Contextual questions

Question 1
Act 1, Scene 2, lines 129-159, from “O that this too ...” to “... must hold my tongue.”
1.1 Refer to lines 132-134.
   1.1.1 Describe Hamlet’s state of mind in this soliloquy. (2)
   1.1.2 Give two possible reasons for Hamlet’s state of mind. (2)
1.2 Explain Hamlet’s thoughts regarding suicide in lines 129-132. (2)
1.3 Refer to line 140, “Hyperion to a satyr”:
   1.3.1 Who is “Hyperion” and who is the “satyr” in the context of this soliloquy? (2)
   1.3.2 Briefly explain what is implied about each in this comparison. (4)
1.4 What is revealed in lines 140-145 about the late King Hamlet’s relationship with Gertrude? (2)
1.5 Explain Hamlet’s statement “Frailty, thy name is woman” in line 146. (2)
1.6 “O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn’d longer ...” (lines 150-151). In your own words, explain what Hamlet is upset about in this quote. (2)
1.7 In line 152, why does Hamlet choose to add the words “my father’s brother” when speaking of his uncle? (2)
1.8 Refer to lines 147-157. What do these lines reveal about Gertrude’s character? (3)
1.9 Throughout the soliloquy Hamlet repeats the word “month”. Explain why. (2)

[25 marks]

Question 2
Act 1, Scene 5, lines 25-112, from “Revenge his foul ...” to “... I have sworn’t.”
2.1 Why does the ghost refer to the death of the late King Hamlet as unnatural? (1)
2.2 What is ironic about Hamlet’s words “Haste me to know ... revenge” (lines 29-31)? (2)
2.3 What theme can be found in lines 32-33? (1)
2.4 How is the late king’s death explained to the people of Denmark? (2)
2.5 “The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown” (lines 39–40):
2.5.1 What figure of speech is used in these lines? (1)
2.5.2 What does the image of the serpent imply about Claudius' character? (2)
2.6 Explain why Hamlet cries out “O my prophetic soul!” in line 41. (1)
2.7 Quote three consecutive words that refer to the fact that Claudius and Gertrude were having an affair. (1)
2.8 Using your own words, describe how the late King Hamlet was murdered. (3)
2.9 What three things does the ghost claim Claudius stole from him in line 75? (3)
2.10 Read lines 76–79 (“Cut off even ... on my head”). What, in particular, is the ghost upset about in these lines? (2)
2.11 What are the ghost's instructions to Hamlet with regard to his mother? (2)
2.12 With close reference to lines 92–103, outline the development of Hamlet's reaction to what the ghost has told him. (3)
2.13 “That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (line 108). What characteristic of Claudius is Hamlet referring to in this line? (1)

[25 marks]

Question 3
Act 2, Scene 2, lines 129–215, from “What do you ...” to “... well, my Lord.”
3.1 In line 129, Polonius asks Claudius and Gertrude “What do you think of me?” He repeats this question in lines 131, 135 and 139. Explain what this repeated question says of Polonius' relationship with Claudius and Gertrude. (1)
3.2 What reason does Polonius give Claudius and Gertrude to explain why he has told Ophelia to end her relationship with Hamlet? Quote to substantiate your answer. (2)
3.3 Using your own words, explain what instructions Polonius gives Ophelia. (3)
3.4 In your own words, explain Polonius' theory for Hamlet's “declension, / Into the madness wherein now he raves” (2)
3.5 What truth is Polonius promising to find in line 158? (1)
3.6 What is ironic about Polonius and Claudius' conversation about truth? (2)
TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

3.7 Explain, using your own words, how Polonius plans to test his theory. (4)

3.8 What is Hamlet’s intention in calling Polonius a “fishmonger” (line 174)? (1)

3.9 “To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand” (lines 178–179):
   3.9.1 How is Hamlet feeling in these lines? (1)
   3.9.2 Why does he feel this way? (1)

3.10 “Let her not walk i’th’ sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive – friend, look to’t” (lines 184–185). What is Hamlet implying about Ophelia in these lines? (1)

3.11 “Words, words, words” (line 191). What aspect of Polonius’ character is Hamlet probably mocking in this line? (1)

3.12 How does Hamlet show his disapproval of Polonius in lines 195–202? Quote as part of your answer. (2)

3.13 What desire does Hamlet express in lines 212–214? (1)

3.14 Explain what this extract reveals about Polonius’ character. (2)

[25 marks]

Question 4

Act 2, Scene 2, lines 534–592, from “Now I am alone ...” to “... conscience of the king.”

4.1 “Now I am alone” (line 534). What does this line emphasise about the way Hamlet is feeling? (1)

4.2 If you were an actor, in what tone of voice would you deliver line 535: “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!”? (1)

4.3 In your own words, explain why Hamlet is upset by the player’s speech. (3)

4.4 “Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have?” (lines 546–547) What motive is Hamlet referring to in these lines? (2)

4.5 Explain the metaphor “unpregnant of my cause” in line 554. (2)

4.6 Refer to line 554.
   4.6.1 What is Hamlet saying about himself? (2)
   4.6.2 Do you agree with Hamlet’s opinion of himself in this line? Motivate your answer. (2)

4.7 Who is the “slave” referred to in line 567? (1)

4.8 Considering what you know of Claudius, do you agree with Hamlet’s description of him as a “Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain” (line 568)? Make sure your answer refers to each of the adjectives above. (4)
CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

4.9 Of what is Hamlet being critical in line 572? (2)
4.10 Refer to lines 581–583.
   4.10.1 Explain Hamlet’s plan to “catch the conscience of the king.” (3)
   4.10.2 In these lines Hamlet finally begins to act on his promise to avenge his father’s death. Comment on which aspects of his character are shown in these lines. (2)

Question 5
Act 3, Scene 1, lines 91–161, from “Good my lord...” to “... see what I see.”
5.1 Refer to lines 91–96.
   5.1.1 What does Ophelia want to give Hamlet? (1)
   5.1.2 Why does she return these items? (1)
   5.1.3 Explain why Hamlet says to her “I never gave you aught” (line 96). (1)
5.2 How does Ophelia describe their previous relationship in lines 98–99? Quote to justify your answer. (2)
5.3 What does Ophelia accuse Hamlet of in line 101? (1)
5.4 What point is Hamlet making about beauty in lines 111–114? (2)
5.5 “Get thee to a nunnery” (line 121). Explain the pun in Hamlet’s use of the word “nunnery”. (2)
5.6 With close reference to lines 121–124 (“Why, wouldst thou be... borne me.”), explain Hamlet’s state of mind. (3)
5.7 Why does Hamlet ask Ophelia where her father is? (1)
5.8 In your view, is Hamlet’s opinion of Polonius in line 133 correct? Explain your answer. (1)
5.9 In your own words, explain the curse Hamlet places on Ophelia in lines 135–140. (3)
5.10 Refer to lines 142–148.
   5.10.1 Explain what Hamlet is accusing women of in lines 142–143. (2)
   5.10.2 What further complaints about women does Hamlet make in lines 144–148? (3)
5.11 Study Ophelia’s soliloquy in lines 150–161 carefully. What conclusions has she come to after observing Hamlet? (2)

[25 marks]
TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

Question 6
Act 3, Scene 4, lines 53–103, from “Look here upon this ...” to Enter ghost.

