MA99 EDUCATION

Hamlet and Dickinson: Practice Questions

NSW ENGLISH ADVANCED 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2027 AND LATER

Instructions

There are no answers in here, and that is the point. A question with a model response on the facing page is not a question. The graduated exemplars are Document C. Do not open it until you have written something.

The format. Paper 2 Section I is one compulsory extended response worth 20 marks, based on your prescribed texts, and the question may include a stimulus. There is no choice. Paper 2 runs two hours plus five minutes reading time across three sections of 20 marks each, so forty minutes is the budget for this section.

These are MA99 questions. The first examination under this syllabus is 2027 and no past paper exists. Every question here is written fresh in the style the specification describes. Where a stimulus appears it is MA99's own wording and is deliberately not attributed to anybody, because a fabricated attribution in a practice paper teaches a student to fabricate one in an examination.

One constraint on every answer. Every body paragraph must name both texts. If a plan can be cut cleanly down the middle, rewrite it before you write a word of prose.

> Write three of these under time before you read a single one of the exemplars.

1. How the questions are graded

The bands describe how hard the question is to answer well, not what it is worth. Every question here is worth 20 marks, because every Section I question is.

Foundation	One clear demand, and the pairing does most of the work for you.
Standard	Two things to hold together, and a verb that has to be obeyed.
Advanced	An unfamiliar angle, or a demand that has to be interpreted before it can be answered.
Stimulus	A statement is printed above the question. The specification permits this in Section I.

Use the bands to choose, not to avoid. The commonest preparation error in this focus area is to practise only the stems that suit the pair of concerns you have already prepared. The 2027 paper will not ask which you would prefer.

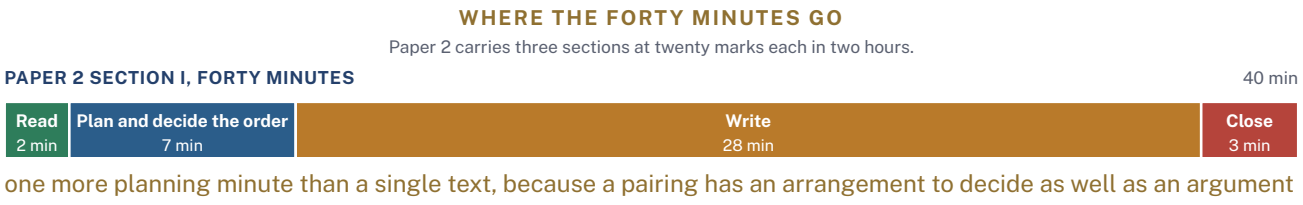


Figure 1 · Where the forty minutes go. A pairing needs one more planning minute than a single text, because the arrangement has to be decided as well as the argument.

2. Foundation

One demand each. Start here if you have not yet written a full comparative response.

Question 1

20 MARKS

Explain how a comparative study of your prescribed texts reveals resonances between them. In your response, refer closely to both texts.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 2

20 MARKS

How do your prescribed texts represent the inner life of a person? In your response, analyse at least one formal feature of each text.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 3

20 MARKS

Discuss the ways context shapes the perspectives in your pair of texts.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 4

20 MARKS

What does a comparative study of your prescribed texts reveal about how each text treats death? Support your response with detailed reference to both.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

3. Standard

Two things to hold together, and a verb to obey.

Question 5

20 MARKS

Analyse how the textual forms of your prescribed texts shape the meanings each one is able to make.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 6

20 MARKS

Evaluate the extent to which the dissonances between your prescribed texts are more revealing than the resonances.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 7

20 MARKS

How does a comparative study of your prescribed texts create a new understanding of each? In your response, refer to at least three points of comparison.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 8

20 MARKS

Analyse the ways your prescribed texts represent the judgement of others, and evaluate what the comparison reveals.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 9

20 MARKS

To what extent do your prescribed texts share a set of values, and to what extent do their contexts drive them apart?

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

4. Advanced

Harder because the demand has to be interpreted before it can be answered.

Question 10

20 MARKS

Evaluate the view that the differences between your prescribed texts are differences of circumstance rather than of belief.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 11

20 MARKS

Assess the significance of what each of your prescribed texts refuses to resolve.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 12

20 MARKS

Analyse how each of your prescribed texts positions its reader, and evaluate what the comparison of those positions reveals about each text.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 13

20 MARKS

A comparative study is most valuable when the two texts have the most in common. Evaluate this proposition in relation to your prescribed texts.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

5. With a stimulus

The specification permits a stimulus in Section I. These three model the shape.

