

Assessment Report

New Zealand Scholarship English 2025

Performance standard 93001

General commentary

Overall, this cohort demonstrated a wide spread of achievement, with a small but discernible group of candidates producing responses of genuine intellectual independence and control. Success at Scholarship level was closely tied to a candidate's ability to think independently, respond flexibly, and sustain a depth of analysis across all three sections. As in previous years, those that did particularly well wrestled with the statement, formulating a thoughtful and robust thesis in their introductions, and then built their argument through the careful use of their text(s).

Section A was frequently the strongest section and elicited the most thoughtful responses. The texts were accessible to the candidates, and the responses featured a good quality of synthesis.

In Section B, candidates should be reminded that these questions focus on specific genre, and awareness of the form and qualities of that form should underpin their argument. The short story and the poetry questions sought an understanding of how the writers craft their texts using deliberate devices. The poetry question was a popular choice, yet so few candidates discussed the way poetry does have 'signposts' in its language features and form for readers to interpret. Instead, many focussed on poetry being difficult to decipher or their response was open in its interpretation, which did not always lead to the best answers. To write with confidence in the short story question, candidates needed to know that specific literary 'building blocks' lead to 'ideas we take beyond the text.' Many wrote superficial answers that did not show an understanding of the genre. Instead, most wrote a discussion on themes and ideas we 'take beyond the text'. While this is a valid approach, elements of narrative point of view, symbolism, imagery, and setting were rarely discussed.

A lot of the candidates who chose to answer on Interactive Texts in Section B did not show understanding of the statement they were responding to. There was clear evidence that a proportion of candidates did not demonstrate an understanding of what interactive texts were. Similarly, candidates who selected Television Series in Section B generally did not articulate the distinctions and nuances of content and form associated with this genre.

In 2025, there seemed to be a higher number of candidates who had taken to heart that they could write about anything, and as a result an array of surprising texts appeared: *Steven Universe*, *Adventure Time*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Modern Family*, *Wall-e*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Bluey*, and *Tomorrow when the War Began*, along with *The Hunger Games*, *Star Wars* and a wide array of manga. These were not being carefully critiqued within their genre or as a cultural phenomenon, but as valid literary texts for a Scholarship exam. The number of Aotearoa New Zealand texts that featured was disappointingly small, almost negligible. In comparison, there was a large group of candidates writing on a very small selection of 'traditional' poetry: Eliot's '*Love Song of Prufrock*', Ginsburg's '*America*', Baxter's '*High Country Weather*', and a smattering of Romantic poems, which suggests that candidates are being prepared for this examination with these texts specifically. While candidates generally performed well with these, the missed opportunity of exploring new and perhaps more culturally relevant texts was noted. Another text that featured significantly was Shirley Jackson's '*The Lottery*' (1948), which also seemed a lost opportunity given the wealth of short texts that teachers have to select from.

Texts which produced good answers included: *Parasite* by Bong Joon Ho; *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood; *Severance*, Dan Erickson; *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald; 'The ones who walk away from Omelas,' Ursula LeGuin; *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead; *Adolescence*, Philip Barantini; *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley; various poetry of Tusiata Avia; *Interstellar*, Christopher Nolan; 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' Charlotte Perkins Gilman; *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare. Overall, there was a dearth of essays discussing texts by New Zealand authors.

Report on performance standard

Candidates who were awarded Scholarship with **Outstanding Performance** commonly:

- engaged with the thesis statement and showed a deliberate response to it
- showed an understanding of genre in Section B and deliberately crafted a measured and sophisticated response to the statement adhering to their thesis throughout
- provided detailed examples from the text to substantiate their ideas
- wrote creative and engaging essays that were fluent and original
- wrote with vocabulary and language that was clear and concise
- used appropriate terminology in their answers.
- knew their texts well – showed a depth of knowledge and an appreciation of literature in their answers
- crafted their essays for impact; introductions and conclusions had an engaging and powerful nature, reflecting on the thoughtful development of their ideas
- fluently synthesised answers; weaving examples of thinking, textual evidence and analysis with clarity and a cogent and fundamental understanding of the power of written argument.

Candidates who were awarded **Scholarship** commonly:

- used and utilised fluent and varied language in terms of both structures and vocabulary
- were discerning in sentence lengths and content
- chose suitable texts (sometimes complex, sometimes not) as evidence to back up hypotheses
- synthesised their answers, weaving examples of thinking, textual evidence, and analysis with clarity
- showed original, high-level thinking around texts, demonstrating consistent insight that culminated in powerful responses overall.

Candidates who were **not awarded Scholarship** commonly:

- did not address the requirement of Section A to discuss "the treatment of nature"
- presented preprepared essays
- presented a recrafted "connections" essay that was poorly adapted to the chosen statement
- demonstrated a superficial understanding of texts
- did not engage with the statement in a meaningful way, instead making a vague reference to this and writing a preprepared essay
- did not respond to all parts of the statement
- lacked a clear thesis statement
- made a limited discussion of the texts, focussing instead on vague generalisations without substantiating their ideas with specific and detailed textual references
- lacked a response to the elements of the chosen genre in Section B
- used lengthy sentences which did not add to their argument and lacked overall clarity, concision and sometimes a formal register

- did not provide a synthesised discussion – instead, texts were talked about in isolation
- selected texts as their main focus which did not have enough academic calibre to enable in-depth and perceptive comments – *The Hunger Games*; lighter streaming series such as *Ted Lasso*, *This is Us*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Modern Family*
- wrote an essay that was driven by a discussion of dense language features
- wrote an excessive number of words that did not advance an argument or address the chosen statement, for example, provided plot summary or irrelevant details about a writer's life.