6.1 Refer to lines 53–64.
   6.1.1 To what does Hamlet point at the beginning of the extract? (1)
   6.1.2 Why does he do this? (2)
   6.2.1 What image does Hamlet create of his dead father in his descriptions in lines 56–59? (1)
   6.2.2 What does this reveal about Hamlet’s feelings for his father? (2)
   6.3.1 Explain the image “like a mildew’d ear” in line 64. (1)
   6.3.2 What does the image convey about Claudius? (2)
   6.4 Between lines 67 and 74 Hamlet levels several insults at his mother. Write down three of these insults in your own words. (3)
   6.5 What, in particular, is Hamlet reprimanding his mother for in line 81 (“O shame, where is thy blush?”)? (1)
   6.6 DiscussGertrude’s reaction to Hamlet’s anger and criticism in lines 88–91. (2)
   6.7 Although Gertrude is affected by Hamlet’s words, he continues his attack. Why do you think he does this? (2)
   6.8 What two crimes does Hamlet accuse Claudius of in lines 97–103? (2)
   6.9 Identify and explain the figure of speech found in line 99, “A cutpurse of the empire and the rule”. (3)
   6.10 Basing your comments on the dialogue, critically discuss the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. (3)

   [25 marks]

Question 7
Act 4, Scene 4, lines 32–66, from “How all occasions ...” to “... or be nothing worth.”

7.1 This is the last of seven soliloquies by Hamlet. What does the large number of soliloquies tell us about his character? (2)
7.2 What is Hamlet lamenting in line 32, “How all occasions do inform against me”? (1)
7.3 Do you agree with Hamlet that his revenge has been “dull”? Justify your answer and provide proof from the play. (2)
7.4 Study lines 33–35, “What is a man ... no more.” In your own words, explain Hamlet’s development of thought in these lines.

7.5 Refer to lines 41–43.
7.5.1 “Of thinking too precisely on th’ event” (line 41). What aspect of his personality is Hamlet criticising in this line?

7.5.2 What does Hamlet say is the result of this characteristic?

7.6 In your own words, discuss why Hamlet feels that he has every reason to act on his revenge, basing your answer on line 45 only.

7.7 Using lines 48–56, “Led by a delicate ... at the stake”, explain what Hamlet’s thoughts are about Fortinbras.

7.8 Hamlet compares himself to Fortinbras, as Fortinbras is also seeking revenge. In your own words, explain why Hamlet feels that he has more cause for revenge than Fortinbras. Pay close attention to lines 56–59, “How stand I then ... let all sleep”, in your answer.

7.9 Using this extract, compare the characters of Hamlet and Fortinbras.

7.10 What is Hamlet motivating himself to do in the last two lines of the extract?

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**Question 8**

Act 4, Scene 7, lines 1–90, from “Now must your conscience ...” to “... come short of what he did.”

8.1 “Now must your conscience my acquaintance seal” (line 1). What is ironic about Claudius’ words?

8.2 Refer to lines 5–9.
8.2.1 What is Laertes asking Claudius in lines 5–9?

8.2.2 What are the “feats” that are “crimeful” and “capital in nature” that Laertes refers to in lines 6–7?

8.2.3 In your own words, explain what Claudius’ “two special reasons” are.

8.3 Give a synonym for “unsinew’d” as it is used in line 10.

8.4 “But my revenge will come” (line 29). How does Laertes’ approach to revenge differ from Hamlet’s?

8.5 How do both Claudius and Laertes react to the idea of Hamlet’s return to Elsinore? Explain their individual reactions.
TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

8.6 Who are the "rest" Claudius refers to in line 48? (2)
8.7 With reference to lines 64–68, explain what Claudius’ plan is. (3)
8.8 In your own words, explain the different meanings of the word "rul’d" as it is used by Claudius in line 59. (2)
8.9 What techniques does Claudius use to manipulate Laertes into doing his will? (3)

[25 marks]

Question 9
Act 5, Scene 1, lines 207–274, from “What ceremony else ...” to “... will sit drooping.”

9.1 In line 207, what is Laertes upset about? (1)
9.2 In line 208, what evidence is there that Hamlet does not have a personal quarrel with Laertes? (1)
9.3 Explain what the priest means when he says “Her death was doubtful” in line 211. (1)
9.4 What is significant about Laertes’ claim that violets will grow on Ophelia’s grave? (2)
9.5 In what tone of voice would an actor deliver the line “What, the fair Ophelia!” (line 226)? (2)
9.6 Explain how Gertrude shows her affection for Ophelia in lines 227–230. (3)
9.7 “Fall ten times treble on that cursed head” (line 231). Who is Laertes referring to in this line? (1)
9.8 “Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense / Depriv’d thee of” (line 233):
   9.8.1 What “wicked deed” is Laertes referring to in this line? (1)
   9.8.2 What is Laertes referring to with the words “thy most ingenious sense / Depriv’d thee of”? (1)
9.9 “The devil take thy soul!” (line 243). Explain how this line reveals Laertes’ feelings for Hamlet. (2)
9.10 “For though I am not ... dangerous” (lines 245–246). Comment on these lines, explaining how they sum up Hamlet’s true character. (4)
9.11 How can the words “Which let thy wiseness fear” (line 247) be seen as a threat? (2)
9.12 With reference to lines 260–265, critically discuss how Hamlet reacts to Laertes at Ophelia’s graveside. (3)
9.13 Give one adjective of your own that captures Gertrude’s feeling towards Hamlet in this extract. (1)

[25 marks]
Question 10
Act 5, Scene 2, lines 270–342, from “A hit, a ...” to “... tell my story.”