How to use a stimulus. It is a lever, not a topic. Find the word doing the most work, decide in one sentence what you accept and in one sentence what you reject, and make the rejection a body paragraph rather than a concession in the introduction. Do not spend a paragraph explaining what the statement means.

Stimulus

Two texts written centuries apart cannot argue with each other. They can only be overheard together, by somebody standing in a place neither of them knew about.

Question 14

20 MARKS

Evaluate this view in relation to your prescribed texts.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Stimulus

What a writer is permitted to say aloud shapes the form of the thing they write more than what they believe does.

Question 15

20 MARKS

To what extent do your prescribed texts support this proposition?

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Stimulus

Every text decides what it will not show you, and that decision is the one worth studying.

Question 16

20 MARKS

Assess the usefulness of this claim as a way of reading your prescribed texts.

Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning.

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

6. Reading a question you have not seen

Two minutes on this is the cheapest two minutes in the paper.

Every question in this set can be answered with the six paired concerns in Document A, section 4. The skill is not recall. It is deciding, quickly and once, which concerns the question is asking for and in which order the two texts will appear.

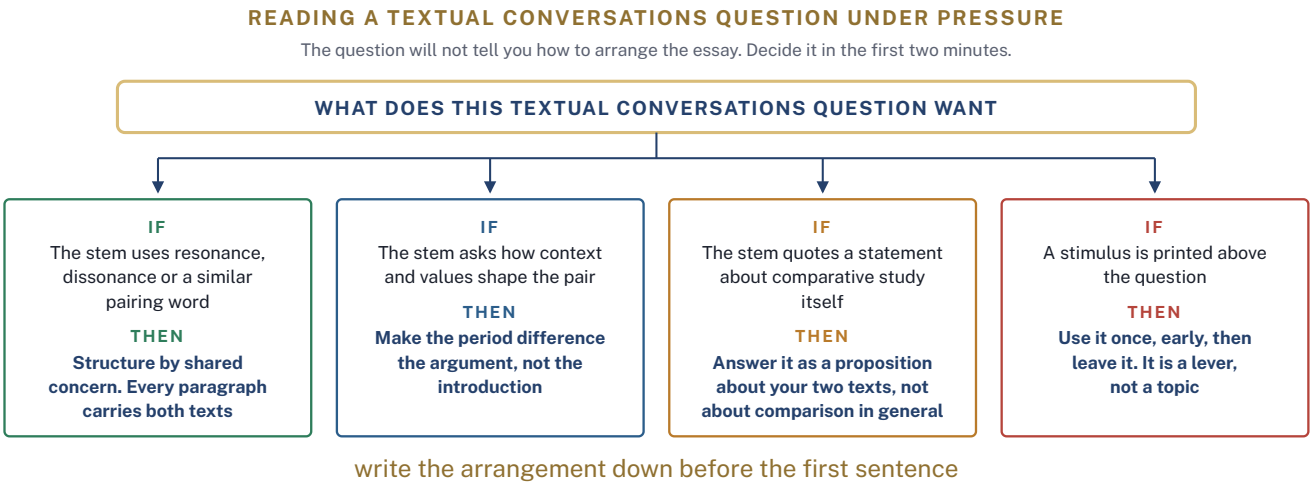


Figure 2 · Four common shapes and what each one asks you to do.

Three checks before you begin writing

Underline the verb. Explain, analyse, evaluate and assess are not the same instruction, and the last two ask for a judgement about worth.

Say the answering sentence in your head. If it names only one text, you have not answered a Textual conversations question yet.

Look at your three claims. Draw a line down the middle of them. If it splits cleanly, rebuild before writing.

After you write, before you look at Document C

Count the paragraphs that name both texts. If it is not all of them, that is the gap and nothing else is. Circle every similarly, likewise and in the same way. Each one marks a place where you listed instead of arguing.

Check that the leading text changes at least once.

Read your first and last sentences together. If the second restates the first, the response did not travel. Only then open Document C.

> Sixteen questions. Three written under time is worth more than sixteen read.

About this resource

MA99 EDUCATION

Scope

NSW English Advanced, Year 12. Written to the NSW English Advanced 11-12 Syllabus 2024, Hamlet and Dickinson, for students sitting the HSC in 2027 and later years. Short quotations from Hamlet and from Dickinson's poems are reproduced for study. Poem titles and first lines are named. Short quotations from critics are attributed.

