CONTENTS

How to use ................................................................. iv

Chapter 1: The English exam
   The structure of the exam ........................................... 1
   Mark weighting ......................................................... 2
   Preparing for the exam .............................................. 4
   Advice for approaching the exam ............................... 6

Chapter 2: Analytical interpretation of a text
   Overview ........................................................................ 8
   The core of textual analysis ......................................... 9
   Exam criteria ............................................................. 14
   Sample responses .................................................... 16
   Ten exam tips ......................................................... 32

Chapter 3: Comparative analysis of texts
   Overview ........................................................................ 33
   Exam criteria ............................................................. 42
   Sample responses .................................................... 43
   Ten exam tips ......................................................... 64

Chapter 4: Argument and persuasive language
   Overview ........................................................................ 65
   Exam criteria ............................................................. 70
   Sample responses .................................................... 72
   Ten exam tips ......................................................... 81
Chapter 3  Comparative analysis of texts

This second section of the exam is officially entitled ‘Comparative analysis of texts’ and requires close textual analysis and comparison of two texts.

OVERVIEW

This section of the exam is an entirely new element in the exam, as of 2017. While the ‘Creating and Presenting’ Area of Study in the previous version of the Study Design required students to read and reflect on the ideas in two set texts, there was no requirement to directly compare them, nor to overtly analyse them. Formerly, a single unseen prompt was given for students to write on, in a manner of their own choosing. Now, two unseen topics will be provided for each of the eight pairs of texts. Students must focus on their selected topic, and resolve its key question, through the close comparative analysis of both texts.

The official VCAA Study Design asks students to ‘explore the meaningful connections between two texts’. Therefore students should juxtapose and overtly compare and contrast the key ideas within the texts, and also explore how these ideas are conveyed ‘including the interplay between character and setting, voice and structure’. There is an explicit expectation that students engage in the ‘comparative analysis’ of such set texts and also to discuss the features of texts ‘used by authors to convey ideas, issues and themes, such as settings, events and characters’. Therefore, students’ writing should capture and reflect both of these facets and dimensions.

The essence of this task is to compare the ways in which major ideas and issues, as identified in an unseen topic, are explored in the two paired texts, and to contrast the messages presented in each text. All eight pairs of texts have been carefully selected. Although they feature different time periods, settings and storylines, there are connections between issues and ideas in each pairing. Students should focus on the extent to which similar or different views are presented about specific issues and themes, and how this has been achieved by the creators of the texts.

When approaching the paired texts, it is important not to oversimplify or limit the ideas, issues and themes which may be meaningfully connected. Since this exam section is officially termed ‘Comparative analysis of texts’, it is important that students closely analyse the inner workings of both texts, in a similar way to that expected for Section A of the exam. The intentional structure and inner elements of both texts must be closely examined and reflected upon. Then, when a comparison is made between the paired texts, students should explore precise similarities and differences, and meaningfully comment upon them.

Writer’s toolbox

When researching previous VCAA exam papers and other sample exam papers, students should note that the former Section B of the exam is no longer relevant. The new Section B is an entirely new element in the exam, as of 2017.
Specific skills required
An array of skills is needed to competently and confidently approach this section of the exam.
These include demonstrating an ability to:
- analyse and reflect upon the issues, ideas and themes which arise in the set texts, and meaningfully explain these in writing
- identify the relevant elements, experiences, events, people, relationships and situations in the texts, which reveal significant aspects of these identified issues, ideas and themes
- explain and analyse similarities and differences between texts by presenting connected ideas, issues and themes
- explore the ways in which character, setting, voice and structure operate in each text, and compare and contrast how this has been achieved
- explain and analyse the impact of the choices made by the authors or filmmakers in conveying and exploring their perspectives on the key issues
- use close and specific textual evidence, including quotations, to appropriately support and substantiate such comparison
- appropriately and assuredly approach unseen essay topics that focus on a specific issue or idea which arises in both texts, and being able to juxtapose this with precision and depth.

The topics
There are five possible forms of essay topics for this part of the exam. The exam-setting panel might use any of these in the topics developed for each pairing of texts. As for Section A, students should practise all styles and approaches in the lead-up to the exam.

■ A PROPOSITIONAL STATEMENT AND KEY TERM EXTRACTED FROM THIS IN A STEM
An example of this type of topic: ‘Where societies are rigidly controlled, individuality is almost impossible.’ What do these texts suggest about the capacity to be an individual? (Stasiland and Nineteen Eighty-Four)
This topic contains a statement which forms the central basis for thinking. It is presented as a proposition in quotation marks, to be carefully considered and its applicability tested, by students applying their knowledge of the two paired texts. By repeating a key element from the statement in the stem that follows (in the above example, ‘individual’), there is a clear indication that this should form the nucleus of the textual comparison.

■ A PROPOSITIONAL STATEMENT WITH A GENERIC STEM
An example of this type of topic: ‘In times of extreme crisis, individuals are often unfairly targeted.’ Explore points of comparison in the way this issue is dealt with in the two texts. (The Crucible and Year of Wonders)
This topic contains a statement which forms the central basis for thinking. It is presented as a proposition in quotation marks, to be carefully considered and its applicability tested, by students applying their knowledge of the two paired texts.
The generic stem that follows the proposition, in the example above, directs a student to focus on the different approaches taken in each text, to present and explore this central idea.

