

**STUDY SKILLS**

**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**A LEVEL**

**ORMISTON RIVERS ACADEMY**



# Useful websites/resources

[www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com)

[www.schmoop.com](http://www.schmoop.com)

[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

[LitCharts | From the creators of SparkNotes, something better.](#)

[BBC Radio 4 - In Our Time](#)

[Poetry Foundation](#)

[AQA | English Literature A | Subject content – A-level | Love through the ages](#)

The school library also has a selection of study guides and literary criticism on the texts you will be studying. These have been hand picked by your teachers to support you in your learning and especially the requirements of Assessment Objective 5 ‘views and interpretations of other readers’

## Wider Reading

The best way to get better at English Literature is to read as many novels, plays and poetry collection from a diverse amount of genres, styles and historical periods. It is also the greatest pleasure in the subject. The more you read, the more you can appreciate the writer’s craft and can begin to articulate what the writers’ you study in detail are doing that is unique or interesting.

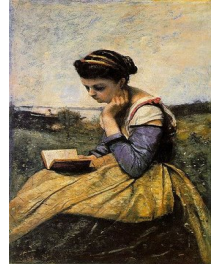
Please use the attached Reading List as much as possible to add breadth to your understanding!

## How to become an informed, independent reader

Before we start to explore your chosen area of literature, we are going to establish what kind of reader you need to be. The aim of AS English Literature is to enable you to develop as an informed, independent reader and confident critic of literary texts.

As an informed, independent reader, you will learn to build a reading text through:

- Careful and close reading which provides you with appropriate and specific evidence to support your interpretation
- Consideration and understanding of other possible readings
- Research into the contexts of both reading and writing.



## Reading for Meaning

As you read the texts for coursework and your exam, you will need to be actively engaged with these texts in order to develop informed, personal responses.

We think that:

### Reading:

- Is an active process: the reader is in an active creator, not a passive recipient of second-hand opinion - you are the 'maker of meaning'
- Can never be 'innocent': all readings are historically, socially and individually specific - you bring your own personal context and experience to the text
- Is not a single skill: some kinds of reading are more demanding than others

## ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

Assessment objectives (AOs) identify the skills and knowledge you're expected to acquire during the course. Each module usually assesses a combination of between three and five objectives. Overall the objectives have a fairly equal weighting, but within individual modules the objectives will have varying degrees of importance.

### Examiner's secrets

It is helpful for you to know and understand the assessment objectives for the course and each unit (module) - you are more likely to pick up marks if you know what the examiner is looking for.

Listed below are the four assessment objectives for English Literature, with a brief explanation of what each one means. Unless indicated, they are tested at both AS and A2; the difference is that at A2 a higher standard is expected.

### A01

**Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression**

*This objective highlights your own writing skills (you need to communicate coherently and accurately), and also the need to know and use effectively relevant literary terms, such as 'metaphor', 'soliloquy' and so on.*

### A02

**Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts**

*You need to analyse closely the language of the writers you study. You also need to look at form and structure. Form is closely linked to genre: for example, some of the poems you study might take the form of sonnets, others might be odes or ballads. Structure refers more to a text's overall organization, including for example how it starts and ends, and the sequence of ideas or events.*

### A03

**Demonstrate understanding of the significance of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received 21.99%**

*This objective requires you to demonstrate understanding of the background that influences a text.*

### A04

**Explore connections across literary texts (14%)**

*This objective requires you to make comparisons and connections between texts: similarities, differences and how texts reflect the ideas of others.*

### A05

**Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations (11%)**

*This objective requires you to explore different critical readings of the text: your own alternative interpretation, schools of criticism and individual analyses of writers.*

### Take note.

Contextual influences on a text might for instance include relevant aspects of the historical period when the text was written, or the historical period of the writer's life in which the text was written

## A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE ESSAY FEEDBACK

|                          |                |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                   |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Grade Boundaries:</b> | <b>U = 0-7</b> | <b>E = 8-10</b> | <b>D = 11-13</b> | <b>C = 14-16</b> | <b>B = 17-19</b> | <b>A = 20-22</b> | <b>A* = 23-25</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|

| GRADE:   |  | AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression. (28%/7 marks)   | AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped by writers in literary texts. (24%/6 marks)   | AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received. (24%/6 marks)   | AO4: Explore connections across literary texts. (12%/3marks)   | AO5: Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations. (12%/3 marks)   |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| MARK /25:  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Band 5 (21-25)</b><br>perceptive/<br>assured                            |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptive, assured and sophisticated argument in relation to the task</li> <li>• assured use of literary critical concepts and terminology; mature and impressive expression</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptive understanding of authorial methods in relation to the task</li> <li>• assured engagement with how meanings are shaped by the methods used</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptive understanding of the significance of relevant contexts in relation to the task</li> <li>• assuredness in the connection between those contexts and the historicist literary concept studied</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptive exploration of connections across literary texts arising out of historicist study</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptive and confident engagement with the debate set up in the task</li> </ul> |
| <b>Band 4 (16-20)</b><br>coherent/<br>thorough                             |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• logical, thorough and coherent argument in relation to the task where ideas are debated in depth</li> <li>• appropriate use of literary critical concepts and terminology; precise and accurate expression</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thorough understanding of authorial methods in relation to the task</li> <li>• thorough engagement with how meanings are shaped by the methods used</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thorough understanding of the significance of relevant contexts in relation to the task</li> <li>• coherence in the connection between those contexts and the historicist literary concept studied</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• logical and consistent exploration of connections across literary texts arising out of historicist study</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thorough engagement with the debate set up in the task</li> </ul>                 |
| <b>Band 3 (11-15)</b><br>straightforward/<br>Relevant                      |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sensibly ordered ideas in a relevant argument in relation to the task</li> <li>• some use of literary critical concepts and terminology which are mainly appropriate; straightforward and clear expression</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• straightforward understanding of authorial methods in relation to the task</li> <li>• relevant engagement with how meanings are shaped by the methods used</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• straightforward understanding of the significance of relevant contexts in relation to the task</li> <li>• relevant connections between those contexts and the historicist literary concept studied</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exploration of connections across literary texts arising out of historicist study in a straightforward way</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• straightforward engagement with the debate set up in the task</li> </ul>          |
| <b>Band 2 (6-10)</b><br>simple/<br>generalised                             |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a simple structure to the argument which may not be consistent but which does relate to the task</li> <li>• generalised use of literary critical concepts and terminology; simple expression</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simple understanding of authorial methods in relation to the task</li> <li>• generalised engagement with how meanings are shaped by the methods used</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simple understanding of the significance of relevant contexts in relation to the task</li> <li>• generalised connections between those contexts and the historicist literary concept studied</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simple exploration of connections across literary texts arising out of historicist study</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simple and generalised response to the debate set up in the task</li> </ul>       |
| <b>Band 1 (1-5)</b><br>largely irrelevant/<br>misunderstood/<br>inaccurate |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some vague points in relation to the task and some ideas about task and text(s)</li> <li>• the writing is likely to be unclear and incorrect; or accurate but irrelevant</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little sense of how meanings are shaped</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little sense of any relevant contexts</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little sense of any connection arising out of historicist study</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little sense of an argument in relation to the task</li> </ul>                    |
| <b>WWW:</b><br><i>I can demonstrate...</i>                                 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>EBI:</b><br><i>I need to demonstrate...</i>                             |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# Self Study Section

*This section will help to get to grips with techniques useful when analysing prose, poetry and drama texts*

## Expanding your mind...

Discuss the following statements about literature:

- (a) In order to understand the *meaning* of a piece of writing, you need to understand the *intention* of the writer.
- (b) The study of literature has no relevance to the living our lives.
- (c) It's more important to have read everything by *one* writer, than to have read a little of everything.
- (d) It's not *how* a writer says something, but *what* he / she is saying.
- (e) The study of the past works of literature has no relevance to the present.
- (f) Contemporary women do not need to waste their time reading literature of the past written by men for men.

### *Ways Of Reading*

There is no one way of reading a book. Whenever we read a text, we bring with us our own experiences, thoughts and ideas. No two people will read a text in an identical way.

Similarly, there are many standpoints that critics may take when analysing a novel. Their standpoint will depend upon what their primary interest is and what they believe is the most important thing in literature and in life.

There are many critical standpoints. Here are a few examples:

*Feminist* - A feminist critique is primarily interested in the way women are portrayed in a text. Are female characters treated equally or fairly when compared to the male ones? Does the text suggest a lack of understanding of the women on the part of the author?