Permitted use

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Not permitted

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MA99 EDUCATION

Hamlet and Dickinson: Graduated Exemplars

NSW ENGLISH ADVANCED 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2027 AND LATER

Read first

These are MA99 models. They are not NESA sample responses. The first examination under the 2024 syllabus is in 2027, so no marked student work exists for this course and no real Band 6 response to a real question is available. Any resource claiming to have one is describing the previous syllabus.

Where the band language comes from. The descriptions below are grounded in NESA's published Year 12 English Advanced performance band descriptions, which separate the top two bands almost entirely by quality words: extensive, insightful, sophisticated and refined against thorough, informed, effective and well developed. A student cannot act on an adjective, so every quality word has been translated into the observable move that earns it.

The point of three versions. The top band response is longer than the strong one, but the extra length is argument, not reading. It reads no more widely and quotes nothing rarer. It is the same material doing more work, and that is the only thing this document is trying to teach.

Dickinson's punctuation. As throughout this pack, her phrases are quoted so that each falls inside a single dash bounded unit. Restore her punctuation from the Faber edition when you write them out.

> Write your own response to the question before reading the exemplar.

1. The question

Evaluate the extent to which the dissonances between your prescribed texts are more revealing than the resonances. (20 marks)

This is question 6 from Document B, Standard band. It was chosen because it uses the focus area's own vocabulary and asks a genuine question rather than a rhetorical one. The verb is evaluate, which means a judgement about worth is required. A response that concludes both are important has not answered it.

The three responses printed here run to 185, 305 and 484 words, counted from the page. They are condensed models: a full response written in forty minutes of handwriting runs to roughly 800 words, and these have been cut back to the moves that separate the bands. Do not treat their length as a target. All three use the same two texts and the same points of comparison, and the second and third reach for a handful of quotations the first does not.

2. Response one · a competent middle band

MIDDLE Accurate, organised, and comparing by listing rather than by arguing.

185 words, condensed. Nothing in it is untrue.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
Both Hamlet and Dickinson's poetry explore similar ideas about the mind, madness and death. The dissonances between them are revealing, but the resonances are also important. This essay will discuss both.	Accurate, and it declines the question. Evaluate asks for a judgement about worth, and both are important is the one answer the verb rules out. Note also that the last sentence announces the essay rather than arguing anything.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
Both texts explore the mind. Hamlet says Denmark's a prison, showing that he feels trapped. Similarly, Dickinson writes that the Brain has Corridors, which also shows the mind as a place. This similarity shows that both authors were interested in the mind.	The word similarly is doing the comparing, and it is a list word rather than a comparative one. The paragraph establishes that two writers were interested in the same thing, which nobody would deny. There is no dissonance anywhere in it.
Both texts explore madness. Hamlet puts on an antic disposition and pretends to be mad. Dickinson writes that Much Madness is divinest Sense, suggesting that madness is really sense. Both authors therefore question what madness is.	Same shape as the paragraph above, which is the real problem: the response has one move and repeats it. Suggesting that madness is really sense is close to paraphrase, and the paragraph never says what either text does with the idea.
There are also differences. Hamlet is a play written in about 1600, while Dickinson wrote poems in the nineteenth century. Hamlet was performed for an audience while almost none of Dickinson's poems were published in her lifetime. This context affects the way they write.	This is the two halves essay in miniature. The differences are quarantined in one paragraph instead of being argued in every paragraph. The observation about publication is the best thing in the response and it is left as a fact rather than turned into a claim.
In conclusion, both the resonances and the dissonances are revealing. The texts are similar in their ideas but different in their contexts and forms. Comparing them helps us understand both texts better.	The conclusion repeats the introduction and refuses the verb a second time. Helps us understand both texts better is the syllabus's own phrase returned unused. A marker reads the first and last sentences together, and these two say the same thing.

What is actually wrong with response one

Nothing is inaccurate, and the student has read both texts.

Every paragraph establishes a resonance and stops. No paragraph argues a difference.

The differences appear in a paragraph of their own, which is the two halves failure at paragraph scale. The word similarly appears where the argument should be.

The question asked for a judgement and the response declined to make one, twice.

3. Response two · a strong band

STRONG Judges, integrates, and argues a difference in every paragraph.