**A QUOTATION FROM ONE OF THE PAIRED TEXTS WITH A RELATED PROPOSITION**

An example of this type of topic: “...the most difficult part of any endeavour is taking the first step”. (*Tracks*)

‘It is not success that matters most, but actually taking risks into the unknown.’ Compare how *Tracks* and *Into the Wild* explore the idea that risk-taking is admirable.

This topic is a quotation from one of the paired texts, with a related proposition. By opening with a quotation from one of the paired texts, there is clear indication that this represents not only a key moment, but also one in which an essential point is being made about a core issue, theme or idea. The subsequent proposition has been developed to directly connect with and reinforce what is revealed in the textual quotation. The central idea must be explored in connection to both texts, but the example provided in the quotation ought to be overtly referred to in the essay.

**TWO QUOTATIONS, ONE FROM EACH OF THE PAIRED TEXTS, WITH A STEM OR A CONNECTED PROPOSITION**

An example of this type of topic: “My son, whose dreams were such that he argued his children would be free.” (*The Longest Memory*)

“I don’t want to join in. I don’t belong.” (*Black Diggers*)

‘Societies often exist only for those who represent the racial majority.’ Compare what the two texts suggest about the difficulties of racial minorities gaining acceptance.

This topic uses a quotation from each of the paired texts, followed by a proposition. The quotations represent key moments in the texts, as well as an essential point that is being made about a core issue, theme or idea for direct comparison. The subsequent proposition has been developed to connect with and reinforce what is revealed in the quotations. The central idea must be explored in connection to both texts, and the examples provided in the two quotations ought to be overtly referred to in the emerging essay.

**A DIRECT QUESTION RELATING TO ONE ESSENTIAL IDEA**

An example of this type of topic: What do *Invictus* and *Ransom* suggest about the real nature of strength in men?

This topic is a direct question. Students should consider all the potential dimensions of the topic in order to provide a meaningful textual comparison. It must not be minimised, but rather extended to ensure that its wider ramifications are effectively considered and explored.

**Opening up the paired texts**

There is a significant number of issues, ideas, concepts and themes which can be meaningfully compared and contrasted in each of the paired texts. By pairing decidedly unalike texts, the exam panel has attempted to ensure that comparisons will be insightful and reflect the wider intentions of the writers and filmmakers of these set texts.
Initially, students should ask some questions about these paired texts, including
the following.
• What aspects of the different contexts (place, time, situation) of these texts are
  noticeably similar or decidedly different?
• How unique or distinctive are the circumstances presented in each text and how do
  these generate the main messages being advocated?
• To what extent has the textual plot reflected real events, and how has this impacted
  on the way in which each text is presented?
• To what extent do key characters grow or change through the challenges they
  encounter and to what extent is this similar or different in each text?
• Are certain characters the main vehicle for the author or filmmaker to present
  their views?
• How do specific characters in the two texts align or contrast?
• Which comments made by, or about, the protagonists in each text embody
  connected ideas or concepts?
• What is revealed through major relationships in each text, and how significant is it?
• What are the similarities and differences in the apparent intentions of the authors?
• To what extent are conflicting ideas being
  advocated in each text?
• What are the main ideas, issues and
  themes raised and explored in each text, and how is this achieved?
• How does each text conclude and to what extent does this impact in a similar or
different way upon the audience?

To assist this process, students should
develop a detailed document which
compares and contrasts both texts, focusing
on situation, character, catalysts, key
quotations, major issues and ideas.

Pivot to success
Students often use one of their paired texts as a central pivot, around which the second
text will be consciously juxtaposed. Having such a pivot ensures that there is ongoing
comparison throughout the essay, regardless of the structure adopted. This does not
mean that one of the paired texts is more significant than the other. Rather, by using
one text as the central point of comparison, students can make more meaningful
contrasts with the other text.

Although the VCAA lists the paired texts in a particular order, there is no requirement
that students follow this order. The texts are considered equally important. The most
important consideration for students should be to order the texts to achieve the most
effective comparison for their individual response.

For example, for the paired texts The Crucible and Year of Wonders, a topic may be:
‘When tested in a crisis, humans can surprise or horrify.’ Compare the way these
two texts deal with this issue. A student may decide to open by focusing on Year of Wonders, since this may enable them to confidently examine the Eyam villagers’ dilemma in dealing with the outbreak of plague as a severe crisis. This would be just as acceptable as concentrating first on The Crucible and the crisis which ensues from the perceived outbreak of witchcraft in Salem. Ultimately, students should determine the order of textual examination, using their own pivot choice based on their textual appreciation and close analysis.

**Structuring the comparative essay**

There are several ways to structure a comparative analytical text essay. Whatever their structure, essays must include overt textual comparison as well as close textual analysis, in a manner which deals directly with the chosen topic.

One common element of high-ranking comparative essays is the way in which the essay opens and closes. Both the introduction and the conclusion will clearly need to clarify the understanding of the views or issues raised in the topic, and also to establish a comparative approach between the two texts, using the pivot principle.