*Marxist* - A Marxist critic believes that there are two main classes in a society: these are the workers, or 'proletariat'; and the people who own and control the factories, land etc, the 'bourgeoisie'. The two classes are engaged in a struggle for power and influence.

*Biographical* - This approach involves reading a text primarily to ascertain what we can learn about its writer. What concerns does the author show, can we make any deductions about the author's life?

*Christian / Humanist* - A critic who takes this standpoint is looking to see how 'morally correct' a text is. Is 'goodness' rewarded? Do 'bad' characters repent or are they punished? Does the reader run the risk of being corrupted by the book?

*Mimetic* - A mimetic critic looks closely at a text to see how truly it represents real life. Are the characters, events and settings portrayed in the book realistic?

*Pragmatic* - Pragmatic criticism sees the work as something which is constructed to achieve certain effects on the audience. Is the book intended to entertain or inform us, or is the author trying to work on our emotions? A pragmatic critic will judge how successful the author has been in these attempts.

*Impressionistic* - A critic following this standpoint believes that the most important thing is how the text makes the reader feel and expresses the responses which the work evokes from the reader. An impressionistic critic is not particularly interested in reason or logic.

Obviously, the definitions given above are very simplistic. Some of these concepts are very complex indeed. This is also not a complete list, there are many other standpoints that a reader can take. Some readers may mix several standpoints together.

### *Developing A Critical Reading Of The Text*

What a reader gets from a text depends largely on what they bring to it. In other words, the reader's own interests, concerns, knowledge, gender, class and history determine how the text is read. There are as many readings as there are readers, but most can be grouped according to what is privileged (focused on). The following are examples of what certain readings might focus on.

*A MARXIST reading might focus on:*

- ◆ the history of relations between groups and individuals (e.g. landowners and their servants)
- ◆ relations between black and white people
- ◆ relations between England and their colonists
- ◆ themes of inequality, poverty, property, exploitation and mistrust

- ◆ the importance of money

*A FEMINIST reading might focus on:*

- ◆ women's lives and possibilities
- ◆ women's relations with each other
- ◆ transactions made between men and women
- ◆ the institute of marriage
- ◆ the bringing-up of children
- ◆ financial dependence

*A PSYCHOANALYTICAL reading might focus on:*

- ◆ dreams and the unconscious
- ◆ experiences in childhood
- ◆ family relations
- ◆ madness, fear, the irrational, anxieties
- ◆ sexuality



# A Language Lab For A-Level Students

At some point during the course, virtually every student concludes that the two most challenging aspects of A-Level English are (a) commenting on author's style and techniques, and (b) finding a suitable language in which to do so.

Below, therefore, is a 'language lab' to help you to meet these challenges. Use the suggestions below to enhance the quality of your work, and add to your notes more suggestions you use as you develop your own analytical and stylistic skills.

## Literary terms and concepts 1

The next two sections explain some of the main terms and concepts relevant to AS/A2 English Literature. Terms which are mainly of relevance to a specific genre (e.g. poetry or drama) are covered later on.

### Genre

A genre is a type of text. The three great literary genres are prose, poetry and drama. There are also 'genres within genres'. The prose genre, for example, includes novels and short stories. Novels can be subdivided further into other genres, such as romantic novels, historical novels, comic novels, science fiction and crime writing.

Take note.

The main dramatic genres are tragedy and comedy. Poetic genres include

### Form

Form refers to the overall shape or pattern of a text. Sometimes it means the same as 'genre': for example, you might refer to the 'sonnet form' in poetry. The term also includes other, smaller aspects of a text's organization, such as the use in some poems of rhyming couplets.

### Structure

The terms structure and form (see above) are often used interchangeably, though structure can also be seen as a broader term which includes not only form but also the sequence of ideas in a text. For example, this might include looking at how a text begins or ends, or at how an episode in one part of a novel or play echoes an episode in another part. There might also be identifiable patterns within a text - for instance, certain symbols or images (see below) might be repeated. Prefiguring occurs when something in a text anticipates (or foreshadows) a later part of the text. In Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, for example, the relationships involving the first generation of characters in many ways prefigure the relationships involving the second generation.

### Language

Considering how writers use language essentially involves studying their use of vocabulary (that is, their choice of words), grammar and sound. The terms discussed in the remainder of this section are all relevant to language.

Examiner's secret

Students tend to find commenting on what a text is about easier than analysing how it is written. Try your best to include in your answers points about form, structure and

## Imagery and symbolism

An important aspect of vocabulary is imagery. This term sometimes refers very broadly to writing which appeals to any of our five senses. Looked at in this way, there are five types of imagery, according to which of the senses is involved:

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Visual imagery    | Sight   |
| Auditory imagery  | Hearing |
| Tactile imagery   | Touch   |
| Olfactory imagery | Smell   |
| Gustatory imagery | Taste   |

### Take note

This table includes terms you may well not have encountered at GCSE. It illustrates how at AS/A2 you should try to make use of a broader range of terminology.

Imagery also sometimes refers specifically to the use of comparisons. From this perspective, an image is usually a simile or metaphor. A simile is a comparison which involves the use of *like* or *as* (e.g. *She ran like the wind*). A metaphor fuses the two things being compared together, saying something that is not literally true (e.g. *the winds of change*). Imagery therefore often involves the use of figurative language - language that is not to be taken literally. Another related term is personification, which occurs when something inanimate is given human qualities (e.g. *The sun is smiling on us today*).

A symbol is something used in a literary text to represent something else. Often, a physical object is used to represent an abstract idea: for example, a locked door or window might symbolize the idea of emotional repression. In a literary text, important symbols are sometimes used repeatedly, emphasizing and developing their significance.

### Take note.

If a writer develops a metaphor over several lines of a text (or perhaps over a whole text), this is known as an extended metaphor.

## Connotations

The connotations of a word or phrase are its associations - the ideas and feelings it suggests to a reader. Some words (e.g. *divine*) have connotations that are clearly positive, while other words (e.g. *serpent*) have connotations that are mostly negative. As well as describing connotations as positive or negative, you should try where you can to be precise about the specific connotations of words or phrases - for example, the word *divine* has connotations of purity and perfection, and religious associations. Connotations can vary according to how a word or phrase is used - the context is important.

## Concrete and abstract vocabulary

Concrete vocabulary refers to things that physically exist, abstract vocabulary refers to things that do not. *Bread, butter, marmalade* are concrete words; *love, hate, fear* are abstract words. Look for how writers make use of these two kinds of vocabulary. If a writer's

description of a room enables the reader to visualize it clearly, for example, one reason for this may be that a large number of concrete words has been used.

**Take note**  
Think about the effects of using concrete or abstract

**Exam preparation**

It is a good idea to keep your own list of terms that you encounter during the course together with definitions and examples

## *Literary terms and concepts 2*

This section covers some more terms relevant to the language of literary texts.

### *Formality and informality*

Formal language uses Standard English, often involves the use of polysyllabic words (words with several syllables) and tends to be complex and impersonal. Informal language is generally simpler, more relaxed and more familiar. It may involve the use of colloquial language, which is the language of everyday conversation. For example, if you described someone as a *good bloke* you would be using a colloquialism.

**Watch out!**  
Not all language can be clearly identified as formal or informal. There are many different degrees (or levels) of formality. Sometimes a text only appears formal or informal in comparison to another text.

### Ambiguity

Ambiguity occurs when language has two or more possible meanings or interpretations. The term might be applied to a single word, phrase or sentence, or more broadly to a larger portion of a text (e.g. we might say that a particular novel or play has an ambiguous ending).

**Examiner's secrets**  
You should always be alert to the possibility of ambiguity; showing an awareness of alternative interpretations is an indicator of close attention

### *Irony*

Irony is a very broad term and it is used in a variety of ways. Usually it involves something being said that is, either knowingly or unknowingly, the opposite of the truth. Thus in Shakespeare's *Othello* it is ironic that the treacherous Iago is on several occasions described as *honest*. Ironic language is sometimes humorous - used in this way, irony is close to sarcasm. There can also be situations that are ironic: at the beginning of Shakespeare's *King Lear* it is ironic that Lear, who has three daughters, disowns the one who in reality loves him most.

Dramatic irony is a particular kind of irony found in plays. It occurs when there is a disparity between what a character knows and what the audience knows, so that something the character says has a meaning that is understood by the audience but not by the character.

For instance, in Othello Desdemona says she cannot get out of her head a song sung by her mother's maid just before she died. The audience recognises the dramatic irony here because we know that Othello plans to murder Desdemona.

