

GCSE English Language (8700) changes: Curriculum Connect 1 April 2025 - FAQs for teachers

Past papers and resources

1. How do I access the practice papers?

The updated sample assessment materials (SAMs) and mark schemes are available on our [website](#). The updated versions show how the changes will look for summer 2026.

2. With Year 10 end of year exams coming up, students and teachers will need to see HOW a top mark answer is written. Any chance this can be made a priority? Can AQA provide model responses for the new questions?

The updated SAMs (Sample set 1) are also suitable to use as mock papers for your Year 10 student cohort and will use the June 2023 Insert. Updated answers and commentaries will be available on our website by the end of April.

3. Is there a timeline for when we will get additional sources and practice papers? We know you're waiting for copyright authorisation but is there a date in mind for us?

We've produced a full set of exam papers which you can use straight away on our [website](#). We're working as fast as we can on this, but creating new or revised exam papers can take time to produce and get copyright approval. We're in the process of creating additional sample papers to support your teaching and learning, and we'll be in touch to let you know when they are ready. To make sure you're the first to hear, you can [sign up](#) for subject updates on our website.

We're also busy working on a *Companion Guide* and additional *Answers and Commentaries* to be available on our [website](#) by the end of April. An eLearning module will also be available in the coming weeks. To make sure you're the first to hear, you can [sign up](#) for subject updates on our website.

4. Can't you just re-use the papers that are already there?

Even for papers that we've used previously, we need to seek copyright permission again from the writers/publishers of the source material and permission is not always granted. Unfortunately, we've no control over how long it might take for permission to be granted.

5. When will you release mark schemes or lists of 'typical features' that we might find on the mark schemes?

The Question 5 mark schemes have additional columns added for 'typical features' at each level. The additional 'typical features' column, seen within the SAMs, will be included on all future mark schemes.

Timings of the changes

1. Why is this for 2026 and not 2027? Not fair to make changes mid GCSE course. Could this be put off and released in 2027?

We wanted to share the updates with you as soon as possible, to support teachers and students by improving the exam experience, rather than wait for reform. From our experience, teaching exam technique and strategy would usually happen later in the two-year GCSE curriculum.

We haven't changed the structure of the papers, mark allocations or the assessment objectives. Timings of papers, weighting of marks and assessment objectives for both papers and all questions remain the same. These are small changes that simply clarify the requirements of the mark scheme. The mark schemes and the expectations of the questions remain the same. We've been delighted with the positive feedback we've received from many of our schools and colleges.

Like you, we've been following the Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review and [responded](#) to both its call for evidence late last year and the [interim report](#) published on 18 March. We share your concerns as English teachers, and we believe that the specification and the texts should match the modern world. The final report and recommendation are due to be published in the autumn.

Paper 1, Question 1

1. Will the sequencing of Question 1 be chronological?

Yes.

2. Will Question 1 be marked by a computer?

Paper 1, Question 1 multiple choice will be auto-marked, meaning that all responses are scanned in and marked online. Responses are grouped based on the response that the student gave (for example, all students who select 2, 3, 1, 2 would be grouped together). Any 'non-standard' responses are manually keyed. Once the student responses are all categorised, the Lead Examiner awards marks based on the student responses for that group.

3. For Question 1, will students get zero marks for ticking more than one question? What do students do if they change their mind?

The instructions will be the same as Paper 2, Question 1.

Paper 1, Question 3

1. Will the focus be explicit in the extract?

Yes, the Paper 1, Question 3 focus will be present in the extract. Question 3 now focuses on a single effect, for example, 'How has the writer structured the text to create suspense?'

2. Why hasn't the support material for Question 3 been updated to reflect the changes?

We're working hard on updating our teaching support materials, and we'll be in touch as soon as they're available. To make sure you're the first to hear, you can [sign up](#) for subject updates on our website.

