

## Task 2: Commentary

Students will produce an analytical commentary to accompany their original writing.

In their commentary, students will reflect on the writing process for **both** pieces.

They should evaluate:

- the findings of their initial research into the topic and texts
- the influence of their studied texts and how they are reflected in their written pieces
- the linguistic and literary features used in the style models that they have adopted in their own writing
- the language choices they made, through the drafting process, to achieve effects appropriate to the chosen function and target audience.

**Students should ensure that any texts and other sources used are accurately referenced.**

Advisory word counts:

Total for assessment: 2500–3250 words.

- Assignment 1 total: 1500–2000 words (Fiction and non-fiction writing)
- Assignment 2 total: 1000–1250 words (Commentary)

The assessment consists of 60 marks –

36 marks for the original writing pieces and

24 marks for the commentary.

### **Advice:**

The commentary is an important part of the coursework process and is worth 24 of the 60 marks for the coursework component. It provides students with the opportunity to reflect and comment on their own work.

The key areas to be covered are:

- an introduction referencing the topic and stimulus texts, providing a clear rationale for the choice of tasks
- an analysis of key characteristics of the text(s) which influenced the student's own writing
- an analysis of the significant linguistic and literary techniques used by the student in the crafting of the two creative tasks.

Ideally comparison of the two creative tasks should be integrated throughout the commentary.

There is no specific formula for writing the commentary as each one should be different depending on the core text(s), the theme, chosen genres and the

intentions of the writer. However, **the main areas that all commentaries need to cover are:**

- genre, audience and purpose
- form, structure and language
- the relationship between the student's creative tasks and the stimulus texts.

**Although there is no formula, there are some pitfalls which students should try to avoid:**

- lengthy explanations of the research undertaken
- anecdotal accounts of what was done in preparation
- long quotations from stimulus texts
- too much focus on minor secondary stimulus material
- identifying literary and linguistic techniques but failing to effectively link them to the specific use in the creative tasks
- self-evaluation by the student – e.g. 'I think I have been successful'.

**Your Commentary:** See the examples below and the Component 3 course work folder, which achieved full marks, in Google Classroom.

1. Introduction - should say what your theme was and the relationship to your writing of the texts you read. How your reading influenced your writing. You need to say something about genre, audience and purpose either here or later.
2. Write a paragraph on one of your writing tasks (Fiction or non-fiction)– ensure you write about form, structure and language choices you made influenced by your stimulus text
3. Write a paragraph on your other writing task (Fiction or non-fiction) again discuss the form, structure and language choices you made influenced by your stimulus text
4. Continue to integrate your two pieces of writing – if you have chosen to do something in both write about them both in that (or those) paragraphs.
5. Avoid the pitfalls detailed above.

### **Examples of good practice: extracts from commentaries**

Extracts from commentaries:

#### **Commentary extract 1**

This commentary gives a succinct explanation of rationale linked to the theme and core text. There is awareness of audience and reference to the narrative perspective.

*I was inspired to write my literary and non-fiction pieces under the topic of 'Women in Society: Gender Inequality'. My core literature text 'Jane Eyre' provided a wide scope to explore the topic, enabling me to highlight the issues faced by 19th-century women in contrast to the present. This topic demonstrates how differences in socially constructed gender roles have led to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender.*

*I chose to write my literary piece, 'Featherless Bird', in a memoir style to share events of the protagonist's life. I used the first person narrative: 'I couldn't stop thinking of my love', to capture her voice and give the readers an immediate and personal view of her thoughts and experiences. This point of view directly engages the readers, influencing their thoughts and emotions to encourage empathy with the writer. The nouns 'rage, lashes and rape' which are from the lexical field of violence make my literary piece suitable for an adult audience.*

### **Commentary extract 2**

This extract refers to a literary narrative on the theme of Crossing Boundaries. There is evidence of a personal investigation. Lexical choices are explained and there is exploration of the deliberate crafting of the narrative.

*The main protagonist is Amelia and her experiences are based on my grandmother's when she migrated to India in 1943. The novel is about her discovery of the arranged marriage in the Indian culture which leads her to form a stronger relationship with her emotionless mother and her autistic brother as they are forced into a scandal in a post-colonial country.*

*To make the setting more convincing I incorporated Hindi lexis, revealing the personalities of the individuals in the family to come across in their names: 'Savar' means 'The King', 'Nishtha' means 'Faith' and 'Ipsa' means 'Desire', hinting at the hierarchy within the family.*

*Compound modifiers emphasise the Indian culture, using colours, for example, 'coconut-brown'. This type of description coupled with the asyndetic list 'the biggest, warmest, most welcoming smile' encapsulates the friendliness and warmth of the family as they welcome Amelia inside.*

### **Commentary extract 3**

The following extract references a specific style model and gives a precise identification of audience, purpose and mode.