### *Grammar and syntax*

Grammar is a broad term for the rules that govern how we form words and combine them into sentences. For instance, one aspect of grammar is tense. If an action is happening now, we use the present tense: *He walks down the street*. If an action happened yesterday, we use the past tense: *He walked down the street*. If you comment on a writer's use of tense - for example, a poem might include a significant change of tense - you are commenting on grammar.

#### Take note

Writers sometimes use the present tense to create an impression of

Another important aspect of grammar is person. A novel might have a first person narrator (which means it uses pronouns such as *I* and *me*). A poem might use the second person (*you*) if it is addressed to somebody.

Syntax is a particular area of grammar and refers to the structure of sentences. Important elements of syntax include:

Word order - The words in a sentence (or in a line of poetry) may be arranged in an order that puts strong emphasis on a particular word or set of words. This will be especially noticeable if the word order is unusual. The term foregrounding can be used when particular words are highlighted in this way. If emphasis is placed at the end of a sentence rather than the beginning, this is known as end-focus. Another term relevant to word order is inversion (or inverted syntax), which occurs when the normal order of words is reversed: for example, saying *Chocolate, I adore* instead of *I adore chocolate*.

Parallelism - This occurs when phrases, sentences or lines of poetry have a similar pattern or structure. Usually one or more words is repeated. In Emily Bronte's poem *Spellbound* the narrator is caught in the middle of a storm, surrounded by hostile forces of nature:

*Clouds beyond clouds above me,*

### **Wastes beyond wastes below**

*The parallel phrases here are Clouds beyond clouds and Wastes beyond wastes.*

#### Take note

Note how the parallelism, and the words *above* and *below*, reinforce the sense that the narrator is trapped.

**Listing** - Words or phrases might be arranged into a list. If the list includes one or more **conjunctions** ('joining' words such as and) this is called **syndetic listing**. If there are no conjunctions the term **asyndetic listing** is used. In Philip Larkin's poem *Mr Bleaney* asyndetic listing is used to describe Mr Bleaney's rented room; note how the starkness of the listing emphasizes how bare and bleak the room is:

*Bed, upright chair, sixty- watt bulb, no hook*

*Behind the door, no room for books or bags -*

Other aspects of the description contribute to the overall effect. *Sixty-watt bulb* implies there is no lampshade. The *upright chair* does not offer comfort or relaxation.

### *Sound*

Terms relevant to the use of sound in literature include rhyme, onomatopoeia, alliteration, sibilance, assonance and dissonance. These terms are all explained in the Poetry chapter though it is important to realise that techniques such as these can also be found in prose and drama.

#### Exam preparation

When you study a text, look for any distinctive features of language that apply to the text as a whole, and make a note of these (e.g. there might be extensive use of irony).

## Revision Checklist

You should now be able to:

|   | Confident | Not confident |
|---|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Identify the main differences between GCSE and A Level English Literature                              |           |               |
| 2. Explain the term 'contexts'.   |           |               |
| 3. Understand the requirement that you consider alternative 'interpretations' when studying certain texts |           |               |
| 4. Explain the official assessment objectives for your AS or A2 course.                                   |           |               |
| 5. Define the term 'genre' and identify the main literary genres.   |           |               |
| 6. Explain the terms 'form' and 'structure'.  |           |               |
| 7. List the five types of imagery, linking them to the five human senses.                                 |           |               |
| 8. Explain the terms 'metaphor', 'simile', 'personification' and 'symbol'.                                |           |               |
| 9. Define the term 'connotation'.   |           |               |
| 10. Explain the difference between 'concrete' and 'abstract' vocabulary.                                  |           |               |
| 11. Explain the main characteristics of formal and informal language.                                     |           |               |
| 12. Define the term 'ambiguity'.  |           |               |
| 13. Understand the different uses of the term 'irony'.  |           |               |
| 14. List and explain the main elements of grammar and syntax that are relevant to literary analysis.      |           |               |
| 15. List and explain terms related to the use of sound in literature.                                     |           |               |

## *Common expressions: single words*

Use these words as alternatives to:

*puts over / gets across / brings out*

(a) evokes, as in ‘Atwood creates an impression of peacefulness by the way in which she...’

***Or ‘Donne’s use of a dramatic opening to the poem evokes the feeling that...’***

(b) conveys, as in ‘Emily Bronte conveys the impression that Heathcliff is an outsider by...’  
Or ‘This whole scene from *Taming Of The Shrew* conveys a strong sense of injustice...’

(c) suggests, as in ‘Lawrence suggests that humans do not value natural life by the way in which he...’  
Or ‘The slow passage of time is suggested by the halting, laboured rhythm of the closing lines of the poem.’

(d) depicts, as in ‘The opening paragraph depicts a scene of bleak desolation.’  
Or ‘Chaucer depicts the Wife of Bath as an aggressively independent woman.’

(e) portrays, as in ‘Shakespeare portrays Kate as a woman more sinned against than sinning.’  
Or ‘In the sleepwalking scene, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a woman whose mind is tortured by guilt and fear.’

*makes clear / gets clear / shows clearly*

(a) evident, as in ‘Morrison’s sympathy for Seth is evident from the way she describes...’

***Or ‘It is evident that Tess is presented by Hardy as a ‘pure woman’ because...’***

(b) focuses, as in ‘Tennessee Williams focuses on Amanda’s restless insecurity by...’  
Or ‘Our attention is focused on the way in which Macbeth becomes increasingly isolated.’

(c) clarifies, as in ‘Walker clarifies the reader’s attitude towards the protagonist when she...’

***Or ‘Brooke’s scornful feelings towards the ‘hero’ are further clarified by his use of the sarcastic phrase...’***

(d) apparent, as in ‘The impression that life is futile is made apparent by the metaphor comparing existence with...’

***Or ‘Iago’s real feelings towards Othello become apparent at the point when...’***

**carries on further / keeps going / adds to**

- (a) develops, as in 'The poem's theme is developed further by the way that...'
- (b) sustains, as in 'Williams sustains the mood of violence and aggression in the second act by...'
- (c) elaborates, as in 'Forster elaborates on Lucy's naïve and inexperienced response to life when...'
- (d) extends, as in 'The imagery of battle is extended by the simile comparing...'

*made stronger / made to stand out / made more obvious*

- (a) reinforces, as in 'Romeo's death reinforces the impression of two lovers being at the mercy of fate.'
- (b) enhances, as in 'In *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams enhances the sense of hopelessness by...'
- (c) intensifies, as in 'The way in which the Athenian workmen perform their play intensifies the mood of comic release.'
- (d) highlights, as in 'Jonson highlights Sir Epicure Mammon's obsession with fabulous riches by...'
- (e) underlines, as in 'Milton underlines his determination to 'justify the ways of God to men' by describing...'

*coming before / coming after / coming one after the other / next to last / next to*

- (a) preceding, as in 'In the preceding stanza, Sylvia Plath has described how terrified of her father she feels'
- (b) subsequent, as in 'During subsequent scenes, the element of foreboding introduced in the expositional scene intensifies.'
- (c) consecutive, as in 'The three consecutive comic chapters lighten the mood of an otherwise sombre novel.'
- (d) penultimate, as in 'The poem's ending highlights the theme Owen has explored in the penultimate stanza.'
- (e) juxtaposes, as in 'In order to bring out the contrast between them, Sassoon juxtaposes these two key ideas.'



## *Common expressions: contexts*

*Use these words accurately by looking at the context.*

### **repetition / reiteration**

- (a) 'The poet's frequent repetition of the soft 'l' sounds evokes a feeling of...'
- (b) The reiteration of the phrase ' Lord have mercy on us' conveys the writer's fear of imminent death.'
- (c) 'The reiterated adjective 'mellow' enhances the expression of...'

### *emphasis / emphasises*

- (a) 'At the opening of the play, the emphasis is on Willie Lomax's sense of confusion.'
- (b) 'Later on in the poem, the emphasis changes; it now falls on the way in which...'
- (c) ' As the novel develops, Morrison emphasises the fact that each generation faces a different set of challenges.'

### *compare / contrast*

- (a) 'The tree is compared to a skeleton to indicate that the whole world of nature seems to be dying.'
- (b) 'Hamlet's feelings about his father's death are strongly contrasted with those of Claudius and Gertrude.'
- (c) 'There is a sustained contrast in the novel between those characters who are capable of compassion and those who are not.'

