

International Advanced Level
Subject: English Literature
The need for Transferable Skills

Sources: Cognitive/Intrapersonal and Interpersonal skills adapted and taken from the NRC framework

In recent years, higher education institutions and employers have consistently highlighted the need for students to develop a range of transferable skills to enable them to respond with confidence to the demands of undergraduate study and the world of work. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines skills, or competencies, as ‘the bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learned and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task and can be built upon and extended through learning’.

To support the design of our qualifications, the Pearson Research Team selected and evaluated seven global 21st-century skills frameworks. Following on from this process, the team identified the National Research Council’s (NRC) framework as the most evidence-based and robust skills framework, and have used this as a basis for our adapted skills framework.

The framework includes cognitive, intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills. These skills have been interpreted to ensure they are appropriate for this subject. All of the skills listed are evident or accessible in the teaching, learning and/or assessment of the qualification.

Identifying and highlighting these skills in International Advanced Level qualifications ensures that it is not only the academic and cognitive skills that are developed, but those broader elements that universities highlight as being essential for success. Skills such as self-directed study, independent research, self-awareness of own strengths and weaknesses and time-management are skills that students cannot learn from a textbook but have to be developed through the teaching and learning experience that can be provided through an international curriculum.

In the tables below, we have taken the NRC framework skills and provided definitions of how each skill can be interpreted for this subject. This will enable teachers and learners to understand examples of how they can develop each skill through an International Advanced Level qualification.

NRC framework skill	Skill interpretation in this subject	Where the skill is covered in content	Where the skill is explicitly assessed in examination	Opportunity for the skill to be developed through teaching and learning approach
Cognitive skills				
Cognitive Processes and Strategies				
Critical thinking	Moving beyond a surface reading; examining the writer's craft; discovering how meanings are created through language, form and structure; awareness that a single interpretation may not be enough and that personal judgments should be weighed against the opinions of others, possibly over different periods in time; recognising that characters are constructs not real people and therefore being aware how everything is being manipulated by the writer.	The AOs require this, but it is especially addressed in AO2, and texts have been selected to be usefully productive when closely analysed. Recognition of different interpretations covered in AO5, and awareness of context in AO3. Unseen passage in WET03 requires students to apply critical skills without falling back on what has previously been taught about a studied text.	Some questions start with an offered point of view, e.g. in WET02. All questions involve the phrase “how does (writer)...” to avoid candidates simply writing about what happens in a text, or what the actual characters themselves do.	Debating, whenever the opportunity arises, and giving students the confidence to express ideas and weigh them against others. Close reading of a range of texts, not always, necessarily, ones being studied for exams, but looking at a range of passages "unseen" to appreciate what writers are doing and how they do it.
Problem solving	Comprehension of often challenging texts, especially where figurative language is deployed in a way that makes interpretation of literal meaning alone an inadequate response.	The "unseen" element in WET03 where meaning needs to be unraveled; AO2 specifically refers to the discovery of how language, form and structure create meanings.	Section A, WET03 (Poetry & Prose) Write a commentary on an unseen poem.	Class discussion in which students explore a range of possible interpretations to discover meaning.
Analysis	Using quotation in order to scrutinise individual words; explore how a writer has achieved effects through grammar and syntax.	AO2 (how meanings are shaped) is assessed throughout the specification.	In WET04 (Shakespeare and pre-1900 poetry) questions ask how a theme “is presented” and the mark schemes make it clear that close reference to the text is required.	Setting tasks that require students to back up points by finding relevant quotation; spending time examining a writer’s choice of words.

