



## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

The 2014 English examination assessed student achievement in the skills and outcomes indicated in the current *VCE English Study Design*.

The examination consisted of three sections. Section A (Text response) offered students the choice of two distinct topics for each of the 20 texts on the text list published by the VCAA. Students were required to complete one response. Section B (Writing in Context) instructed students to compose a piece of writing stemming from a prompt for one of the four Contexts. Section C (Analysis of language use) required students to analyse the ways in which writers Yvette Yergon and Dr Peter Laikis used written and visual language to persuade their audience.

More than 40 000 students sat for the 2014 English examination, and the skills and qualities shown by the majority of students were impressive. Most were able to respond well and present three completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the knowledge and skills required. Both the quality and quantity of work produced under the timed conditions of the examination were quite sound, and, at times, impressive. The growing awareness of the value of close textual knowledge and careful management of response structure indicates sound teaching and learning.

Assessment was based on criteria, which were applied holistically. The descriptors of the 'Expected Qualities for the Mark Range' can be found on the VCAA website by following the link to the examination criteria from the English study page. These descriptors are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected for the specified mark ranges in each section of the examination. Finer judgments are then made when the exact characteristics of responses are analysed.

Students seemed to have a clear understanding of how to approach the examination. There were very few incomplete responses. It is important for students to correctly fill out the information required in the answer books. (For example, the box indicating the text selected and topic chosen, another to indicate the Context selected and writing the name of the text that most informs the Section B piece of writing.)

On the other hand, it should be noted that:

- there seems to be a dependence on formulaic, prepared responses by some students. The study of English is concerned with developing students' understanding and confidence in responding to the specific topics and prompts offered in the examination. Active engagement with texts enables students to develop language awareness, to articulate ideas and to develop communication skills. A personal engagement with the texts and ideas is neither formulaic nor predictable
- some students did not fully engage with the elements of the topics and prompts. Greater care needs to be taken in analysing and recognising the specific expectations of each topic or prompt – often this comes down to a precise understanding of the words that comprise the task
- as this is an English examination, strong language skills (including correct spelling and grammar) are expected and necessary for success
- it is recommended that students organise their time so that enough time is left to proofread their work.

## **SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

**Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

The student responses provided below are presented for illustrative and informative reasons, and they may form the basis of worthwhile discussions. These examples should not be taken as 'the best' that is possible or as 'perfect'; none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. In the 2014 report, however, they have been selected both as typical of better responses and/or material that may be of some use for improving the knowledge and skills in the English study. Readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the brief comments offered in this report.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding errors resulting in a total less than 100 per cent.



## Section A – Text response

The topics enabled students to address the knowledge and skills outlined in the study design. The choice between topics enabled students to develop a sustained discussion from the initial focus on one or more of the following aspects of key knowledge for Units 3 and 4 Outcome 1.

- an understanding of the ideas, characters and themes constructed by the author and presented in the selected text (Units 3 and 4)
- the structures, features and conventions used by authors to construct meaning in a range of literary texts (Units 3 and 4)
- the ways in which authors express or imply a point of view and values (Unit 4)
- the ways in which readers' interpretations of text differ and why (Unit 4)

It may be useful to link each of the key knowledge points from the English study design above with the topics offered in the examination. While some topics focused on more than one aspect of key knowledge (for example, *The Complete Maus* [i.]), most focused on a single aspect. There are subtle but discernible differences in the topic types and students would benefit from understanding these variations. All topics required student responses to address the full range of key knowledge and skills, and to be supported by detailed analysis and specific reference to the selected text. The more successful responses did not rely entirely on the most obvious scenes from the texts. Familiarity with the entire text and the discerning selection of scenes to support and explore ideas ensured responses that were thoughtful and moved beyond predictable and superficial discussions. The most successful students recognised the conceptual ideas and implications of the topic and explored precisely, using detail from the text as a means of exploration to support and develop their discussion.

Students should be encouraged to have confidence in their own reading and demonstrate a personal understanding of their text, rather than relying exclusively on commercially produced material. All texts are complex works of art with a wealth of opportunity for exploration. There are no 'expected' responses to topics, and the most successful pieces were those that were thoughtful and fresh. The assessor does not have to agree with the student's interpretation of a topic or text; the students must, however, be able to support their interpretation with insightful evidence from the text. If students have excellent knowledge of their text and have a grasp of the topic, then they should be confident when presenting their ideas and constructing their essays.

The area that still requires the most work is the understanding, deconstruction and organisation of responses in relation to the set topics. Students should be taught to look critically at the wording of the topic and to consider what implications and assumptions are being made within the topic. It is still a problem that too many students want to respond to their own question rather than grappling with the ideas of the topic as it is presented. Students should have the confidence to challenge the position of the topic without changing the topic itself. Students would benefit from further practice analysing and distinguishing different topics and approaches to topics.

