**Conducting the oral commentary**

**Preparing:**

i. The IOC needs to be conducted in a quiet room, preferably with an adjacent room for the 20 minutes of preparation

ii. Recording can be digital or analogue, but digital recordings inevitably carry many obvious advantages. Check that the equipment is working prior to beginning the recording.

iii. Students should be given a blank sheet of paper on which to record notes additional to their annotated passage. To ensure the right degree of detailed text reference, it is advised that the majority of notes are made on the extract itself, and the blank sheet used to work out the best way to structure the commentary.

iv. The IOC can only be conducted once; students can engage in a ‘practice run’ but they must not be given any passage that will be used in the final oral.

v. In the final oral, students must not know in advance the passages selected for examination. On the day of the exam, the passage must be chosen randomly from a range, not by or for the student. Remember that in the case of Standard Level extracts must be drawn from both works.

vi. Please remember the guidelines relating to numbers and length of passage.

vii. Please remember the guidelines relating to the number of extracts that should be used in relation to the number of students in your class.

viii. Contextual information, such as act and scene number etc should be removed. The titles of poems can remain, as they are considered part of the text of the poem.

ix. Remove original line numbers and replace, starting from 1. Most teachers tend to number every 5 lines.

**During:**

x. The student must be allowed to talk without interruption for up to 8 minutes.

xi. Subsequent questions must be put to the student

xii. Subsequent questions should be constructive, not seek to intimidate or catch the student out. Students can often pick up valuable extra marks in response to helpful, directed questions.

xiii. Remember that the focus of the task is detailed comment on the extract, not the

19

whole work. Elements of contextualising need to take place, but they should not dominate. Any tendency towards description and paraphrase should be actively discouraged.

**Afterwards:**

xiv. Please make sure the recording is clear

xv. It is often difficult to mark whilst the student is talking. Many teachers prefer to make preliminary notes but then listen again at some point before arriving at a final mark.

xvi. In centers with more than one teacher, it is vital that time is spent standardising. There are, of course, lots of ways you could tackle this, but it is very important to ensure consistent application of the criteria. Standardising can also often raise some very interesting discussion about good and bad practice.

xvii. The mark you submit for each student is an average of the mark awarded for the IOP and the IOC. When this mark is submitted, a sample of IOC recordings will be selected randomly, and these are the ones you must send in for moderation, complete with the 1/IARF form which details the break down of marks awarded for both the Presentation and the Commentary.

**Assignment** Your task is to work in groups to put together an advice sheet that you could give students to help them prepare for their commentary.

Review the prompts that follow and consider what it is they are asking the student to do and how you might help students to do those things they are being asked to do.

**(i). Using the 20 minute preparation time**

• What advice would you give students about the best way to use this time?

• How might they be encouraged to annotate successfully?

• How could they use the extra sheet of blank paper?

**(ii) Introductions - what advice would you give about the best way to introduce their commentary?**

• What kinds of things do you think a good introduction should aim to show?

• How might the student be encouraged to provide a ‘reading’ - i.e. a thesis that provides the commentary with a sense of direction

**(iii) Structure – how could the 8 minutes be organised?**

• Would a linear approach be best, or a more conceptual one? Or would it depend on the extract?

20

• How might the structure be clearly shown? You might consider signposting, for example

**(iv) Conclusions – what advice would you give about ways to conclude the commentary?**

• Conclusions can be really important as a means to maintain the sense of structure right to the end.

• In what ways could the commentary be ‘concluded’?

**(v) General points**

• Is there anything else you might say to the student to help them prepare for the assessment?

• How to revise?

• How to practice oral commentary skills?

**Classroom practices**

Here are just a few suggestions of classroom practices that you might like to consider:

1. ***Making Notes****:* The term ‘taking notes’ is familiar to everyone. But this term in

some respects implies a rather passive listening response to any speaker, wherein the student simply writes down as much as they can hear or understand without thinking or processing. Making notes, on the other hand, implies a more active approach – in reaction to any presentation writing down things that are new, things that lead to further reflection and/or things with which a student disagrees; in this way the student is critically engaged, reflecting on the value and meaning of what is being said, and fundamentally being forced as a result to think. Using laptops or if you have a classroom computer, nominating one student to record their ‘listening journey’ through any discussion can stimulate some really interesting discussion subsequently about the kinds of points they recorded and why.

2. ***Using drama****:* role play, monologues, hot seating and making tableaux are all

tried and tested ways to promote imaginative engagement with character; listening to responses in or out of role, can yield some really fruitful work – especially in terms of picking apart such things as character motivation, subtext and so on.

3. ***Formal Debate****:* a sure-fire way to encourage confidence with speaking and

listening, at the same time as develop skills in organizing ideas and constructing a thesis. Students prepare an argument, or perhaps a ‘reading’ of a particular text in small groups and then go head to head with another team. The debate can be as formal as you think necessary and can often work as a stimulus to some highly useful written work.

**Reflection question**

What kinds of teaching strategies do you currently employ in your literature teaching that promote response through speaking and listening?