Reasoning/argumentation	Being able to debate a topic and not just repeat answers that have been learnt.	AO5 requires students to consider “other interpretations”.	An assertion is often offered to students, who are then called on to respond to it “in the light of this statement”, for example in WET01 (Post-2000 Poetry & Prose).	Exposing students to a range of critical opinions through books and the internet; enabling them to make reasoned judgements on the basis of their wider critical reading; perhaps providing them with a collection of critical essays put together by the teacher.
Interpretation	Decoding what is written to discover explicit or implicit meanings; in drama realising how writing can be interpreted on the stage; awareness of media interpretations of texts.	AO5 is concerned with “different interpretations”; AO3 with interpretation resulting from contextual awareness; AO2 interpretation through language form and structure.	The word “explore” is used throughout WET02 when considering drama – “explore Beckett’s presentation of hope and hopelessness in ‘Waiting for Godot’ ” for example.	Looking at adaptations of texts for film to see how they can be interpreted; writing essays which demonstrate a clear understanding of a text using student’s own original thinking as proof of comprehension.
Decision making	Arriving at an individual response having considered alternative judgements and making this clear in speaking and writing; making an informed judgement about a text’s purpose and value; selecting relevant material and argument when writing an essay.	All the AOs involve an element of decision making as students have to decide how to use their texts to address them; WET01 & WET04 give students a poem from a collection and require them to choose another of their own choice to make a suitable comparison.	WET01 offers the suggestion that ‘Brooklyn’ would “have been better told through the first person narrative of Eilis”: students must decide the extent to which they agree or disagree with this.	Essay writing and discussion to arrive at decisions about texts (even if the decisions are that there is not a single straightforward answer); looking at a range of possible essay questions on a text and deciding which approaches are most suitable for which questions.
Adaptive learning	Responding to unfamiliar texts and adjusting any preconceived ideas in the light of them; ability to be flexible and appreciate differences in perception across time, different cultures and beliefs.	AO3 (context); AO5 (interpretations).	In WET03 (Poetry & Prose) novels are grouped by theme (e.g. “women and society”) where students need to consider the interpretation of that theme in two linked texts.	“Before” and “after” discussion: students’ perception of an issue before and after studying a text that deals with it.
Executive function	The successful carrying through of a planned activity, whether essay writing or completion of a whole topic such as studying a novel or play and being able to discuss it afterwards.	The specification requires students to complete essays in response to set questions; these will reflect the preparation, thinking and practice that has taken place previously.	Each paper requires essays to be written.	Practice at writing plans; breaking down arguments into stages before putting them together as complete essays.
Creativity				
Creativity	Having an element of originality and fresh thinking in responding to texts, as opposed to repeating what has been taught.	The specification is designed to encourage freshness and originality in the questions set: this is reflected in mark schemes which reward this approach.; the “Qualification aims and objectives” section of the specification aims to make students “engage critically and creatively with texts.” Students.	WET03 (Poetry & Prose) links writers from different eras, (e.g. Charles Dickens and Alice Walker) requiring students to make original connections.	Presenting students with challenging and original interpretations in the form of assertions about literature to which they can respond in a fresh and creative way.
Innovation	Developing creativity further to introduce a fresh concept.	AO5 requires students to take into account the views of others and formulate an independent position of their own in the light of this.	WET04 offers a point of view and asks students to respond to the text “in the light of this comment.”	Constantly challenge students’ ideas by developing the technique above to ask what new ideas they can bring to the subject.

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Intrapersonal skills				
Intellectual openness				
Adaptability	Ability to listen to the views of others when discussing a set text; ability to respond to the unfamiliar when presented with an unseen text.	AO5 requires students to respond to the interpretations of others and consider their own views in the light of this.	WET03 offers an unseen poem; WET01 & WET04 require reconsideration of a familiar poem in the light of a given statement.	Discussion and debate; considering wide range of different texts outside of the prescribed list to prepare for unseen poem and to broaden perspectives.
Personal and social responsibility	Heightened sense of moral values stemming from a study of literature; recognition of relevance to the present day and to oneself.	Selection of set texts and unseen material which is appropriate for making students think seriously and responsibility about themselves and society.	Writers such as Emily Bronte (WET03) addressing social and moral concerns in Victorian England; questions designed to make this relevant by introducing a modern text by Toni Morrison as a comparison.	Linking the discussion of literature in class to happenings in the outside world.
Continuous learning	Planning and reflecting on one's own learning in and out of the classroom; setting goals and meeting them in a continually developing fashion; learning for life, in the expectation that reading will continue beyond A level.	Structure of the specification enables students to sit the units on a modular basis if required; the stated aims of the specification are "to define and assess achievement ... that will be needed by students planning to progress to undergraduate study..."	WET03 & WET04 bring together the skills in a synoptic way through addressing all the Assessment Objectives.	Peer review; teachers and students setting targets; looking back at work done earlier in the course and seeing how ideas have developed or changed.
Intellectual interest and curiosity	Independent study, including students' own research.	Wide range of texts - as stated in the specification "up to date, relevant and engaging to an international audience using a combination of classic and international texts."	Texts such as 'The White Tiger' (WET01) present a challenging view of the world, often controversially, with questions being set to match this.	Providing students with material related to their texts which will stimulate them and make them think further.
Work ethic/conscientiousness				
Initiative	Going beyond what is required, to follow through an idea or interest.	The specification invites exploration and imposes no limits; all five AOs lead to the skill of evaluation in the top band and originality is rewarded.	Questions invite a personal response which requires the student to have had the initiative to think through a reaction to the text: WET02 asks about 'Waiting for Godot' - "we find ourselves laughing as we watch the play" (despite the awfulness in it).	Allowing students to give presentations, based on their own findings - for example about a particular personal, idiosyncratic reading of a text; or report on a piece of original research.

