

## English Language, Literature, and Composition: Essays (0042)

### Test at a Glance

Test Name	English Language, Literature, and Composition: Essays		
Test Code	0042		
Time	2 hours; approximately 30 minutes for each question		
Number of Questions	4 essay questions		
Format	(1) One literature question that asks examinees to interpret a work of poetry (2) One literature question that asks examinees to interpret a work of prose (3) One issue question that asks examinees to evaluate the argument and rhetorical features of a passage that addresses an issue in the study of English (4) One issue question that asks examinees to take and defend a position on an issue in the study of English, using references to works of literature		
	Content Categories	Number of Questions	Percentage of Examination
	I. Interpreting Literature: Poetry II. Interpreting Literature: Prose III. Issues in English: Understanding Literary Issues IV. Issues in English: Literary Issues and Literary Texts	1 1 1 1	25% 25% 25% 25%

### About This Test

The English Language, Literature, and Composition: Essays test is designed for those who plan to teach English at the secondary level. The test addresses two key elements in the study of literature: the ability to analyze literary texts and the ability to understand and articulate arguments about key issues in the study of English. The test consists of four essay questions, which are weighted equally. Two questions ask examinees to interpret literary selections from English, American, or world literature of any period. The first question always focuses on a work of poetry, while the second always features a work of prose. The third question asks examinees to evaluate the argument and rhetorical features of a passage that addresses an issue in the study of English. The fourth question asks examinees to take and defend a position on an issue in the study of English, using references to works of literature to support that position. The questions asking examinees to discuss issues in the study of English may deal with such matters as the nature of literary interpretation, the value of studying literature, the qualities that define the discipline of literary study, the kinds of literary works we choose to read and teach and why we make those choices, and so on.

## Sample Test Questions

*This section presents sample questions and responses along with the standards used in scoring the responses. When you read these sample responses, keep in mind that they will be less polished than if they had been developed at home, edited, and carefully presented. Examinees do not know what questions will be asked and must decide, on the spot, how to respond. Readers take these circumstances into account when scoring the responses.*

### Interpreting Literature

*Below is a sample of the first question in the test, which presents a poem and asks examinees to analyze some of the literary elements in the poem. The second question in the test is similar in format, except that it will ask examinees to analyze literary elements in a prose selection instead.*

Read carefully the following poem by Louis MacNeice. Then discuss how MacNeice uses imagery and diction to convey the qualities of what the narrator calls “world.” Be sure to use at least THREE specific examples from the poem to support your points about MacNeice’s use of imagery and diction.

#### Snow

The room was suddenly rich and the great  
bay-window was  
Spawning snow and pink roses against it  
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:  
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,  
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion  
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel  
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world  
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—  
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears  
in the palms of one’s hands—  
There is more than glass between the snow  
and the huge roses.

From *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by E. R. Dodds, copyright © 1966 by The Estate of Louis MacNeice. Reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd. and David Higham Associates, agent for The Estate of Louis MacNeice.

*This scoring guide is used to evaluate responses to the poetry and prose questions.*

## SCORING GUIDE

### Interpreting Literature

The score range is 0 to 3.

#### 3

- Analyzes the specified literary elements in the selection accurately and with some depth
- Shows a sound understanding of the selection
- Supports points with appropriate examples from the selection and explains how the examples support those points
- Is coherent and demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntax
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English

#### 2

- Analyzes the specified literary elements in the selection with overall accuracy but may overlook or misinterpret some elements
- Demonstrates understanding of the selection but may contain some misreadings
- Supports points with appropriate examples from the selection but may fail to explain how the examples support those points
- Is coherent and demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntax
- Displays control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws

#### 1

The response demonstrates some ability to engage with the selection but is flawed in one or more of the following ways:

- Incorrectly identifies literary elements in the selection or provides a superficial analysis of those elements
- Demonstrates an insufficient or inaccurate understanding of the selection
- Fails to support points with appropriate examples from the selection
- Lacks coherence or has serious problems with the control of language, including diction and syntax
- Contains serious and persistent writing errors

#### 0

A zero is given for blank papers, off-topic responses, responses containing severely inaccurate or incoherent observations, or responses that merely rephrase the question.

