

A quick guide to marking this question

- E responses = 1-2 paragraphs...poorly written, vague link to question
- D responses = Page...or pages...poorly written...clichéd [these responses sometimes write themselves from a 'C' into a 'D']
- C responses = 2-3 pages...reasonably well written...apparent structure...'safe' with little originality
- B responses = originality
- A responses =
 - 13/15 = 'Great'
 - 14/15 = 'wonderful'
 - 15/15 = 'Wow'

Thou shall...Thou shalt not

While markers are asked to leave their pet hates and prejudices at the door, students;

- Should avoid anything resembling a soap opera script...[If a student avoids this approach, and writes a reasonable narrative, they put themselves in at least the "B" range]
- Should not 'borrow' from films [e.g. I read a few rewritings of *Little Miss Sunshine...and Black Balloon*]
- Should not plagiarise from "Bored of Studies" ...fan fiction sites etc. Suspect pieces are passed on to be Googled and checked.
- Should avoid certain topics as only truly gifted writers can explore them with the sensitivity and control they deserve; death...suicide...illness...rape...abuse...stolen generation. Too many students latch on to these issues in a very inappropriate, lazy, clumsy fashion. These students are penalised for their lack of originality and then marked on their use of language.
- Should avoid issues that are too close or too "raw" to them at present. From our school experience we know that these scripts tend to lack control & perspective.
- Should remember that having lots of violence and blood in their story is not being creative even [especially?] if it includes vampires.
- Should not begin with; "*I am sitting in an examination hall staring at my examination paper...*"
- Should not finish with 'To be continued' as the marker may not return in 2012.

Good writers can break all the 'rules'.

Students therefore, are best avoiding what is labelled by the markers at the centre as; 'The 'A-List'.

- America [i.e. an amalgam of melodramatic minutia from American soap opera]

There were of course some outstanding stories set in other countries based on personal experience or research

- Adoption
- Abuse
- Awakening...dreams, comas
- Arrival
 - new school [so many boring scripts]
 - the migrant [ranged from 'wow' to dreadful]
 - refugees [refugees suffer enough as it is]
- Adolescent Angst
- Anorexia
- Autism...Aspersers
- Alzheimer's
- Addiction...alcohol...drugs...online gaming
- Facebook [A sense of belonging on Facebook...bullied on Facebook]
- Affairs [especially multiple...fascinating reading but still a low 'D']
- Animals [The dog as the first person narrator, "I am outside the door']. Animals and inanimate objects do not work as protagonists or narrators
- Aboriginal [some dreadful narratives on 'The Stolen Generation'... snippets from half remembered RE and History lessons]

Note

- Building a narrative around a creative performance [piano, painting], while often well done, has become a bit of a cliché.
- ...as has attending M L King speech or being there with Rosa Parks

Better responses

- Had an 'authentic' voice, setting, ... "Life can be bizarre but fiction must be realistic" [Unknown]
- Tended to have an original evocative take on a simple everyday scenario.
- Had a tight time frame, which provided essential structure in shorter narratives. Longer timeframe became '**AND THEN**' stories...

"This happened **and then** I went home **and then** I did my creative writing **and then** I got 2/15"

- Created a mood through light/colour/weather
- Sometimes had significance, symbolism...seasons...landscape...doors...windows...water...light
- Did not have tokenistic time shifts
- Tended to develop one character and one event in detail
- Were not dark and depressing...were often poignant & reflective...embellished with some humour and lighter moments
- Had a strong sense of place and location underpinning the sense of Belonging or alienation
- Knew their setting both in terms of time and place extremely well...either from experience or research. There were many brilliantly crafted pieces set in other times and other places.

* My favourite [15/15] was about the relationship between a Chinese girl and her grandmother in Australia. The persona [girl] is really annoyed with her grandmother as she has to go shopping with her, haggle on her behalf, complain on her behalf... They both go on a holiday to their home village in China and the roles are reversed as the young girl does not understand the local dialect of Mandarin

Having read so many bad American soap operas, reading a story with a genuine Australian setting was very refreshing and duly rewarded. Some examples;

* One "A" range story [15/15] I remember had a typical Sydney suburban setting. A young boy walks home from school and quickly joins his hero, his grandfather in the shed. His grandfather is making a piece of furniture and delights in showing his grandson how to use some of the tools. Some of the lines included;

- *'The whistle of the plane as it skated across the wood'...*

- *'The mingling aroma of pop's tobacco and linseed oil'*

- *'The plane struck a knot; "bastard", pop muttered and smiled down at me with a conspiratorial wink'*

Note;

1. The story did not include the word 'Belonging' or any obvious synonym of it. [Weaker scripts hit you over the head with the word. It was carefully highlighted in one script]

2. There was no dialogue [all communication was at most a word...grunt...gesture...a nod of approval...a pat on the shoulder...the love was shown rather than spoken]

* A second 15/15 piece was that about a year 11 boy playing his first game of representative football. He shares his hopes, fears [anxious parents on the sideline] and sense of pride. The writer very cleverly captured both the sense of isolation and team effort on the pitch. The time frame was the last 20 minutes of the game with him coming off the bench to play. It ended with a minute to go with the boy lining up a penalty kick. I am still wondering what the result was.

* A third piece was set on a farm in regional NSW against a backdrop of real place names...Cumborah...Walgett...Narran Lake...It was a wonderful story about a female persona and her relationship with her family before and after the rain broke the drought. The writer struck a wonderful balance between her sense of belonging on the farm and a desire to escape.

Genre/structure

- SF & Fantasy often read like a rehash of their favourite online game. Not genres to experiment with for the first time in yr 12.
- Feature articles/speeches tended to be wooden
- Poems were truly awful but quick to mark
- Horror stories were scary for the wrong reasons
- Journal & diary entries began well but tended to drift into a very colloquial use of language

- Better responses sometimes embedded one text type in another, e.g.
 - A short extract from letter/email/blog within a short story.
 - A brief diary entry, a note.
 - One half of a telephone conversation allowing the reader to reconstruct the other half.
 - A snippet of radio news...newspaper headline...overheard conversation.

Other things to note for 2013 students

- Description and technical detail must be accurate...mistakes or generalisations erode the illusion
- Build different options into your story. You will pick a particular option to suit the question on the day. Allow your story the potential to go in different directions. Think of your narrative as composed of components; setting, locations, characters, narrator, ideas etc. Think about how you could rearrange your story to suit the different aspects of Belonging. Experiment with variations. Demote the main character...promote a minor character. Turn a first person narration into a third person narration...alternate between a sophisticated narrator and a naive narrator. Try using different settings etc
- Write as neatly as possible. Sacrifice length in favour of clarity
- Be as careful as you can with punctuation.
- Clearly mark shifts in time. The more pointers a tired marker gets the better.
- Set out dialogue correctly. It is very irritating to trying to decipher who said what in tangled dialogue. **Use dialogue sparingly.** It should add a significant insight into the story. Avoid meaningless chitchat [ping pong conversation]. Use synonyms for "said" such as "recounted", "declared", "snapped", and "stammered". [Murray, 2003, pg 57.]. If you intend to have a lot of dialogue, then a portion of transcript might be an easier option. Then you are not wasting a lot of time on correct punctuation and layout [Murray, 2003, pg 57.].
- Make sure you know the features and layout of all main text types.