

# English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT)

## Notes for teachers

This test will be taken by *all* applicants to read English at Oxford. It has been designed to enable applicants to show their ability in the key skill of close reading. Close reading has been defined by Elaine Showalter (in *Teaching Literature*, Blackwell: 2003) as “slow reading, a deliberate attempt to ... pay attention to language, imagery, allusion, intertextuality, syntax and form.” (p.98) Earlier in the same book she writes:

The close reading process, or *explication de texte*, that we use in analyzing literary texts does not have to come with the ponderous baggage of the New Criticism, or with political labels. Before or along with attention to factors outside the text, students have to understand something about the verbal, formal, and structural elements of the words themselves. (p.56)

The English Literature Admissions Test will assess how far students have developed this understanding and, with it, the ability to shape and articulate an informed response to unfamiliar literary material. The test is designed to be accessible to all students in their last year of a pre-university course of literary study. It is important to stress that this is not a test of wide reading, nor is it based on the assumption that there are certain texts that all students should have read by this stage in their education. Marks will not be awarded for references to other texts or authors, nor will candidates be expected to try to apply any theoretical frameworks to their discussion of their chosen passages.

In the test paper, the poems and passages selected will generally be unfamiliar. Thus, in the published sample paper, Sylvia Plath’s poem *Daddy* might have seemed an obvious choice; however, Plath’s poetry is so frequently studied as a set text that to offer such a well-known poem might give an advantage to students who had previously encountered the poem.

It should be noted that the instructions to candidates do not ask them simply to ‘compare and contrast’ two or three passages as a formal exercise. They are asked to explain briefly why they have selected the passages they are going to compare by indicating what they plan to explore or illustrate through their comparative analysis. Thus, candidates taking the sample paper might choose one of the following approaches (among several other possibilities):

- an exploration of the different ways in which Samuel Richardson and Philip Roth represent fathers as figures of authority
- a contrast between the ways in which three writers (e.g. Herrick, Lowell, Roy) commemorate their fathers in poetry
- a comparison of the effects created by the use of a first person speaker in two or three of the passages (e.g. Roy, Wiggins, Richardson).

## Marking

(i) The maximum mark for the paper will be 60. All scripts will be double marked, each examiner marking out of 30. The two marks awarded will be added together. Where there is a difference of five or more marks between the two examiners, a third examiner will assess the script, and the two nearest marks will be totalled. The full range of marks will be used. The scripts will not be marked by admissions tutors, but by external examiners; however, the final grading will be decided by a panel of awarders to include members of

the English Faculty and teachers from schools and colleges entering candidates for admission to read English. The Chair of the awarding panel will be appointed by Cambridge Assessment.

(ii) The awarders will set three thresholds, to establish four bands of achievement. The top band will identify those candidates who should definitely be called for interview (unless other indicators strongly suggest otherwise); the second band will indicate candidates who should probably be invited, provided other information supports this; the third band will contain candidates who may not be called unless there is other convincing evidence to suggest they ought to be interviewed. The fourth band identifies those students who are very unlikely to be invited, though other factors may outweigh the evidence of the test.

(iii) Where a candidate's script has been marked three times, and one of the marks has been significantly higher than the other two, the final aggregate mark will be flagged to alert admissions tutors to a candidate who may have greater potential than indicated by his or her final mark.

(iv) It is important to stress that the test is by no means the only tool to be used in the selection process. *No applicant will be invited or not invited for interview on the basis of the Admissions Test alone.* Candidates' GCSE results and final school-leaving forecasts; their UCAS forms and the School's reference, examples of recent work – all of these will play their full part in helping admissions tutors decide whom to invite.

*NB Because all scripts will already have been double marked, and because they will constitute only one element of the evidence used to decide whether to invite an applicant for interview, there will be no provision for re-marking requests or for the return of scripts to candidates.*