### Sample Response That Received a Score of 3:

In the poem “Snow,” by Louis MacNeice, the narrator uses conflicting imagery and unusual diction to draw a picture of a strange and contradictory world.

Throughout the poem, the narrator uses conflicting images to create his “world.” The first is the description of snow and roses at a single bay-window. This image confuses the sense of season. Snow normally falls in the winter, while roses bloom in the summer months. Then the narrator remarks that the two are “collateral and incompatible,” again employing conflicting imagery. Another example of the narrator’s use of conflicting imagery is his description of the fire bubbling. Usually, fire is expected to crackle and water is expected to bubble; people usually talk about “fire and water” as if they are two conflicting things. The narrator’s use of imagery and description in the poem gives the reader a greater concept of the contradictory world he is describing. This world is full of contradictions and incompatible things. While the images illustrate the poem, it is the narrator’s use of language that brings it to life.

In this poem, the narrator uses vivid but odd diction in order to add life to his idea of “world.” For example, he never refers to “a world” or “the world,” but only “world,” like it is something strange and new. The elaborate language creates an illustration of what the narrator is describing. For example, he refers to feeling the “drunkenness of things being various.” Not only do things change in “world,” but the changes are sharp and quick, enough so that one can feel intoxicated by the experience. The language even sounds intoxicated when it says, “On the tongue on the eyes on the ears...” The narrator also uses a variety of vivid and surprising verbs throughout the poem. This tactic avoids stale, repetitive language that can often bore readers. In one case, the window in the first stanza was said to be “spawning snow and pink roses.” While the idea is physically impossible, the word choice creates an unmistakable picture for the reader. It also emphasizes the idea that “world” is contradictory and strange.

The overall effect of the narrator’s use of imagery and diction was brilliant. The elaborate descriptions, verb variance, and conflicting images created a beautifully “crazy” world for the reader.

### Sample Response That Received a Score of 1:

The author uses imagery and diction to convey qualities of what the narrator calls “world.” In the poem “Snow,” the author shows different views of the world. One of the five senses, sight, is used as a device of imagery in the first stanza. The world is described as “suddener,” which means that its reality is nearer than a mere window.

The second stanza describes the world to be “crazy” and “incorrigibly plural” which could be interpreted as meaning that there is more than one way to view the world. In this stanza, another one of the five senses, taste, is used as an imagery device, with peeling the tangerine.

In the third stanza, a sound is heard describing the world. The words “spiteful” and “gay” are contradictory. This use of diction again tells of different ways the world can be seen.

Taste, sight, sound, and touch are utilized in the last stanza to relate the many ways the world can be experienced. The final line of the poem sums up the entire point.

Imagery and diction play an important role in the interpretation of the poem. The imagery makes the reader feel and relate to what the narrator is trying to describe as the “world.”

## UNDERSTANDING LITERARY ISSUES

Read carefully the following excerpt from an essay by Annie Dillard. Then, in your own words, identify Dillard’s central idea in the passage and show how the method of development and the prose style (sentence structure, word choice, and figurative language) clarify and support her point. Be sure to refer to specific examples from the passage in your discussion.

Oddly, almost everyone who can read feels qualified to discuss works of fiction, and even to discuss their merits and demerits in print. You could work yourself into a genuine froth over this: everyone who reads fiction seems to feel qualified to review it. One might as well let children, who eat, judge restaurants. Some book reviewers have no training in literature whatever. Now, no one would collar a man in the street to review a showing of a contemporary painter’s work. The man in the street would be decent enough to beg off. So why do people with no special training in literature discuss so unabashedly their tastes in fiction?

The preceding paragraph was a hoax. I want you to feel, as I mostly do, that although its argument has a few merits in the abstract, it is essentially elitist, curmudgeonly, and morally wrong. Why? We would swallow the same argument about painting or music without demur. Clearly, our assumptions about fiction are different.

In the simple answer to this exaggerated question lies one of fiction’s great strengths. It is of course that fiction, as a field, is not entirely the prerogative of specialists. And the fact that fiction is not the prerogative of specialists militates in favor of its traditional virtues simply because nonspecialists prefer depth to abstract surface. Specialists are interested in form; nonspecialists like lots of realized content.

## SCORING GUIDE Understanding Literary Issues

The score range is 0 to 3.

