

# English Literature A Level Coursework Guidance Booklet

## The Task

This is a 3000-word academic essay, comparing the writing in two literary texts from any genre (poetry, prose, drama) with a particular focus. In the essay you must:-

- have an **argument and write in an academic register (AO1)**;
- **compare consistently and in a detailed way (AO4)**;
- **study the writer's craft (AO2)**;
- include references to other **critical opinions (AO5)** (best done through the application of a small selection of literary criticism)
- include discussion of the **context (AO3)** surrounding the texts, both at the time they were written and, if relevant, at the time they has been read (including now).

## The Texts

Your teacher will guide you with these, but it is best to use texts that are recognised as 'literary' and to avoid any text that you did as part of your GCSE.

## The Question

Again, your teacher is here to help with this. You should have some input into the formation of your question, if you can, or at the very least pick from a list. You are comparing an aspect of the writing, which could be a theme ('materialism', for example) or a key dimension of context (such as the presentation of women), or a key aspect of the way the text is written (endings are good for this).

This is a quote and an example from the exam board:-

"What makes a good coursework title?

*You are advised to adopt a title which encourages students to address all five assessment objectives.*

*For example 'With reference to your wider reading and considering the context of the time in which text A and text B, compare how writer X and writer Y present Z.'*

*Or 'Compare the way in which Z is presented Z in text A and text B considering the contexts of their production and reception and the different ways in which these texts have been read.'*"

Equally, you could find a good general critical quotation and test it out in relation to the two texts.

*According to Linda Alcoff in her essay Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory, a woman in society '...is always the Object, a conglomeration of attributes to be predicted and controlled...' Compare the presentation of women in 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood and 'The Bell Jar' by Sylvia Plath in the light of this comment, considering the contexts of production and reception.*

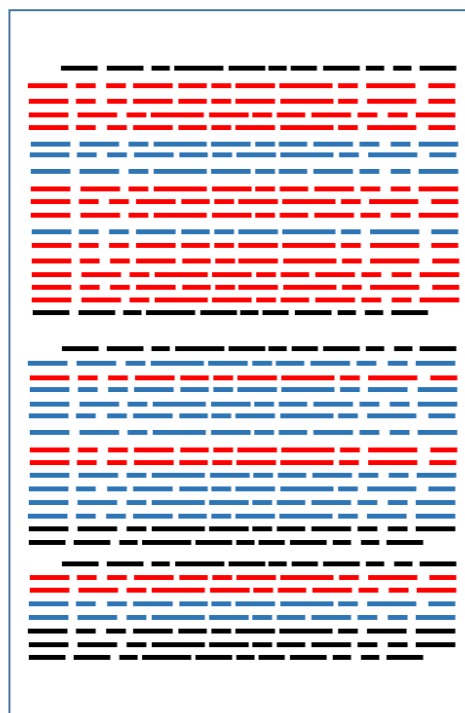
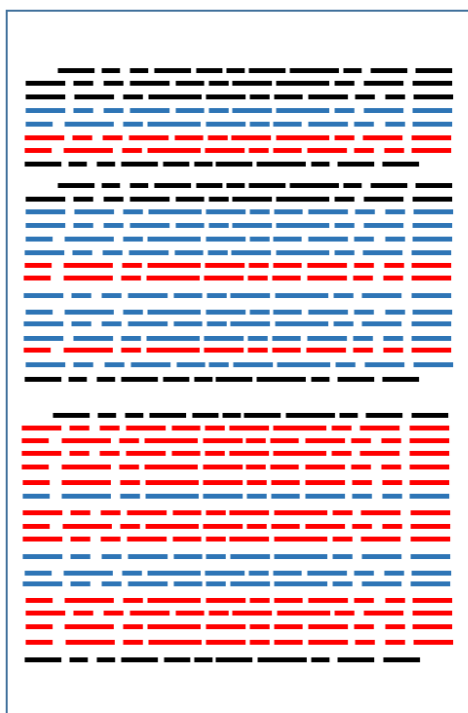
Or you could make up your own quotation and focus the attention of the essay on a key part of the text:-

'The endings of modernist texts are necessarily unsatisfying.' In the light of this statement, compare the ways in which T.S. Eliot and Evelyn Waugh end 'The Waste Land' and 'A Handful of Dust'.

### Good Academic Writing

Once again, your teacher will give you more guidance on this one.