Students must also ensure that they explore all of the elements presented in the topic. Too often a key point was taken from the topic and a response produced, omitting a significant idea that had a major bearing on the topic itself. On other occasions students ignored a key term that may have played an important part in understanding the topic's implication. For example, the first topic for *A Christmas Carol* was "'An important theme in *A Christmas Carol* is that actions have enduring consequences.' Discuss."; however, far too many students ignored the word 'enduring', which was essential in responding meaningfully to this topic.

Students and teachers must also be aware of the list of stories or poems on the VCAA text list. In some cases, not all stories in an anthology are on the list, and students are expected to use only those listed in their responses. Likewise, a student must not study more than one multi-modal text as their major texts. A student who selects a multi-modal text for Section A and then uses a multi-modal text as the primary text for Section B will be penalised.

Finally, almost without exception, students demonstrated an understanding of writing a text essay. Clear introductions, appropriate paragraphing and the ability to embed quotations appropriately were features of most pieces. These basic skills must be continually reinforced, including building more sophisticated vocabulary, continuing to improve grammar and placing more focus on sentence structure.

Data on text selection and averages is supplied at the end of this report.



The following is an example of an upper-range response. This piece shows close meaningful textual analysis and develops a sustained argument. There is an awareness of the topic and exploring its implications throughout the essay. It is a thorough discussion that uses the text well, although better responses found more breadth in the discussion. Its expression is sound without being exceptional. This piece was awarded a score at the lower end of the top range.

***This Boy's Life***

**i. "I had my own dreams of transformation..."**

**'The reader feels that Toby and his mother are never going to be able to improve their lives.'**

**Do you agree?**

*Wolff's memoir This Boy's Life positions its readers to question the ability of Tobias and his mother to 'change [their] luck'. In the midst of the post-war conservative backlash the pair are caged by societal norms that prevent them from achieving their 'dreams of transformation.' Furthermore, Tobias' impracticality and sense of entitlement lead him to reject opportunities. Despite this, the memoir ends on an optimistic note. The reader closes the novel with the belief that the lessons the pair have learned throughout their journey may offer them a chance to improve their lives.*

*The societal norms and expectations of the 1950's post-war America inhibit Tobias and his mother's ability to transform their lives. Toby's sense of self worth is completely broken by his inability to meet the era's stereotypes of masculinity. The notion that he 'could not break down [his] sense of being at fault to its components' who he reveals his inability to reconcile his identity with social expectations. Wolff juxtaposes Toby's 'natural' desire to 'seek status' with his complete and total discomfort with this own self. The contrast between the pacifistic and loving young boy who cries at a squirrel's funeral and the gun-toting, rebellious teenager is a stark one. It reveals the overpowering need that Toby feels to conform. The memoir reveals that way in which Tobias' need to fit in prevents him from pursuing success. Rather than 'change [his] luck, as he initially intended, Tobias camouflages himself in the safety of social norms and joins the army. His choice to return to the 'clear life of uniforms, ranks and weapons' cements his future. He decides to commit to leading an average life through conformity rather than stay true to his identity and pursue his dreams of 'status' and wealth.*

*Rosemary is similarly trapped by societal customs. Post-war America designates her one position in life: the role of a housewife and mother. This convention cages her, despite her attempts to escape it. The memoir emphasises the perpetual cycle of abuse that Rosemary and her son are subjected to. The opening line of the text, 'Our car boiled over again.', demonstrates the repetitive and fruitless nature of Rosemary's attempts to transform her life. The inability of the 1950's women to escape from abuse is a prevalent element of the text. It reveals the way in which such situations were treated as normal and largely ignored. The 'strangeness' of the cycle of abuse and oppression 'over the years became normal' to both Tobias and his mother. Eventually, despite her efforts to 'run from [men she] was afraid of, Rosemary is unable to escape the pervasive violence in her life. Both she and Tobias adopt the same view of the abuse as the rest of the society does. They opt to ignore it and turn a blind eye 'languidly [convincing themselves] that the strange noises came from cats.' Thus, societal expectations prevent Rosemary and Tobias from achieving their 'dreams of transformation.'*

*It is not social norms alone that hinder the pair's progress in society. Toby's impractical and idealistic nature also damage his chances of success. He feels a sense of entitlement that prevents him from working hard to improve his circumstances. Toby manages to lie and manipulate his way into a good school, Hill, but does not put any effort to secure his future there. Instead, he considers it his 'desire and [his] right' to be a part of this 'great world.' Even the prospect of being expelled due to failing classes does not spur him into action. He simply 'pray[s] like a moslem' that he will be allowed to stay.*

*In a similar manner, he also wastes opportunities to escape granted by Mr Bolger who offers him a refuge from Dwight's abusive household. He is 'welcomed' by the family, yet he does nothing to repay their kindness. The troubles he causes them though his actions are forgivable, but his pride and inability to take responsibility for his own wrongdoings destroy his chances of remaining in his adoptive home. Tobias refuses to apologise for siphoning fuel out of the neighbours' trucks. This 'brings shame' on him and incites resentment from the Bolgers who have offered him a chance to change his future. Rather than take responsibility for his actions he 'le[aves] a dummy in [his] place to look sorry...but [he is] nowhere in the neighbourhood.' This façade of regret ultimately prevents him from finding a new home.*

