

Hamlet : Applying knowledge in the examination

Section A part i: Extract / 15

AO1 (5 marks)

AO1 will assess your ability to engage with the extract and respond to the question. Apply your knowledge and understanding of the play to working out what is taking place in the extract and thinking about what the audience is watching. You should use relevant concepts and terminology in constructing your response to a literary text. Remember to organise your answer carefully, and to write using an academic register.

Top Tip: It can be useful to begin with some overview of how the extract is positioned within the play, before offering a close reading and analysis of this particular extract.

AO2 (10 marks)

AO2 will assess your analytical skills as you discuss Shakespeare's use of language and dramatic techniques to create meaning. Considerations in response to an extract from *Hamlet* might include Shakespeare's use of form and structure, e.g. prose or blank verse; the dramatic significance of a soliloquy or dialogue within the extract, any dramatic irony or staging effects. Analyse Shakespeare's use of themes and imagery to convey meaning in depicting characters, ideas, situation, attitudes.

Top Tip: Consider the question 'what is the meaning here and how is it shaped?' and focus on analysing the meaning of the extract in relation to the question focus, whether it may ask you about Shakespeare's presentation of characters/attitudes/relationships/ideas/thoughts and feelings. Look for any word patterns in the extract which seem significant in communicating meaning.

Section A part ii: Essay / 45

AO1 (5 marks)

AO1 will assess your knowledge and understanding of the play as a whole and your skills at organising your ideas in shaping your response to the question. You should take time to consider what the question is asking, and break up the question into key strands. You must try to address each strand presented in the question. Make time to plan your response and organise your knowledge of the text into relevant banks of material for the essay. You must consider which key concepts, relationships and themes within the play need to be addressed in light of the question. In terms of terminology, when considering for example Hamlet as a tragic hero, you could apply your knowledge of the elements of tragedy derived from Aristotle, such as hubris (excessive pride), hamartia (tragic flaw), anagnorisis (recognition of error) and catharsis (the releasing of pity and fear at the end of the play).

AO2 (10 marks)

AO2 will assess your analytical skills as you discuss Shakespeare's use of language and dramatic techniques to create meaning. It is vital that your essay is anchored in textual evidence and that you can refer precisely and accurately to Shakespeare's use of language and dramatic techniques as you navigate through the question. Selecting concise quotations can strengthen opportunities to link relevant contextual and critical discussion of the play. In responding to an essay question on *Hamlet*, apply your knowledge and understanding where relevant of features such as the use of dramatic devices such as the play within the play, or Hamlet's frequent soliloquising. In terms of discussing imagery, apply where relevant your knowledge of patterns of imagery, such as corruption and disease. Apply relevant knowledge of key aspects of Shakespeare's presentation of characters/attitudes/relationships/ideas/thoughts and feelings. Considering the impact of the language on the audience and the dramatic significance of actions is also an effective method of addressing AO2 e.g. Hamlet's killing of Polonius (3:4) and the significance of the skull (5:1).

AO3 (30 marks)

AO3 assesses your understanding of the significance and influence of contexts in how texts are written and received. It is important to show at all times links between text and contexts, rather than writing about contexts in isolation. Successful responses will integrate discussion about contextual significance/influence into their argument, drawing where relevant on literary, cultural, political, religious and social contexts, such as:

- the revenge tragedy tradition
- religious ideas and beliefs about the supernatural
- the Elizabethan Chain of Being.

AO5 (15 marks)

AO5 assesses your ability to articulate relevant critical discussion of the text in response to the question. You must demonstrate some critical judgement by engaging with the expressed critical view in the question. You must also consider other critical views or interpretations of the play which are relevant to your argument. It is important to apply your knowledge of such views to advancing your own argument. You can also gain credit here by exploring alternative ideas and multiple interpretations of the text, which might include stage productions. It's useful to think of a critical view as a lens through which to look at the play.

Some examples of critical discussion:

Bloom, H (2003) *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (Canongate);

Bradley, AC (1991) *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Penguin Classics);

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/hamlet-and-revenge>;

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09jqtf5> (BBC Radio 4's In Our Time on *Hamlet*)