

# GCSES TO UNDERGRADUATE: MANAGING STUDENT TRANSITION

Becoming Well Read: Tuesday, 16 April 2019

# INTRODUCTIONS

- An academic perspective
- A teacher's perspective

## WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS AND WHAT DO THEY KNOW?

- How well do you know your students' academic backgrounds?
- What, broadly, are the average entry requirements for your Arts/Humanities/English/Social Sciences courses?
- Are there any common weaknesses you observe in your first years' academic practice?
  
- Can you generate a 'wish list' of where you would like your entrants to be at with their reading by the time they arrive at university?

# GCSE: ENGLISH LITERATURE, AQA SPECIFICATION

**Skills** - In studying the set texts students should have the opportunity to develop the following skills.

## **Reading: comprehension and reading critically**

- literal and inferential comprehension: understanding a word, phrase or sentence in context; exploring aspects of plot, characterisation, events and settings; distinguishing between what is stated explicitly and what is implied; explaining motivation, sequence of events, and the relationship between actions or events
- critical reading: identifying the theme and distinguishing between themes; supporting a point of view by referring to evidence in the text; recognising the possibility of and evaluating different responses to a text; using understanding of writers' social, historical and cultural contexts to inform evaluation; making an informed personal response that derives from analysis and evaluation of the text
- evaluation of a writer's choice of vocabulary, grammatical and structural features: analysing and evaluating how language, structure, form and presentation contribute to quality and impact; using linguistic and literary terminology for such evaluation
- comparing texts: comparing and contrasting texts studied, referring where relevant to theme, characterisation, context (where known), style and literary quality; comparing two texts critically with respect to the above

## **Writing**

- producing clear and coherent text: writing effectively about literature for a range of purposes such as: to describe, explain, summarise, argue, analyse and evaluate; discussing and maintaining a point of view; selecting and emphasising key points; using relevant quotation and using detailed textual references
- accurate Standard English: accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## **Where to begin?**

- Because of the range of ways in which students might approach AO3, the following questions might be a useful starting point:
- What is it helpful to know in order to understand about the text or the writer's view when reading this text?
- What might different readers / audiences take from this text, or from this moment in the text?
- What might it be helpful to know in order to get a fuller, richer understanding of the themes, or the language, or the characters?
- To what extent does the context broaden / deepen my understanding of this text?

## **The idea of 'specificity'**

- The idea of 'specificity' is useful to bear in mind. The mark scheme highlights the need for students to relate their comments on context to the text:
- Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/ contextual factors shown by specific links between context/text/task.
- Therefore context needs to be considered in the light of the text itself: context is informed by, and helps to inform, understanding of the text, rather than to dominate a particular reading.

## A LEVEL – ENGLISH LITERATURE

Students are required to:

- show knowledge and understanding of how playwrights use dramatic forms to shape meaning in drama texts and evoke responses in audiences
- show knowledge and understanding of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received, and understanding of how these contexts influence meaning
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read and experience texts, responding critically and creatively
- respond to and evaluate texts, drawing on their understanding of interpretations by different readers such as literary
- identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and evaluation of texts
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts and sources.

Taken from Edexcel A Level English Literature specification. 4 components: Prose, Poetry, Drama, Coursework. Critical reading (AO5) assessed explicitly in Drama and Coursework, and through context (AO3) in the other units.

## A LEVEL

### Critical writing

As part of their study of their selected Shakespeare play, students should engage with different interpretations. To support this, students should be provided with either the Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology: Tragedy or Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology: Comedy. Each critical anthology includes four generic essays and three specific essays on each set text to encourage students to engage with different readings of their studied Shakespeare play. Each anthology fulfils all of the requirements for engagement with different perspectives for this component.

However, centres are welcome to select other essays or criticism on their studied Shakespeare play, or to supplement the critical anthologies with other critical materials on Shakespeare's drama.

Does anything surprise you about the A Level requirements?  
How well do they link with your expectation of first year HE entrants?

## AREAS OF CHALLENGE

- Issues with GCSE transition
  - Sudden increase in level of challenge
  - First exposure to critical reading
- Issues with A Level transition
  - Again, steep increase in level of challenge
  - Skill set required at GCSE does not fully map onto A Level, making the transition awkward
  - Students find the greater level of independence/discipline required problematic

A Level students' perspectives on academic reading:

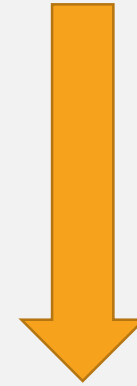
- I don't know where to start
  - There's too much
  - I don't understand it
  - What do I do with it?

How does this relate to your experience with your students?



# TEACHING CRITICAL READING AT GCSE THROUGH TO A LEVEL – GRADUAL INCREASE IN CHALLENGE

- Concepts abstracted – ideas decontextualized and taught simply
- Short quotations – introduction to a writer’s original phrasing
- Longer readings – anthologised or edited essays
- Whole essays/chapters
  
- AfL strategies throughout



# GENERAL READING SKILLS

- Prediction: read the introduction or abstract and predict the writer's strategies
- Skim read for stand-out ideas
- Scan the topic sentences of paragraphs first for an overall idea
- Look up unfamiliar terms/concepts, or try to figure them out from context
- Summarise the key argument – if you don't understand it well enough to do this, what can you do about it?
- Guided reading
- Annotating the text
- Making connections with other content on the unit

# GROUP TASKS

# GENERAL READING SKILLS: INDEPENDENT STRATEGIES

First Reading: Previewing

Second Reading: Annotating and Analysing

Third Reading: Review

Fourth Step: Responding

1. Students required to keep a reading log or develop a critical review – foundational academic practice and encourages students to follow subject through to university
2. Scaffolded repetition of reading makes it more purposeful – important as students in Year 13 often still lack discipline and rigour in their academic practice.

## PLENARY

- Based on A Level requirements, how can initial undergraduate training be adapted to capitalise on existing A Level skills?
- What skills would you like to see undergraduates enter university with?
- In an ideal world, how can colleges and sixth forms adapt to help?
  
- [Alison.croasdale@gmail.com](mailto:Alison.croasdale@gmail.com)