- The introduction: this is important to any literature essay, but particularly important to your coursework essay. You need to:-
  - Set out an argument which starts the process of comparison
  - Consider using a critical standpoint (if it was not in the title itself)
  - Show the direction of your discussion without saying exactly where you will end up
- Main paragraphs: you need to make these as comparative as you can. There is more than one way of doing it, but a good rule of thumb is this:-
  - Frame an approach in the first sentence which is part of your overall discussion. So, if you are doing the presentation of women, you might decide to consider the two main female characters side by side.
  - Concentrate on one of the two texts
  - Follow the guidance on paragraph structure that comes later in this document, bringing in the other text where it is relevant to do so
  - Switch texts, and concentrate on that text, bringing in the other where relevant. This diagram may help! Blue represents writing about Text A, red represents writing about Text B and black represents writing about both texts



## Some sample writing...

It is impossible to give a fool proof guide to how to write each paragraph. However, see if you can determine whether this one (from an essay which got 53 out of 60 – good but not perfect) does the interlinking and detailed comparison that is suggested above. Check, too, **to see how the opinions of critics are included**. Could the paragraph **have a bit more in the way of context**? Is there enough close analysis of language and/or narrative? Could the authors be mentioned more (to steer writer and reader more towards the 'writer's craft'?)

(The essay is comparing 'The Turn of the Screw' a novella by Henry James and 'Dracula' by Bram Stoker, arguing for or against the view that literature is a 'record of social fears')

*Although women are portrayed as dangerous it could be argued that women are in fact weak, the real societal fear explored may be a fear of emasculated men. In "The Turn of the Screw" the governess is to have no contact at all with the absent male figure. The only male character in the novel is the ghost of the gardener who causes the problems. Once again the male has failed to make the women and children feel safe. This could lead to the conclusion that women are not feared because they are weak; they are simply reliant on men and need their help. It is true that Mina is attacked by Dracula; she asks "what have I done to deserve such a fate, I who have tried to walk in meekness...all my days". At first glance it seems as if Mina was truly horrified of Dracula and is a victim. But the word "tried" suggests that she desires to step out of the role of the victim. I agree with Glover who says that Mina is "extremely hard to place". She does show signs of obedience to her husband and learns shorthand in order to "keep up with Jonathan's studies" and so that she can help him. But this also shows that Mina is a strong woman and that the true fear is the fear of emasculated men. Contemporary critic, Spencer claims "that never in western society have gender roles been more rigid or distinct". Mina appears to know this and assigns herself to organise the notes of the men, therefore she takes an active role in destroying Dracula. Ledger claims that she "(inscribes) herself within the paradigm of ideal Victorian womanhood" and uses her "mans brain" to fit into a role which is neither the uneducated and powerless woman nor the feared New Woman. Instead Stoker creates a modernised version of the angel in the house which is acceptable. Although Mina hints that she did indeed want Dracula to attack her, the men have still failed in their duty to protect her. One interesting point is that in both novels men can also be seen as weak. In "Dracula" the merry band of men who are going to fight Dracula are depleted by blood transfusions, they also need four members to face one monster. And in "The Turn of the Screw" the gardener is a ghost. Perhaps the texts are in fact showing that society fear emasculated and feminine men and were blaming strong women like Mina. Perhaps the actions of men make women weak; if female characters had been allowed to work alongside the men then they would not have been open and vulnerable to attack. If Mina had been allowed to go with the merry band of men then Dracula would not have attacked her. Some women have been portrayed as weak and reliant on men but strong female characters such as Mina can highlight how emasculated men can weaken women and that women need not be feared.*

## Here's another model, taking the integrated approach (where possible)

Question about the extent to which modernist texts present absence at the heart of human experience.

(The problem with this model is probably that there are no critics included in it – how might you improve it to sort that out?)

*In both TWL and The Great Gatsby, settings are used to demonstrate the notion of absence, often linked to the characters who live in them. In The Great Gatsby, this is most clearly shown by the 'valley of ashes' in chapter Two. Sandwiched, literally, between the wealth of the Eggs in Chapter 1 and the decadence of New York that we come to at the end of Chapter Two (not to mention the lavish description of the first party in Chapter Two), Fitzgerald depicts a terrifyingly grey landscape, with 'ash-grey men' 'where ashes grow like wheat'. The inversion of something that should be natural and fertile, 'wheat', into something that is often associated with death – in the funeral incantation 'ashes to ashes', for example – shows a place where good things are absent and emptiness reigns. This is further underlined by the arrival of Wilson, who is himself described as a 'blond, spiritless man, anaemic': in other words empty of life in every sense.*