Self-direction	Showing ability to plan an essay without having it scaffolded by the teacher.	Alternative questions offered for every text; AO1 looks for work that “evaluates” – i.e. students have come to their own conclusions.	The rubric in the papers - “You must consider contextual factors” - requires students to move away from reciting their historical knowledge to demonstrate the ways their appreciation is enhanced by discoveries they have made.	Setting research tasks, followed up by students giving presentations; encouraging wider treading by introducing texts not on the set book list but which illuminate the ones being studied (perhaps by the same author, or belonging in the same period).
Responsibility	Taking responsibility for any errors or omissions in work and creating a plan to improve; recognising that much of the work in this subject - such as reading and rereading the set texts in the first place - is the student’s own responsibility.	AO1 involves accurate writing and expression that has been checked by the student; the collection of set texts which the student is going to be responsible for reading.	“Check your answers if you have time at the end” is the injunction on the front page of every paper.	Give students the sense that the responsibility for doing well in this subject is theirs, so, in addition to handouts and worksheets, encourage them to produce their own learning materials which are perhaps shared with the rest of the class. Avoiding dictating notes where other options are more productive and put responsibility back on the learner.
Perseverance	Actively seeking new ways to continue to improve own learning despite setbacks, with willingness to re-draft, undertake further reading or keep at a task until completed.	The substantial nature of the specification, with its range of set texts across different times and cultures and the in-depth study required: students will need to have persevered through a rigorous course of study to be successful.	The injunction “explore” on all the papers means that students are now reflecting on the course through which they have persevered.	The skill of redrafting should be practised: students should not accept that work cannot be improved. Saving early drafts of work and comparing them with an improved version can also be helpful.
Productivity	Continuous production of work to the students’ best standard throughout the course.	Requirement of a substantial amount of written work through the eight hours of exams.	Two substantial writing tasks are set on each paper.	Practice at sustained writing, beyond notes and bullet points: writing under exam conditions; also giving students opportunities to write at greater length than might be required in a timed exam in order to develop ideas.
Self-regulation (metacognition, forethought, reflection)	Being self-critical; developing the ability and confidence to comment on one’s own work and assess it in terms of strengths and weaknesses.	The Assessment Objectives are stated clearly in the specification and students are able to check that they are meeting them, and giving them the due weightings required.	WET01 for example assesses all the AOs, except AO5, with AO3 missing from Part A. Students need to adjust their responses to match these requirements.	Students share observations about their own work and sample essays, learning how to recognise strengths in tackling questions relevantly and responding to AOs; ensuring that the distribution of AO weightings across the papers is properly understood; being able to make sound judgements about their own work.
Ethics	Responding to the moral and ethical aspects of texts; interpreting these in the light of context; sensitivity to the value of these aspects to oneself as a modern reader; recognising didactic literature but also texts in which the ethical implications are more subtle.	Choice of set texts reflects moral and ethical values across time.	In WET04 there are the Divine poems in the Metaphysical Poetry section and the direct addressing of moral and ethical issues in Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure”.	Teaching students to recognise a writer’s purpose, whether to convert, inspire or question; debating the ethical issues that arise from texts such as “The White Tiger” in WET01.
Integrity	Taking ownership of one’s own work and willingly responding to questions and challenges; employing working methods which are honest and appropriate; avoiding any kind of deception about how work was produced.	The specification is clear on candidate malpractice, which “undermines the integrity of the qualifications or the validity of results/certificates.”	All questions seek to elicit a genuine original answer from candidates in the way they are phrased; they do not require reiteration of the work of others.	Guidance on the correct use of internet sources; showing students how to make ideas their own; avoiding going to internet sources first before making one’s own attempts at a question.

Positive Core Self Evaluation				
Self-monitoring/self-evaluation/self-reinforcement	Developing the self-motivated habit of planning, completing and reviewing one's own work as a matter of habit, critically and constructively.	All the AOs call for a degree of reflection – AO1 in the shaping of ideas in an essay, for example, and AO5 in reflecting on one's own judgement, weighing it against the opinions of others.	In WET 04 an opinion is given about a Shakespeare play which may well challenge ideas that the student has held previously. The injunction part of the question requires the student to respond to the play in the fresh light of this assertion.	Giving students good clear feedback on their written work so that they can move on to the next step of being able to judge their work for themselves and be self-critical.