10.1 Refer to lines 272–273.
   10.1.1 “Stay, give me drink. Hamlet this pearl is thine.”
       What is Claudius actually doing in this line? (1)
   10.1.2 Explain the irony of Claudius saying to Hamlet,
       “Here’s to thy health.” (1)

10.2 How does Gertrude show her support for Hamlet in lines 278–286? (3)

10.3 Refer to lines 287–301.
   10.3.1 What is revealed of Laertes in his aside comment in
       line 288? (1)
   10.3.2 How is this further enforced with the words in
       line 301: “I am justly kill’d with mine own
       treachery”? (2)

10.4 What is Claudius’ intention in saying “She swoons to see
       them bleed” (line 302)? (1)

10.5 What, in particular, prompts Laertes to confess to Hamlet? (1)

10.6 “Then, venom, to thy work” (line 315). What is significant
       about Claudius’ death being caused by venom? (2)

10.7 “O yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.” (line 317). Explain
       how this statement is typical of Claudius. (2)

10.8 “Here, thou incestuous, murd’rous, damned Dane” (line 318).
       Critically discuss each adjective as it pertains to Claudius. (3)

10.9 Refer to lines 315–320.
   10.9.1 What is significant about how Hamlet avenges his
       mother’s death? (1)
   10.9.2 What is significant about how Hamlet avenges his
       father’s death? (1)

10.10 What is Laertes acknowledging about Hamlet by referring to
       him as “noble Hamlet” in line 322? (1)

10.11 What does Laertes absolve Hamlet of before he dies? (2)

10.12 What is Hamlet’s dying wish to Horatio? (2)

10.13 How does Horatio reveal that he is unable to deal with the
       events taking place? (1)

[25 marks]
Answers to contextual questions

Question 1

1.1.1 In this soliloquy Hamlet is upset / distraught / distressed / suicidal ✓ due to his father’s death and is disgusted ✓ by his mother’s hasty remarriage to his uncle. (2)

1.1.2 Hamlet is mourning the sudden death of his father ✓ and the fact that Claudius is now king ✓. His mother has remarried very quickly ✓ and to a man so different to his father ✓ and has married her dead husband’s brother ✓. [any two] (2)

1.2 Hamlet finds the thought of suicide tempting, ✓ and wishes that God had not forbidden it ✓. (2)

1.3.1 “Hyperion” is the late King Hamlet ✓ and the “satyr” is Claudius ✓. (2)

1.3.2 “Hyperion” is the sun god ✓. This implies that the late King Hamlet was a great man and a good king ✓ and at the top of the Chain of Being. A “satyr” is a lustful mythological creature, half-man and half-goat ✓. This implies that Claudius is associated with one of the lowest ranking creatures ✓ as satyrs are always linked to the physical pleasures of wine drinking and lechery. (4)

1.4 The late king was devoted and protective of Gertrude to the point where he would not allow the “winds of heaven” to “visit her face too roughly” ✓. She in turn “would hang on him” as if she never tired of him and the more time she spent with him the more she loved him ✓. (2)

1.5 Hamlet is accusing his mother, and all women, ✓ of being incapable of feeling deeply and of being weak and inconsistent ✓. (2)

1.6 Hamlet is upset that his mother has displayed reasoning that is no better than that of an animal ✓ in the way that she has not allowed an appropriate time of mourning ✓ to pass before remarrying. (2)

1.7 Hamlet emphasises the fact that his mother’s new husband and her dead husband were closely related ✓. By putting the words “father” and “brother” together he points out the incestuous nature of her new marriage ✓. (2)

1.8 Gertrude shows herself to be fickle ✓ and forgets quickly about her husband Hamlet, “ere those shoes were old” (line 147). She shows herself to be hypocritical ✓ as her
emotions are “all tears” (line 149) and yet she thoughtlessly ✓ and insensitively remarries without proper mourning. (3)

1.9 The word “month” is repeated to convey his shock and outrage at the speed with which his mother has remarried ✓ and to show that in such a short period of time his whole existence has changed ✓. (2)

[25 marks]

Question 2
2.1 By referring to King Hamlet’s death as unnatural, the ghost is implying that the late king was murdered and did not die of natural causes ✓. (1)

2.2 Hamlet’s words “Haste me to know ... revenge” are ironic because he is impatient to hear the details so that he can exact revenge ✓, but as the play progresses is unable to follow through with the actual revenge ✓. (2)

2.3 The theme of disease, decay and corruption is found in the image “fat weed” ✓. (1)

2.4 The people of Denmark are told that King Hamlet was sleeping in his orchard ✓ when he was bitten by a snake ✓. (2)

2.5.1 Metaphor is the figure of speech found in these lines. ✓ (1)

2.5.2 The image of the serpent implies that Claudius is evil / not to be trusted / sly ✓, dangerous and a killer ✓. (2)

2.6 Hamlet cries out “O my prophetic soul!” because what he has suspected happened has been confirmed by the ghost ✓. (1)

2.7 The words “That adulterate beast” (line 42) refer to Claudius’ affair with Gertrude ✓. (1)

2.8 The late king was sleeping in the orchard ✓ when Claudius poured a vial of poison into his ear ✓. This quickly spread, causing sores all over his body / thickening his blood and killing him ✓. (3)

2.9 The ghost claims that Claudius stole his life ✓, the crown ✓, and his wife, the queen ✓. (3)

2.10 The ghost is upset that the late king was killed at the height of unconscious sinfulness ✓ and was thus deprived of the opportunity to confess his sin and be absolved ✓. (2)

2.11 The ghost tells Hamlet not to plot against his mother ✓ but to leave her to suffer because of her conscience and the workings / judgement of God ✓. (2)
WERS TO CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

2.12 At first, Hamlet is full of doubt that the ghost is honest and fears that it may be the devil ✓. He is worried that he will not cope with the knowledge the ghost has given him / calls for strength to deal with it ✓. Lastly, he becomes determined to clear his head of all other thoughts besides what the ghost has asked him to do ✓.

2.13 Hamlet is accusing Claudius of hypocrisy / treachery ✓.

Question 3

3.1 The words “What do you think of me?” show that Polonius wants to be in Claudius and Gertrude’s favour / is concerned about their opinion of him / is eager to please them / is sycophantic (someone who flatters those in authority) ✓.

3.2 Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude that he has told Ophelia that Hamlet is a prince and therefore moves in a sphere above hers ✓. “Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star” ✓.

3.3 Polonius tells Ophelia not to allow Hamlet near her ✓, not to accept messages from him ✓, and not to accept any gifts he may give her ✓.

3.4 Polonius feels that Ophelia’s rejection ✓ of Hamlet has made him sad so that he has stopped eating, becoming very weak as a result, and, finally, showing signs of madness ✓.