*Likewise, in The Wasteland Eliot repeatedly serves up places of emptiness and people with empty lives. Whilst the room where we find the aristocratic woman in 'A Game of Chess' is thoroughly lavish with 'a golden Cupidon' and 'sevenbranched candelabra' and is presented in appropriately lavish vocabulary ('candelabra' is not a common word) we discover that the woman within it is actually as lost and empty as so many others in the poem. She could be seen as an echo of Daisy in Gatsby. Like Daisy she twice asks 'What shall I do?', the repetition evoking mild panic. In chapter seven Daisy who we know is 'pretty cynical about everything' says 'What shall we do with ourselves this afternoon... and for the next thirty years'. Both women are aimless. In the Wasteland, however, Eliot relies to a large extent on the settings to give the sense of her hollow existence, with such features as 'the wind under the door' and the reference by the speaker to 'rat's alley'. In both texts these lives are depicted as empty of meaning, itself seemingly a modernist trope, repeated in books like Mrs Dalloway and A Handful of Dust. We are presented with a world where certainty is lost and so happy endings for characters are inappropriate.*

Another Model Answer, doing everything! (this one got 60/60)

Title was

'Modernist writers present fragmented psyche as unhealed.' By a comparison of *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and '*The Wasteland, Prufrock and other Poems*', by T.S.Eliot, explore the truth of this statement.

This excerpt is from the second page of the candidate's essay...

However, these voices come together in the end, to converge into "larger unities" and symbolise the healing psyche. Woolf chooses to end her novel with Bernard's voice, in affirmation that "we exist not only separately but in undifferentiated blobs of matter". There is a certain tension in the sentence, created by "not only" that suggests the opposition between "separately" and "undifferentiated" can be reconciled. This links to the modernist idea that "no human practice is unique but is one form of response to our shared situation and the similarities (...) [are] more marked and significant than any contrasts" (Macrea, 1980). Therefore, perhaps the use of several voices by Woolf is intended to highlight the shared identity of humans, since fundamentally we are all "blobs of matter". Rather than fragmentation, Woolf evokes a sense of unity of all our individual psyches and reminds her reader of our underlying brotherhood.

Eliot concludes *The Wasteland* with a similar convergence of his lost and isolated voices. In the final stanza, rather than creating new voices, he brings old voices together, such as the voice speaking of Philomel and that of the Fisher King and the Grail Knight. Arriving at his destination "fishing, with the arid plains behind me" the Grail Knight has found the Grail and the Fischer King has left "the wasteland" behind; an image of new fertility and potential growth "bringing rain". This coincides with the accumulation of voices for a hopeful end, when finally, the voices are united as subjects of "the thunder" symbolising God, and all advised to "give, sympathise and control". Eliot accumulates the message running throughout the section "what the thunder said" in the penultimate line, "the thunder" repeating "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata." Therefore, since the voices seem to come together to bring a new start, and listen to the advice of the higher power of "thunder", there is a sense of resolution. The fragmented psyche in search of identity and purpose has found peace, symbolised by the final repeated word "Shanti"; the peace of God.

In agreement with Hough, both Eliot and Woolf allow their voices to come together at the end: Woolf through the reminder of our shared identity, and Eliot by bringing a new start with peace for all of the voices. However, the texts ultimately maintain the separation of the voices, Eliot only leaving the fragments of voices with advice for the future; whilst despite Woolf's shared situations the voices remain separate from one another. To determine whether the psyche is left unhealed therefore, one should consider how the communication between the voices within the poem enforces or reduces such separation.

## A Possible Model for Answering the Prose Question

1. Start of paragraph: show you are answering the question (A01) and set out the comparative point you are making...

2. Now focus on one text: make a point in relation to question (A01) and focus of paragraph

Question/broad focus

5. (A04) Now focus on the other text: make a comparative point in relation to the question and the focus of paragraph

3. (A02) Now bring in your evidence and analyse it closely, using terminology (such as the narrative terms you have learnt). . Now focus on one text: make a point in relation to question and focus of paragraph

