies any particular accepted form of referencing can be used (but not more than one). References should include: Full details of the author, title of publication, publisher and date of publication must be provided in the bibliography, which should list all sources used in the essay in alphabetical order (by the author's family name). Any material that is not original must be acknowledged.

CRITERIA J: The abstract

The abstract must consist of three elements: the research question (or hypothesis); the scope of the essay(that is, the main points to be investigated and the sources used to research these points); and the findings or conclusion. Students should be reminded that the abstract is not a summary or precis of the topic. The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents the three above mentioned required elements, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of the argument or conclusion.

CRITERIA K: Holistic judgement

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include the following:

Initiative: Ways of demonstrating this in Language A1 essays include the choice of topic and **creativity and insight** as shown by the student's presentation of a personal judgment on the literature from the chosen text(s). Routine essays on well worn topics will not score well under this criterion.

Problems demonstrated by students in past essays:

Following are problems reported by examiners relative to several important areas with respect to the Language A1 extended essay--

Knowledge and understanding of the literature studied.

Expectation: References to literary work(s) are highly relevant to references by secondary sources.

Note: *Where the essay is based solely on works originally written in a language other than the language of the essay, level 0 will be awarded for this criteria.*

Personal response justified by literary judgment and/or analysis:

Expectation: The candidate's personal response to the literature studied is fully justified by the literary judgment and/or analysis.

Note: *Where the essay is based solely on works originally written in a language other than the language of the essay, level 0 will be awarded for this criteria.*

Problems in the past for both of the above listed items:

Best essays covered author's language and structure in addition to addressing themes characters and plot. Secondary sources remained a problem for weaker essays whose authors used them as a substitute for their own personal engagement and research into the primary text.

Use of language appropriate to a literary essay:

Expectation: The candidate writes with linguistic precision coherence, fluency, conciseness, and clarity. The register and vocabulary are appropriate to the discussion.

Problems in the past:

Some candidates attempted to use sophisticated critical vocabulary that they did not fully command. Also some misused apostrophes and others needed to be careful about structuring their paragraphs, and embedding quotations appropriately in their own prose. Avoid language that is too informal or colloquial.