### **explicit / implicit**

- (a) 'By showing that Macbeth is a warrior, Shakespeare makes his lack of physical fear quite explicit.'
- (b) 'Implicit in Lady Macbeth's comment 'What beast wasn't then / That made you break this enterprise to me/ ' is the accusation that her husband does not possess manly courage.'

# *Commenting on imagery : simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism*

## **Golden rules**

1. NEVER make vague generalisations, as in ‘There is a lot of imagery in this poem.’
2. ALWAYS be specific - explain the meaning of an image and describe its effects, as in ‘The image comparing two lovers with the feet of a pair of compasses shows how, though separated by distance, they remain emotionally and spiritually linked together.’
3. Choose verbs to describe an author’s use of imagery carefully: ‘The poet employs a simile comparing x with y...’

Or ‘The military metaphor used in the first line of the speech is part of a pattern of imagery which extends through the whole scene.’

*Simile* - acceptable usages include:

- (a) ‘The poet uses a simile to compare the effect of turbulent winds with the sun to suggest the way in which she illuminates his life.’
- (b) ‘The simile comparing imagination with a flash of lightning makes clear the sudden, unpredictable way in which a mental connection between two ideas can be made.’

*Metaphor* - acceptable usages include:

- (a) ‘Hughes uses a metaphor to compare the effect of turbulent winds on a landscape with a wild stampede of cattle.’
- (b) ‘The sun is described metaphorically as ‘the eye of heaven’.’
- (c) ‘Metaphorically speaking, the solid-seeming house is, under the assault of the storm, like a fine glass goblet which is fragile and easily shattered.’
- (d) ‘The metaphorical phrase, ‘There’s daggers in men’s smiles’ suggests that, beneath a façade of friendliness, no one can be trusted : anyone might be a dangerous traitor.’

*Personification* - acceptable usages include

- (a) ‘The personified description of the house as ‘mean’ and ‘slit-eyed’ suggests that, like its owner, it conveys a feeling of miserliness and a lack of warmth.’

(b) 'The twigs are personified as 'aged hands', evoking the impression that, like an old person's fingers, they are gnarled, thin and bony.'

*Symbolism* - acceptable usages include

(a) 'The caged bird is a symbol of the captive imagination.'

(b) 'The sick rose symbolises the death of young love.'

(c) 'Symbolically, the grinning skeletons represent the triumph of death.'

(d) 'The fast withering grass is symbolic of the transience of human life.'

## *Commenting on the sound of words*

### **Golden rules**

1. NEVER generalise. The effect produced by sound will be local and specific; they will never apply to a whole poem or to the whole of a speech in a play.
2. ALWAYS link comment on sound to your understanding of the meaning, following Alexander Pope's observation that, 'The sound must seem an echo of the sense.'
3. Distinguish between consonant and vowel sounds. Consonant sounds apply to all the letters of the alphabet except 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', and 'u'.

*Acceptable ways of commenting on the effect of word sounds include:*

- (a) 'The hard 't' sound which is reiterated in the opening two lines reinforces the impression of the rough wind cutting through the 'bladed atmosphere'.
- (b) 'The succession of full, rounded vowel-sounds evokes a sense of rich spring growth. Together with the mellow 'm' and 'sh' sounds, they convey a sense of ripe fulfillment in the world of nature.'

### **Useful adjectives**

These adjectives are useful for describing the effects produced by certain vowel and certain consonant sounds. ALWAYS check their exact meaning.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Vowel sounds   | Consonant sounds  |
| <b>broad / open</b><br><b>clipped / terse</b><br><b>drawn out / expansive</b><br><b>heavy / weighty / laboured</b><br><b>rounded / flat</b><br><b>thin / spare / taut</b><br><b>brisk / staccato</b> | <b>soft / mellow</b><br><b>hard / harsh</b><br><b>liquid / lilting</b><br><b>hushed / sibilant</b><br><b>sonorous</b><br><b>aggressive / vigorous</b><br><b>explosive / dynamic</b> |

*Alliteration* - acceptable uses include:

- (a) 'The 'f' sound is alliterated throughout these two lines, enhancing the impression of a boat moving swiftly through the water and creating flying foam as it slices the waves.'
- (b) 'The alliterated 'w', together with the weighty, dragging vowel sounds, has the effect of creating a mournful mood.'
- (c) 'In the first stanza, the heavy alliteration of the 'p' and 'd' sounds adds to the impression of footsteps plodding relentlessly onwards.'

*Onomatopoeia* - acceptable usages include:

- (a) 'The onomatopoeic word 'thump' which ends this line suggests an aggressive knocking on the solid oak door.'
- (b) 'The word 'batter' in 'Batter my heart' is onomatopoeic, giving the impression that Donne wants God to break forcefully through his own resistance to salvation from sin.'

## *Commenting on rhythm*

### Golden rules

1. NEVER generalise. The effects produced by rhythm will be local and specific; they will never apply to a whole poem or to the whole of a speech in a play.
2. ALWAYS link comments on rhythm to your understanding of the meaning. Writers, especially poets, use rhythm to reinforce the thoughts and feelings they wish to convey; any comment on rhythm that does not acknowledge this will be irrelevant.

3. ALWAYS look for two aspects of rhythm as a starting point for commenting on it - *speed* (or pace) and *variations* (or 'departures from regularity').

*Acceptable usages include:*

- (a) 'The rhythm of the line is slowed down by the succession of long drawn-out vowel sounds. This laboured pace reinforces the impression of exhaustion as the weary soldiers drag themselves back to the trenches.'
- (b) 'The pace of these lines is accelerated by the monosyllables ('skip', 'flit', 'jig') which help to evoke a mood of carefree enjoyment as the children play happily in the park.'
- (c) 'In these heavily punctuated lines the rhythm is halting and tentative, reflecting the way in which Hamlet finds it extremely difficult in rousing himself to act.'

## Adjectives for describing rhythm

Useful adjectives for describing the rhythm of a line, or sequence of lines, include:

disjointed, fragmented, laboured, pedestrian, halting, faltering,  
staccato, turbulent, lively, brisk, animated, swelling, smooth, even-  
paced, regular, fluid

*Adjectives best avoided include:*

flowing, jerky, choppy, fast

## *Commenting on verse form or 'versification'*

### Golden rules

- (a) NEVER make generalisations about the form of a whole poem. It is not a matter of analysis, merely of observation, to write, 'this poem is a sonnet...' or 'The poem has seven stanzas...' or 'Othello's speech is in blank verse...' or 'This stanza rhymes ABAB...' or 'There is a mixture of long and short sentences in this poem...' - and leave it at that.

- (b) ALWAYS focus on the part rather than the whole - single, specific instances such as the effects of versification within a couplet, a line, or a half-line. As ever, relate the resulting comments clearly to meaning.
- (c) The most common aspects of verse form on which comment is expected are: word order (or 'syntax'); line length; rhyme; and the poet's/ playwright's use of punctuation and syllables. In practice, these will often overlap with each other, they will also frequently be linked with the effects of sound and rhythm.

### Example of comment on word order

*Pears from the boughs hang*  
Golden, the streets lay still and cool.

The poet places 'Golden' at the start of line two in order to emphasise the rich, burnished colour of the fruit, and effect heightened by the contrast with the 'still' and 'cool' streets. In addition, the fact that 'Golden', with its two heavy syllables, follows an unpunctuated open-ended line indicated how the ripe fruit bends the bough from which it is hanging.

### Example of comment on word order

*He sipped with his straight mouth*  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his long slack body,  
Silently.

The first line is monosyllabic; its even, measured rhythm suggests the way in which the snake drinks in a relaxed and unhurried manner. The second line, with its broad and drawn-out vowel sounds, is far longer, giving an impression of the slow lengthy passage of water through the snake's seemingly endless body. The placing of the single word 'Silently' on a separate line draws

attention to the aura of calm stillness surrounding the snake - and also suggests, perhaps, something sinister about the snake, as if, now relaxed, its body is latent with potential power and violence.

### Example of comment on rhyme

*Twenty-one years have passed away*  
Tomorrow is another day

The rhyme here has the effect of drawing a contrast. In the first line, the poet reflects on the fleeting passage of time; his tone is melancholy and wistful, as though he is reproaching himself for wasting opportunities which have slipped by. In the second line, however, the tone changes to one of optimism and the poet makes a resolution to face the future with more determination. His sense that many years have 'passed away' is offset by his consoling awareness that there will be 'another day' in which to live more purposefully.

### Example of comment on punctuation

'No, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee.'

