

GCSE (9–1)
Teacher Guide

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351
For first teaching in 2015

Reading Skills: Comparing and Evaluating Texts: Question 4

Version 1





Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide additional support to teachers with regard to Question 4, the highest tariff reading question in GCSE (9-1) English Language J351/01 and 02. This guide supports teachers in their understanding of the assessment requirements of the question and what exactly is being asked for in responses to enable development of the skills relevant to AO3 and AO4. This guide will also offer guidance on ways that learners' comparative and evaluative skills can be developed in the classroom.

The relevant assessment objectives

In Component 1 and Component 2, Question 4 tests both AO3 (the ability to compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts), and AO4 (the ability to critically evaluate texts and support with appropriate textual references). The mark allocation is awarded separately, with 6 marks available for AO3, and 12 marks available for AO4.

The requirements of the question

(NB. The following guidance is based on the format of Question 4 in the GCSE English Language J351/01 and 02 sample assessment materials.)

This guidance should enable teachers to understand the demands of the question and enable them to design possible Question 4 practice exercises:

- the question begins with a statement, giving a clear focus to a reading of the texts and the ideas they present
- the question that follows this statement asks, "How far do you agree with this statement?"
- there are three bullet points, prefaced by the word "should" rather than "could" as the bullet points directly relate to the AOs (AO3 and AO4)
- the first and second bullet points relate to AO4 and they require learners to show an understanding of what the writers are saying in relation to the statement. The focus is on the ideas (similar or different) that the writers are presenting and learners may consider the writers' viewpoints, bias, and different interpretations
- the second bullet point focuses upon the impact of the writing on the readers, and how this impact is created by the writers' presentation of their ideas
- the third and final bullet point will be a reminder to learners that they need to include comparison in their answer (AO3).

All the exam questions in both components have been structured to provide accessibility for the range of learners taking this untiered qualification, partly through creating tasks with graduated levels of demand. The

level of demand in terms of learner response increases as the reading section progresses, with the increased level of demand on Question 4 (and 3) contributing to the concept of appropriate differentiation. At the same time, every care is taken with the higher tariff questions (including Question 4) to make sure that all learners are able to respond at some level – with Question 4, this is through some guidance in the form of the bullet points. This should ensure accessibility, but is not intended to limit the potential for highly original and perceptive responses from the most able learners.

There is a PowerPoint presentation available in under ‘Assessment Materials’ in the Assessment Preparation section of the GCSE English Language J351 webpage (<http://ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse-english-language-j351-from-2015/>) that also provides guidance on the key requirements for each question, including Question 4, using the GCSE English Language sample assessment materials.