**3**

- Paraphrases or summarizes the central idea fully and accurately
- Analyzes important writing techniques accurately and with some depth
- Supports points with appropriate examples from the selection and explains how the examples support those points
- Is coherent and demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntax
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English

**2**

- Paraphrases or summarizes the central idea with overall accuracy but may overlook some aspects
- Analyzes important writing techniques with overall accuracy but may overlook some aspects
- Supports points with appropriate examples from the selection, but may fail to fully explain how the examples support those points
- Is coherent and demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntax
- Displays control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws

**1**

The response shows some understanding of the essay but is flawed in one or more of the following ways:

- Inaccurately paraphrases or summarizes the central idea
- Contains a superficial or inaccurate analysis of important writing techniques
- Fails to support points with appropriate examples from the selection
- Lacks coherence or has serious problems with the control of language, including diction and syntax
- Contains serious and persistent writing errors

**0**

A zero is given for blank papers, off-topic responses, responses containing severely inaccurate or incoherent observations, or responses that merely rephrase the question.

### Sample Response That Received a Score of 3:

Annie Dillard is arguing that literature possesses “depth” (line 27) because it is the art of the people. This makes it unique. It is the art form we are most likely to feel qualified to respond to, regardless of our training in literature, because it touches our feeling for depth, not our knowledge of form. This fact of literature’s populist status is emphasized when we consider how less qualified most people feel when they are asked to critique other art forms.

Dillard makes her first “false” argument clear by giving analogies that *seem* convincing. The idea of letting children judge food just because they eat at restaurants seems silly—because we recognize children often dismiss food for being the wrong color or because it isn’t served with action figures. Similarly, the analogy of the man on the street refusing to critique a work of art seems possible. While most of us “know what we like,” when it comes to painting, not many people know the pretentious language that goes with it—“modernity,” “content versus form,” “pointillism,” etc.

The “gotcha” ploy of Dillard’s passage, her admission that the first argument is a hoax, is key to her method of development. It coerces the reader into seeing her point of view. So while her initial analogies are convincing, a doubt begins to creep in as we read, awakening our sense of literature as a non-specialist’s art form. Significantly, she tries to arouse feelings—“hey, this sounds right but it’s dead wrong!”—rather than make a structured argument. In other words, she tries to appeal to our feeling for depth rather than our appreciation of form. In this manner, content (what she is arguing) and form (how she argues it) come together in this passage.

### Sample Response That Received a Score of 1:

Ms. Dillard, the author of *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, is concerned with the virtues of literature. She makes the point that too many people think they can talk about literature, but I say, why should that be the case for literature if it’s not the case for art? It’s a very good point about children eating in restaurants—just because people can read doesn’t mean that they should be able to be literary critics.

Ms. Dillard’s argument is effective because she pretends to be self-contradictory, stating one thing and then changing her mind as a “hoax,” but really she is sticking to one central point—that literature should not be put down as beneath the other arts when really it is just as important and “artistic” as any of the others. Just because literature is read by everyone, even children, doesn’t mean that we don’t need experts, literary critics, to help people appreciate it.

This essay is also effective because, like all of Annie Dillard’s work, the writing is conversational and slightly humorous: the critic collars a man in the street and the man “begs off.” These images, like the imagined scene of a child judging a restaurant, engage us.

## LITERARY ISSUES AND LITERARY TEXTS

*The writer's primary function in society is to pass judgment on political issues, social conditions, and people themselves.*

Choose TWO works from the list below and then write a well-organized essay in which you SUPPORT the statement above. Develop your thesis using specific references to elements of the works you select (e.g., characters, plot, themes, styles, language, point of view).

### Literary Works

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* or *Oliver Twist*

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* or *1984*

## SCORING GUIDE

### Literary Issues and Literary Texts

The score range is 0 to 3.