The tortured syntax of this line, with its heavy punctuation and reiteration of negatives ('No...not...not'), evokes the poet's anguished struggle to resist falling into despair. He holds back the word 'Despair' until half way through the line, as if by postponing naming it he will be more able to avoid it. The frequent punctuation gives to the line a disjointed rhythm, evoking the impression of a man wrestling in some spiritual vortex against an enemy which threatens to overwhelm him. The short, panting phrases reinforce this sense of bitter struggle, as if the effort of resistance all but exhausts him.

### Example of comment on closed-end (or end-stopped) lines

*The hands of the clock are still*

Its eyes are blind  
This house has died.

The heavy end-stop concluding each line creates an inert, lifeless rhythm. Together with the emphatic monosyllables, this helps to suggest the way in which time has conquered the house. The image of the stopped clock serves to reinforce the impression of a house at the mercy of time's tyranny.

### Example of comment on open-ended (or 'run-on') lines

No more it opened with all one end  
For teams that came by the stony road  
To drum on the floor with scurrying hooves  
And brush the mow with the summer load

All the lines in this stanza are open-ended, the effect being to suggest the way in which the barn used to be a scene of busy, ceaseless activity. This impression is heightened by the brisk rhythm of 'scurrying hooves' and the way in which the tempo of each of the last three lines increases towards the line-ending.

## Examples of comment on syllables

(a) The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew...

The poet is describing a boat being forced through the water at high speed. The succession of monosyllabic words, with their expansive vowel sounds, gives the impression of swift, surging forward movement - an effect heightened by the internal rhyme on 'blew' and 'flew' and by the regular rhythm of the two clauses separated by a caesura. The effect is of strong, rhythmic gusts of wind propelling the boat onwards.

(b) But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful.

The poet, by his use of two consecutive polysyllabic adjectives, emphasises the co-existence of mystery and beauty he perceives in the wild swans; each word has the same syllabic structure as the other and the balancing caesura brings them into closer relationship. In addition, the polysyllables, with their light vowel sounds, evoke an impression of the way the swans move across the 'still water' in a smooth, apparently effortless way.

## A spelling checklist

Words most commonly misspelt include:

alliterated  
alliteration  
alliterative  
archaic  
beginning  
caesura  
climactic  
commentary  
communicates  
comparative  
convey  
corresponding  
description  
develops  
echoes  
effective  
emphasis  
emphasises

evocative  
evokes  
focused  
focuses  
generalisation  
generalised  
heightened  
imagery  
ironic  
ironically  
lyrical  
metaphor  
metaphorical  
monosyllabic  
onomatopoeia  
pathos  
perceives  
personified

playwright  
portrays  
reinforces  
reiterates  
repetition  
repetitive  
rhyme  
rhyming  
rhythm  
rhythmic  
simile  
stanza  
successive  
symbolises  
tragedy  
tragic



## *Producing the evidence: how to use reference and quotation*

No essay question can be successfully 'argued' in general terms alone; evidence from the text is always required. However, if reference and quotation are not used appropriately they can actually obscure an argument - or at least be irrelevant to your 'case' - instead of assisting it. This section demonstrates how to use 'quotes' as an integral part of building up an argued essay. It is one of the most important A level skills you need to acquire - and, like every other aspect of your ability to argue on paper, it can be learned.

### **Use versus usefulness**

Good argued essays use close reference to the text in order to support, or back up, key points in the development of an argument. Poor argued essays use close reference to the text as a substitute for the real argument at all. Below are examples of each, drawn from A level exam work.

### **Example A**

'The Lake Of Innisfree' gives a romantic view of Ireland: 'There midnight's all a-glimmer and noon a purple glow'. Yeats' idea of paradise is 'a small cabin of clay and wattles made.'

Consider why the quotations here add *nothing* to the candidate's statements about Yeats' 'romantic view of Ireland or his 'idea of paradise'.

### **Example B**

In "Byzantium", Yeats visualises the afterlife and encourages us to consider the unity of the natural and spiritual worlds. The 'fury and the mire of human veins' is contrasted with a spiritual image, 'Shade more than man, more image than a shade'. Here Yeats is suggesting that our

physical body is actually a way of imprisoning the soul and that, with death, the soul can finally become free.'

Consider why the quotations here are used both to illustrate and develop the candidate's commentary.

### ***Going round in circles***

Some uses of quotation gain credit for illustrating a statement but fail to carry forward the point being made in the next stage of the argument. Consider why, in the example below, quotation is used in a merely 'circular' way rather than in a 'progressive' one.

Throughout the play, Tennessee Williams presents Blanche Dubois as unstable, vulnerable and scared: '( stage direction) She is seated in a tense, hunched position.' This presents the audience with a scared and vulnerable side of Blanche. William's choice of words allows the audience to see that she is scared.

## ***Making quotations work for you***

Examiners will reward you highly for providing quotations if you use them for the reasons listed in the following table under 'plus'. They will not reward you at all if you list them for the reasons under 'minus'.

| <i>Plus</i>  | <i>Minus</i>   |
|--|--|
| To illustrate a <i>specific</i> point - not a general one - in your argument   | To show that you have read and remembered the text                                 |
| To take your analysis of the subject matter and/or style of the text a step further  | To paraphrase or summarise what the text is about                                  |
| To show that you can integrate details from the text into your argument about some aspects of the novel/play/poem as a whole | To let the author's words do you arguing for you instead of doing it yourself      |
| To show that you are able to make a personal response to the author's style and use of language                              | To show that you have remembered your teacher's advice to 'use quotes' in the exam |

For future reference, make notes on what you have learned from this section so far about the importance of building quotation into your writing.

# Checklist Of Aspects Of Prose

**Genre:** What kind of writing is this? Short story, novella, novel, journalism; historical, humour, satire?

**Plot:** What happens, and for what underlying motive?

**Structure:** Is the story unified around one event or character or theme, or around one kind of atmosphere or mood? Built around several of these?

Chronological or non-chronological order of events? Overlapping times?

Built

Built around a single moment / day / weekend ? Or embraces an extended (not necessarily continuous) period of time? Built around contrasts, or perhaps around one central contrast? Events organised so as to move towards a climax, or a series of these?

**Opening:** How does it work, what aspects of the story (themes, characters, atmosphere?) Does it focus on?

- by the creation of puzzles and mysteries?
- by the creation of suspense and tension?
- by using an intriguing in medias res (in the midst of the action) approach, or
- by shock tactics?

**Ending:** How does it work? Surprise factor? Coming full circle?

Reinforcement of central mood or theme? Revelation? Enigmatic or ambiguous ending?

**Narrative Point of view:** *Are we shown events through the eyes of a character who may be liable to mis-judge other people and their motives and behaviour? Are we shown events from several characters' competing viewpoints? Are we shown events from the viewpoint of the author, who may choose to adopt the convention of authorial omniscience (all-knowingness), and have privileged, reliable access to characters' inner, private feelings and hidden motives (interiority), and be aware of all relevant action, events and circumstance?*

**Descriptive:** (as oppose to narrative elements in the story)

- How successful and evocative are the descriptions?
- Do they involve more than one sense impression?

- What functions do they fulfill?

*Setting:* What historical period / geographical region / social class / milieu / time of day or of the year / weather conditions etc. have been chosen? Why?

*Dialogue:* How skillfully and economically is dialogue handled?

*Atmosphere / mood / feeling:* What atmosphere/s does the writer create? For example, is the prevailing feeling melancholy, tense, frightening, joyful, celebratory, mysterious? How is this atmosphere created? Is it appropriate to the story? Does the atmosphere change in the course of the narration?

*Title:* Has this any special significance?

*Tone:* Does the story have, for example, ironic, satirical, humorous or elegiac overtones?

**Theme/s versus subject matter:** *Apart from what the story is 'about', at the most obvious, subject-matter or event level (eg. a family's holiday ends), what is it about at a more general, underlying level? (Note that themes are often expressed as abstract ideas: eg. justice, conflict, time, childhood etc) Does the story have one central theme, or a number of themes? How is the theme conveyed in the story?*

*Author:* Was the text influenced by the aspects of the author's life and / or time?

*Intentions:* What do you suppose were the author's intentions in writing this text?

**Target audience:** *Whom does the text seem to be intended for? Adults or children for example? How can you tell?*

*Characters:*

- Complex or simple ('rounded' or 'flat') ?
- What are their functions in relation to the plot, theme, mood etc.?

- Are there contrasts between pairs? (Use of foils to emphasise differences)
- Are we invited to eg. admire, criticise, pity these characters?
- How does the author secure a particular response from the reader?
- How credible are these characters?