3.5 The truth Polonius is hoping to find is if this is the real reason for Hamlet’s strange behaviour ✓.

3.6 Polonius seeks to find the true source of Hamlet’s madness, but ironically the true source lies in the fact that Claudius has murdered the late king ✓ – and this truth is something that Claudius would very much like to stay hidden ✓ / Claudius is very dishonest ✓.

3.7 Polonius’ plan is to send Ophelia to Hamlet ✓ when Hamlet is walking alone in the lobby ✓. Polonius will hide behind a wall hanging ✓ and eavesdrop on their conversation ✓.

3.8 Hamlet is insulting Polonius by calling him a “fishmonger” ✓.

3.9.1 Hamlet is feeling betrayed / despondent / alone / disillusioned ✓.

3.9.2 Hamlet feels this way because he does not know who to trust / he has lost faith in his mother / Ophelia has lied to him / his father was murdered by his uncle ✓.

3.10 Hamlet is implying that Ophelia is not pure / chaste ✓.
3.11 Hamlet is mocking the fact that Polonius talks too much✓. (1)
3.12 Hamlet mocks Polonius for being old and open to mockery. He implies that Polonius, being old, has a “lack of wit” (is foolish), and with his “weak hams” is physically feeble. He also refers to the ugliness of old age, using terms such as “wrinkled”, “eyes purging thick amber”. [any valid point✓ + quote✓] (2)
3.13 Hamlet wishes that someone would take his life✓ / wishes for death✓. (1)
3.14 Polonius shows himself to be naive, sycophantic, meddlesome. [any two✓✓] (2)

[25 marks]

**Question 4**

4.1 Hamlet feels isolated and lonely in his situation✓. (1)
4.2 The line “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” should be said slowly, pausing to enunciate each word to emphasise disgust in one’s self / as a cry of anguish / [any valid answer]✓. (1)
4.3 Hamlet is upset by the player’s speech because the actor is moved to tears✓. The player is simply acting a scene, but Hamlet, who has every reason to be moved to react with passion✓, is unable to do so✓. (3)
4.4 Hamlet’s motive is the need to avenge the murder of his father✓ and the affair between Claudius and Gertrude✓. (2)
4.5 The metaphor “unpregnant of my cause” uses the word “unpregnant” to mean not producing anything✓. Hamlet feels that, although he has cause, he is still not stirred to action✓. (2)
4.6.1 Hamlet is saying that he is a coward✓. He doesn’t have it in himself to do what needs to be done✓. (2)
4.6.2 Yes, I agree with Hamlet that he is cowardly and lacks passion. He should actively find the proof he needs and act on it immediately✓ for the good of Denmark✓. OR No, I disagree with Hamlet’s opinion of himself. He is a thinker / rational person✓. It is not in his character to commit an act of violence and therefore he needs time to find enough proof to check if Claudius did do what the ghost accuses him of, before he can take action✓. (2)
4.7 Claudius is the “slave” Hamlet is referring to✓. (1)
4.8 Yes, Claudius is a “Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain”. “Remorseless” – because he shows no guilt /


**Question 5**

5.1.1 Ophelia wants to return to Hamlet the tokens of affection / keepsakes that he has given her ✓. (1)

5.1.2 Ophelia’s father, Polonius, has told her to return them ✓. (1)

5.1.3 Hamlet says “I never gave you aught” because he no longer feels like the same man who gave her the presents ✓ / he is being deliberately obtuse as part of his act of madness ✓. (1)

5.2 Ophelia describes their previous relationship as a loving relationship ✓. This is implied in “words of so sweet breath” ✓. (2)

5.3 Ophelia is accusing Hamlet of being cruel / unkind ✓. (1)

5.4 Hamlet says that beauty subverts virtue and turns women ✓ into duplicitous whores who are unable to be honest and pure ✓. OR Hamlet says that honesty and virtue ✓ do not translate into beauty ✓. (2)

5.5 “Nunnery” is a pun as a nunnery is a convent ✓ and a “nunnery” was also slang for a brothel ✓. (2)

5.6 Hamlet’s state of mind in lines 121–124 is one of disillusionment ✓. He feels that everyone is a sinner and evil and that if Ophelia has a baby it will also be a sinner ✓. He feels himself to be so bad that he wishes he had never been born ✓. (3)
ANSWERS TO CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

5.7 Hamlet asks Ophelia where her father is because he wants to test her ✓ as he suspects Polonius is hiding close by.  
5.8 Yes – Polonius is foolish and meddles / talks too much ✓  
OR No – Polonius is simply doing his job and is protecting his daughter and king ✓.
5.9 Hamlet curses Ophelia by saying that even if she stays pure until marriage (“pure as snow”) ✓, she won’t escape false accusations (“calumny”) ✓ of impure behaviour ✓.
5.10.1 In lines 142–143 Hamlet is accusing all women of being deceitful ✓: God gives them one face and they paint another one over it with make-up.
5.10.2 In lines 144–148 Hamlet accuses women of talking in an affected way (they “lisp”) ✓, of moving in an affected or provocative way (they “jig and amble”) ✓, of being purposely childlike (nicknaming animals) ✓ and of pretending that they are ignorant of their wanton behaviour ✓. [any three ✓✓✓]
5.11 After observing him, Ophelia feels that he is no longer the same person he was. He was once noble and respected as a soldier and scholar ✓ and has descended into madness / lost his mind ✓.

[25 marks]

Question 6

6.1.1 Hamlet points to a portrait of King Hamlet and one of Claudius ✓.
6.1.2 Hamlet points to the portraits to demonstrate the obvious differences between the two men ✓ and to try and visually prove ✓ to Gertrude that her choice makes no sense.
6.2.1 Hamlet creates a god-like image of his father by referring to Hyperion, Jove and Mars ✓.
6.2.2 Hamlet respected / loved / admired his father ✓. He worshipped him ✓ and put him on a pedestal.
6.3.1 Hamlet compares Claudius to an infected ear of corn ✓.
6.3.2 Hamlet compares Claudius to a “mildew’d ear” because mildew is a mould that makes corn diseased and inedible, and Hamlet is implying that Claudius’ corruption is as distasteful ✓ and, like mildew on corn, will cause decay in Denmark ✓.
6.4 Hamlet accuses his mother of being blind (“Ha, have you eyes?”) ✓, of marrying for reasons other than love (“You cannot call it love”) ✓, of having poor judgement (“what judgement /
WERS TO CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

Would step from this to this?" ✓, of having limited / paralysed intelligence ("that sense / Is apoplex'd") ✓. [any three ✓✓✓] (3)