Essential elements to Question 4 responses

- responses must be relevant to the question, and show the learner’s thoughts, rather than not being linked clearly to the thrust of the question
- the question (including the bullet points) contains key words and phrases, and these must be addressed by the learner if they are to progress up the band levels in the mark scheme: in Question 4 of the Component 1 sample assessment materials those words are “powerful...freedom and strong personal beliefs...How far do you agree?...the impact...compare...presented...support”; and on Component 2, “presented...challenging...How far do you agree?...pupils’ various experiences...unusual...compare”
- learners’ answers should demonstrate an understanding of the texts. This understanding will be shown in the range and detail of their references to the text. Re-wording sections of the text without commentary or demonstration of understanding is of little value
- all three bullets need to be addressed for access to the full range of marks for this question – hence the “should” prompt, rather than a “could” prompt
- the key factor as ever is to do with the quality of the response rather than the quantity, however, the requirement for Question 4, in recognition of the higher level of demand and the consideration of two appropriately challenging texts, is for an ‘extended’ response. A useful rough guide to the amount of time that learners might spend on Question 4 is 25-30 minutes, given its relative importance in terms of the weighting of marks for the question – worth 18 marks in a two hour exam where the total marks available are 80 (and with time needed for the reading of the texts)
- with regard to the distinction between Question 3 (and the assessment of AO2) and Question 4 (with its assessment of AO3 and AO4), it is important to remember that there will inevitably be occasions when on Question 4, the demonstration of AO4 awareness resembles somewhat an awareness and demonstration of AO2 skills. The key differentiator to bear in mind here is that on AO4, the requirement of “critical evaluation” explicitly demands a balance between personal engagement, involvement and judgement, and the establishment of a critical “distance” that contains an overview and that is characterised by a level of detachment. The questions are specifically designed to help learners with regard to this distinction, by focussing on different aspects of the texts for Question 2 (in Component 2) and Question 3 (in Components 1 and 2) than for Question 4. The questions and mark schemes have been developed to ensure that it is clear that learners are assessed on this ability to ‘evaluate texts critically’, requiring a personal, considered judgement, supported with evidence and taking an ‘overview from a critical distance’. The design of Question 4 prompts learners to discuss and explain their critical evaluation in detail (two bullet-point prompts) and develop their evaluation with a comparison of the texts (one bullet-point prompt). The question stems used in the sample assessment materials specifically prompt an evaluative response by asking, ‘How far do you agree?’ - encouraging learners to take a summative and considered overview of the impact of the texts. The allocation of two sets of mark scheme level descriptors for Question 4, specifying the double weighted marks for AO4, also facilitates this understanding; so AO4 has 12 marks and AO3 has 6 marks, with a combined mark out of 18. This ensures that teachers, learners and examiners are clear about what is to be assessed and the weighting for each Assessment Objective
- the element of ‘judgement’ when considering AO4 is one that is looked for even at lower levels, to discourage answers that are unconsidered and/or unsupported personal opinions. Even at the lower levels, learners should try to justify their thoughts with reference to the texts

- better answers on Question 4 will support their judgement with examples that go beyond a straightforward illustration of a point to become not only apt, but also convincing and persuasive
- learners need to ‘compare’ the two texts for an assessment of AO3 – where the notion of ‘comparison’ includes the concepts of both similarity and difference. This may be done in several ways. The mark schemes make it clear that candidates do not have to construct their response in the same order as the bullet points. A sophisticated, higher level response may well integrate comparative and evaluative analysis, and this is a valid approach to the question. The seamless interweaving of textual examples, personal response, judgement and comparison is often characteristic of a higher level response. This ensures that the most able learners are not constrained by a mechanistic response to evaluating and comparing texts, but provides appropriate support for lower ability learners.
- the demonstration of both AO3 and AO4 skills can involve (where appropriate) a consideration of not only genre but also of purpose. Component 1 will contain two non-fiction texts and Component 2 may contain not only fiction but also examples of literary non-fiction (such as autobiography or some travel writing); and, therefore, that the purpose of the writing may include persuasion, argument, description, explanation, or information.

Required knowledge, understanding and skills for Question 4

- Identify and compare themes and ideas
- Explore connections across texts to develop understanding of the ideas, attitudes and values presented in them
- Engage with texts, developing independent viewpoints and recognising different interpretations
- Draw inferences and justify points of view by referring closely to evidence from the text
- Use a broad understanding of the texts’ contexts to inform the reading (historical setting, genre)
- Explore how effectively texts achieve their purposes by comparing and evaluating the usefulness, relevance and presentation (linguistically) of ideas and themes
- Evaluate the usefulness of a text (where appropriate) by identifying bias and misuse of evidence
- Evaluate how the presentation of ideas, form and structure contribute to the effectiveness and impact of a text.

Curriculum Design

The OCR GCSE English Language Delivery Guides have a section titled Thinking Conceptually, that gives advice about how best to structure a departmental curriculum to develop the skills needed to engage effectively with unseen texts. This can help to identify a hierarchy of skills with clear progression linked to the assessment objectives.