305 words, condensed. The same two texts, and a few quotations the first response did not reach for.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
The dissonances are more revealing, but only because the resonances are so complete. Hamlet and Dickinson agree almost entirely about what a mind is, what madness is and what death is not, and that agreement is what makes the differences between them measurable.	It answers the verb in the first four words and then complicates the answer immediately. But only because is the phrase that turns a judgement into an argument, and it predicts the shape of everything that follows.
Both texts give the mind dimensions. Hamlet could be bounded in a nutshell were it not for his bad dreams, and in poem 670 the Brain has Corridors. But Hamlet's enclosure is described to two visitors in a court, and Dickinson's corridors have no listener at all. The resonance identifies the image. The dissonance identifies who was there to hear it.	The same two quotations response one used, doing four times the work. The paragraph opens with the resonance, spends its second half on the difference, and names what each half contributes. There is no linking adverb in it.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
Both treat madness as a verdict rather than as a condition. Hamlet's antic disposition is a decision before it is a symptom, and poem 435 supplies the rule the court is obeying: "'Tis the Majority" prevails, and whoever demurs is "handled with a Chain". What differs is what each speaker survives. A prince can perform the verdict. The poem's speaker is restrained by it.	Two new quotations, both short, both inside sentences. Supplies the rule the court is obeying is the move that makes this comparative rather than parallel: the poem is being used to explain the play.
Form is where the dissonance is sharpest. The soliloquy makes a private mind audible to a full theatre, so Hamlet's claim that he has that within which passeth show is a performance of privacy. Dickinson sewed more than eight hundred poems into forty booklets and printed almost none, so her withholding is not a claim inside a text but a fact about the object.	Formal evidence, which is the strongest kind available in this focus area and the kind most responses omit. A performance of privacy is four words and does more than the previous paragraph's four sentences.
It could be objected that the resonances are what make a comparative study possible at all, and that without them there would be nothing to compare. That is true, and it is why this response treats the agreement as the instrument rather than as the finding.	An objection raised and answered. It is short, which is right at this length, and it converts a potential weakness into a restatement of the thesis.
The dissonances are more revealing because they are all of one kind. Hamlet had a public audience and Dickinson did not, and everything else follows from that.	The close makes a judgement and gives a reason. It could not be swapped with the opening sentence.

4. Response three · the top band

TOP The same material, made to answer something in every paragraph, with form carrying the argument.

484 words, condensed. About 180 words longer than response two, and nothing new was read.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
The dissonances are more revealing, and the reason is methodological rather than literary. The two texts agree so completely about the mind that the places where they part become a unit of measurement, and every difference between them turns out to be a version of one difference: one writer was permitted a public audience and the other was not.	The judgement is made and then explained by a distinction, methodological rather than literary, which tells the marker at once that the response knows why it is comparing rather than only what it is comparing.
Consciousness is the clearest case, and it is clearest because nothing separates the images. Hamlet could be bounded in a nutshell, and Dickinson's Brain has Corridors: both make the mind an architecture with dimensions and something inside it that cannot be walked away from. What separates them is grammatical. Hamlet's enclosure is delivered to two visitors he knows are reporting to the king, so the complaint is also a manoeuvre. Poem 670 supplies no addressee at all, and the absence is structural, because the poem was sewn into a fascicle and not sent.	Two additions to response two. What separates them is grammatical locates the difference in the language rather than in the biography. So the complaint is also a manoeuvre reads the speech as an action inside a plot, which is what analysing drama means.
Madness produces the same finding with the consequences attached. Hamlet's antic disposition is announced as a plan in the first act, which makes his madness a rhetorical position before it is anything else. Poem 435 states the rule his court is following, that "'Tis the Majority" prevails, and then names the two verbs everything turns on, assent and demur, and what follows from the second: to be "handled with a Chain". The play can afford to leave the question open for five acts because a prince is permitted a licensed strangeness. Eight lines cannot afford ambiguity, and the poem ends with restraint rather than with a verdict.	The last sentence is the one that separates the bands. It draws a consequence from the length of the poem, which is a formal fact, and turns it into a claim about what each form can afford. That is evaluation of how meaning is shaped.
The strongest objection is that a play and a lyric are different kinds of thing, so this comparison measures genre rather than belief. The answer is that genre here is circumstance. Hamlet's soliloquies exist because a theatre needed a way to make a mind audible to two thousand people. Dickinson's compression exists because she wrote for no public audience and nothing had to be sayable aloud. Form is the record of what each writer was permitted, which makes the formal difference the finding rather than a category error.	A full paragraph on the objection, and it is the objection a good marker would actually raise. Genre here is circumstance is the sentence the whole response is built to earn.