6.5 By saying "O shame, where is thy blush?" Hamlet is berating Gertrude for not being ashamed of her behaviour ✓. (1)

6.6 Gertrude becomes upset and asks Hamlet to stop ✓. He has made her look inside her soul and she is faced with the ugly reality of her sin ✓. (2)

6.7 Hamlet continues his attack because, on the one hand, he is impassioned, upset and has almost lost control of his emotions ✓ and so cannot stop himself. On the other hand, his mother has shown herself to be fickle and shallow and so he continues to make his point, so that he is sure that she has realised what she has done ✓. (2)

6.8 The crimes Hamlet accuses Claudius of are being a murderer ✓ and a thief ✓. (2)

6.9 The image "A cutpurse of the empire and the rule" is a metaphor ✓ for Claudius' usurping the crown. A cutpurse is a pickpocket who steals from people without their noticing ✓ and this is exactly what Claudius has done. He has stolen the kingship from the rightful heir, Hamlet ✓. (3)

6.10 The dialogue reveals that Hamlet and Gertrude have a close relationship ✓ as Hamlet feels free to speak to his mother about very personal issues. He feels safe to call her husband a murderer and their marriage incestuous. He is also aggressive and disrespectful towards her ✓ and in reaction she is weak and appeasing ✓. Instead of berating him for speaking to her in this manner, she addresses him by endearments, calling him "sweet Hamlet," and submits to his accusations. (3)

[25 marks]

Question 7

7.1 The large number of soliloquies tells us that Hamlet is a scholar ✓ and thinks very deeply about things ✓ / he is a person who reasons ✓ and thinks about everything from every angle ✓ / is often alone ✓ and so talks his problems out with the audience ✓. [any two ✓✓] (2)

7.2 In line 32, "How all occasions do inform against me", Hamlet is complaining that everything seems to be going wrong / working against him getting revenge ✓. (1)

7.3 Yes, I agree that Hamlet's revenge has been "dull". He has taken time to think things over and has worried about what
will happen to his soul ✓; this causes him not to use the
opportunity he has when Claudius is “praying” ✓.  
7.4 Hamlet questions what the point of life is ✓ if all you do is
eat and sleep ✓. He then reasons that you are no better than
an animal ✓.  
7.5.1 By saying that he thinks “too precisely on th’ event”, Hamlet
is saying that he over-analyses things ✓.  
7.5.2 Hamlet says that the result of over-analysing is
cowardice ✓.  
7.6 Hamlet feels that he has “cause”, which is a valid motive for
his revenge ✓; he has the “will”, the strength of character
and the desire to follow through ✓ with his revenge; he has
“strength” because he is determined ✓ has the physical and
mental power ✓; and he has “means” because he has the
proof ✓ resources he needs ✓.  
7.7 Hamlet feels that Fortinbras is young ✓ and sensitive ✓, that
he is following his quest for honour ✓, that God is supporting
his ambition ✓, that he is brave ✓ and risks everything ✓ for
a worthless piece of land because of honour ✓, that he acts
immediately ✓ with a show of force that is not in line with
the importance of the goal ✓.  
7.8 Unlike Fortinbras, Hamlet has a murdered father ✓ and a
shamed mother ✓.  
7.9 Fortinbras is decisive and quick thinking ✓, while Hamlet is
slow to act and over-analyses things ✓; Fortinbras doesn’t
fear the consequences of his actions ✓, while Hamlet is very
aware of and fearful of the consequences of his revenge ✓.  
7.10 Hamlet is motivating himself to be focussed on active
revenge ✓.  

[25 marks]

Question 8

8.1 Claudius’ words are ironic because he is in fact indirectly
responsible for Polonius’ death. ✓ Hamlet kills Polonius
thinking he is Claudius; and the killing happens as a result
of Claudius’ murder of Hamlet’s father. ✓ Also, Claudius has
shown that he has no conscience ✓.  
8.2.1 Laertes is asking why Claudius has not acted against
Hamlet for his killing of Polonius ✓.
WERS TO CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

8.2.2 The “feats” that are “crimeful” and “capital in nature” are the killing of Polonius ✓ and the threat of treason against Claudius ✓.

8.2.3 Claudius has not acted because of Gertrude’s fondness ✓ for Hamlet and the people of Denmark’s support of Hamlet ✓.

8.3 A synonym for “unsinew’d” is weak / feeble ✓.

8.4 Laertes is passionate in his quest for revenge ✓; Hamlet is slow to act on his revenge ✓.

8.5 Claudius is shocked and worried; he can’t understand how his plot has failed ✓. He asks lots of questions because he doesn’t understand the outcome of events ✓. Laertes is excited ✓ because this gives him an opportunity to have his revenge ✓.

8.6 The “rest” Claudius refers to are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ✓.

8.7 Claudius’ plan is to deliberately create a situation / lead Hamlet into a situation ✓ in which he is killed ✓ but make it look like an accident ✓.

8.8 Claudius uses the word “rul’d” to mean ruled by a king, where you have no option but to obey ✓, but it could also mean controlled by someone else’s opinion ✓.

8.9 Claudius manipulates Laertes through flattery ✓, uses his position as king ✓ (he asks if Laertes will be ruled by him), plays Laertes and Hamlet off against each other to stroke Laertes’ ego ✓ and deceives Laertes in order to deepen his misconceptions of the situation ✓.

[25 marks]

Question 9

9.1 Laertes is upset because Ophelia’s funeral has not been given enough ceremony / ritual / respect ✓.

9.2 Hamlet describes Laertes as a “noble youth” ✓.

9.3 The priest is alluding to the fact that Ophelia may have committed suicide / it is not clear that her death was an accident ✓.