3. What happens if students write about structure but not the named focus?

If a student writes about structure but not the named focus then this would not be a 'clear' response to the question and will be reflected in the mark awarded.

Paper 1, Question 4

1. The word 'evaluate' has been removed from the bullet points. Are we still teaching students that they should be evaluating the statement?

We've removed the reference to a 'student' making the statement in Question 4. This is to help focus students on the statement itself, making sure that their response offers a critical judgement of the writer and the text, rather than what the imaginary speaker (the student) is saying.

The critical judgement offered by the student (agreeing/disagreeing with the statement) is evaluation. We've changed the second bullet from 'evaluate' to 'comment on' methods to clarify that the focus of this Assessment Objective is evaluation of the text in relation to the statement. This should be supported by analysis of the different methods used by the writer. In summary, students are weighing up their response to the statement, using methods to support their ideas.

2. Currently, this question always has two parts to ensure they write enough for their 20 marks. Will the new structure always have two parts?

Yes.

Paper 1, Question 5

1. **Will the possibility of both Paper 1, Question 5 tasks being two descriptions or two narratives remain, or should we expect one of each?**

These haven't changed, so there will not necessarily always be one narrative and one descriptive writing task.

2. **What would be the consequence for students who write full narratives and not just the opening?**

Students won't be penalised for writing a full narrative and can still access the full range of marks. It's worth following the advice from the June 2024 examiner's report (Report on the exam). Our Lead Examiner references that the weakest responses were "Lengthy, uncontrolled ...where the control over structure, description, characterisation had been lost." This partially stems from students trying to write fully realised stories which has never been a requirement of the assessment.

The June 2024 examiner's report also states that "Responses that were more secure with how to end a narrative also tended to be more successful. These responses did not need to finish the whole story, but rather completed the episode into which the reader had been placed. Not all threads need to be tied up and these students understood this narrative feature."

3. **What do we do about pre-learning Question 5 responses from students?**

We do not recommend pre-learning. Students must respond relevantly to the question in the exam, and a pre-learned response may mean they're not answering the question which would constitute a rubric infringement.

Paper 2, Question 2

1. **What's the motivation behind de-prioritising 'summary' in Question 2? Inference is harder to teach requiring wider contextual understanding/knowledge; summary is a more practical and worthwhile skill at the level of marks available.**

The task is unchanged – it's the wording that's been simplified. Thus, Question 2 has had meaningful changes made to the wording of the question to make it clearer to students what they need to do to gain marks. We believe this is fairer and allows all students to demonstrate their ability to select, infer meaning and synthesise information, as required by the assessment objective.

2. **Paper 2 Question 2 - differences or similarities?**

The question will arise out of the texts chosen - it remains the case that the question could ask for similarities or differences.

3. Will Paper 2 Question 2 always use the word “infer”?

Yes.

Paper 2, Question 4

1. So should students still compare the methods, or can they just discuss the individual methods of each source?

We've changed the second bullet from 'compare' to 'comment on'. To clarify, the focus of this assessment objective is the comparison between the authors' ideas and perspectives. This should be supported by analysis of the different methods used by the two authors but not necessarily by a direct comparison between the methods. This has also been reflected in the skills descriptors in the mark scheme. Thus, the question is a comparison of ideas and perspectives rather than a comparison of methods.

General

1. Will there be a change to time allowance for Paper 2 as candidates are expected to read twice as much in the same time as Paper 1?

No. Timings of papers, weighting of marks and Assessment Objectives for both papers and all questions remain the same.

2. Your specification should reflect these changes; have you modified the spec?

The changes only affect our assessments; the specification hasn't changed. Timings of papers, weighting of marks and Assessment Objectives for both papers and all questions remain the same.

3. What consultation process was undertaken before making these changes? You say it was in response to customer feedback but was this formal or just anecdotal?

We made our decisions based on reflections on teacher feedback in various forms, through feedback after events and trends identified in examiner feedback and student attainment in specific questions.