THE RESPONSE	WHAT THE MOVE EARNS
Read this way the resonances change function. They stop being the point of the comparison and become its instrument: without the shared architecture of mind, madness and unconsoled death there would be no scale on which the differences could be ranked. Hamlet's distrust of language fills the longest play Shakespeare wrote and Dickinson's fills eight short poems, and that is only legible as a difference because the distrust is identical.	This paragraph exists in neither of the other responses. It returns to the question's own terms and reassigns them, which is what evaluate means when it is done properly rather than announced.
The comparative study therefore creates a new understanding of each text by showing what neither can show alone: that the form each took was not a matter of temperament. A play that had to be performed and a poem that never was are two answers to the same question about how much of a mind can be made public, and only the pairing makes the question visible.	A judgement about what the comparison is worth, which is what this focus area is for. Only the pairing makes the question visible answers the syllabus's demand for a new understanding of each text without quoting the phrase.

5. Tracing the difference

Not a mark. An explanation, move by move.

The three responses use the same two texts and almost the same evidence. Read side by side, the differences are small, nameable and learnable, which is the only reason it is worth setting them out.

TWO TEXTS IN ONE PARAGRAPH, TWICE

MIDDLE BAND
both texts present, no argument between them

Hamlet says Denmark is a prison, showing he feels trapped. Similarly, Dickinson writes that the Brain has Corridors, showing she also felt trapped. Both authors present the mind as confining.

STRONG BAND
the same two quotations, made to disagree

Hamlet can call Denmark a prison because he has a court to say it in front of. Dickinson's corridors have no listener at all, and the poem's refusal to name one is the difference between a confinement that can be complained of and a confinement that cannot.

Similarly is the word that turns a comparison into a list.

the second version has no linking adverb in it

Figure 1 · Middle against strong, on the same two quotations.

The word similarly is the tell. It appears in every weak comparative paragraph and in almost no strong one, because a genuinely comparative sentence puts both texts inside the same clause and does not need an adverb to announce that a second item is arriving.

STRONG AGAINST TOP, ON ONE SHARED IDEA

STRONG BAND
integrated, controlled

Each text withholds its interior: Hamlet names what passes show without displaying it, and Dickinson's speaker watches the watchers rather than the spectacle.

TOP BAND
the same sentence, made to account for form

Each text withholds its interior, but only one had to. Hamlet's withholding is spoken aloud to a full stage, so it is a performance of privacy. Dickinson's is structural: the poems were sewn into fascicles and not printed, so the withholding is not a claim inside the text but a fact about it.

The top band version brings the material conditions of each text into the claim.

form and circumstance, not just content

Figure 2 · Strong against top, on one shared idea.

The top version brings the material conditions into the claim. Sewn into fascicles and not printed is not biography. It is a fact about the object being analysed, and in this focus area it is the most reliable kind of evidence available, because the difference between a play and a manuscript book is not a matter of interpretation.