9.4 Violets are symbolic of love ✓ and chastity ✓.

9.5 An actor would deliver the line “What, the fair Ophelia!” with shock / horror / dismay / anguish ✓✓. [any two ✓✓]

9.6 Gertrude shows her affection for Ophelia by using endearments ✓, saying she had hoped Ophelia would be Hamlet’s wife ✓, and she puts flowers on Ophelia’s grave. ✓
9.7 Laertes is referring to Hamlet ✓.
9.8.1 The “wicked deed” Laertes is referring to is the killing of Polonius ✓, which caused Ophelia to lose her sanity. (1)
9.8.2 Laertes is referring to the loss of Ophelia’s lively intelligence ✓. (1)
9.9 By saying “The devil take thy soul!” Laertes shows his hatred for Hamlet ✓ and curses him to an eternity in hell ✓. (2)
9.10 Hamlet is not rash and hot tempered ✓ – he thinks things through before acting ✓. Nonetheless, he is strong willed / focussed ✓ and therefore dangerous ✓. (4)
9.11 Hamlet has explained that he is in fact dangerous ✓ and warns that Laertes would be wise to fear the danger he poses ✓. (2)
9.12 Hamlet sees his grief as competing with Laertes’ grief ✓ [must include this point] and accuses Laertes of jumping into the grave to shame him ✓. Hamlet says that if Laertes says he will be buried with Ophelia then so will he. ✓ OR Whatever Laertes will do to show the extent of his grief, Hamlet will equal or better. ✓ (3)
9.13 Gertrude is protective towards / concerned about / worried about Hamlet ✓. (1)

[25 marks]

Question 10
10.1.1 Claudius is putting poison in the cup ✓. (1)
10.1.2 Claudius is actually busy poisoning Hamlet ✓. (1)
10.2 Gertrude shows her support by offering him her handkerchief ✓, drinking a toast to him ✓ and wiping his face ✓. (3)
10.3.1 Laertes’ aside shows that he is not an evil / bad person ✓ and does have a conscience. (1)
10.3.2 In this line, Laertes admits that he has been killed with the same sword that he has used to kill Hamlet, and that he has killed Hamlet with an act of deceit (“treachery”) ✓. Laertes admits that his own death is an act of justice (“justly killed”) ✓. (2)
10.4 Claudius is trying to hide the fact that Gertrude is dying / has been poisoned by the wine ✓. (1)
10.5 Laertes confesses because Claudius has allowed Gertrude to drink the poisoned wine ✓. (1)
10.6 The ghost calls Claudius a serpent and refers to the poison that Claudius has used to kill the king as venom ✓. / After Claudius has killed the king, using poison, ✓ he spreads a story that the king has been killed by the poisonous bite of a snake. The fact that Claudius is now being killed by the same
Venom (poison) that he plans for Hamlet to drink means that exact revenge has been carried out. [any two ✓✓] (2)

10.7 It is typical of Claudius because he is once again lying /; he wants the people watching to protect him. OR He is in denial / of the reality of the situation. [any one ✓] (1)

10.8 Hamlet describes Claudius as “incestuous” because of his affair and marriage with Gertrude, his brother’s wife ✓; as “murderous” because he has killed his brother, planned to kill Hamlet, and inadvertently killed his wife ✓; and as “damned” because he is evil and is going to hell ✓. (3)

10.9.1 Gertrude drinks wine poisoned by Claudius, so Hamlet forces Claudius to drink the same poisoned wine ✓. (1)

10.9.2 Hamlet avenges his father by stabbing Claudius with a poisoned sword. This is significant because his father was poisoned by Claudius ✓. It is also significant that Hamlet kills Claudius with the same poisoned sword meant to kill him ✓. (2)

10.10 Laertes is acknowledging that Hamlet was a good man ✓. (1)

10.11 Laertes tells Hamlet that Hamlet is not responsible for his death ✓ or Polonius’ death ✓. (2)

10.12 Hamlet wishes that Horatio should live ✓ and, even if he finds it painful, tell people the truth about Hamlet ✓. (2)

10.13 Horatio tries to kill himself ✓. (1)

[25 marks]

Essay questions and guidelines

In your literature exam, you will have to choose between doing a Hamlet essay or a Hamlet contextual question if you are a Home Language learner – you cannot do both. It is advisable to read through both options before you decide which to do. If you choose to do the essay question, it is very important to take the time to think about and plan your essay before you start. Make sure that you are clear in your approach before you start writing. You will lose marks if you ramble, contradict yourself or write off the topic.

English First Additional Language learners are not required to answer essay questions in the exam. These are included for practice only.

Your essay will be marked against a rubric that awards 15 marks for content and 10 marks for language and structure, if you are a home
language learner. Therefore, it is important that you pay attention to these three elements as you write your answer. Remember, when you write a literature essay, your knowledge and understanding of the play are being tested. You must base your answer on the play and substantiate all your opinions and points with proof from the play. Be very careful to avoid simply retelling the story of the play. Try to refer to the essay question as often as possible to ensure that you are on topic.

The first step is to analyse the question / topic. Underline the key words and be sure that you understand exactly what you are being asked to discuss or explain. Take five minutes to plan your essay. Your introduction must outline your stance on the topic, then argue your points in the body of the essay and conclude by summarising your main arguments and reiterating your stance. Each paragraph should deal with a separate point and should have a topic sentence that clearly states the point you are making. The rest of the paragraph is the supporting proof from the play. Plan your essay carefully, as you will have a lot of information to convey in a limited number of words, as literature essays are usually only 400–450 words long (Home Language).

Essay 1 below is a sample essay to show you the organisation, structure and type of language. It is one way of answering this question. Your approach may be different. Remember that you will be assessed on how you engage with the play and how well you can structure your answer. Essays 2 to 5 have notes to guide you in your planning of the essays and examples of how to develop your points.

The rubric your educator will use to assess your work is provided on page 195 (English Home Language). Study the rubric before starting to write, so that you understand how your task will be assessed.

1. “Hamlet is not so much a play dealing with revenge, as it is a play about loyalty and disloyalty.” Discuss this statement and consider in your answer the characters of Horatio, Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia, Laertes and Hamlet. (HL)

Suggestions for writing your essay
The most important step in writing this essay is analysing and understanding the topic: “Hamlet is not so much a play dealing with revenge, as it is a play about loyalty and disloyalty.” Discuss this statement and consider in your answer the characters of Horatio, Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia, Laertes and Hamlet.

Decide which characters are loyal, which are disloyal and which fall into both camps. List who they are loyal and disloyal to and find supporting proof from the play to substantiate your arguments.
**Hamlet** tells of three peoples’ quests for revenge, all rooted in a sense of loyalty to a dead loved one. This loyalty creates situations where others are called to be either loyal or disloyal. It is, in fact, an act of gross disloyalty to the whole of Denmark that throws the characters of Horatio, Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia, Laertes and Hamlet into conflict and that tests their loyalties and leads to acts of revenge.

The author of this disloyalty is Claudius. He has an affair with his sister-in-law, and murders his own brother in order to opportunistically create a situation in which he will be elected king instead of his nephew, Hamlet. Claudius is then disloyal to Gertrude by plotting against her son, and by allowing her to drink the poisoned wine and then trying to hide what he has done.

