

Notes and guidance: NEA

This resource provides extra detail on key areas of the A-level English Language non-exam assessment (NEA).

Overview

Two kinds of individual research

The NEA component requires students to carry out two different kinds of individual research. These are:

- a language investigation (2,000 words excluding data)
- a piece of original writing and commentary (750 words each).

The two NEA tasks do not need to be linked, but individual schools or teachers can encourage this if they wish.

NEA is only for A-level

There's no NEA in the AS, but A-level students may start work on their NEA at any point during their two-year course. Co-teaching doesn't mean that it can't be started until year two. See our [guidance on co-teachability](#) for more information, as well as the [sample schemes of work](#) on our website.

NEA is worth 50 marks

There are 50 marks available in total for the investigation: 25 marks for the original writing piece and 25 marks for the commentary.

The NEA forms 20% of the overall marks of the A-level.

You can see the marks for each AO in the [scheme of assessment](#).

What's changed

Teachers who covered the old AQA B specification will see very little difference in the content of this language investigation.

Teachers familiar with the old AQA A specification will see there is no longer a need to focus solely on spoken data. Students can choose to pursue a study of spoken, written or multimodal data, or a mixture of text types.

Language investigation

What the language investigation assesses

The investigation is marked using the following AOs:

- A01 15 marks
- A02 15 marks
- A03 20 marks.

The AOs are defined in the [scheme of assessment](#).

Students should include a bibliography

Students who do this with references will be more likely to access Level 5 of the A02 mark scheme.

Students can choose any topic

There is scope to do any topic – whether covered by the exams or not even covered as part of the course – but the final decision is down to the teacher and their professional judgement. See more in Language investigation

Teachers who don't feel comfortable supervising and marking an investigation can suggest alternative topics or approaches.

Data needs to be submitted

Students should include cover sheets and clean copies of their data.

Teachers don't need to pre-approve tasks

Teachers do not need to get NEA tasks approved in advance, but allocated NEA advisers can offer advice and guidance if needed.

Ask us for NEA adviser details by emailing English-gce@aqa.org.uk, or calling 0161 953 7504.

Original writing and commentary

The scope of the original writing task

Students will produce one piece of original writing along with a commentary and annotated style model. It must be based on one of the following three areas:

- the power of persuasion
- the power of storytelling
- the power of information.

[Section 4.3.2 of the specification](#) gives enough detail to make a judgement on task suitability.

The specification also provides these examples of potential pieces:

- the power of persuasion
 - a piece of investigative journalism
 - a speech delivered on a controversial topic
 - a letter to an MP
- the power of storytelling
 - a short story
 - an extract from a biography
 - a dramatic monologue
- the power of information
 - a piece of travel journalism
 - a blog focusing on social issues
 - a piece of local history

An NEA adviser is on hand to offer guidance if needed.

Students must demonstrate the power of storytelling, persuasion or information

Writing doesn't need to specifically address the power of storytelling, persuasion or information. The requirement is to demonstrate the power of storytelling, persuasion or information. You can see some examples in the specification of the kinds of tasks which might be undertaken for each of the three titles (eg a short story or a dramatic monologue for the power of storytelling). It is very similar to the legacy ENGB2 unit.

Students can't access A04 without a style model

A student who doesn't submit an annotated style model, or who doesn't refer to it in their commentary, will not be able to access any A04 marks.

Only a single model is needed and the nature of annotation is down to each individual teacher.

See [Original writing](#)

There's no prescribed audience

There's no prescribed audience for the original writing. For example, some individuals prefer to write for children. This will present unfamiliar challenges, so is left to teacher discretion.

There's no prescribed form

There's no prescribed form for the original writing. For example, a chapter in a novel or a short story would be acceptable, providing the commentary explained clearly where it would fit and how it would work and if the style model chosen was appropriate. Any synopsis of the rest of the novel would need to be included in the commentary word count.

A poem or song lyrics would be acceptable, but these carry risks around quality and word count. As with the question of audience, this is left to teacher discretion.

Word count

The language investigation word count is 2,000 words, so encourage a focused question

The word count upper limit is 2,000 words (excluding data). Students might need to think more carefully about the amount of data they collect and how they can select the most relevant material for their investigation question to be answered. This might mean choosing a smaller, more carefully defined data set, and making sure that the research question is focused enough to prevent overly long and/or diffuse analysis.

The structure of the analysis will also need to be considered and students might be encouraged to write using concise and focused analytical sentences, well-chosen subheadings and clear, contextualised examples from the data (which will not count towards the overall word count).

See also: [sample language investigation extract](#).

What is excluded from the word count

Students should exclude:

- quotes from the data
- quotes from the style model
- references
- brief footnotes
- bibliographies.

The original writing and commentary should each be 750 words

There's no penalty for exceeding the word count, which is guidance only, but the student shouldn't assume that 1,500 words can be split across the two at their discretion.

Each item should have a word count of 750 and teachers are advised to guide their students towards this.

Teacher support

Teachers can provide guidance and support

It's important to see jcq.org.uk for instructions. Teachers can provide guidance and support so students are clear about task requirements and marking criteria. Teachers may also provide guidance on task suitability, particularly if students won't meet the requirements of the marking criteria. For more, see [Non-exam assessment administration](#).

When checking draft work, teachers may not comment or provide suggestions for improvement. However, teachers can ask questions about approaches to the task and highlight the requirements of the marking criteria.

Once submitted work has been marked, it can't be returned to the student for improvement.

Teachers can annotate a first draft

Our guidance follows JCQ regulations.

- No marks can be awarded to first drafts.
- Annotations can be made, but only 'at a general level'.

NEA adviser

An NEA adviser is assigned each autumn term and can be contacted at any point during the academic year. Their details will be sent to you.

Please mail English-gce@aqa.org.uk with further questions, or call 0161 953 7404.

There's no more area moderation

All awarding bodies have to comply with conditions of recognition which no longer allow area moderation.

All standardisation is now online

Teachers will be standardised online via onlinestandardisation.co.uk. Teacher online standardisation (T-OLS) shows example work that's been marked by the lead moderator, and users then mark it personally to get instant feedback on how they compare to the standard.