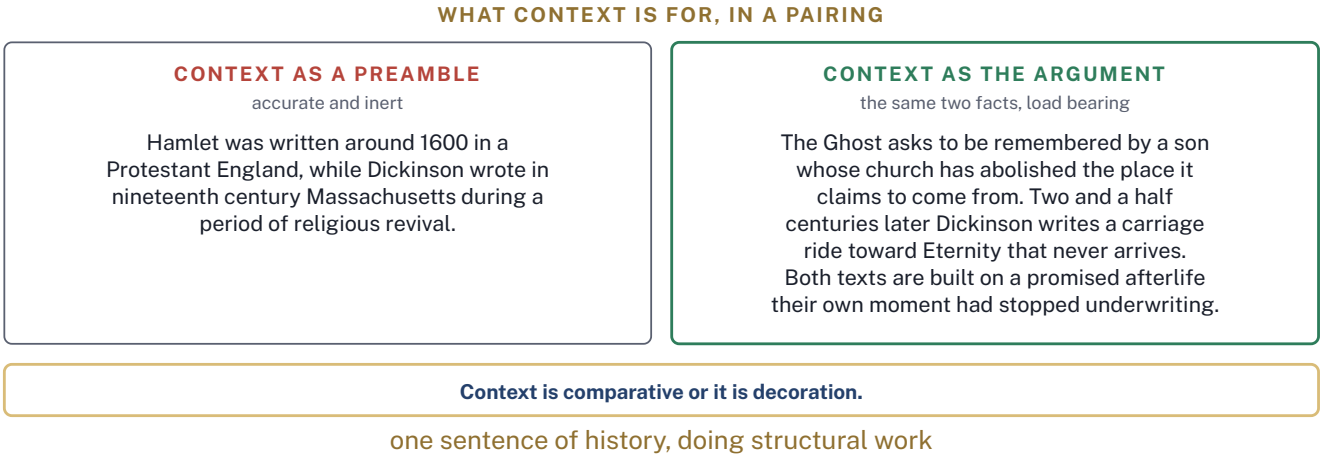


Figure 3 · Context as a preamble, against context as the argument.

Neither of these sentences appears in the three responses above, and that is why they are included. Contextual material is where most capable students in this focus area lose marks they have already earned, because they know two contexts and put them in two paragraphs.

5.1 The eight changes, named

THE MOVE	MIDDLE	STRONG	TOP
Answering the verb	Declines to judge	Judges in the first sentence	Judges, then explains why the judgement is possible
Where the difference sits	In a paragraph of its own	In the second half of every paragraph	In the grammar of the sentence itself
Linking words	Similarly, also, both	None. Both texts in one clause	None, and the clause carries a causal word
Use of form	Mentioned once, as context	One paragraph, load bearing	The whole argument rests on it
Objection	None	One, in two sentences	One, in a full paragraph, and it is the real objection
The question's own terms	Repeated	Used	Reassigned. Resonance becomes an instrument
Which text leads	Hamlet every time	Alternates once	Alternates, and the lead is chosen by the claim
Closing sentence	Restates the opening	Judges and gives a reason	Says what the pairing shows that neither shows alone

> Six of those eight cost one sentence each. That is the whole distance.

What did not change between response two and response three

The kind of material. Response three is about 180 words longer than response two, and the extra words are argument, not new material.

The reading. No additional criticism was consulted and no rarer quotation was used.

The texts. The same points of comparison in both, chosen rather than prescribed by the question. The time. Both are planned for forty minutes; a real response in that time would run to about 800 words.

5.2 Openings and closings, side by side

A marker reads your first sentence and your last one together. Here are all six.

BAND	THE OPENING SENTENCE	THE CLOSING SENTENCE
Middle	Both Hamlet and Dickinson's poetry explore similar ideas about the mind, madness and death.	Comparing them helps us understand both texts better.
Strong	The dissonances are more revealing, but only because the resonances are so complete.	Hamlet had a public audience and Dickinson did not, and everything else follows from that.
Top	The dissonances are more revealing, and the reason is methodological rather than literary.	Only the pairing makes the question visible.

Read the middle pair twice. The two sentences say the same thing, which means that a hundred and eighty-five words of accurate writing did not move the argument anywhere. That is the most common reason a competent comparative response stays where it is, and it is visible from those two sentences alone without reading the body at all.

5.3 Where the forty minutes actually went

Response three was not written by a better reader. It was written by somebody who spent the first nine minutes differently.

MINUTES	WHAT HAPPENED	WHY IT MATTERS
0 to 2	Read the question twice. Underlined evaluate and more revealing. Decided a judgement was compulsory.	Two minutes here removes the risk of writing both are important, which is the single commonest way this verb is failed.
2 to 4	Wrote the thesis. Rewrote it once, because the first version was a preference rather than an argument.	First drafts of theses in this focus area are almost always statements of which side the writer likes.
4 to 9	Three claims, each naming both texts, with the leading text decided and written down. The objection chosen.	The extra minute over a single text essay buys the arrangement. Deciding which text leads each paragraph in advance is what stops the essay drifting into halves.
9 to 37	Wrote without stopping to reread. One Dickinson phrase was uncertain and was paraphrased rather than hunted for.	Hunting for a half remembered quotation under time costs more than it recovers. Describe the form and keep moving.
37 to 40	Wrote the closing sentence, which had been decided at minute four. Read the opening and the close together.	The close was retrieved, not composed, which is why it does not read like a summary.

> The nine minutes of planning are the nine you will most want to spend writing. Spend them anyway.