He also corrupts others and causes them to be disloyal. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern overturn years of loyal friendship to Hamlet in order to spy for Claudius. Gertrude betrays her loyal husband and turns against her son in favour of being loyal to Claudius. Besides the affair, Gertrude is disloyal to her dead husband by remarrying less than two months after his death. She sides with Claudius and berates Hamlet for still grieving for his father. Contradicting Hamlet’s desire to return to Wittenburg, she asks that he stay in Elsinore. She also supports Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s spying although it could be argued that her motive here is concern. Once Hamlet confronts her, her loyalty shifts to him and she perpetuates the myth that he is mad.

Ophelia is forced into acts of disloyalty by her father. Polonius instructs her to end her relationship with Hamlet and to take part in his attempts to find out the reason for Hamlet’s madness. In being loyal to her father she is forced to be disloyal to Hamlet. This further reinforces his belief that everyone around him is disloyal except for Horatio.

Horatio is the only character who is loyal to Hamlet. He tells Hamlet about the ghost and Hamlet shares the ghost’s news with him. Hamlet trusts Horatio with the truth about pretending to be mad and asks Horatio for help during the play. Horatio’s loyalty is such that he even tries to drink the last of the poison but is prevented by Hamlet, who asks him to tell the world his true story.

Laertes’ strong sense of loyalty to his family leads him to act rashly and demand justice for the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia. Similarly, Hamlet is driven by a strong sense of loyalty towards his father and to his oath to avenge his father’s murder. It is because of this loyalty that he is cruel to Ophelia and confronts his mother with the truth of her disloyalty. At the end, he avenges both his parents’ deaths and thereby shows his loyalty to them.
Although the play *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, in which all the characters are affected by Hamlet's quest for revenge, the true catalysts in the play are Claudius' treacherous disloyalty and Hamlet's strong sense of loyalty.

2. "Hamlet's delay in avenging his father's murder is an act of cowardice." Discuss critically. (FAL)

Suggestions for writing your essay

Begin by stating whether you agree with the statement or not. There is division over whether Hamlet's delay is due to cowardice, or because he is gathering proof and seeking the right moment for his revenge. Your essay should look critically at Hamlet's reasons for delay, his search for proof, his missed opportunity and his self-criticism (he accuses himself of cowardice). Once you have explored the facts presented in the play, conclude with a well-balanced and argued decision.

*Hamlet's delay and need for proof*
VY QUESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

this may suggest that he is actually keen to act but is holding himself back in order to prove Claudius' guilt.
• Does Hamlet show cowardice in the final scene?

3. In his play, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare explores the relationships between parents and their children. Discuss. (FAL)

*Suggestions for writing your essay*
List all the parent-child relationships in the play before starting to plan your essay. Decide on the nature of the relationships: are they healthy, loving and balanced, or unhealthy, selfish and destructive? Find evidence from the play.

**Hamlet and his parents**
• What does Hamlet feel for his father? How does he describe his father in his soliloquies and when confronting his mother? (See Act 1, Scene 2, lines 130–159; Act 3, Scene 4, lines 53–105.) Does he put his father on a pedestal (i.e. worship him)? Is this hero worship of his father healthy? Is the ghost fair in asking Hamlet to go against his nature and avenge his father’s murder? What kind of moral and spiritual burden does this place on Hamlet?
• What does Gertrude’s remarriage so soon after Hamlet’s father’s death suggest about her relationship with and respect for Hamlet? At the start of the play, Gertrude sides with Claudius in chiding Hamlet for grieving; what does this say about her relationship with her son? Why does she want Hamlet to stay in Elsinore? Is Hamlet right in being so mocking, scathing and sarcastic towards her? Why does Gertrude want to find out the reason for Hamlet’s strange behaviour? What does the scene in her chamber reveal about their relationship? Who is actually the dominant person in their relationship? How does Gertrude finally show her love for Hamlet (consider the scenes by Ophelia's grave and the sword fight)? How does Hamlet show his love for Gertrude?
• What is Hamlet’s relationship with Claudius, his step-father?

**Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia**
• What is Polonius’ relationship with his children? Why do they allow him to control their actions and relationships? What does it say of his opinion of Laertes that he sends Reynaldo to spy on Laertes?
• Ophelia and Laertes both have strong emotional reactions to Polonius’ death. What does this say about their feelings for him?
Although the play *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, in which all the characters are affected by Hamlet's quest for revenge, the true catalysts in the play are Claudius' treacherous disloyalty and Hamlet's strong sense of loyalty.

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**Suggestions for writing your essay**

Begin by stating whether you agree with the statement or not. There is division over whether Hamlet’s delay is due to cowardice, or because he is gathering proof and seeking the right moment for his revenge. Your essay should look critically at Hamlet’s reasons for delay, his search for proof, his missed opportunity and his self-criticism (he accuses himself of cowardice). Once you have explored the facts presented in the play, conclude with a well-balanced and argued decision.

**Hamlet's delay and need for proof**

- Could Hamlet simply take the ghost at its word? What evil could the ghost represent?
- Consider Hamlet’s nature and personality. Is it in his nature to act rashly? Does this make him a coward? What happens when Hamlet does act on impulse? (See Act 3, Scene 4.) What is the result of this impulsive action?
- As the Prince of Denmark, is Hamlet free to act as he wants? Does he have political and social expectations and constraints to consider? Does he have his mother and the future of Denmark to consider? Has Claudius proved to be a good or bad king? Would the people support Hamlet’s murder of Claudius? Without proof, how would he explain his revenge?
- Does Hamlet create an opportunity to find the proof he needs? (See Act 3, Scene 2.) Is his method of finding proof clever and conclusive? Is he ready to act on this proof? (See Act 3, Scene 3, line 73.) What stops him? From Hamlet’s perspective, is his thinking justified or valid when he sees Claudius praying? Does Hamlet show soon after this that he is willing to act?

**Is Hamlet a coward?**

- What events prompt Hamlet to berate himself and call himself a coward? (See Act 2, Scene 2; Act 3, Scene 1; Act 4, Scene 4.) Who does he compare himself to? Are these fair comparisons? Consider the fact that he is so frustrated with the delay and that
this may suggest that he is actually keen to act but is holding himself back in order to prove Claudius' guilt.

- Does Hamlet show cowardice in the final scene?

3. In his play, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare explores the relationships between parents and their children. Discuss. (FAL)

Suggestions for writing your essay
List all the parent-child relationships in the play before starting to plan your essay. Decide on the nature of the relationships: are they healthy, loving and balanced, or unhealthy, selfish and destructive? Find evidence from the play.