*For my non-fiction piece I decided to write an online blog article for 'The Telegraph' in the style of the journalist Harry Mount for an educated mature audience that would be willing to consider child labour from a different perspective.*

*The blog article is subjective and persuasive and aims to provoke deeper thought into the child labour situation in India and the English interventions into it. Like Harry Mount I focused on my own opinion whilst including differing opinions and case studies from the Channel 4 show 'Unreported World'.*

### **Commentary extract 4**

The following is an extract which evaluates the connection between the main stimulus text and the student's own writing. Specific literary and linguistic techniques are identified and explored.

*The main inspiration for my original writing was the 'southern gothic' style of William Faulkner whose narratives explore the effects of disturbed psychological conditions in realistic, everyday settings.*

*I have created two texts that enable me to explore my theme of paranoia. A short story ('The Janitor'), and a series of blog posts. The two styles show contrasting sides of my theme whilst being inspired by the same source. My main character in 'The Janitor' is inspired by the character Hawkshaw from 'Hair' whose mysterious, repetitive behaviour shows how he has stepped out of time and is biding his time until Susan Reed is old enough to replace Sophie Starnes. I use repetition to show how the janitor is locked into an unchanging routine. I also repeat the onomatopoeic word 'Flash' to highlight the importance of isolation in the story. This helps to build towards a shock ending where it is revealed that the janitor has a whole wall of photographs of a particular schoolgirl. The noun phrase 'The blonde waves ...' links to Hawkshaw's obsession with hair that is 'not brown and not yellow'.*

*I felt it was important to use a third person narrator for 'The Janitor'. This creates a detachment between the reader and the main character, helping to develop a sense of mystery around him.*

### **Commentary extract 5**

*The next extract demonstrates perceptive insight into the rationale, makes clear references to the stimulus texts and effectively applies knowledge of linguistic and literary concepts.*

*Inspired primarily by William Shakespeare's 'King Lear', I became interested in how the society in which an individual lives can catalyse insanity. This is portrayed in my non-literary piece, which addresses the public treatment of mental health. Furthermore, my literary piece portrays the madness caused by the breakdown of society, whose fate is thwarted by an impending apocalypse.*

*My non-literary piece is written as a feature article, enabling me to convey a range of ideas from my research on madness. Mark Haddon's 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' inspired me to explore the issues surrounding mental health. My title 'Depression: The Lowdown' immediately presents the topic and summarises the content of the article. The noun 'lowdown' illustrates a serious and devastating illness, challenging the stigmatising views around depression, thus suiting the contentious nature of the feature article.*

*In contrast, my literary piece, entitled 'A Place We Once Called Earth', delineates the situational madness of a nuclear holocaust in a dystopian style, similar to McCarthy's 'The Road'.*

### **Commentary extract 6**

*This extract discusses the influence of the stimulus texts and the deliberate crafting to produce an effect on the target audience.*

*My literary piece was inspired by Kurt Vonnegut's 'Slaughterhouse 5'; the repetition and exclamatory sentence of 'my God, my God, no!' conveys shock, while also alluding to the unstable minds of those subjected to 'awful times'.*

Ambiguity is conveyed by the use of 'someone' and repeated use of the personal pronoun, 'he'. Inspired by H P Lovecraft's 'He', in which the protagonist remains unidentified, I also presented anonymity in my non-literary piece.

### **Commentary extract 7**

This next extract is an example of thoughtful, sustained analysis and a sensitive response to structure and language.

*Inspired by Julian Barnes' 'The Sense of An Ending', tense changes reflect the retrospective nature of the narrator in my literary piece. For example, the piece begins in the past tense, describing recollections of an 'aged' man, who had a 'deadened' stare. This transgresses into the present tense - 'another bomb wakes me from a moment's transfixion' - portraying the saturated mind of the protagonist, typifying madness itself. Tense changes, alongside the use of dynamic verbs, 'tampering and tinkering', unsettle the reader and portray the disturbed minds of those subjected to a nuclear holocaust. This is further reinforced by fragmented sentences in indirect speech, 'please, please don't do this to me', illustrating a memory from the past and interrupting coherence as memory plagues the protagonist's mind. The disintegration of coherent structure also parallels the disintegration of civilisation; this suits the entertaining nature of a literary piece through empathy, while further conveying the influences an unsettled society can have on an individual's sanity.*

### **Commentary extract 8**

This example demonstrates understanding of the possible interpretations of the stimulus texts and offers a critical evaluation of how meaning is shaped in the student's own writing.