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Interpersonal skills				
Teamwork and collaboration				
Communication	Expressing ideas, arguments and responses to texts through discussion and in writing, in such a way to make meaning clear to others; employing an appropriate range of vocabulary and literary terms; doing so with accuracy and fluency.	AO1: "articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts..."	Every question in every unit assesses this skill. The cover of each question paper reminds students to "read each question carefully" and "check your answers if you have time at the end."	Formative assessment, giving feedback on written work throughout the course; hot seating a character from a text, debating issues arising from texts, acting scenes from plays.
Collaboration	Sharing work with others in a research task or discussion on a literary theme; putting ideas together.	AO5 is concerned with different interpretations: students can write about ideas that have been shared over the duration of the course.	Giving a point of view for the student to respond to - for example Section A of WET04 - where a student's individual response can have been enriched through sharing ideas.	The sharing of ideas throughout the course; students can see others' work in progress and comment; class and teacher work together on how best to tackle a question.
Teamwork	Working with others on researching a theme; putting together and rehearsing a presentation.	AO5 as with Collaboration (above).	Responding to an assertion, as with Collaboration (above).	Where the class size allows it, work can be done in groups and a team can put together a scene from a play, to illustrate various ways of interpreting a text.
Co-operation	Sharing resources and ideas with other students; students co-operating with teachers to achieve best results; where appropriate teachers working with each other and students learning to accept their differing points of view.	The selection of a challenging range of set texts, written across different periods of time, ensures that students have been prepared in co-operation with others rather than working in isolation.	The "unseen" poem in WET04 gives students the opportunity to arrive at interpretations based on their experience of looking at poetry in co-operation with others, sharing ideas, etc.	Group work; team teaching; continual sharing of resources.

Interpersonal skills	Using verbal and non-verbal communication skills in a discussion; being receptive to, and tolerant of others.	AO1 is about the ability to transfer ideas and arguments that have previously formed part of a discussion onto paper; AO5 specifically requires students to entertain more than a single notion.	WET02 asks students to explore an idea about <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> that can only have been properly developed through previous discussion with other people and, ideally, with both males and females: “we shouldn’t be shocked by Stanley’s attitude and his violent behaviour....”	Classes run on a discussion basis throughout the course.
Empathy/perspective taking	Advocating the position of another in an oral presentation during a discussion of a literary subject; seeing something from a character’s point of view in a text; recognising how a writer has attempted to manipulate the reader into responding in a certain way to a fictional character.	AO5 is assessed across the specification: “explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.”	WET02 starts a question on <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> with an assertion which requires students to look from a character’s perspective: “Blanche’s tragedy is that she doesn’t belong anywhere and has no useful role to fulfil.”	Taking sides and arguing a case in discussion, even if it is an argument the student does not personally support; re-interpreting a text with a changed viewpoint (seeing the events in a play, for example, through a particular character’s eyes.).
Negotiation	Debating a topic, attempting to reach shared conclusions with others, compromising where appropriate using negotiation skills.	AO5 (as above); AO1 in looking at the construction of an essay, especially its conclusion, to see how different ideas might be reconciled.	WET03, section B, links texts which explore a given theme in different ways; essay questions are set which require students to show they have debated and reached conclusions.	Discussion with a particular focus on intellectual humility and an awareness that no single voice should have autonomy.
Leadership				
Leadership	Steering others by taking a leading part in a discussion or group task; having confidence.	Questions are set which, whilst requiring students to be open minded and receptive to different interpretations, also require a confident voice, acquired through the experience of promoting an opinion.	AO1 looks for robust argument, presented in a confident way.	Balancing the different demands of AO1 and AO5: ensuring that, whilst being prepared to listen to others and appreciate others’ points of view, students have the confidence to take the lead when required in discussion or group work.
Responsibility	Taking responsibility for one’s own learning; behaving responsibly towards others and not giving offence, especially when sensitive topics are raised by texts.	Knowledge of set books and knowing about context are tested; the results will reflect the degree to which responsibility for learning and practising has been in evidence.	WET01 has texts which reflect different cultures and religions; written responses reveal the responsible way in which topics have been discussed.	Giving students the chance to progress without excessive teacher interference in order to reinforce the fact that they are responsible for their own learning; ensuring that students behave responsibly towards each other and in the case of meeting deadlines.
Assertive communication	Developing an appropriate vocabulary and persuasive style to direct others and emphasise key points in an argument. In writing, putting forward a clear, well argued case.	The “Qualification aims and Objectives” statement in the specification requires students to “engage critically and creatively”, and “develop and effectively apply knowledge”.	Injunctions in the questions require confident responses: “Explore” in WET01, 02, 04 and “compare” in WET01, 03.	Giving students the chance to give short, to the point, rigorously argued talks to the rest of the group, arguing for a particular interpretation of a text.
Self-presentation	Presenting a topic to a class; giving a personal view of a text along the lines of what it means to the speaker, personally.	AO1 is about expressing oneself in an appropriate way.	The tasks and the accompanying mark schemes indicate that a “critical and evaluative” (the description of level 4 in WET04) approach is well rewarded.	Giving students the confidence to realise that their own point of view arises from their own uniqueness; what they bring to a text is valuable, and their reading of it, if well supported and thought through, will be listened to.