*Wolff's memoir, however, closes on an optimistic note. Toby is once again on the road, 'posed for flight', and journeying toward a brighter future. The passage is reminiscent of the opening of the text. The difference, however, is that this time Tobias is equipped with the resilience, resourcefulness and determination that he has gained from his troubled childhood. The final lines of the memoir are full of hope as Tobias shouts 'hymns' at the 'top of [his] lungs' and drives along the road to an uncertain but optimistic future. This causes the reader to question whether his dreams of transformation have truly been 'saved', or whether Toby is simply filled with the same naivety that he possessed at the beginning of the memoir.*

*The pervasive idea of 'transformation' and 'chang[ing] luck' in Wolff's This Boy's Life are hindered by multiple obstacles. Social norms and Toby's personal attributes prevent the pair from transforming their lives in the memoir. The reader is left with an overwhelming sense of optimism, however though which Tobias Wolff suggests that these 'dreams' may eventually be realised.*



The following response explores the implications of the topic and makes sound and thoughtful conclusions particularly well. The student is able to use examples from the text to interpret aspects of the topic. The response shows an excellent control of language, is fluent and uses appropriate vocabulary. This piece was assessed as an upper-range script.

*Stasiland*

**i. 'Funder shows that victims of the Stasi were never fully healed following the collapse of the East German regime.'**

**Discuss.**

*In Ann Funder's exploration into the oppressive and restrictive reign of communism in what was the GDR, she finds and interviews a range of people in her search for stories of 'human courage'. Not deterred by the difficulties in facing a system that has left the vast majority of its people looking upon the past with feelings of 'embarrassment', Funder captures the 'tragic' and 'uplifting' stories of the people forgotten, but who are unable to forget the implications nor the repercussions of the 'iron curtain'. Describing what remains of East Germany as a 'horror-romance', Funder shows that those victimised by the Stasi were never fully healed instead trapped in the memories and scars of their pasts.*

*Funder's most tragic character, Julia was the perfect GDR citizen. Growing up in a good home in which communism was believed, Julia only wished to contribute to this society and broadcast the advantages of her home. Yet her romance with a foreigner brought her to the Stasi's attention. 'Overtly' monitored and restricted, her 'private sphere' was invaded looking back on her past, Julia confides in Funder revealing that the surveillance 'damaged the worst'. Manipulated by the Stasi, her education and career were tarnished and her faith in the East German reign swayed as she was interrogated by Major N, her entire romance put under a 'microscope'. Except once the wall fell, in what should have been a time of liberation, Julia was confronted by the flaws in a new system, as she was raped. Feeling betrayed by the GDR, Julia reflects upon the time in which she had 'security' with nostalgia. So traumatised by everything that had happened to her, she became like a 'hermit'. Victimised by both systems, 'there is something about Julia that breaks my [Funder's] heart', Funder highlights that Julia continues to suffer and is constantly affected by her experiences of before and after the wall.*

*Miriam Webber's 'past ended when Charlie died.' Funder's deep connection with Miriam is made all the more potent with her highly emotional input into the tragic yet inspiring onslaught of Miriam's story. Feeling both pity and admiration for Miriam who 'became, officially an enemy of the State at sixteen' – an age still considered a child, was capable of defying communist rule and possessing her own 'sense of justice'. A 'living epitaph' Miriam is 'suspended' in time and unable to move forward until she uncovers the truth and 'Charlie is given the justice' he deserves. 'Brave and strong and broken all at once,' Miriam still carries the scars of her past, constantly reminded of her interrogation, torture and incarceration because of the 'strange little tricks' she developed and the haunting emotion of feeling 'no longer human' once she was released. Miriam remains as a 'maiden in her tower' though feeling 'triumph' that the Stasi are 'gone' she is unable to move on with her life, unable to forget her pain and suffering or Charlie's.*

*Though Hagen Koch is the ex-Stasi official cartographer, she too was a victim of the Stasi. Growing up and believing in communism, he was the 'poster boy' of the regime and his is the story of the 'making of a patriot'. Funder's interactions with Koch and her own inclusion of her interpretations of his story, further emphasise the sympathetic nature his ordeal should be treated with. Marking the line for the 'anti-fascist measurement' was Koch's career peak and his proudest achievement, so much so that the 'wall defined him'. Yet when it became known to him that this entire life had been moulded and manipulated by the Stasi, he tried to resign. At which point he was wrongfully arrested by the Stasi, his family split up and his position within the regime became interchangeable. Dedicating his life to 'the party', Koch took his 'private little revenge' stealing a gold plate. 'All I had the courage for.' Koch isn't able to move past the wall and instead nostalgically tries to maintain and preserve it. Taking tours of what remains and providing his side of history, Koch cannot forget the suffering and betrayal of the Stasi as it is too rooted into his being.*

