

AQA English Language A-Level

Teachers: Miss C Greenacre; Ms J Webb; Mrs E Zappala

Welcome to the English language A-level course. This is a popular course at THS because it works well with all other subject choices.

Preparation for July Induction

You are not expected to have completed all these tasks ready for the July induction days. However, if you want to check anything you are working on then please bring it with you in July.

Why take English language as a subject at A-level?

- It is a **gateway to higher education** and offers a wide range of degree options. These include English, English language, linguistics, forensic linguistics and creative writing. There are also a number of related subjects such as English literature, law, journalism, media, speech and language therapy, teaching, drama and history.
- There are a **wide range of careers** either directly related to English language, such as speech and language therapist, teaching, editor, writer, or in areas such as publishing, journalism, the media, advertising, marketing, public relations, arts administration, record offices, libraries, national and local government and the civil service.

What can I expect as I progress from GCSE to A-level English?

English language at A-level is very different to English language at GCSE and you must expect to learn a wide range of new concepts, skills and, especially, terminology. English language is more scientific and technical; it will require a much more in-depth study of language and how it is used to communicate meaning.

Topics that students find most different to GCSE, and therefore enjoyable, are those which are completely new: analysing spoken language, considering attitudes to language, child language acquisition, and the opportunity to complete two pieces of non-exam assessment.

In particular, **Year 1** will focus on:

Component 1: language: the individual and society

We will introduce methods of language analysis, exploring the concepts of audience, purpose, genre, mode and representation.

We will explore a range of texts about various subjects, in a variety of genres, for different audiences and purposes, and from different times. We will consider how language is: shaped according to audience, purpose, genre and mode; shaped according to context; used to construct meaning and representations; used to enact relationships between producers and audiences.

Component 2: language: diversity and change

We will explore language in its wider social, geographical and temporal contexts, as well as how it has changed over time.

We will study social attitudes to, and debates about, language diversity and change.

We will write discursively and analytically about language issues.

As a linguist, as well as being challenged you can expect to:

- develop a greater understanding of how language is linked to identity
- recognise and appreciate linguistic variation
- learn new and complex terminology
- conduct research
- work independently

Introducing Key Terms and Related Concepts

There are some important areas that will be the basis of your study of the language of texts taken from everyday sources. You will have to become confident in using them. There are a number of linguistic frameworks and related concepts to come to grips with.

Linguistic Frameworks

1. Lexis
2. Semantics
3. Grammar
4. Phonetics / Phonology
5. Pragmatics
6. Discourse
7. Graphology

Language Framework 1: Lexis

The words used in text or spoken data; the words, phrases and idioms of language

Key features may include:

- choice of lexis, e.g. jargon (specialist terms), dialect, slang, colloquialisms, swearing, taboo terms, clichés, euphemisms, dysphemisms, archaisms (deliberate use of old-fashioned terms).
- choices indicating factors such as levels of formality and education, e.g. elevated, literate, sophisticated, Latinate, unusual and polysyllabic terms (largely a reading or writing vocabulary) as opposed to simple, every-day, vernacular and monosyllabic (largely a speaking vocabulary).
- the concept of the lexeme.
- types of word, e.g. compound, shortening, abbreviation, acronym, neologism, blend, loan word.
- use of recurring lexis from particular lexical (semantic) fields.
- collocations, whether common (predictable) or uncommon (deviant).
- use of figurative language, e.g. metaphor, simile, pun, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, oxymoron.

Task 1: formality

List as many words for 'drunk' as you can, trying to cover as many different registers (levels of formality and informality). Try to think about what your parents and grandparents would say, and also think about different contexts, e.g. what would you say to a police officer/teacher and what would you say to your friends.

Next you need to get your words in rank order, from most formal to least. Once that's done, try applying some lexical labels to them. Do you have examples for each of the following terms? If not, can you add some for the categories you don't yet have?

Formal	Technical	Informal
Colloquial	Impolite	Slang
Taboo	Dialect/regional	'posh' slang
Old fashioned	Older people's slang	'youth' slang

Language Framework 2: Semantics

The meaning of language. The semantics of a word is the meaning of it as given in a dictionary. The semantic meaning of a text is not always straightforward, though, because we can add layers of meaning, for example through euphemisms or dysphemisms and through imagery.