Hamlet and his parents
- What does Hamlet feel for his father? How does he describe his father in his soliloquies and when confronting his mother? (See Act 1, Scene 2, lines 130–159; Act 3, Scene 4, lines 53–105.) Does he put his father on a pedestal (i.e. worship him)? Is this hero worship of his father healthy? Is the ghost fair in asking Hamlet to go against his nature and avenge his father’s murder? What kind of moral and spiritual burden does this place on Hamlet?
- What does Gertrude's remarriage so soon after Hamlet's father's death suggest about her relationship with and respect for Hamlet? At the start of the play, Gertrude sides with Claudius in chiding Hamlet for grieving: what does this say about her relationship with her son? Why does she want Hamlet to stay in Elsinore? Is Hamlet right in being so mocking, scathing and sarcastic towards her? Why does Gertrude want to find out the reason for Hamlet’s strange behaviour? What does the scene in her chamber reveal about their relationship? Who is actually the dominant person in their relationship? How does Gertrude finally show her love for Hamlet (consider the scenes by Ophelia's grave and the sword fight)? How does Hamlet show his love for Gertrude?
- What is Hamlet's relationship with Claudius, his step-father?

Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia
- What is Polonius' relationship with his children? Why do they allow him to control their actions and relationships? What does it say of his opinion of Laertes that he sends Reynaldo to spy on Laertes?
- Ophelia and Laertes both have strong emotional reactions to Polonius' death. What does this say about their feelings for him?
Fortinbras
- Is Fortinbras' love for his father similar to Hamlet's? Is it more or less healthy?

4. “Frailty thy name is woman.” How accurate a criticism is this of Gertrude and Ophelia? (HL)

Suggestions for writing your essay
This type of question calls for a character essay, but be very careful that you do not simply fall into story-telling. While writing your essay, constantly refer to the key issue of whether Gertrude and Ophelia are guilty of the criticism. This type of essay requires a broad knowledge of minor characters and events and tests your ability to draw this information together under the banner of a specific topic. Be sure that you have a clear understanding of the quote before you undertake such a question. Explain the quote in the introduction and state whether you feel Gertrude and Ophelia are guilty of this criticism. The body of your essay will be your proof.
- What does the quote mean? What is Hamlet accusing all women of? Are Gertrude and Ophelia guilty of being “frail”, and to what extent?
- Is Hamlet objective in his view of women, and especially of Ophelia?

Gertrude
- How does Hamlet describe Gertrude’s marriage to and her love for his father? (See Act 1, Scene 2, lines 130–159.) What effect does her speedy remarriage have on Hamlet’s view of this relationship? Does it make him doubt the sincerity of her feelings for her husband? What does the speed with which she changes her affection say of her personality? Is Hamlet right to judge her remarriage and her?
- How does Claudius seduce Gertrude? (See Act 1, Scene 5, line 43.) What does this say of her character? Consider what she gives up for his gifts and sweet words. Does this confirm or negate the criticism?
- What does the speed of Gertrude’s remarriage suggest about her respect for the memory of her late husband? And what does it suggest about her respect for Hamlet? Where does Gertrude’s loyalties lie? In the beginning of the play she sides with Claudius over Hamlet: what does this suggest?
- How does Hamlet get Gertrude to see the error of her ways? Is it easy for him to turn her against Claudius and remind her of the loyalty she should have had for her late husband? What does this make her guilty of? Who has her final loyalty?
Questions and Guidelines

- Ultimately, is Gertrude inherently weak in character and fickle in nature?

Ophelia
- Why does Ophelia break off her relationship with Hamlet and return his gifts? Could she have gone against the wishes of her father and brother? Is she honourable, chaste and pure, or is she deserving of Hamlet’s accusations of disloyal hypocrisy and wanton behaviour? Could Ophelia have refused to take part in Polonius’ plan to find out the reason behind Hamlet’s madness?
- Is Ophelia’s madness the result of an inherently weak character?
- Does Ophelia deserve the treatment she receives from Hamlet and his accusations of “frailty”, or is Hamlet treating her unjustly and punishing her for his frustration with his mother and his own situation, falsely accusing her of dishonest behaviour?

5. Hamlet has often been called a “revenge tragedy” in which characters are bound by honour to avenge the deaths of loved ones.

Write an essay in which you discuss how honour relates to the characters and actions of Fortinbras, Laertes and Hamlet in their respective quests for revenge. (HL)

Suggestions for writing your essay
This is a complex essay topic that has many elements to it. Be careful to analyse the topic and make sure that you deal with every aspect and character listed in the topic.

In your introduction, explain the concepts of revenge and honour. Briefly discuss the concept of how Hamlet is a revenge tragedy and explain how the three characters are all involved in a quest for revenge. Be sure to cover all three characters and to explain their individual quests for revenge. The key to this essay is to understand that revenge is not the discussion point. The discussion point is that the characters are bound by honour to follow through with their revenge, and this honour affects their actions.

Fortinbras
- Explain Fortinbras’ reason for revenge. Consider how his father has died, who has killed him and whether Fortinbras’ quest for revenge is justified. Are his intentions honourable? Does he always behave with honour in his quest for revenge? Is he driven by a sense of honour or justice? Consider his first plan
for revenge and how Claudius thwarts it. How does Fortinbras respond to this development? How does his uncle redirect his intentions and use his sense of honour in a different way? Does Fortinbras over-analyse his need for revenge? Is he easily swayed or is he relentless in his quest? Is his quest a personal one or does it involve thousands of soldiers? Does his sense of honour display itself in a selfish way? Does Fortinbras' concept of honour contradict a more modern view of honour? Does he succeed in his revenge?

Laertes
- Explain Laertes’ quest for revenge. Is he swift in acting on his desire for revenge? Consider that he immediately returns from France and demands justice. Does he think his actions through before acting? Does Laertes behave with honour in his quest for revenge? How is Claudius able to manipulate Laertes’ sense of honour? (See Act 4, Scene 7.) Do his intentions remain honourable? Are his actions always honourable?

Hamlet
- Explain Hamlet’s quest for revenge. What does the ghost tell Hamlet? What effect does this information have on Hamlet? What does the ghost ask Hamlet to do? How does the ghost make Hamlet feel guilty? Does Hamlet choose to avenge his father’s murder, or is the task forced on him? As the son of a murdered father, is it expected of him to avenge his father’s death? Is it Hamlet’s destiny to avenge his father? Does Hamlet approach his vengeance with honour? Consider that he seeks proof before acting and does not kill Claudius while he prays. Can it be argued that this is a very honourable act? Are his intentions always honourable? Why does Hamlet find it difficult to put his intentions into action?

Conclusion
- How are the three men bound by honour? How are they similar in their actions and intentions? How are they different?