*Funder emphasises who the victims are and highlights the magnitude of their suffering and why they are unable to move on and entirely heal, by including interviews with ex-Stasi officials and Stasi advocates. Using a formal and informative approach when dealing with the Stasi, Funder draws attention to their inhumane and paranoid natures. These men are ossified – showing neither remorse nor guilt for their actions, but some like Herr Winz who is waiting for the 'second coming' of socialism having treated the 'GDR like a religion'. Continuing support through groups like the 'insiderkomitee'. These men held power – able to turn 'humanity into inhumanity' and speak aggressively over Funder like a 'bully', as Von Schnitler does. These men were a superior group who shared a nature in which they were able to enjoy having women like Funder 'at his urge'. Men like Herr Boch, Herr Winz and Von Schnitler impudently defend themselves and their nefarious traits. In Funder's appraisal of them, the full scope of the GDR and what it must have been like being constantly surveyed and manipulated by Stasi such as these – is fully realised. Affording the audience an opportunity to view this Stasiland more holistically and come to terms that men such as these were never held accountable for their actions and contribution to the fear and pain.*

*Funder shows a world that is 'grey' but has hope. That though the victims of the Stasi – who 'bred mistrust' and created an oppressive society, have never fully healed, there is still a chance they might. It will just take time and justice for the scars to fade and allow it's suffering citizens to step out beyond the shadow of the 'collapsed' system and fallen wall.*



## Section B – Writing in Context

The task in each Context required students to write an extended piece for a specified purpose and audience, exploring ideas and using detail from at least one text selected from the English Text List 2, published in the *VCAA Bulletin VCE, VCAL and VET*. All students were able to produce a piece of writing as described in the instructions, and it was clear that some very interesting approaches and interpretations to creating and presenting were studied in classes.

Assessors were not looking for a specific response or approach. Most students demonstrated that they had gained a number of insights about the Context they studied, and many demonstrated the capacity to present those insights in a controlled, fluent and well-written manner.

Assessment was based on the interrelationship among:

- the quality of writing in relation to the specified purpose
- the quality of ideas (formed by the study of the Context and from the texts studied)
- the handling of the prompt.

Most pieces of writing could be described as expository, although it seemed that more students were prepared to attempt more varied approaches to writing. Many successfully employed a heading and wrote with a lively voice that was appropriate for the piece itself. Many of the more imaginative pieces were successful, but those pieces that did little more than tell a story without exploring the ideas of the prompt were not successful. Responses with a singular textual approach tended to be awarded low marks. It was pleasing to see the varied and imaginative ways that students were able to explore the Context, the nominated text and the prompt.

There is no good writing without good ideas. Students who have spent the year exploring the ideas of their selected Context should have thoughtful insights into both the Context and to what their texts have offered in relation to that Context. High-scoring students were able to explore sophisticated ideas that had emerged from their study and from the prompt.

While students are free to create a response that is ‘an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing’, the piece itself must explore the nominated Context and respond to the prompt offered for that Context. In addition, the instructions are clear about the expectation of the connection of the response to the student’s nominated text: ‘Your writing must draw directly from **at least one** selected text that you have studied for this Context and be based on the ideas in the prompt.’

It is a requirement of the examination that the piece of writing be informed by the nominated text in ways that are apparent to the reader. This does not mean that the text must be referred to directly, but must draw from the text. Those who compose creative pieces with little exploration, simply labelling one of their characters or demonstrating little connection to the nominated text have not fulfilled the requirements of the task.

Students may not come into the examination and write whatever they wish. Some students composed stories or narratives that seemed to have no connection to the ideas that the text offered in relation to the Context and the prompt. Assessors make every effort to discover the relationship between the piece of writing and the nominated text, but ultimately the onus is on the student to ensure that the connection is discernible. There is no provision for a statement of intention or a reflective commentary in the examination, so students must make the connections between text and prompt clear.

Students who completed excellent scripts responded to the prompt. They used their understanding of text(s) and concepts from their Context study to inform the ideas they explored within their writing. Weaker scripts did not show critical thinking about the idea the prompt was communicating or ignored the prompt altogether. The more successful responses explored the core ideas of the prompt instead of treating it like a text response. Students need to be reminded that there is an important distinction between the Context they have studied and the task they have to complete in the exam. They are asked to ‘explore the idea’ that is represented in the prompt; students should not present prepared responses that relate to the concepts/issues central to their Context study and ignore the idea the prompt is communicating. While the prompt can be seen as a springboard for effective writing, the ideas of the prompt must be explored. It is important to demonstrate an understanding of the core of the prompt.



The most successful responses drew thoughtfully from the text; the least successful only used a scene or a character in a superficial way or retold the plot of the text. These approaches were not always relevant to the prompt. There can be no definitive advice about the success of relying on a single text or employing both of the studied texts. Some students used the two texts expertly to demonstrate exceptions and qualifications, while others did little more than use the second text to add more of the same examples.