Key features may include:

- denotation: factual and objective meanings
- connotation: personal and subjective meanings
- types of meaning: positive / negative, specific / vague, literal / figurative
- contrasts in meaning: synonym, antonym, hypernym, hyponym, homonym, homophone, homograph
- changes in meaning: amelioration, pejoration, broadening, narrowing

Task 2: definitions

Look up any of these key words that you do not know and add them to your own glossary.

Task 3: euphemisms and dysphemisms

A **euphemism** is the substitution of a polite expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh or blunt (e.g. "spending a penny").

A **dysphemism** is when we use a harsh expression instead of a more neutral one (e.g. animal names when they are applied to people, such as coot, old bat, pig, chicken, snake, and bitch). We might call someone a pig when we actually mean that his or her table manners are not very delicate!

- A. Pick an area where euphemisms are often used (sex, death and bodily functions are the most common). Try to list five euphemisms and five dysphemisms.
- B. Write a school report in which you, the teacher, wish to communicate a true picture without giving offence.

Language Framework 3: Grammar

The way individual words are structured and arranged together in sentences.

Key features may include:

- word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and determiners
- features of the verb: main and auxiliary, tense, modal auxiliaries, active and passive voice
- sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory
- sentence complexity: minor, simple, compound, complex, relative length
- unusual word order
- standard or non-standard forms
- other aspects: ellipsis, pre and post modification, subject / object, pronoun use, person, agreement, content and function words, noun phrase complexity
- word structure: prefix, suffix

Some of the key features are explored below.

Word Classes

You need to know the different word classes so that you can analyse how they are used. They are the basic types of words that English has. There are eight of them:

Nouns	A noun is a naming word. It names a person, place, thing, idea, living creature, quality, or action. There are two main types of noun: proper and common. Most nouns are common nouns and they can be divided up into three categories: concrete, abstract and collective.
Adjectives	An adjective is a word that describes a noun. It tells you something about the noun. Examples: <i>big, yellow, thin, amazing, beautiful, quick, important</i>
Verbs	A verb is a word which describes an action (doing something) or a state (being something). You will need to find out about main verbs, auxiliary verbs, primary verbs, modal auxiliaries, active and passive verbs.
Adverbs	An adverb is a word which usually describes a verb. It tells you how something is done. It may also tell you when or where something happened. Many adverbs end in <i>-ly</i> . Examples: <i>slowly, intelligently, well, yesterday, tomorrow, here, everywhere</i>
Pronouns	A pronoun is used instead of a noun, to avoid repeating the noun. Examples: <i>I, you, he, she, it, we, they</i>
Prepositions	A preposition usually comes before a noun, pronoun or noun phrase. Prepositions can relate to position. They join the noun to some other part of the sentence. Examples: <i>on, in, by, with, under, through, at</i>
Conjunctions (connectives)	A conjunction joins two words, phrases or sentences together. Examples: <i>but, so, and, because, or</i>
Determiners	These words come before nouns and refer to them directly. The most common determiner, <i>the</i> , is called the definite article. The indefinite article is <i>a/an</i> .

Task 4: nouns

A. Sort these nouns into two categories. Note that the two groups are not necessarily even in number:

Peter	Boy	Cheese	England
Country	Dumbo	The Lion King	Rover
Table	Elephant	Yorkshire	Film
Pencil	Doctor	Fire engine	Brick

B. Once you have reached an agreement over what goes where, define the difference between the two groups as clearly as you can. Next repeat the exercise with these nouns:

Happiness	Armchair	Light bulb	Hate
Sky	Heart	Tree	Charity
Christianity	Flag	Woman	Time
Wheelbarrow	Loneliness	Jug	Mystery

Modal auxiliary verbs

will shall may/might would can/could must should ought to

Modal verbs are used to express ideas such as possibility, intention, obligation and necessity e.g.

*I would have told you, if you had wanted me to.
Yes, I can do that.*

They are not used to talk about things that definitely exist, or events that definitely happened.