*Characterisation:*

What methods are used to create these characters? Direct authorial 'telling' (eg. 'Emma was clever and rich.')

Or 'showing' us by what they do, say, think, or by other characters' comments on them? Are physical appearance, manners and speech used to characterise them?

*Language:*

- Diction patterns: eg. recurrent use of words concerned with eg. colours, animals, the weather, or illness to emphasise a mood or theme.
- Is there a tendency to use words that are long, obscure, emotionally loaded, archaic, foreign, short or simple?
- Or literary references, slang, colloquialisms, technical terms, puns, dialect, adjectives?
- What effects are produced by such choice of language?
- Is alliteration used (eg. for emphasis, or to create a poetic effect?)
- Are onomatopoeic words (eg cuckoo, bang, click) used?
- Is there imagery (in either of its two senses):
  - Creating pictures in the reader's mind
  - Figurative (non-literal) use of language, as in metaphor and simile.
  - How well chosen, fresh, expressive are these?
- Is there symbolism (closely related to metaphor), paradox, hyperbole, litotes, antithesis, or repetition of words or phrases? To what effect?

**Sentence structure:**

- *Simple? Or sophisticated (using contrasting and balanced or parallel structures, for example)?*
- *Does word order or grammar deviate from the patterns of standard English?*
- *Are the sentences varied in length and structure, or monotonously regular?*
- *Are the sentences clumsily constructed, or fragmented?*
- *Are such characteristics deliberate effects?*

# Contexts

An important part of the course is considering the effects of background influences known collectively as contexts - on the books you are studying. For certain texts - your teacher will tell you which they are, or you can find out by checking the syllabus or specification - your understanding of contextual influences is especially important, as it is specifically assessed. The main types of contextual influence are:

- Biographical - aspects of the writer's life that are reflected in the work;

## Watch out!

In answers, only mention biographical factors which might have influenced the text in some way (don't simply tell the story of the author's life). And keep such references brief - the main focus should always be on the text itself

- Cultural and literary - the influence of other writers, artistic movements and the conventions and traditions associated with the work's genre;
- Historical - the influence of political and other events which occurred around the time the work was written;
- Social - how the society of the time influenced the work, or is reflected in it.

## *Interpretations of texts*

Another important element is the consideration of alternative interpretations of texts. As with contexts, this will be of particular relevance to certain specified works. You will look at how critics from different historical periods or different critical perspectives have interpreted particular books. At the same time, it is important to show that you can think for yourself by comparing the views of others and justifying your own opinion.

## Watch out!

The word critic as used here does not mean someone who necessarily has a negative view of a text. A critic is simply someone who comments on or interprets a text - any views expressed may be positive or negative.

## Take note.

An example of a critical perspective is feminism. A feminist critic would tend to focus on the attitudes towards women evident in a text.

# Writing essays 1

Most of the written work you complete during the AS/A2 course will take the form of essays: homework essays, coursework essays and essays written in the actual examination.

## Know your assessment objectives

If you are writing an examination or coursework essay, your mark will depend on how far you have met the assessment objectives for that particular text or module. For example, it is sometimes important to show an understanding of ‘*cultural, historical and other contextual influences*’ on the text you are writing about. An essay, which made little or no reference to the text’s context, would obviously not be given a high mark. In the case of exams, the relevant assessment objectives are always printed on the question paper, and usually stressed in the question themselves, but you should familiarise yourself with them beforehand.

## Understanding the question and answering it

With coursework essays it is sometimes possible to devise your own task, but most of the essays you write during your AS/A2 course will be in response to a set question. Here a few tips:

- Read the question carefully and make sure you understand it. Students often misinterpret a question not because it is too difficult for them to understand but because they have read it carelessly. If you genuinely can’t understand it, choose another question, or identify those parts of the question you can understand and then try to work out what the rest of it might mean. Occasionally there are questions that can be read in different ways, and explaining in your opening paragraph how you are going to approach the question can be a good idea

### Examiner’s secrets

Try to link the question to the assessment objectives, and think about how your answer can address these objectives.

- Underline key words and phrases in the question, and work out how many parts the question has. Breaking down a question in this way helps you to understand it, and also can help in the planning of your answer. Imagine for example that this is the question:  
*How far do you agree that The Nun’s Priest’s Tale is a comic story which nevertheless has a serious purpose?*

The key words and phrases here are *How far do you agree*, *comic* and *serious purpose*. A very broad outline for an answer which addresses these three elements might be:

1. Is the Tale comic?
  2. Does it also have a serious purpose?
  3. Conclusion - how far do I agree with the view expressed in the question?
- When you plan your answer and when you are writing it, you should always have the question in the back of your mind: all of the arguments you present should be geared towards answering it. To keep on track, and to show that you are clearly answering the question, you might occasionally use words from the question in your answer. With the above example, the words *agree*, *comic* and *serious purpose* would feature in most good answers. However, you don't need to overdo this - continually repeating words and phrases can make an answer seem mechanical and tedious.

### Planning and paragraphing

It is important to spend some time working out the main points you will make, and the order you'll put them in. The advantages of doing this are:

#### ***Watch out!***

Although it's important to make a plan, in an examination you shouldn't spend too long on it. As a rough guide, if you have an hour to write an answer, you should probably aim to spend about 10 minutes on planning. Students sometimes overdo it by writing a very detailed plan and then find they don't have long enough to write the actual answer.

- You're more likely to produce an essay that puts forward a coherent, structured argument. This will impress the examiner.
- Your answer is more likely to remain relevant to the question.
- In an exam, if you start by planning the answer you'll discover quite quickly if you've chosen the wrong question. There should still be time for you to switch to another one.

Here is some advice on how to plan:

- As mentioned above, the wording of the question itself might suggest a plan for you. If the question has three or four elements in it, can these be arranged to form the main stages of an answer?
- A standard way to plan is to make a list of points, ideas etc. that might be relevant to an answer. You then arrange these into three or four groups of linked points; these will be the main sections of



your essay. As you are doing this, you might well find that identifying your main ideas or topics helps you to think of more points. If any points don't 'fit' they could simply be left out. Alternatively, if you really want to include them, think about how this could be done. Could they be used in the introduction or conclusion? Are they strong enough to stand on their own as another stage in the argument? Once you have decided on the main sections of the essay, work out the best order for the sections.

***Take note***

Remember as you plan that you're looking for points that answer the question and help you to meet the assessment objectives.

- Each section of your answer should usually be presented as one or two paragraphs. This means an average exam essay is likely to have roughly six to eight paragraphs. It is difficult to be too precise about the number of paragraphs you should have, but if your essay has a lot more than this your paragraphs are almost certainly too short. On the other hand, if your essay only has two or three paragraphs they're too long (or the essay is not long enough!).

***Take note***

It is helpful for paragraphs to begin with a topic sentence, which clearly indicates what the paragraph is going to be about. You should also try to link the paragraph to what has gone before. A sentence such as *Roderigo is another character who is easily manipulated by Iago* does both these things.

## Writing essays 2

This is the second of the two sections on writing essays, with advice on beginning and ending essays, making points effectively and importance of demonstrating a personal response to the texts you have studied.

### Introduction and conclusions

The main point about both introductions and conclusions can be summed up as: avoid waffle. More specifically:

- Avoid the kind of all-purpose introduction that could be tagged on to an essay (e.g. *Charles Dickens lived from 1812 to 1870 and wrote many famous novels*). You won't get any credit for an introduction such as this.
- When you're planning your answer, don't start by trying to think of an introduction. You need an introduction that fits in with the rest of your essay, so it's more sensible (and also easier) to decide on an introduction after you've worked out what main body of the answer will cover.

#### *Take note*

Often the first stage of your argument - i.e. your first main point - can be used as the introduction.

- It's important to be on track from the very beginning, so make sure your introduction is clearly linked to the question. Explaining in your own words what the question means, or how you intend to answer it - or both - often makes for an effective start.
- Another way of starting can be to refer to an early part of the text. For example, if you're writing about a character, how is the character first introduced to the reader or audience? If you're writing about a theme, when does the theme first appear? An advantage of this approach is that you quickly engage with the text and offer detailed analysis of it from the outset. There are dangers though: the rest of the essay is probably not best answered with a simple chronological approach (i.e. one which works through the text from start to finish), and it is easy to spend too long on the opening pages of a text - remember most essays (especially exam answers) need to show a good grasp of the text as a whole.