*My magazine article was mostly influenced by 'A Rose for Emily'; it has a gothic semantic field, e.g. 'What had once been a palace was now a tomb'. The juxtaposition of the concrete nouns emphasises the decaying scenery.*

*For 'The Shadow Man' I was also inspired by Patrick McCabe's work and I interpreted his titles into my own in order to introduce each chapter, such as 'A Letter of Complaint' in 'The Dead School' to 'The Poetry of Warning' in my own short story in order to foreshadow events. I also noticed the significance of songs in 'The Dead School' such as 'Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep', which has an underlying meaning of abandonment. This led to the exophoric reference to 'Every Breath You Take' by The Police in 'The Shadow Man'. This also infers the theme of paranoia as the lyrics suggest obsessive stalking; this is ironic as Hannah is being stalked herself. In addition I used Patrick McCabe's idea of manifesting paranoia through physical tendencies 'the nerve ticking over his eye'. I applied this technique by the noun phrase 'trembling hands' and the process adverbial 'shakily (preparing)'.*

### **Commentary extract 9**

The following extract is from a commentary exploring the Gothic theme. There is good exploration of structural and literary features closely related to the theme.

*My main gothic influence in my fiction piece is the theme of nature, as the main symbolism throughout is that of birds, similar to the style of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' as the characters transform into something else. In my drama the pirates represent birds, typically vultures, as they are birds of prey, who hunt and kill, highlighting the danger of the pirates. This links to 'The Raven' as the bird is usually depicted as an omen of bad fortune ... the stage directions create detailed images of the characters transforming ...*

*I have used dualities in my play which is done in 'Wuthering Heights', using the idea of calm versus storm in Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship and in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in the Reverend's relationship with his friend. Order and chaos is shown in the relationship between the pirates and the soldiers.*

### **Commentary extract 10**

The next example gives a close examination of syntax and its effects related to characterisation. A discriminating commentary that highlights specific stylistic characteristics.

*Using 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' as my stimulus text, I was able to draw upon its integral merging of reality and hallucination to inspire my protagonist's visibly unstable condition. Personification ('the door began to quiver in its frame') displays these hallucinations whilst also acting to symbolise Christina's own projected feelings. This is shown particularly through metaphorical references and a consistent use of sibilance here where Christina is describing her experience with the hushed patients ... 'the quivering prey for the silent, starved predator'. This zoomorphic reference is reiterated through the personifying post-modification; 'her nails penetrating the worn leather as if it were the helpless deer', suggesting once more the character's animalistic persona.*

*Structurally, I have used a split narrative to display the variance between the protagonist's past thoughts and present experiences. Occasional irregular sentence structure such as ... 'trite phrases lining, unevenly, those clean walls ...' is designed to add to the disjointed feel of Christina's account. In this example, the sentence structure highlights the adverb 'unevenly' as the key information. Her confusion is also displayed through the oxymoron 'minuscule yet horrific'.*

### **Commentary extract 11**

This commentary extract refers to the theme of Women and Gender Inequality. There is a very clear statement of purpose illustrated by specific examples of literary techniques.

My objective in 'Featherless Bird' was to help my target audience learn from the mistakes and life experiences of the protagonist. I also wanted to evoke thought and shock the reader. 'He would grab me by the neck and tell me not to make a sound.' The title of the task indicates the vulnerability of the protagonist after losing her metaphorical feathers, that is: her wealth, warmth and everything familiar. The readers are then given a sense of hope that her destiny would change for the better: 'Frieda encouraged me ... she had faith that they would forget all my wrongdoings at the sight of my state', only for her situation to get worse. I used a

metaphor; 'Like a wingless bird, I perch in this alley ... wishing I could fly again', in relation to the title to emphasise the extremity of the consequences of the protagonist's refusal to conform to society's expectations.

### **Commentary extract 12**

This extract demonstrates a perceptive interpretation of the stimulus text and an analytical approach to contextual factors with some sustained analysis of lexical choices and how they are employed to develop the chosen theme.

*Inspired by my stimulus text 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood, I have used complex sentences, sensory imagery and metaphors at the beginning to introduce the dystopian theme/mood: 'the click click sound', 'like still water'. I make NoName's room appear like a strange, surreal place outside of the real world. This exaggerates her being on her laptop at night into something abnormal. Having this fairly normal activity described in a complex and figurative way, 'self-spun cocoons in that space of time', makes the audience compare their present-day existence to this dystopia, and consider whether both NoName's actions and their own are the same and could both be seen as weird and unhealthy. The slow pace and direct personal narration, 'Yes, she was named', makes the reader feel uncomfortable and fearful of the dystopia. They then connect this fear to the internet, seeing its effects as detrimental.*

*An important feature of my piece is neologisms, used to create a believable dystopian setting. Atwood uses many neologisms, immediately giving an impression of the future and creating a fear of the unknown in the reader. I used the internet as a source for my neologisms, taking slang from Twitter and Tumblr but using them in real life situations, changing their meaning. This familiarity with the words themselves but not the way they are used make the reader and they connect how this dystopic world could develop from their own.*

### **Commentary extract 13**

The following extract is an example of a succinct conclusion which links the two creative tasks.

*Both pieces highlight the problems that women faced in the 19th century and show how they have progressed over the years: from women's suffrage which was a major subject in Western Europe in the late 19th century to domestic violence which is still a problem today. The memoir focuses on themes of domestic violence, social criticism and class differences while my non-fiction piece focuses more on women in the work force in relation to the feminist movement as a whole.*