



HOW TO REVISE

# LANGUAGE A ENGLISH LITERATURE

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# PAPER 1: GUIDED LITERARY ANALYSIS

(1 HOUR 15 MINUTES) (20 MARKS) 35% FOR BOTH SL AND HL

## What do I have to do?

The paper consists of two unseen passages, from two different literary forms (usually one poem and one prose) each accompanied by a question. You will be asked to choose one passage and then write an analysis in response to the given question

## What does this mean?

A guided analysis really just refers to how you will be asked to explore a particular theme or motif within your exploration of the various literary elements of the passage. Therefore to get the top marks, your answer will need to demonstrate that it is being 'guided by the question' and is not simply a random assortment of the things from the text that you found interesting!\*

The other really important thing to note about this paper is that it can only test you on unseen material. Therefore, rather than having to memorise huge chunks of information, preparation for Paper 1 is about honing your critical reading and writing skills and developing a system that will allow you to approach any passage of prose or poetry with confidence.

\*Technically you can write an answer that isn't directly answering the question but is based on an 'alternative point of entry'. However we strongly advise you structure your response in regards to the focus of the given question because this is what the examiner thinks is an extremely important aspect of the text and is probably the one you will end up mostly talking about anyway!

## How to revise it

At the end of the day, there are just two things that you can do to improve your Paper 1 skills:

- Find a technique that works for you
- Practice, practice, practice!



# Technique

There certainly is no one right answer for writing a good commentary, or a magic trick to convince the examiner that you deserve a 7! Instead there are a number of approaches which you should try out for yourself, in order to work out what best suits your writing style and works within the time limits of the exam

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE MAIN WAYS STUDENTS TEND TO ORGANISE THEIR COMMENTARIES

1

### LINE-BY-LINE

This is an answer that follows the structure of the passage to be commented on, either discussing a poem a line at a time, or a prose passage one paragraph after the other. While this is a valid approach according to the mark scheme, it is much more impressive - and you will be rewarded with more marks - if you can avoid commenting in this way. For one thing, it's very easy to slip into narration (which will get you a 1 out of 5 in Criterion A: Understanding and Interpretation), and it can give off the impression to the examiner that you don't really know how to organise your thoughts independently of the text.

2

### CHECKLISTS

A technique students quite often use - and which can work very well - is to have a checklist of things to discuss (such as, for example, tone, character and imagery) and to write a paragraph or two on each. This can be extremely useful if you find it difficult to pick apart the passage and then know what to write. However, this does not mean you should ignore the focus of the question - all the elements identified should relate back to this specific theme.

3

### ARGUMENTATIVE

This is the favoured approach among students for structuring commentaries that aim to get into the highest mark bands. It involves students deciding on a central argument, or thesis, that they are able to defend and provide evidence for in relation to the question. For instance, if the text was to ask you: 'how does the author use descriptive language to create atmosphere'. You could make an argument that outlines a specific effect e.g.

The author utilises a range of literary techniques to cultivate an optimistic and thrilling atmosphere which mirrors the sense of freedom the central protagonist feels.



Each of the following main body-paragraphs would seek to provide evidence to back up this statement. You can therefore still talk about the passage in chronological order, but each paragraph should be grouped under a particular sub-theme or element of your overall argument.

Developing a strong way of structuring your commentaries is hugely important. This is because Criterion C: Focus and Organisation, specifically marks you on how effective your structure has been in communicating your points and because a poor structure will affect the clarity and persuasiveness of your ideas throughout, thus losing you marks elsewhere.

## Practice

You can never do too many practice commentaries. As a minimum, try to do at least five before your final exam but the more, the better. Ask your teacher to mark them and take their comments on board: you'll be surprised how much you improve each time!

If you haven't got time to write out a whole essay, grab a past paper (or simply pick a poem or passage from a book) and give yourself 45 minutes, or as long as you usually spend in an exam, to analyse it and write out a plan for a commentary.

Organise your observations on the passage into outlines for paragraphs that will form a coherent essay. However, rather than just writing bullet points it is good practice to try and write full sentences for beginning and end of each paragraph. This is called signposting and will really help enhance the overall clarity of the essay.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

#### Paragraph 1:

Dewdney effectively expresses the immense power of the wind

- “blow[n] through all the worlds I have known” - superlative, dominance over the speaker
- “Strains” and “blows” - destructive power
- free prose and enjambment - uncontrollable, sense of freedom, unique

As a result, the power of the wind is heavily emphasised in “Night Wind,” in order to reflect the intense desire for the speaker who aspires to achieve the same level of complete freedom as the wind.