#### *Examiners secrets*

It is quite common in answers for students to show a detailed knowledge of the opening pages of a text, but only a limited knowledge of the rest of it. When you're looking for evidence to support your points, try to range across the whole text

- In your conclusion it might be appropriate to emphasise and reinforce your main points, but conclusions which simply repeat what you've already said won't get much credit. Often it is a good idea to broaden the argument, by offering some kind of overview of the text. If you've been discussing a theme, how is it linked to other themes? Above all, you need to be sure that by the end of the essay you've answered the question. If you were asked to respond to someone else's interpretation of the text, how far you agree with the interpretation should be clear from your conclusion.

### Making and supporting points

Although it is important that an essay should not read like a simple list of points, in practice essays do usually consist of a series of points. What prevents the 'list' effect is ensuring that the points you make are properly linked and developed:

- Many points can be developed by using PEA formula: Point - Evidence - Analysis. Points constructed in this way begin with an assertion or argument: *The novel has an ambiguous ending, The characters in the sub-plot in many ways mirror those in the main plot etc.*
- The evidence that is then offered to support the point can take two main forms: quotation from the text, or reference to the text in your own words (e.g. references to what happens, or to things that are said). Whichever you choose, it is important that the evidence is specific - you need in answers to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the text.
- Avoid quotations that are too long. Most quotations should be no more than two or three lines. Short quotations (a single word or a short phrase) can be very effective. Remember also to take care over how you set out quotations. It is unnecessary to put short quotations on a new line, but you should do this with longer quotations.

#### *Take note*

It is especially important when quoting poetry to observe the poet's original line divisions - i.e. set the quotation out as clearly separate lines of poetry.

- Analysis of the evidence will give your answer more depth. If you have included a quotation, this is a good opportunity to comment on the author's use of language. For example, can you explain or comment on the use of imagery in the quotation?

#### *Take note*

If you're commenting on language, using relevant terminology in your analysis ('metaphor', 'connotations' and so on) will gain extra marks.

- Try to ensure the points in your answer are effectively linked. Arranging them in a logical order is part of this. It is also helpful to use words and phrases such as *however*, *in contrast*, *another*, *a similar* etc.
- Take care over your own style. In particular, students can tend to be too colloquial - avoid conversational expressions such as *lots of* and *over the top*. Proofread what you have written (try to allow time for this in an examination), looking for errors in spelling, expression etc. Misspelling character's names will only irritate the examiner - especially if they're correctly spelt in the question!

### Personal response

There is nothing wrong with expressing personal opinions about a text, provided you can support your points with evidence. In fact, a genuine personal response to the literature you have studied is always seen as a strength by examiners and rewarded accordingly. Even when you are showing your knowledge of how a text has been interpreted in different ways by other readers, critics and audiences, don't forget to explain where *you* stand.

You need to prepare thoroughly for the exam, but try not to switch to 'auto pilot' when you're writing your answers. This is especially a danger if the question appears a relatively straightforward one, when you might well be putting forward arguments that you've written about before. You don't want to write an essay that seems jaded and mechanical. Try to show the examiner that you've engaged with the text on a personal level: that you've thought about it, been moved by it, have your own opinions about it - and still feel enthusiastic about it!

## Glossary

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Abstract vocabulary</b>  | Vocabulary which refers to things that do not physically exist (ideas, feelings etc).                                       |
| <b>Adjective</b>            | A word used to describe a noun.   |
| <b>Adverb</b>               | Usually a word that gives more information about a verb. Many adverbs end in -ly (e.g. slowly, carefully).                  |
| <b>Allegory</b>             | A story with at least two levels of meaning, often involving the use of human characters to represent ideas.                |
| <b>Alliteration</b>         | When two or more words begin with the same sound.   |
| <b>Ambiguity</b>            | Having more than one possible meaning.  |
| <b>Anapaestic metre</b>     | Within poetry, a metre in which two unstressed syllables are followed by a stressed syllable.                               |
| <b>Anglo-Saxon</b>          | See Old English.  |
| <b>Antithesis</b>           | When words, ideas etc. are directly opposite in meaning.  |
| <b>Archaism</b>             | A word or expression that has fallen out of use.  |
| <b>Aside</b>                | In drama, a brief piece of speech heard by the audience but not by the other characters.                                    |
| <b>Assessment objective</b> | One of the criteria used to allocate marks in AS/A2 assessment.   |
| <b>Assonance</b>            | The rhyming of vowel sounds within two or more words.   |
| <b>Asyndetic listing</b>    | A list which does not use conjunctions.   |
| <b>Auditory imagery</b>     | Imagery which appeals to our sense of hearing.  |
| <b>Augustan period</b>      | The first half of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century.   |
| <b>Ballad</b>               | A poem that tells a story in simple, everyday language.   |
| <b>Bildungsroman</b>        | A German term for a novel that charts the growth of a character from early years to maturity.                               |
| <b>Blank verse</b>          | Unrhymed poetry based on iambic pentameter.   |
| <b>Caesura</b>              | A pause in a line of poetry - usually in the middle of the line, and usually shown by a punctuation mark.                   |
| <b>Comparative</b>          | An adjective which makes a comparison, such as bigger, worse, better.   |
| <b>Colloquial language</b>  | The language of everyday conversation.  |
| <b>Conceit</b>              | An elaborate, extended metaphor based on an unexpected comparison between dissimilar objects.                               |
| <b>Concrete vocabulary</b>  | Vocabulary which refers to things that physically exist.  |
| <b>Conjunction</b>          | A word that joins together parts of a sentence (e.g. and, but).   |
| <b>Connotations</b>         | The associations that a word has.   |
| <b>Contexts</b>             | The background influences on a text or part of a text.  |
| <b>Couplet</b>              | A pair of rhymed lines.   |
| <b>Courtly love</b>         | A set of conventions related to the presentation in literature of romantic love. Especially influential in the Middle Ages. |
| <b>Criticism</b>            | Comment on, or analysis of, a text (not necessarily unfavourable).  |
| <b>Dactylic metre</b>       | Within poetry, when each stressed syllable is followed by two unstressed syllables.   |

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| <b>Denotation</b>          | The straightforward, objective dictionary meaning of a word.  |
| <b>Dialect</b>             | A form of language with distinctive features of vocabulary, grammar etc. Usually the term refers to regional dialect (e.g. Geordie, Cockney).                                     |
| <b>Dissonance</b>          | When the sounds of words are so different that they clash with each other, creating a discordant effect.  |
| <b>Dramatic irony</b>      | In drama, when something said by a character has an additional meaning or significance, apparent to the audience but not to the character.  |
| <b>Dramatic monologue</b>  | An extended piece of speech by an imaginary character.  |
| <b>Elegy</b>               | A poem that mourns someone's death. The term is also sometimes applied more generally to solemn, contemplative poems.   |
| <b>Elision</b>             | The omission of a sound or syllable (e.g. o'er instead of over).  |
| <b>Emotive language</b>    | Language intended to produce an emotional response in the reader or listener.   |
| <b>End-focus</b>           | When emphasis is placed on the end of a sentence.   |
| <b>End-stopped line</b>    | When the end of a line of poetry coincides with a grammatical pause, which is usually indicated by a punctuation mark.  |
| <b>Enjambement</b>         | In poetry, when the sense of one line continues into the next, and the end of the first line has no punctuation mark.   |
| <b>Epic poetry</b>         | Long poems, often about mythical heroes and with grand, impressive settings.  |
| <b>Epistolary novel</b>    | A novel in the form of letters written by the main characters.  |
| <b>Extended metaphor</b>   | A metaphor which is continued and developed over several lines (or more) of a text.   |
| <b>Fable</b>               | A story with a clear moral or message, often with animals as characters.  |
| <b>Figurative language</b> | Language that is not to be taken literally.   |
| <b>First person</b>        | Use of first person pronouns such as I, me, us.   |
| <b>Foot</b>                | A group of two or three syllables forming a unit within the metre of a poem (e.g. a line based on the iambic pentameter has five feet because there are five pairs of syllables). |
| <b>Foregrounding</b>       | Using word order to highlight part of a sentence.   |
| <b>Foreshadowing</b>       | See prefiguring.  |
| <b>Form</b>                | The overall shape or pattern of a text. Sometimes used to mean the same genre.  |
| <b>Formal language</b>     | The opposite of informal language; language that is not casual or conversational.   |
| <b>Genre</b>               | A type of text (e.g. short story, newspaper article).   |
| <b>Gothic novel</b>        | A type of horror story, especially associated with 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> century English literature.  |
| <b>Grammar</b>             | A broad term for the rules that govern how we form words and combine them into sentences.   |
| <b>Gustatory imagery</b>   | Imagery which appeals to our sense of taste.  |