When students used more than one source for illustration of their ideas, the best pieces had a strong sense of unity and purpose. This cohesiveness was contrasted by pieces where one idea followed the next, as students went through their list of examples. The product was more a plan for an essay than a thoughtful, finished piece.

### Information on assessing the Context

Context	%	Average	Most popular text
Encountering conflict	46	5.5	<i>Paradise Road</i>
Exploring issues of identity and belonging	25	5.6	<i>Skin</i>
Whose reality?	22	5.8	<i>Death of a Salesman</i>
The imaginative landscape	7	6.0	<i>One Night the Moon</i>

Advice for teachers and students.

- Formulaic approaches were limiting.
- Avoid memorised responses.
- Students should use texts as vehicles for exploring/stimulating ideas, not as the centre of the task.
- Avoid retelling the plot of the text and presenting it as a piece of writing.
- Work on the transference of ideas offered by the texts.
- Students should practise writing using a range of approaches. If they become too comfortable with just one approach, they may find that it does not suit the task and prompt in the examination.
- Ensure there is adequate practice and strategies for exploring the prompt.
- Aim to develop greater sophistication with creative pieces.
- Work on developing well-crafted pieces.
- Discourage superficial personal stories that offer little depth to the piece of writing.

## Context 3 – Encountering conflict

*'Conflict causes harm to both the powerful and the powerless.'*

### Sample 1

This response shows a genuine attempt to engage with ideas of the prompt and uses textual knowledge to make conclusions and offer insights. Effective use of text is not consistent, however, and some of the ideas are not well developed. The student works to create a sense of cohesion with the piece. There is some control of language, but there are a number of expression weaknesses. It is typical of an upper-middle script, and its strength is that it works with the prompt from start to end. The nominated text is *Every Man in this Village is a Liar*.

*Conflict is like a raging fire, it is often unexplainable, random and devastating. These merciless qualities often mean that damage is done to both the powerful and powerless. Although fire does not choose which houses it burns, the powerful may be able to delay the fire. Ultimately conflict will cause some kind of harm to the powerful and to the powerless, so in accepting this harm we can learn about the conflict and rebuild again.*

*Due to its personal nature, conflict often results in damages to the powerful and the powerless. Conflict has the ability to strike us deeply and then we are hurt we often fight back. Megan Stack recounts the differences between powers in her journalistic account *Every Man in this Village is a Liar*. Muammar Gaddafi has a strong hold on power with this extreme scheme to 'rule on terror', this means that the victims, the people, can not speak out with fears 'of being shot'. Although they are powerless, the people yell in the only place they can 'a soccer stadium'. Eventually over 40 years Gaddafi was overthrown by a revolt of these people. Although it often takes longer and can sometimes be unrelenting, Conflict when inflicted upon personal behaviour will eventually cause damage to both the powerless and the powerful.*

*External forces in conflict often cause harm to both the powerful and the powerless. External forces such as war can lay devastation randomly and forcefully. Stack's entrance to Kurdistan was surrounded by devastation as Stack witnessed scenes 'Like a hurricane was locked in', children powerless were attached by the unforgiving nature of war. Stack's role as a journalist*



even though had minimal power was still 'threatened as she tried to convince herself 'it was not blood.' Stack found 'it was getting harder and harder to find a dry piece of ground' and even with the little power she had, she lost it as she eventually 'wound up nowhere.' Similarly Pyke's confrontation of Fowler in 'The Quiet American' was surrounded by the force of war. Fowler attempts to convince himself he is degage, a 'clean, safe...distance' away from war yet still he is affected by it. Upon witnessing a 'river' of corpses Fowler is disturbed and as much as he is convinced he is 'distant' reveals, 'I hate war.' Conflict's external force means it often does not choose its victims. Often even with the little power we have, it is used against us as we also become the one harmed.

Although, through accepting the harm associated with conflict the powerless often become the powerful. Mahatma Gandhi who grew up in a strict Hindu religion was subject to much racism and abuse. In England studying as a lawyer Gandhi became the powerless; he was beaten for not removing his turban in court, subject to the qualms of the seemingly 'powerful' English. Yet Gandhi accepted this beatings and more than that questioned as to why these views of religions exist. Instead of backing away Gandhi approached the harm through understanding it as a politician. This acceptance led him to reveal 'All religions are equal and all are helpful to one another' possibly turning him into the iconic figure of wisdom he is today. Gandhi accepted harm when he was powerless and in doing so gained the power he is known for today.

As Newton keenly suggested in the world of Physics 'to each force, there is an equal and opposite force.' This is often not the case in conflict due to the presence of external forces such as war and emotion, this fact can cause greater harm to those that witness it. Although harm can often come to the powerless, when we accept it and fight to understand it is often when the most lasting solution is found, ultimately resulting in status as the 'powerful'.

