

## Junior Cycle English



### Introduction

As you know, the Department of Education has scrapped the '*Junior Certificate*' English curriculum and replaced it with '*Junior Cycle*' English. The old exam was in need of reform for obvious reasons.

- ✓ The **two papers** contained far too many tasks. This meant that the focus for candidates was on time management and rote learning rather than creativity or quality.
- ✓ The structure of the Junior Cert exam meant that students often became totally '*exam-focused*', and therefore, lost sight of developing the skills that make effective writers and communicators. Instead, focus was placed on short-term strategies designed to produce a high grade in the exam.
- ✓ As a result, many students have achieved high grades into the Junior Cert but have progressed into the Leaving Certificate without the required / expected skills to help them cope and succeed.

Therefore, reform of the examination of English for this age cohort is to be welcomed.

**So what do we know?**

- There will be **one paper** (instead of the old system of Paper 1, which was in essence a ‘creative writing / language’ paper, and Paper 2, which was the ‘literature’ paper.)
- The exam will have sections which will examine both **creative writing** and understanding / knowledge of **prescribed literature**.
- The exam will be **120 minutes / 2 hours long**.
- The exam will be graded out of **180 marks**.

The NCCA have stated that

*“Students will sit a two-hour written examination paper. They will be required to engage with, demonstrate comprehension of, and respond to stimulus material. The content and format of the examination papers may vary from year to year. In any year, the learning outcomes to be assessed will constitute a sample of the outcomes from the tables of learning outcomes.”*

The terminal exam – the paper students will sit next June – will be worth **90%** of the overall grade.

The final exam will be reported using the following grading system:

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>RANGE(%)</b>
Distinction	≥90 to 100
Higher Merit	≥75 and <90
Merit	≥55 and <75
Achieved	≥40 and <55
Partially Achieved	≥20 and <40
(not graded)	≥0 and <20

Students will also be graded on **three tasks to be completed in class**.

These tasks are

- 1) An ORAL COMMUNICATION task.
- 2) A collection of STUDENT TEXTS.
- 3) An ASSESSMENT TASK (AT).

**The AT will account for 10% of the final SEC exam grade** but students will only be able to complete the AT if they have completed the Collection of Texts Classroom Based Assessment.

*The AT is a reflection task. It will require you to look at a piece of work you have produced over the last two years. Your task will be to critically appraise it under a selection of headings. The headings will be given to you by your teacher before you have to complete the AT, so you will have plenty of time to prepare.*

**You do not need to stress about your AT.** It is only worth 10% of your overall grade and therefore will not have a huge impact on the outcome of your exam. Think about it as an opportunity to be creative / imaginative and to illustrate just how good you can be when given time and the opportunity to write about something you are interested in.

The Oral Communication and Collection of Student Texts are both Classroom Based Assessments and **will not be worth any percentage of the final grade of the SEC exam.** They will be reported separately on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement using the Descriptors in the box below:

Classroom Based Assessment Descriptors
Exceptional
Above Expectations
In Line with Expectations
Yet to Meet Expectations

So, there is a lot of information to digest here. However, **the calculation of your final grade will be decided in its entirety by an outside examiner.** You will receive **2 grades** when your results are delivered. The first, as outlined above, will consist of a simple statement of assessment by your teacher on your work and ability. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, compiled by the SEC, will replace the old A,B,C, D, E, F grades with the list presented above.

**Very few candidates will receive a DISTINCTION. It is extraordinarily difficult to achieve 90%+ in an English exam. My aim with you is to help you achieve the best grade you are capable of if you work hard here and in your school throughout the year. It is absolutely possible for you to achieve a Higher Merit grade (75-89%) and that should be our aim.**

**If you achieve that aim, or even exceed it, great. However, if you do not, and instead receive a merit (55-74%), there is no reason to despair or to be ashamed. The only thing you have to do is work hard and consistently. If you do, you will improve. If you do not, you will not. The Dept of Education's ultimate aim is to produce confident writers and users of language. That takes time, and this exam is merely a stepping stone in your development.**

## Course Aims

The Department of Education and the NCCA use typically bureaucratic language (that means that the language they use is often difficult to understand and unclear) in the Junior Cycle English documents and information thus far published. I have read all of them extensively and believe I can sum up the aim of the reformed curriculum succinctly.

- The idea of an exam at intermediate secondary level is a distraction from effective learning.
- The ultimate aim is to get rid of the exam in its entirety.
- The aim is to shift focus away from the achievement of grades and towards developing actual long lasting communication skills.
- These skills, once instilled, will enable students to be both creative and analytical, and will create confident communicators.

These are laudable (praiseworthy) aims, and this course will aim to reinforce and explain the key skills students need in order to excel.

Therefore, the course provided by me will focus on understanding

- 1) The characteristics of good narrative writing / story-telling.
- 2) The characteristics of good argumentative writing.
- 3) The subtleties of persuasive writing.
- 4) The qualities of a strong blog.
- 5) How to write formal letters.
- 6) How to analyse and understand marketing in the media

**The aim is to assist students as you become informed, confident and capable of deconstructing a piece of writing and explaining the qualities of that piece. This confidence and understanding will then naturally aid you when you are presented with a creative task, because you will have a heightened awareness of the aspects of style that result in 'good' writing / communication.**

The study of **literature** remains an integral part of the curriculum. Therefore, the course will also cover **poetry, drama and fiction**. Notes will be provided on the following texts:

#### **Novels**

1. Noughts and Crosses (Marjorie Blackman)
2. The Dare (John Boyne)
3. Jane Eyre (Charlotte Bronte)
4. The Weight of Water (Sarah Crossan)
5. Once (Morris Gleitzman)
6. Lord of the Flies (William Golding)
7. The Outsiders (S.E. Hinton)
8. To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee)
9. Chalkline (Jane Mitchell)
10. Animal Farm (George Orwell)

11. True Grit (Charles Portis)

12. Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck)

#### **Drama**

- 1) A Midsummer Night's Dream (William Shakespeare)
- 2) Henry IV, Part I (William Shakespeare)
- 3) The Merchant of Venice (William Shakespeare)
- 4) Romeo and Juliet (William Shakespeare)