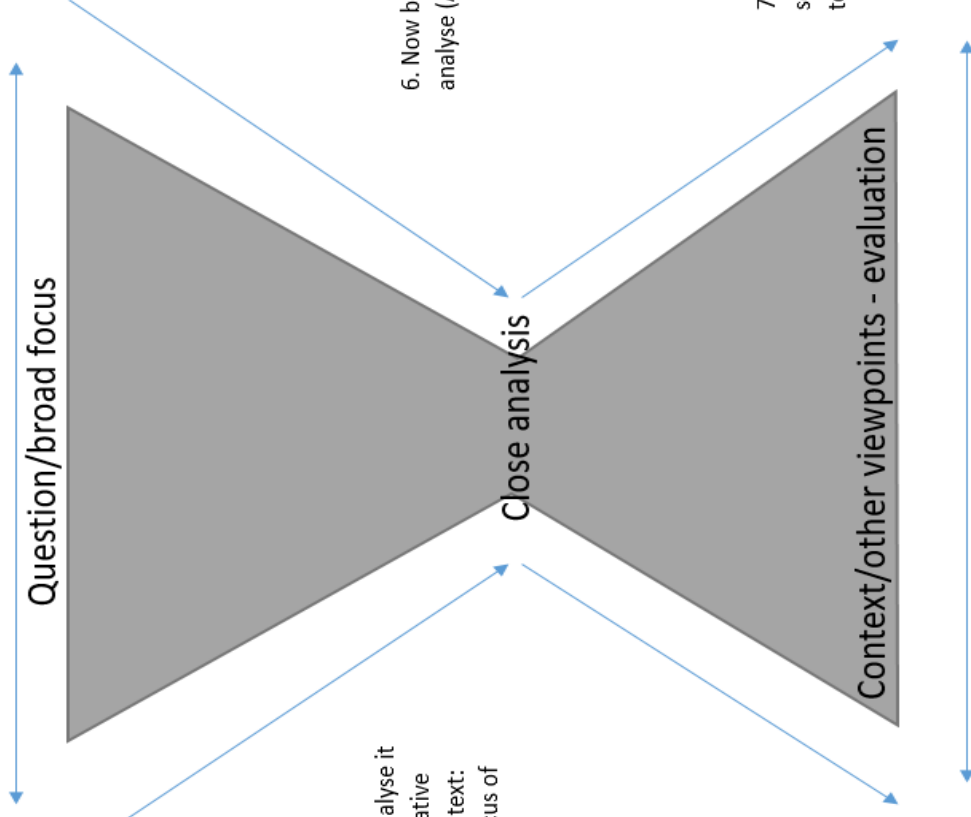
6. Now bring in your evidence from the second text: analyse (A02) using literary terminology

Close analysis

4. Now pull 'back out': apply a critical opinion (A05) or some context (A03) to this and try to use either of these to help you **critically evaluate**

7. Now come 'back out': apply a critical opinion (A05) or some context (A03) to this and try to use either of these to help you **critically evaluate**

Context/other viewpoints - evaluation



## Referencing Critics and Writing a Bibliography

This is Harvard Referencing:-

Citing critics: quote the critic, then in brackets put the name of the critic and the date of publication

plans. The connotations of this noun suggest she was trying to make them spend more money (as she has done throughout), and it seems ridiculously selfish to do so to a grief-stricken family. As she is a minor character like Bradshaw, her role in the novel seems to be to depict this value, and by reappearing on the very last page, it shows how widespread this belief is in society, and how difficult it is to escape. Both authors may be satirizing this new "stark, dangerous, urban, electric, technological" [Malamud, 1989] world of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where having money and material objects became more important to people to show off their social status as many people had a dispensable income for the first time after the war. Both authors seem to be opposed to this behavior of their characters, suggesting that like love may be, money is a corrupt value that poisons Britain.

Therefore, we can see that both authors present a variety of beliefs and values of society in Britain in their respective novels. The extent to which these are corrupt and how much they should be valued is questionable, due to the decline of the traditional belief in religion in the modernist era. Waugh seems to be opposed to this, unlike Woolf who agrees with it, but what replaces this in the modernist society seems to be more of a void with no single shared value, or arguably love and money, both of which appear to be condemned alternatives.

Word Count = 3134

Bibliography then picks that up: author, date, title, publisher.

### Bibliography

1. Faulkner, Peter (1977), '*Modernism (Critical Idiom)*', Routledge.
2. Murray Davis, Robert (1997), introduction to Penguin Modern Classics edition of *A Handful of Dust*.
3. Littlewood, Ian (1983), '*The Writings of Evelyn Waugh*', Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
4. Woolf, Virginia (1919), 'Modern Fiction'.
5. Malamud, Randy (1989), '*The Language of Modernism*', U.M.I. Research Press.
6. Bond, Chris (February 2009), '*A Handful of Dust: Evelyn Waugh as satiric reformer*', English Review, Volume 19.