## Sample 2

This is a thoughtful piece that explores the ideas of both the prompt and the Context. It is constructed in an interesting manner, and there is a clear voice that contributes to the success of the piece. The use of supporting material is provocative and interesting. It is well written and shows excellent control. It was assessed as an upper-range script. The nominated text is *The Life of Galileo*.

1942

*The Mask of Evil*

'Sympathetically I observe,

*The swollen veins of the forehead, indicating*

*What a strain it is to be evil.' B.B.*

*Five years ago, today, I penned it. And yet here I am, in another time, in another country, 'evil' as ever. I've seen it all before. Back in Munich and Berlin, it was whistles and stink bombs on opening night from the Nazis in the audience – Rise and Fall of Mahogany, apparently, not their favourite opera. Here, it's all about government lists and HUAC enquiries, though the sentiment remains the same. About to be blacklisted, and about to be expelled, I know what happens next. I've seen it all before. To think my faced actor, the original 'Galileo', would pass up a trip home to London! I'm losing my footing amidst this 'Red Scare' and they are scared. Loughton, more than most. The show must go on, but the show can't go on now, without him. It is as if I were Death himself, and any further association, a resignation into the blazing underworld' the 'Red Hell'.*

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*It was Bertolt Brecht's scathing appraisal of the prevailing social and political climate, as conveyed through such poems as 'The Mask of Evil', that saw him raise the ire of authorities desperate to preserve their power. Additionally, it was the Marxist sentiment of plays like Rise and Fall of Mahogany that caused him to be blacklisted in both Nazi Germany, and in post-war America by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). This ongoing political pressure in both nations instigated many problems from Brecht, both personal and professional. The man with whom he had translated and scripted the play, Charles Loughton, decided to remove himself from the play, Life of Galileo, as Brecht was seen to be a communist, which at the time, was a dangerous association to have. It is ironic that Loughton faced a similar dilemma to that of his stage persona, Galileo, and experienced the same kind of internal conflict. Both were torn between the value of loyalty – to a friend, or to scientific truth – and the promise of safety. Loughton left the play, and its tour to England was therefore cancelled, and Galileo recanted halting scientific advances for a number of years. But can we judge the people who make these decisions?*

*Brecht did. He labelled Galileo's recantation an 'absolute crime', and went so far as to write a satirical Obituary for C. Loughton – the man was 'dead' to him once he decided not to act for Brecht.*

*But can we look at these situations anyhow, and see the immense harm it did to both men. Galileo, having previously stated that 'any man who knows the truth, and calls it a lie, is a crook', chastised himself and lived in immense guilt for the remainder of*



his life, even though he was able to smuggle out his *Discorsi* later. Loughton lost a friend in Brecht, and a connection to one of the foremost playwrights of his day. And if they were not harmed in this way, they would feel 'Physical pain', which pushes Galileo to recant, or lose their professional standing. Even for Brecht, he lost a friend, an actor, and a play, because of Loughton's actions, but Loughton was no criminal – he merely acted in his own interests, and avoided receiving a dangerous label, 'communist', to which he had no loyalty. And neither was Brecht, for being a criminal. It was only the authorities that made him so.

What Brecht recognised in both Germany and America, which is examined in *Life of Galileo* was the recurring situation of a dogmatic authority suppressing the opposing views of those within their jurisdiction. This is done often by use of rhetorical device, just as Brecht's fellow playwright, Arthur Miller, noted. In his doctrine of 'contemporary diabolism' he stated that time and time again, the people in positions of power would associate their political or philosophical enemies with something demonic: Galileo had his 'famed telescoped dubbed a 'Devil's tube'; Brecht was seen in association with the 'Red Hell'; Miller's *The Crucible* deals with the trial of witches, and those involved with 'witchcraft'. Each time, an 'inhumane overlay' is given to a group within society, allowing the abrogation of all normally applied customs of civilised intercourse. This way, authorities can inflict harm, and the public – if only tacitly – condones it.

Galileo was 'shown the instruments' of torture, for simply expressing what he thought to be true, which was eventually shown to be true. But because he was seen as a 'heretic', he was able to be treated in this manner. And in the modern day, the US government policy of 'extraordinary rendition' allows people to be kidnapped, taken to a country with less human rights laws, and tortured until confession. How is this allowed? When George W Bush collated the nations of North Korea, Iraq, and Iran into an 'Axis of Evil' it was perhaps the most potent use of contemporary diabolism in the 'modern day' the label is no 'witch', 'heretic', or 'communist' – it is 'terrorist'. Australian-Egyptian national, Mandouh Habib, is a victim of such a policy. American war journalist, Megan Stack, in a piece for the LA Times, claimed that he had been kidnapped and tortured before 'confessing to a litany of horror-related crime', none of which he was ever found guilty. He was powerless in this situation and was forced, like Galileo, to say something he knew not to be true. It is the authorities that demonise these groups, and the authorities that cause this sort of thing to happen.