The essay should be substantial both in length and coverage. Given that it has a larger scope than that of an analytical text response essay, it is reasonable to assume that the introduction and conclusion should be somewhat longer and more complex than those in Section A essays.

A sample essay introduction is included here.

**Topic:** ‘By distorting the truth governments can readily control individuals.’ Compare what Nineteen Eighty-Four and Stasiland say about the power gained by controlling truth.

The intentional manipulation of the truth, and its deliberate distortion so as to maintain control, is observed first-hand both in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Stasiland. For both the Stasi and the Inner Party, rigid and reliable control must be unchallenged. Therefore, since the ruling elite are all-powerful, the individual is seen to be utterly expendable. In East Germany, this is seen with a vast network of Stasi officers and elaborate surveillance. Likewise, in Orwell’s Oceania, telescreens continually scan people and even children are taught to scrutinise their parents lest they be ‘thought-criminals’, just as the Parsons children do to their unwitting father. So, there is a prevailing fear and sense of distrust in both Funder’s and Orwell’s views of totalitarian regimes. Ordinary people’s lives are subject not only to rigid controls, but also to the lies which are part of the ruling elite’s strategy to maintain a sense of external threat, if not imminent war. Within such a society, even the most outrageous actions can be justified on grounds of national security and the public good.
Comparative essay structuring options

Student should choose an approach that best enables effective analytical textual comparison and meaningful focus on the topic. It is essential that the style chosen does not encourage a mere contrast of events or characters or a plot comparison. Some structuring options are listed below.

**OPTION 1: ANALYSE EACH TEXT SEPARATELY IN EACH PARAGRAPH**

Each paragraph focuses on one text, with linking comments at the end of the paragraph. Then, the other text is dealt with in the following paragraph. This becomes an alternating pattern of focusing on one text and then the other.

For example:
- Paragraph 2: focusing on *Ransom*: end of paragraph: link to *Invictus*
- Paragraph 3: focusing on *Invictus*: end of paragraph: link to *Ransom*
- Paragraph 4: focusing on *Ransom*: end of paragraph: link to *Invictus*
- Paragraph 5: focusing on *Invictus*: end of paragraph: link to *Ransom*

**OPTION 2: SETS OF BLOCKED PARAGRAPHS**

This approach involves writing blocked paragraphs on one text and providing linking comparative comments to the other text. Then, the focus is alternated to consider the other text in a series of paragraphs, ending with summative comparative comments.

For example:
- Paragraphs 2–3: focusing on *Tracks* with a comparative links to *Into the Wild*
- Paragraphs 4–5: focusing on *Into the Wild* with comparative links and summation to *Tracks*

**Writer’s toolbox**

When planning a comparative analytical text essay, students should ask themselves the following questions relating to the ‘four Cs’.

**Contention**
- Is the contention outlined and fully explained initially, so that the full dimensions of the topic will be able to be potentially resolved?
- Does the contention incorporate the central issues or ideas specified in the topic and is this reflected in the subsequent topic sentences?

**Content**
- Is the contention fully justified on the basis of the textual analysis through specific references and succinct quotations?
- Is there a capacity to meaningfully and systematically compare the two paired texts so that the topic is consistently and thoroughly dealt with?

**Coherence**
- Is the argument developed logically and consistently?
- Are the points sequenced in a clear and connected manner, so that the argument is consistently building and being reinforced?

**Clarity**
- Is the expression and metalanguage sharply focused, formal, controlled, and appropriate?
- Is the sentence structure, paragraphing and syntax controlled, accurate and able to capture and articulate the given ideas?
OPTION 3: CONTINUOUS COMPARATIVE THREADING
This is arguably the most sophisticated and complex approach. Here, there is a continuous comparative threading or weaving between the two texts throughout the body of the essay.
For example:
• Paragraphs 2–5: each focusing on both Black Diggers and The Longest Memory weaving between the two texts in each paragraph

The texts
The VCAA paired texts all have an array of significant ideas, issues and themes which can be readily identified. Lists of what these ideas, issues and themes are should be seen as indicative, not definitive. Students should examine and aim to extend any list they are given. Below are some lists that students can expand upon.

TRACKS AND INTO THE WILD
Common ideas, issues and themes include:
• societal disconnection
• belief in personal challenge to find oneself
• coming to terms with the natural world to determine new understanding
• appreciating new forms of beauty
• confronting one’s own fears
• the corruption which arises from modern civilisation
• the empowerment of self-denial of societal comforts
• journeying into the unknown to find one’s own innate strength
• the costs of turning one’s back on society and the modern world.

INVICTUS AND RANSOM
Common ideas, issues and themes include:
• how societies and people look for, and uphold heroes
• the true nature of leadership
• the transience of leadership
• the need for humility to find one’s own real strengths
• the inherent dangers in seeking revenge
• the need to recognise and acknowledge one’s own flaws and weaknesses
• the power of empathy
• how individuals can impact greatly on others
• the need for mutual respect and recognition of the worth of others
• the unifying quality of being a fellow human.