**3**

- Analyzes the literary issue introduced in the statement thoughtfully and in depth
- Develops a thesis according to the demands of the question and uses appropriate examples from two literary works to support the thesis
- Is coherent and demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntax
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English

**2**

- Demonstrates understanding of the literary issue introduced in the statement but may fail to analyze the issue in depth
- Develops a thesis according to the demands of the question and uses appropriate examples from two literary works to support the thesis, but may include some inaccuracies in the discussion of the works
- Is coherent and demonstrates adequate control of language, including diction and syntax
- Displays control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws

**1**

The response demonstrates some ability to engage with the issue statement but is flawed in one or more of the following ways:

- Provides a superficial response to the issue introduced in the statement, or misunderstands the position articulated in the statement
- Fails to develop a thesis, fails to support the thesis with appropriate examples from two literary works, or provides a number of distorted, inaccurate, or overly general characterizations of those works
- Lacks coherence or has serious problems with the control of language, including diction and syntax
- Contains serious and persistent writing errors

**0**

A zero is given for blank papers, off-topic responses, responses containing severely inaccurate or incoherent observations, or responses that merely rephrase the question.

### Sample Response That Received a Score of 3:

Literature is, at bottom, a criticism of society and of individuals. Writers don't just blindly "imitate" the world around them but represent the world, its politics, societies, and individuals, in such a way that we see them, and ourselves, more clearly. Point of view, symbolism, allegory, and other literary devices help writers critique the world around them. The author shows us the hypocrisy and frailty of the human world as we rarely see it when looking at it with our own eyes.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is a perfect example of this critique through portrayal. It shows the racism in the American South during the Depression. It portrays people resistant to change and distrustful of outsiders. But it also shows us the humanity of the very people it critiques, as well as a flicker of promise in their mostly ineffective institutions. Harper Lee's book accomplishes this subtle critique because literature is uniquely suited to showing us the complexity of the world as experienced by a sensitive observer, the book's narrator, a 6-year-old girl. This child is simultaneously accepting and questioning of the world around her, which allows us to see the South from a fresh perspective. When her father, a lawyer defending an African American man who

has been accused of a crime against a white woman, is criticized by the community at large, the daughter is at first unsure of who is at fault; her dad or the community. The father shows his daughter the irrationality of judging people on the basis of their skin color.

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* also critiques contemporary society through literary devices. Like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Crucible* addresses a contemporary problem in such a way that we are provided with new eyes. Published during the McCarthy period, *The Crucible*, which on the surface seems to be only a dramatization of the Salem Witch Hunts, is actually a condemnation of the hunt for communists during the 1950's.

Both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Crucible* criticize political institutions and social norms, and they do so in a way that compels us to see injustices we are often blind to. Seen through the eyes of a child, injustice becomes inexcusable. Portrayed as an example of injustice and superstitiousness similar to a witch hunt, the McCarthy hearings become more than just an embarrassing episode in American history; they become a ludicrous chapter in persecution that must never be repeated. It is the primary role of writers to expose such dangerous thinking through their art.

## Sample Response That Received a Score of 2:

I agree with the statement made by the author about the writer's primary function in society. Both *The Scarlet Letter* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* were written by authors who criticize hypocritical societies.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne writes about the Puritan experience and how the Puritan ethos shaped American culture. Hester is a marked woman, forced to wear the Scarlet Letter A for Adultery on her breast as punishment for the sin of adultery. However, it is the private shame and guilt of the congregants that Hawthorne finds damnable.

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiography of an African American woman who grows up in the South during the Depression. Her experiences with racism, religious fundamentalism and sexism lead to her greater understandings of her place in the world. She is a woman that suffers many setbacks: prejudice, poverty. Ultimately, she triumphs and becomes the Presidential Poet Laureate writing the inauguration speech for President Clinton.

Both of these novels are passing judgment on political issues, social problems, and individual people. They were written over a century apart, but in both cases the writers are fulfilling the same function in society: to show what is wrong with a hypocritical society so that people can see themselves clearly and be inspired to make things right.

## A Note About the “Literary Issues and Literary Texts” Question

*The list of literary works included in the “Literary Issues and Literary Texts” question will change from test to test. A representative sample of the range of literary works you may encounter in this question is included below. Note that this list is NOT exhaustive. The list of works you encounter on the actual test may or may not include some of the works below.*

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*  
 Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*  
 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*  
 Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*  
 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*  
 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*  
 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*  
 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*  
 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*  
 Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*  
 Homer, *The Odyssey*  
 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*  
 Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*  
 Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*  
 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*  
 N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*  
 J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*  
 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*  
 Leslie Marman Silko, *Ceremony*  
 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
 Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*  
 Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*  
 Elie Wiesel, *Night*  
 Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*



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