



Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney at Farnleigh House in Dublin. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA

how poetry works and that you can identify the key elements of the poem.

Preparing your poetry

The style of question allows you to answer on whichever of the poems you have studied that suits the topic on the exam paper.

You may be asked to write about a poem you liked on your course or by a poet you liked (you need to know the names of the poems and the poets studied). You may have to write about a poem that deals with a particular theme so you must make sure you have a selection to choose from.

For each poem you should:

- ◆ Know the title of the poem and the poet's name.
- ◆ Know the theme of the poem.
- ◆ Be able to write about and comment on the language and imagery used.
- ◆ Be able to quote to support your answer.

As a general rule, it is better, when answering in the exam, to be positive rather than negative about the poetry you are discussing. You should try and study poems that touched you in some way, so that you can display an understanding and a liking for them when writing your answer.

If you are asked why you liked or disliked a poem, try to be positive and give examples of assonance, alliteration, similes and so on, in the poem as reasons for your having liked it.

If you dislike a poem, it is more difficult to explain why and support your views in a way that will gain you marks in the exam. Use the key words to show the examiner that you have an understanding of what poetry is about.

It may be an old exam cliché, but it is important to remember that the examiner will be reading hundreds, if not thousands, of answers, one after the other, so try and make your answer as personal to you as you can. If you can make your answer stand out, you have a better chance of getting a good mark.

The A1 student



Alan Meehan studied for his Junior Cert at Dungarvan CBS, Co Waterford

I did my Junior Cert last year in Waterford, at Dungarvan CBS. I'm in fifth year now; I didn't do transition year. I thought I was reasonably well-prepared for the exam. I wasn't really expecting an A, but I knew I had put in the work. The mocks gave me confidence. I didn't think they were too hard, I just thought that they were a good indicator. I mean, I did well enough at them to feel I was doing well and should stick to what I was already doing.

With study, what I prefer to do – particularly with English – if, for example, we were doing a poem that week, is look over the notes that I'd taken and the poem itself that weekend and go over it. I think the best thing is to do your study and go over the course bit by bit, as you do it, so that when you come back to it later on, all you have to do is refresh it. That's the way I usually do it anyway, and it worked for me.

I didn't cram, but I did look over my notes and the course a lot coming up to the end, going over it the whole time – really just revising things I'd already done, so I wasn't cramming anything new in. It was mainly revision.

I preferred to study at home. There was an after-school club and a lot of people went, but it wasn't for me – I felt more comfortable at home. I liked to get my work done on Saturday if I could, more or less. Sometimes it would spill over, but not often. I liked to get the work out of the way. That way, I could relax for the rest of the weekend and my work was never that hard to do because of that.

In terms of notes, we would take a lot of those in class, as well as receiving handouts, which were very useful, so I didn't feel the need to make flash cards or anything of that nature to help me revise. I felt confident enough with the stuff I already had.

The key to my success, I suppose, was "little and often", keeping up with the course as it was being taught rather than having to cram. I think the best thing to do, if someone is unsure, or isn't confident with the stuff that they're learning in class, is to jot down notes as they go, so they can look at those things at home.

I wouldn't attribute too much to flash cards, but if there's anything specific that you might find difficult or complicated, take it down in class, as much as you can, then go through it bit by bit later on. I didn't do any grinds for English – I felt confident enough in my own work, and thought what we were doing in class was more than I needed to cover the course.

– In conversation with Eoin Cunningham

Getting the most out of the exam

Paper one is two hours, 30 minutes long. Before you go into the exam you should know how you're going to break up your time.

The following is a guideline; adapt it to suit yourself but don't leave yourself short on time for another section.

Section one – Reading Section: 40 marks, approximately 30 minutes.

Section two – Personal Writing: 70 marks, approximately 60 minutes.

Section three – Functional Writing: 30 marks, approximately 30 minutes.

Section 4 – Media Studies: 40 marks, approximately 30 minutes.

Paper two is also two hours, 30

minutes long. Here you have three sections and in each section you have an unseen text with questions, as well as questions on your studied text.

In the Drama section you have two different unseen texts to choose from: a Shakespearian text and a modern text. Even if you have studied a Shakespearian text for the exam you do not have to answer on the unseen Shakespearian text.

You are free to choose either unseen text.

Section 1 – Drama: Unseen and Studied, 30 marks and 25 minutes each.

Section 2 – Poetry: Unseen and Studied, 30 marks and 25 minutes each.

Section 3 Fiction: Unseen and Studied, 30 marks and 25 minutes each.

If you find you have time at the end of the exam you should go back through your paper and check for errors.

If you are under pressure in the exam, you may find that you make simple mistakes, so take the time to check everything again.

Remember that marks are deducted for bad spelling and grammar so be careful throughout the exam.

Make sure you know how to spell the names of the authors and characters you are writing about. If in doubt, check the exam paper – there is no excuse for misspelling a word that is written on the paper in front of you.



Peter Dinklage as Richard, Duke of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *Richard III*