# Decoding the Assessment Objectives (how to get in the top three bands)

Level	Mark	Guidance	Non-examination assessment		
			AO1 = bullet point 1	AO2 = bullet point 2	AO3 = bullet point 3
			Descriptor (AO1, AO2, AO3)		
	0		No rewardable material		
Level 1	1-7	<b>Low (1-2 marks)</b> Qualities of levels are inconsistently met	<b>Descriptive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes little reference to the text with limited organisation of ideas. Limited use of appropriate concepts and terminology with frequent errors and lapses of expression.</li> <li>Uses a narrative or descriptive approach that shows limited knowledge of texts. Shows a lack of understanding of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Shows limited awareness of contextual factors.</li> </ul>		
		<b>Mid (3-5 marks)</b> Qualities of level are largely met			
		<b>High (6-7 marks)</b> Qualities of level are convincingly met			
Level 2	8-14	<b>Low (8-9 marks)</b> Qualities of levels are inconsistently met	<b>General understanding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes general points, identifying some literary techniques with general explanation of effects. Aware of some appropriate concepts and terminology. Organises and expresses ideas with clarity, although still has errors and lapses.</li> <li>Gives surface readings of texts and shows general understanding of writer's craft by commenting on straightforward elements.</li> <li>Makes general links between text and contexts. General awareness of significance and influence of contextual factors.</li> </ul>		
		<b>Mid (10-12 marks)</b> Qualities of level are largely met			
		<b>High (13-14 marks)</b> Qualities of level are convincingly met			
Level 3	15-21	<b>Low (15-16 marks)</b> Qualities of levels are inconsistently met	<b>Clear relevant application</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers a clear response using relevant textual examples. Relevant use of terminology and concepts. Creates a logical clear structure with few errors and lapses in expression.</li> <li>Shows clear understanding of writer's craft. Demonstrates knowledge of how meanings are shaped with <b>consistent analysis</b>.</li> <li>Identifies detailed points to link texts and contexts. These are supported by specific textual examples that show clear understanding of significance and influence.</li> </ul>		
		<b>Mid (17-19 marks)</b> Qualities of level are largely met			
		<b>High (20-21 marks)</b> Qualities of level are convincingly met			
Level 4	22-29	<b>Low (22-23 marks)</b> Qualities of levels are inconsistently met	<b>Discriminating controlled application</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constructs a controlled argument with fluently embedded examples. Discriminating use of concepts and terminology. Controls structures with precise cohesive transitions and carefully chosen language.</li> <li>Analyses the effects of literary features and demonstrates discriminating understanding of how meanings are shaped. Controlled analysis that is aware of <b>nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft</b>.</li> <li>Provides a discriminating analysis of how context influences the writer's craft. Explores links in a <b>detailed way</b>.</li> </ul>		
		<b>Mid (24-27 marks)</b> Qualities of level are largely met			
		<b>High (28-29 marks)</b> Qualities of level are convincingly met			
Level 5	30-36	<b>Low (30-31 marks)</b> Qualities of levels are inconsistently met	<b>Critical evaluative application</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a critical evaluative argument with sustained textual examples. Evaluates the effects of literary features with sophisticated use of concepts and terminology. Uses sophisticated structure and expression.</li> <li>Exhibits a critical evaluation of the ways meanings are shaped. Evaluates the effects of literary features and shows a <b>sophisticated</b> understanding of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Presents a <b>sophisticated</b> evaluation and appreciation of significance and influence of contextual factors. Makes sophisticated links between text and contexts.</li> </ul>		
		<b>Mid (32-34 marks)</b> Qualities of level are largely met			
		<b>High (35-36 marks)</b> Qualities of level are convincingly met			

'Clear and relevant' = you answer the question you have set for yourself, with some good evidence

'Consistent analysis' = you analyse some aspect of the writer's craft (narrative voice, symbolic use of setting, form etc) in every paragraph

'Discriminating' = you select the best evidence for your argument, *time after time* (and probably more than one quote per paragraph)

'nuances and subtleties' = thoughtful study of the choices writers make both linguistic *and* structural

'Critical evaluative' = you can weigh up the reasons for a particular feature of the writer's craft or weigh up the significance of well-chosen contextual factors

'sophisticated' = doing it all in a concise, economical, focussed and advanced way; not a word is wasted.