Of course, with such horrific methods, the people who inflict pain might, after the notification of others, be found out. Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning, a former US soldier, leaked masses of documents on the 'War on Terror', most notably the video entitled 'Collateral murder', which shows innocent people being shot down at the enjoyment of US soldiers. This was a great embarrassment to the United States government, and furthermore, a shame on the people of their nation. But they are not the victims. Harm to a reputation does not register against the harm to innocent victims, or against the harm that Manning endured in over 1000 days of torturous imprisonment without a proper trial. Often, after conflict, when these crimes are found out, it is too late, the damage has been done.

Another former US government worker who leaked documents is Edward Snowden, who has been stripped of his citizenship (like Brecht) and lives in Russia. He has said that Manning and he are indeed 'powerless', and change must come from an 'angry, informed public', as they are who keep the government in power. But as Brecht saw, this seldom happens.

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*I've decided to leave. This nation is no different. It survives on the promise that its people are petrified, its enemies are devils, and the playwrights are its enemies. There is no room for me in America. I've seen it all before.*

## **Section C – Analysis of language use**

This year students were presented with two pieces of writing to be analysed – an opinion piece that appeared in a daily newspaper and a response to that opinion piece, challenging its premise. There was no expected manner in which the pieces were to be analysed and most students began by analysing the first piece then analysing the second. The more successful responses made insightful analytical comparisons, focusing on such things as tone, structure and, most importantly, the language used by the two writers. For example, the piece by Yvette Yergon employed language that related to size, and words and phrases that attempted to evoke awe, such as 'biggest thing we do', 'big dreamers', 'huge amount of money', 'trillion dollars' and 'unlimited'. Laikis, on the other hand, was dismissive of Yergon and sarcastic, referring to 'little issues like hunger and disease and the environment'. He tended to challenge the idealistic nature of Yergon's piece with 'Off the planet' and 'Wake up, Yvette!'



While students were expected to respond to both pieces, they were free to determine the amount of response spent on each as appropriate. Some wrote a significant amount on the first piece and offered only a cursory comment on the second. Students should have decided which parts of the material they would use in order to demonstrate their understanding of how language was used by the writers to persuade. Successful responses were able to show the inherent connection between the general ideas of each piece and the language used to present those views.

Students needed to demonstrate understanding of how written and visual language is used to persuade. Students could achieve full marks yet select different parts of the material to exemplify and explore language use. The exception, however, is that students were expected to acknowledge and explore the way visual features were used in adding persuasiveness to the entire piece.

While few students resorted to simplistic technique identification, it was still evident. Some students offered topic sentences that suggested they were searching for particular ‘techniques’, with little regard to the instructions for this section: ‘How is written and visual language used in the newspaper article and the letter to attempt to persuade readers to share the points of view presented in them?’ Simply identifying techniques demonstrates a limited approach to this task.

It is also worth noting that the instructions focus on the intent, not the result. Students should be wary of making claims about the exact response from the reading audience but are expected to analyse the intention of the writer.

The analysis in the more successful responses was insightful and sophisticated. Weaker responses showed an understanding of the task but tended to be generalised and lacked depth. For example, a weaker response might use phrases such as ‘*makes the reader think*’ or ‘*inclusive language is used to make the reader feel included*’. Demonstrating an understanding of subtle, persuasive approaches and the nuance of language used were characteristics of the more successful responses.

Many students who struggled with analysing the language were still able to make insightful comments about the visuals. It was evident that most students understand the implications of a visual, but some are not able to transfer that knowledge to written language. It is worth considering how to transfer those skills shown in analysing visuals to the language itself more effectively.

The following is an example of an upper-range response. This is a thorough and well-developed analysis of language. It is clear that the student understands the position of both writers and explores how each uses language to attempt to persuade the audience. There is sufficient analysis of specific words and phrases while maintaining an appropriate overview. It is not without its expression weaknesses but is generally fluent and well controlled. This script was assessed in the upper range.

*There have been suggestions by a group known as Kolumbus21, urging governments to invest resource and time into further space exploration for the twenty-first Century. In her opinion piece, ‘Exploring our dreams’, Yvette Yergon contends in an emphatic tone that space exploration is fundamental in today’s world for the growth of technology and to find answers to societal problems. Conversely in his letter to the editor, ‘Off the planet’, Dr Peter Laikis contends in a critical tone that ideas in favour of space exploration are misguided and injudicious, given the far more significant world problems such as hunger and poverty.*

*Connecting the word ‘exploring’ a symbol of research and learning, with the word ‘dreams’, representing a fantasy and our strongest desire, in her headline, Yergon inspires readers to consider how space exploration can be highly advantageous to the future of ourselves and society. Yergon begins by referring to the closeness of space to our earth, ‘only about 160 kilometres’, and mentions the fact that we are ‘closer to space than to Canberra’, emphasising how integral and significant space exploration can be after visiting a space exhibition inviting readers to reflect on their preconceived views towards exploration and to consider its effect on their own attitudes of excitement and innovation. Lightening the atmosphere, Yergon refers to our ‘beautiful blue planet we call home,’ suggesting that such a perspective would not have occurred if not for the ‘bravery’ of astronauts in exploration, compelling readers to reflect on the fortune they have of such a beautiful planet which has been developed through exploration. This notion is portrayed in the accompanying image, depicting a ship bustling through the hardships of exploration, further positions readers to develop a greater sense of gratitude towards the early explorers, and to recognise the importance of discovery that has played a significant role in developing the conditions of our planet.*