# Things to focus on when practising

There are a number of other key things that you should think about perfecting when you are doing your practice essays:



## LANGUAGE AND STYLE

In **Paper 1**, you are being tested on your ability to describe how different language techniques are employed to achieve a particular effect. You want to make sure that the examiner understands the points you are making and that you are not wasting any time giving unnecessary details.

Try to be as concise as possible by using short quotations (no more than 3-4 words) so that you can clearly showcase your analysis skills rather than your ability to merely describe the text.

Moreover, when it comes to style, it is worthwhile to brush up on your terminology.

This applies to subject-specific language (e.g. metaphors, similes, assonance, semantic field, feet and metre, e.c.t) as well as useful phrases that are frequently used in academic writing (e.g. this suggests, this implies, on the other hand). However, if you are ever unsure about a word or phrase don't use it!

As literature teachers, your examiners will know what elision, assonance and even zeugma mean, and will immediately spot when it is clear that you don't know what you're talking about! It is much better to identify a different technique or refer to the just effect of the device/imagery.



## INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This goes back to the huge importance of structure for the Paper 1 exam. Please, please, please (!) write an introduction AND a conclusion. You will seriously risk losing a lot of easy marks if you don't. They can both just be a sentence long if need be (!), but without them it is extremely difficult to show the examiner that you know how to effectively structure your answer.

For the introduction, you should essentially summarise what you're going to say and this can be as short as you like. However, I do suggest that for any essay that adopts the argumentative structure, it is important that you also outline your thesis statement before telling the examiner how you are going to answer the question.

### FOR INSTANCE:

I argue that Dewdney uses the motif of nature to explore the theme of freedom as he presents the wind, a symbol for nature's unrestrained and enormous power, as an exhilarating and liberating force. I will first look at how Dewdney emphasises the immense physical power of the wind, then I will ... \*



\*Some teachers are not a big fan of the first person narrative. The IB doesn't seem to mind too much and it can be a great way to clearly tell the examiner what you think. However, an easy way to get around this if you are a little reluctant to insert yourself directly onto the page (!), is to use the phrase 'This essay argues' or 'one could argue that' or 'this effectively/convincingly demonstrates that' whenever you really want to emphasise a major point.

The conclusion serves a very similar function to the introduction and should feel a bit like a recap of your main points. Here you really want to ensure that you have answered the question. It can also be worthwhile to reflect on the purpose of the passage as a whole. Is it an extract from a larger body of work? If so, how does it set this up? What does the author want the reader to come away with after reading this?



Worry about this after you've got your technique right. How long you spend on reading, planning or writing is up to you. I'd recommend 15-30 minutes on reading and planning but remember, you don't get marks for your plan. Experiment with more or less detailed plans and see what yields the best results!

## Paper 1 Top Tips

- ✓ Ask everyone and anyone for criticism and feedback
- ✓ Read friends' commentaries and think about what they're doing differently to you. Don't copy them - but ask yourself what you could improve? What are you doing well?
- ✓ Read for pleasure outside of class as widely as possible, and with a critical eye. Consider different forms, genres, and authors, and constantly ask yourself how the language and stylistic techniques work in relation to the points of the text.

# PAPER 2

## COMPARATIVE ESSAY

(1 HOUR 45 MINUTES) (30 MARKS) 35% FOR SL, 25% FOR HL

### What do I have to do?

The paper consists of four general questions. You will be asked to write a comparative essay in response to one question, using two of the works that you have studied for your course.

### What does this mean?

This exam is specifically testing you on the knowledge that you have learnt in class. You will not be allowed to access your chosen texts during the exam so you will have to memorise key moments and quotations from the texts that you can use in your essay.

First and foremost, the examiners will be looking for relevance. Why have you chosen these two texts to discuss this particular question? What key quotes and themes from these texts provide insight into an answer for this question? Therefore the best way to prepare for this exam is to make notes on, and revise, three of the works you have studied in the class. This will give enough flexibility in the real exam to choose the text and literary elements which are appropriate for the question you are answering.

Secondly, this is a comparative essay! You must talk about how the texts work in relation to one another. How do they present similar themes in different ways? What is the effect of this? You may choose to talk about each work individually but, at some point, you will need to explicitly contrast and compare them. Use phrases such as: Both texts highlight the theme of.... However, in contrast to text a, text b employs.... Similarly, text a utilises ....



# How to revise it

While the above advice for Paper 1 is useful for Paper 2, the key extra thing to think about for this paper is that you must ensure that you have the right knowledge to draw upon.



## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Know a bit of context. What would have shaped your authors' thought? Why are certain settings chosen for these texts?

For instance, Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll House* was written in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, a period of significant political and cultural upheaval. Meanwhile *A Streetcar Named Desire* is set in New Orleans in the 1940s when the South was experiencing a time of major economic growth and significant social change

All of this is fantastic information you can include in your introduction to really show off to the examiner, or, if you are able to, combine with your points in your main body paragraphs to get those top Criterion A (knowledge, understanding and interpretation) marks!



## PRACTICE A CLOSE READING

Read your texts carefully, and reflect on the impact they aim to have on their audience. To a large extent, the Paper 2 exams encourages you to think about the mechanics of your texts, which means that they employ many of the same critical skills as Paper 1.

While you don't have to learn quotes by heart, it can make it a lot easier in the exam to effectively demonstrate your language analysis skills if you are able to quote and dissect an important line.



## COMPARISON

Think about ways that your writers can be compared and contrasted. These don't have to be thematic (and because of the spread of authors covered on the course, it might in fact, be hard to make thematic comparisons) but they can be stylistic and structured around different techniques. Use the questions from past papers to direct your thoughts here. Lots of students find their best ideas come to them when they're writing practice essays.

## HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF ONE COMPARATIVE PARAGRAPH PLAN ON THE QUESTION:

How have underdogs been presented in two plays that you have studied?

In both, **A Streetcar Named Desire** and **The Importance of Being Earnest**, utilise their respective underdog characters, Blanche and Jack, to evoke feelings of empathy and compassion.

- Blanche is portrayed as weak and vulnerable
  - Fluffy wide bodice,” juxtaposes “denim work clothes” of Stanley and Mitch
  - “Incongruous to the setting” - outsider status, polar/foil to Stanley
  - “Moth” - vulnerable, sense of doom, underdog, foreshadowing, desire
- Likewise, Jack is presented as a similarly fragile character
  - In comparison to Algernon - Inferior repartee, Cucumber sandwich and motif of food, chasing for cigarette case, “kneels”
  - In comparison to Gwendolen - reversal of gender roles, ridicules rigidity of Victorian convention (“may I propose now”)

As a result, both characters are presented in ways to elicit sympathy from the audience, however whereas Blanche’s vulnerability emphasises her status as a tragic victim and represents a crucial aspect of the play as a provocative drama, Jack’s underdog status is played for laughs, reflecting the comedic nature of the work.



Remembering your arguments (and, very importantly, the quotations that illustrate them) is a hugely important part of your Paper 2 revision:

- Some students find it most helpful to do past paper after past paper, repackaging their ideas each time to meet the demands of a specific question, and learning by repetition in the repetition.
- Some like to condense existing essays and notes down into bullet points, or keywords that trigger whole arguments.
- Others use visual triggers to help them remember: highlighting notes; putting paragraphs in spider diagrams, or writing quotations out on pieces of paper and sticking them in visible places. Try a couple of things and see what works best!



# Practice!

It would be difficult to overemphasise the importance of practising past papers for Paper 2 success. Not only will addressing the demands of each question help you to think of new and interesting things about your authors that you can learn and recycle in your final exam, but (as with Paper 1) your technique will improve a huge amount with each essay you write.

Finally, comparing the questions from year to year will highlight the huge amount of similarity between them, and should lessen your terror and dread about the exam! Work on perfecting your technique before you start timing your essays

By the time it comes to crunch time, you'll have a whole host of things other than the literature on your plate, and two hours might seem like a big chunk of time to take out of your day. **Therefore, I'd recommend two things:**



It's never too early to have a go at writing a past paper. You could even set aside two hours a week (say, first thing on a Saturday morning) from the beginning of January onwards that are dedicated to practising for your final exam. One paper a week isn't a huge amount to add to your workload, but will improve your final mark infinitely.



If you write well, but lose marks because of poor structure, try just taking an hour to think about a question, and write out an argument in bullet point format. If you're having problems with style and timing, try writing a few untimed essays but make a particular effort on ensuring that your paragraphs are as concise as possible.

## PAPER 2 TOP TIP!



**Always ANSWER THE QUESTION** you've been asked.

Treat the examiner like a child: imagine yourself leading them through your essay by hand, everywhere pointing out where and how you've knocked the question on the head. Make it as easy as possible for them to give you the marks you deserve.



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+44 20 4571 0455

**WEBSITE**  
[lanterna.com](https://lanterna.com)

**EMAIL**  
[info@lanterna.com](mailto:info@lanterna.com)