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| <b>Half-rhyme</b>                     | When a rhyme is not quite complete; usually the consonants in the rhyming words match but the vowels do not. Also known as pararhyme.                               |
| <b>Heroic couplet</b>                 | In poetry, a pair of rhymed iambic pentameter lines of verse.   |
| <b>Hyperbole</b>                      | Intentional exaggeration.   |
| <b>Iambic pentameter</b>              | A Poetic metre in which a line has five pairs of syllables, with the stress falling on the second syllable in each pair.  |
| <b>Idiolect</b>                       | The way language is used by a particular individual.  |
| <b>Imagery</b>                        | Any aspect of a text that appeals to the reader's senses. Also used more specifically to refer to the use in literature of similes and metaphors.                   |
| <b>Informal language</b>              | Language that is casual, conversational; the opposite of formal.  |
| <b>Internal rhyme</b>                 | Occurs when words rhyme within a line of poetry.  |
| <b>Intonation</b>                     | Tone of voice.  |
| <b>Inversion (or Inverted syntax)</b> | Reversal of the normal order of words in a phrase or sentence.  |
| <b>Irony</b>                          | Saying the opposite of what is meant. Can also refer to an event having consequences which are the opposite of those expected or intended. See also dramatic irony. |
| <b>Kitchen sink drama</b>             | A movement within British drama mainly associated with the 1950's, in which there was a strong emphasis on domestic realism.  |
| <b>Lyric poetry</b>                   | Poetry which expresses an individual's thoughts and feelings (most poetry can be described as lyric poetry).  |
| <b>Magic realism</b>                  | Writing which is a blend of realism and fantasy.  |
| <b>Metaphor</b>                       | A comparison which is not literally true because it refers to something as if it were something else.   |
| <b>Metaphysical poetry</b>            | A term used to describe the work of a group of 17 <sup>th</sup> century poets, including John Donne and George Herbert.   |
| <b>Metre</b>                          | The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables within a poem.   |
| <b>Middle English</b>                 | The version of English spoken and written from (approximately) 1150-1450. It was a mixture of Old English and French.   |
| <b>Modernist poetry</b>               | A term used for the work of some poets in the first half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century, which deliberately rejected traditional forms and conventions.            |
| <b>Monologue</b>                      | An extended utterance spoken by one person.   |
| <b>Monosyllabic</b>                   | Having one syllable.  |
| <b>Motif</b>                          | An element such as an image, phrase or action which occurs repeatedly in a work of literature.  |
| <b>Narrative poetry</b>               | Poetry that tells a story.  |
| <b>Naturalistic dialogue</b>          | Dialogue which resembles natural conversation.  |
| <b>Neologism</b>                      | A new word or expression.   |
| <b>Noun</b>                           | A word which names an object, person, feeling etc.  |
| <b>Novella</b>                        | A short novel.  |

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| <b>Ode</b>                     | A lengthy poem addressed to a person, object or abstract idea.   |
| <b>Old English</b>             | The version of English spoken and written from (approximately) the fifth century to 1150. Also known as Anglo-Saxon.   |
| <b>Olfactory imagery</b>       | Imagery which appeals to our sense of smell.   |
| <b>Omniscient narrator</b>     | In prose fiction, an 'all seeing, all knowing' narrator.   |
| <b>Onomatopoeia</b>            | When words imitate the sounds they describe (e.g. splash, buzz).   |
| <b>Paradox</b>                 | A statement or situation which appears to contradict itself but which is nevertheless true.  |
| <b>Parallelism</b>             | When parts of sentences (or complete sentences) have a similar pattern or structure.   |
| <b>Pararhyme</b>               | See half-rhyme.  |
| <b>Parody</b>                  | A humorous imitation of another work.  |
| <b>Passive voice</b>           | Using a verb in a way that emphasizes the object of an action rather than the person or thing performing the action (e.g. The man <u>was questioned</u> by the police instead of The police questioned the man). |
| <b>Pastoral</b>                | Literature associated with rural life.   |
| <b>Pathetic fallacy</b>        | A literary technique which uses natural elements (such as the weather) to reflect human moods and emotions.  |
| <b>Persona</b>                 | In a literary work, a narrator who is a character created by the author.   |
| <b>Personification</b>         | When something not human is described as if it were.   |
| <b>Polysyllabic</b>            | Having three or more syllables.  |
| <b>Postcolonial literature</b> | A term used for literature from, or about, Britain's former colonies.  |
| <b>Prefiguring</b>             | Occurs when something in a text anticipates (or foreshadows) a later part of the text.   |
| <b>Preposition</b>             | A word that indicates how one thing is related to something else (e.g. The book is <u>on</u> the table).   |
| <b>Pronoun</b>                 | A word that takes the place of a noun (e.g. he, it).   |
| <b>Protagonist</b>             | The central character in a play.   |
| <b>Pun</b>                     | A humorous play on words, dependent on a word or phrase having a double meaning.   |
| <b>Quatrain</b>                | A four-line stanza, usually with a regular rhyme scheme.   |
| <b>Renaissance</b>             | A term used for the resurgence of art and literature that occurred in the 15 <sup>th</sup> and 16 <sup>th</sup> centuries.   |
| <b>Restoration period</b>      | The period of English history immediately following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.   |
| <b>Rhetorical features</b>     | Traditional devices and techniques used to make speech or writing powerful and persuasive.   |
| <b>Rhetorical question</b>     | A question which does not require an answer.   |
| <b>Rhyme scheme</b>            | The pattern of rhymes within a poem.   |
| <b>Romantic poetry</b>         | A term used to describe the work of a group of poets from the late 18 <sup>th</sup> and early 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries.  |



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| <b>Satire</b>                  | A literary work which uses humour and ridicule to make a serious point.  |
| <b>Second person</b>           | Use of second person pronouns such as you and your.  |
| <b>Sibilance</b>               | The repetition of 's', soft 'c', 'sh' and 'z' sounds.  |
| <b>Simile</b>                  | A comparison which uses the words like like or as.   |
| <b>Soliloquy</b>               | In drama, an extended speech by a character, heard by the audience but not by the other characters.  |
| <b>Sonnet</b>                  | A poem of 14 lines, usually with a traditional rhyme scheme and a rhythm based on the iambic pentameter.   |
| <b>Spondaic metre</b>          | Within poetry, when there are two successive stressed syllables.   |
| <b>Standard English</b>        | The 'standard', formally correct variety of English, used in most written texts and taught in schools.   |
| <b>Stanza</b>                  | A separate section of a poem consisting of several lines (also sometimes known as a verse).  |
| <b>Stream of consciousness</b> | Writing which aims to capture as accurately as possible an individual's flow of thoughts; in doing this, conventional punctuation and sentence construction are sometimes abandoned. |
| <b>Stress</b>                  | Within poetry, emphasis on a syllable that is required by the poem's metre.  |
| <b>Structure</b>               | Similar to form, but a broader term which also covers the sequence of ideas in a text.   |
| <b>Subplot</b>                 | A secondary plot running alongside the main plot of a play or a novel.   |
| <b>Superlative</b>             | An adjective meaning 'the most' of something (e.g. biggest, worst, best).  |
| <b>Symbol</b>                  | Something (often a physical object) used in a literary text to represent something else.   |
| <b>Syndetic listing</b>        | A list with one or more conjunctions.  |
| <b>Syntax</b>                  | An aspect of grammar, referring to the ways in which words are put together to form sentences.   |
| <b>Taboo language</b>          | Words that are avoided because they are considered offensive or obscene.   |
| <b>Tactile imagery</b>         | Imagery which appeals to our sense of touch.   |
| <b>Theatre of the Absurd</b>   | Within drama, a movement that emerged in the 1950's. It sought to reflect the absurdity of existence by deliberately rejecting conventional approaches to plot and dialogue.         |
| <b>Third person</b>            | Grammatical constructions which do not use the first or second person. This may involve nouns (e.g. The house is a ruin) or third person pronouns (e.g. It is a ruin).               |
| <b>Trochaic metre</b>          | Within poetry, when the first syllable in every pair of syllables is stressed.   |
| <b>Unseen texts</b>            | In the examination, texts set for analysis which you are unlikely to have seen or studied before.  |
| <b>Verb</b>                    | A word that refers to a physical or mental action (e.g. run, think) or to a 'state' (e.g. seems, is).  |
| <b>Visual imagery</b>          | Imagery which involves an appeal to our sense of sight.  |

## What can you do with A Level English Literature?

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