'detailed way' = not putting in big chunks of context, but applying a key piece of information sharply to the point. NB: Writing about how the text(s) fit or break a genre (e.g. dystopian g.) counts as 'genre context'



Non-examination assessment		
Level	Mark	AO4 = bullet point 1 AO5 = bullet point 2 Descriptor (AO4, AO5)
	0	No rewardable material
<b>Level 1</b>	1-4	<b>Descriptive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates limited awareness of similarities, differences or links between texts. Describes the texts as separate entities.</li> <li>• Shows limited awareness of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts. Limited linking of alternative readings to own response.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2</b>	5-9	<b>General exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies general similarities, differences or links between texts. Makes general cross-references between texts.</li> <li>• Offers straightforward explanations of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts. Some support of own ideas given with reference to generic alternative interpretations.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3</b>	10-14	<b>Detailed exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes <b>clear connections</b> between texts, developing an integrated, connective approach with clear examples.</li> <li>• Offers clear understanding of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts. <b>Explores different interpretations</b> in support or contrast to own argument.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 4</b>	15-19	<b>Discriminating exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyses connections between texts. Takes a controlled discriminating approach to integration with <b>detailed examples</b>.</li> <li>• Produces a developed exploration of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts. Discussion is controlled and offers <b>integrated exploration</b> of alternative interpretations in development of own critical position.</li> </ul>
<b>Level 5</b>	20-24	<b>Critical and evaluative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Evaluates connections between texts</b>. Exhibits a <b>sophisticated connective approach</b> with exemplification.</li> <li>• Applies a <b>sustained evaluation</b> of different interpretations of texts. This is cogent and supported by sophisticated use of application of alternative interpretations <b>to illuminate own critical position</b>.</li> </ul>

'explore different interpretations' = you are working through a particular angle on the texts (the question should allow that)

'integrated exploration' = you can work off other critical positions and form your own in response

'sustained evaluation of different interpretations... to illuminate own position' = you are in control, working with other opinions but forming your own critical and analytical judgements

'clear connections' = you have connected one text with the other, probably developing the comparison in the paragraph

'detailed examples' = you make some detailed links from text to text, within paragraphs

'sophisticated connected approach' = you are able to cross back and forth between the texts, within paragraphs

## What support are we allowed to give you?

- You get one full draft opportunity. Many teachers like to also give the opportunity for students to do a plan and a sample paragraph before the draft is completed
- We'll give you a minimum of two weeks to do the draft (which may be over a holiday)
- We collect in the draft and provide you with fairly detailed written feedback, including a copy of the assessment criteria
- We do not give you draft mark (we are not allowed to do so) but we can indicate roughly where you have got to in terms of the skills you are demonstrating. We will use a mark sheet to illustrate this, or give you a clear indication of level within the written feedback
- Some teachers give 'audio' feedback, with recordings of what they think about your essay and where you could go next with it
- Once your draft has been returned (which will be within two weeks of us receiving the work) we will give you at least two weeks to complete a final version of the essay
- **There is centralised hand-in, in the Hall, between 1pm and 2pm on:**
- While you work on your final version, teachers may allow some class time to work on your coursework, which will give them an opportunity for some further one-to-one verbal feedback to clarify what has been written on the essay
- Please be aware that **you will need to sign a cover sheet to say that this is all your own work and that you have not had any other help (and that includes tutors outside college) that has not been acknowledged in the work itself**
- We ask you to put 'class notes' in your bibliography to indicate that you have been taught some of the material in your essays

## How is the essay marked and moderated

- We collect in the essays on the deadline day and your coursework teacher will mark them
- We use the assessment criteria (see last two pages) and any guidance we have received from the exam board and our professional experience and expertise to mark your essay
- When all the essays have been marked, we meet as a team to moderate them internally. A top, middle and bottom is selected from each class and triple marked (i.e. two additional teachers will check the sample)
- If there is seen to be an inconsistency in a teacher's marking in any given year, they will go back to their essays and adjust up or down as suggested by the moderated sample
- Any further essays which are seen as problematic are also offered up for internal moderation during this period
- You will receive a mark for your coursework, at least a fortnight before the end of teaching on the course. Please note that these marks are provisional, because the external moderator can adjust them, and you will not receive a grade at this stage; grades are awarded by the exam board in the summer and boundaries are not set until then
- In early May the external moderator will request a sample from our college, to check that our marking fits with national standards
- You will receive your final mark in the summer, along with your other exam results