*Adopting a more serious tone, Yergon postulates that there is more to exploration than simply the ‘thrill of discovery’, cultivating new perspectives on exploration that are not restricted to its excitement and moments of adrenaline. Likening an asteroid to a ‘lifeless rock’, Yergon intimates that asteroids are simplistic yet she notes the value of these asteroids that are to the value of approximately a ‘trillion dollars’, allaying readers’ potential fears as to the worthiness of governments investing in space exploration given the value that can come out of it, and its poetical to enrich society as a whole. Indeed, she states that such a*



*statistic doesn't seem to 'dampen anyone's enthusiasm', highlighting the great benefits that can be achieved through space exploration.*

*In this light, Yergon employs the inclusive pronoun 'we' in reference to our need to 'find the answers to our problems', which includes 'taking risks' and 'encountering the unexpected', suggesting that a reformation of attitudes towards exploration and protecting life on earth is a societal duty. Indeed, she refers to the 'benefits that nobody predicted at the time', of past space explorations and the 'valuable products available to us now, thus urging readers to concede the vast benefits of space exploration for society as a whole. This notion is supported by the accompanying image, showcasing the various outcomes that are achieved through space exploration, such as solar cells, medical imaging, and radial tyres, practices and tools that are fundamental to everyday society on earth. These resources are lined back to an image of an astronaut, representing space exploration and discovery and suggesting the astronaut's powerful role in achieving amazing and integral sources for our world, thus stressing and reiterating the importance of space exploration to enrich and enhance our society.*

*In contrast, Dr Peter Laikis' letter to the editor adopts a critical and unenthusiastic tone, disparaging Yergon's views as insignificant and unworthy of investment. Laikis engages the attention of readers immediately by employing a pun in the headline, 'off the planet', intimating that Yergon's ideas are misguided and foolish, utilising a categorical tone to inspire readers to consider the limitations of space exploration for the benefit of a society. Sardonicly referring to 'hunger and disease' as 'little issues', Laikis stresses that Yergon's claims to the importance of space exploration are far less significant in contrast to the aforementioned issues that are far more pressing and devastating. Indeed, Laikis forcefully demands Yergon to 'wake up', while utilising an exclamation mark carrying connotations of urgency and immediacy, compelling readers to consider the limitations of space exploration for a society's benefit. Linking back to Yergon's reference to asteroids as 'lifeless rocks', Laikis jestingly retorts that his hope that our 'infinitely precious blue planet' doesn't 'turn into one', compelling reads to consider the potentially devastating and deleterious repercussions society can face if they are to follow Yergon's ideas and invest too heavily in space exploration without dealing with more immediate problems on earth.*

*In closing, Laikis reiterates that focussing on 'our real problems' is a 'dream worth pursuing', accentuating the importance of solving problems such as hunger and disease as an unequivocal priority compared to space exploration. Consequently, readers are urged to engage in a paradigm shift, compelling them to understand that investment to global world issues that impact the lives of many are far more worthy than investment into space exploration.*

# 2014 Examination Report



Table 1 shows the texts selected by students in the 2014 English examination and the average scores achieved by students for the associated text. The table also shows the scores for Section B and Section C for the same grouping of students.

From this table it can be seen that students achieved the highest scores on average for *Cat's Eye*. However, it can also be seen that on average this same set of students achieved well in other sections of the English examination. Conversely, students who selected *No Sugar* had the lowest average score in Section A but also had lower scores, on average, in Sections B and C.

**Table 1: Text selection from Section A of the 2014 English examination and average scores for Sections A, B and C**

Section A Text	% of Students	% Average Score – Section A	% Average Score – Section B	% Average Score – Section C
<i>Twelve Angry Men</i>	15	53	53	52
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	11	54	53	53
<i>All About Eve</i>	9	58	57	56
<i>Ransom</i>	7	61	58	60
<i>This Boy's Life</i>	6	54	54	53
<i>Stasiland</i>	6	61	57	57
<i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i>	6	55	54	54
<i>Mabo</i>	6	53	52	53
<i>The War Poems</i>	5	64	56	56
<i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	5	69	69	67
<i>Brooklyn</i>	4	57	58	57
<i>No Sugar</i>	3	51	51	50
<i>In the Country of Men</i>	3	53	53	53
<i>Cloudstreet</i>	3	59	55	55
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	3	64	62	61
<i>The Complete Maus</i>	3	59	56	54
<i>Selected Poems</i>	2	65	61	59
<i>Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?</i>	2	59	58	55
<i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i>	1	59	58	57
<i>Cat's Eye</i>	<1.0	70	66	67