For centres who are looking for a curriculum model that brings together GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature, the GCSE English Language and English Literature 19th Century texts Delivery Guide (<http://ocr.org.uk/Images/208296-19th-century-literature-set-texts-delivery-guide.pdf>) provides a selection of themed approaches that contain reading, writing, and speaking and listening activities, with both fiction and non-fiction 19th century texts, as well as links to on-line video clips.

Similarly, the Journeys Delivery Guide (<http://ocr.org.uk/Images/164038-journeys-delivery-guide.pdf>) is aimed at helping English Departments plan and teach GCSE English Language through relevantly thematic guidance on key concepts and the provision of classroom activities.

Suitable Teaching Strategies

1. *Use of OCR Delivery Guides (e.g. Approaching Unseen 20th and 21st Century Literary Texts; Journeys; 19th Century Texts), Exemplar or Candidate-Style Answers, Sample Assessment Materials and Practice Materials.*

OCR has recognised the importance of providing resources that can either be used as teaching resources incorporated into a Scheme of Work or that can be used as part of an on-going assessment process and measure of progress.

The sample assessment materials and mark schemes are intended to give a clear steer to centres and to learners of what constitutes best practice when it comes to the teaching of the specification and the writing of a response. They aim to model the practice of the live papers and the style of the mark schemes that examiners will use.

If centres are choosing their own texts and combinations of texts to provide their learners with suitable practice passages, they should remember that for GCSE English Language the selection of texts should be based on high

quality, challenging texts that have been written primarily for adult audiences.

The texts included in the Anthology of Unseen 20th and 21st Century Literary texts should provide a useful teaching aid for addressing the Reading section of the exam. We have created Question 4 style questions (below) to put alongside those paired texts in the anthology. These suggested tasks can be used either as part of the teaching resources supporting the departmental Scheme of Work, or as part of their whole school assessment structure.

NB. The following questions are based on the format of Question 4 as given in the GCSE English Language sample assessment materials.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Paying Guests* and **Text 2**, *The Songlines*.

4 'Both of these texts present the idea of home as a surprising place.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of home
- explain why home is surprising to them
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of home.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *About a Boy* and **Text 2**, *The Quarry*.

4 'Both of these texts present feeling different from other young people.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of feeling different
- explain why they feel different
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of feeling different from others.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.





Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Home* and **Text 2**, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*.

- 4** 'Both of these texts present the past as an impossible place to return to and relive.'
How far do you agree with this statement?
In your answer you should:
- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of thinking about the past
 - explain why they are thinking and feeling as they do about the past
 - compare the ways the writers present the experience of returning to the past.
- Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Children of Men* and **Text 2**, *Man and Boy*.

- 4** 'Both of these texts present feelings about having a child as a confusing experience.'
How far do you agree with this statement?
In your answer you should:
- discuss your impressions of the characters' various feelings about having a child
 - explain why they feel they way they do about having a child
 - compare the ways the writers present the experience of the way the characters feel.
- Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Me Cheeta: The Autobiography* and **Text 2**, *A Rose for Winter*.

- 4** 'Both of these texts present significant and life-changing experiences.'
How far do you agree with this statement?
In your answer you should:
- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences
 - explain why they were so significant
 - compare the ways the writers present significant and life-changing experiences.
- Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Bone Clocks* and **Text 2**, *Starter for Ten*.

4 'Both of these texts present leaving home as an incredibly difficult experience.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of leaving home
- explain why they find it so difficult
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of leaving home.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *No Night is Too Long* and **Text 2**, *A Judgement in Stone*.

4 'Both of these texts present how feelings of guilt can have a huge effect on people.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of feeling guilty
- explain why they feel guilty
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of feeling guilty.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Bad Blood* and **Text 2**, *Goodbye to All That*.

4 'Both of these texts present how first becoming aware of social class and status is a shocking experience.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of becoming aware of social class and status
- explain why they feel as they do
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of becoming aware of social class and status.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.



Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *Somewhere Towards the End* and **Text 2**, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time*.

4 'Both of these texts present people's reactions to growing old as worrying.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of people's reactions to growing old
- explain why they feel as they do about the reactions
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of people's reactions to growing old.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *A Lovely Way to Burn* and **Text 2**, *Empire of the Sun*.

4 'Both of these texts present the after effects of a disaster as immensely frightening.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of the after effects of a disaster
- explain why they feel as they do
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of the after effects of a disaster.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *We Had it So Good* and **Text 2**, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

4 'Both of these texts present parent-child relationships as about not understanding each other.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of parent-child relationships
- explain why those relationships are as they are
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of parent-child relationships.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Ministry of Fear* and **Text 2**, *Bad Blood*.

4 'Both of these texts present remembering the past as a wonderful, magical place.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss your impressions of the characters' various experiences of remembering the past
- explain why they are remembering the past and feeling this way
- compare the ways the writers present the experience of remembering the past.

Support your response with quotations from both texts.



Understanding the Mark Scheme

Acquainting learners with the language of the mark scheme can be a useful teaching strategy and one that can dispel many myths and worries from learners. Some important general guidelines are as follows:

The specific task-related notes (indicative content) on each question will help you to understand how the band descriptors may be applied. However, these comments do not constitute the full range of valid responses. They are some thoughts on what was in the setter's mind when the question was formulated. It is hoped that learners will respond to questions in a variety of ways and will give original and at times unexpected interpretations of texts. Rigid demands for 'what must be a good answer' would lead to a distorted assessment.

Development of AO3 skills

Learners need to be taught that the concept of comparison involves an identification of similarities as well as differences – and those similarities and differences could be in the areas of theme; genre, perspective, general mood, and use of language.

The quality of learners' analysis is often weaker when they have to compare texts, because of the necessity of focussing on more than one thing at the same time. There are several well-established teaching ideas for developing the comparative ability, that can be adapted easily for the purposes of Question 4. Several are as follows:

Activity 1

- Put the learners into pairs; give half of the pairs one text extract and the other half of the pairs the another text extract (the texts from the Anthology of Unseen 20th and 21st Century Literary texts (<http://ocr.org.uk/Images/258267--unseen-20th-and-21st-century-literary-texts-teacher-guide.pdf>) would be suitable)
- Give the pairs large sheets of paper and have them draw up a table topped with the following headings: theme; genre; perspective; general mood; use of language
- Learners enter their ideas into each of the sections; cut words/phrases from the extract to support their ideas; annotate those words/phrases with notes relating to their ideas
- Join pairs together who have looked at different texts

- Learners identify points of similarity and points of difference. It might be that they have identified the same theme (e.g. parent-child relationships in *We Had it So Good* and in *Why be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*) but have noted different perspectives (the parent's point of view in the Grant extract, or the child's understanding and view in the Winterson). It might be that they identify totally contrasting moods, as with the Waters and Chatwin texts, but both comment on the finely observed detail in both texts used to create those contrasting moods. It might be that their notions of theme for the Parsons and Lee extracts are different, and that they also usefully identify contrasting genres and perspectives for those texts, while at the same time commenting on the heavy use of complex figurative language
- Learners present to the class the similarities and differences they have identified.

Activity 2

- Establish a context of the learners as examiners for the GCSE English Language sample assessment materials
- Revisit the the relevant Assessment Objectives, and give them some training in your imaginary position as a lead examiner
- Provide them with a retyped version of a Question 4 exemplar answer from the taken from the 'Candidate Exemplars' of the Teaching and Resources section of GCSE English Language J351 webpage (<http://ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse-english-language-j351-from-2015/>)
- Ask learners to annotate the answer; write a summative comment identifying at least one strength of the answer, and at least one area they feel the candidate could develop further; consider the level the response
- Learners present their comments to the class
- The teacher then reveals the examiner commentary and the level given and discusses with the class.



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