These meanings are sometimes divided into two groups:

1. **Degrees of certainty:** certainty; probability; possibility; impossibility
2. **Obligation/freedom to act:** permission; lack of permission; ability; obligation

Modal verbs are verbs that 'help' other verbs to express a meaning; it is important to realise that modal verbs have no meaning by themselves. A modal verb such as *would* has several functions: it can be used, for example, to help verbs express ideas about the past, the present and the future.

Sentence types

There are four sentence types in English. The first sentence type is the most common:

1. Declarative

A declarative sentence "declares" or states a fact, arrangement or opinion. Declarative sentences can be either positive or negative. A declarative sentence ends with a full stop.

Examples: *'I'll meet you at the train station.'*
 'The sun rises in the East.'
 'He doesn't get up early.'

2. Imperative

The imperative commands (or sometimes requests). The imperative has no subject as 'you' is the implied subject. The imperative form ends with either a full stop or an exclamation mark.

Examples: *'Open the door.'*
 'Finish your homework!'
 'Pick up that mess!'

3. Interrogative

The interrogative asks a question. The interrogative form ends with a question mark.

Examples: '*How long have you lived in France?*'
 '*When does the bus leave?*'
 '*Do you enjoy listening to classical music?*'

4. Exclamatory

The exclamatory form emphasises a statement (either declarative or imperative) with an exclamation mark.

Examples: '*Hurry up!*'
 '*That sounds fantastic!*'

More about sentences

All of the sentence types fall into three further categories:

1. Simple

Simple sentences contain no conjunction (*and, but, or...*)

Examples: '*Jack ate his dinner quickly.*'
 '*Peter and Sue visited the museum last Saturday.*'
 '*Are you coming to the party?*'

2. Compound

Compound sentences contain two statements that are connected by a conjunction (*and, but, or...*)

Examples: '*I wanted to watch TV, but it was late.*'
 '*I went shopping and my wife went to her classes.*'
 '*The company had an excellent year, so they gave everyone a bonus.*'

3. Complex

Complex sentences have an independent main clause and at least one other clause that is added. They are joined by a subordinating conjunction, such as *which, who, although, despite, if, since...*

Examples: '*My daughter, who was late for class, arrived shortly after the bell rang.*'
 '*Although it was difficult, the class passed the test with excellent marks.*'

Task 5: identifying parts of speech and sentence types

Make a key and try to highlight / identify / label different parts of speech, sentence types and forms in this extract:

CHAPTER ONE



RHEN

There is blood under my fingernails. I wonder how many of my people I've killed this time.

I thrust my hands into the barrel beside the stables. The ice-cold water bites at my skin, but the blood clings. I shouldn't bother, because it will all be gone in an hour anyway, but I hate this. The blood. The not knowing.

Hooves ring against the cobblestones somewhere behind me, followed by the jingle of a horse's bridle.

I don't need to look. My guard commander always follows at a safe distance until the transition is complete.

Guard commander. As if Grey has men left to command.

As if he didn't earn the title by default.

I swipe the water from my hands and turn. Grey stands a few yards back, holding the reins of Ironheart, the fastest horse in the stables. The animal is blowing hard, its chest and flanks damp with sweat despite the early-morning chill.

From: 'A Curse so Dark and Lonely', by Brigid Kemmerer (2019 Bloomsbury)

Language Framework 4: Phonetics/Phonology

Phonetics is the study of the sounds made by speakers

Phonology is the use of vocal elements to add extra forces to what is being said

Phonetics

Part of the study of spoken texts is to record and transcribe conversations yourself, as well as analysing those done by others. This is a skill that you will gradually develop; you will find useful information on Wikipedia, among other sites, and details about the phonetic symbols. You will need to know that a phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language and that each phoneme has its own phonetic symbol. The symbols represent the sounds of Received Pronunciation.

Phonology

Key features may include:

- characteristics of normal spoken delivery, e.g. volume, stress, pitch, intonation, (pitch pattern or melody), tempo, silent pauses, voiced pauses (fillers, e.g. 'er', 'erm'), alliteration, assonance. These are called **prosodic** features.
- elision (partial loss of sounds from words in connected speech, indicated through spelling), e.g. I'm, can't, 'cos, fish 'n' chips, livin', cuppa tea).
- significant aspects of accent, indicated by means of deviant spelling, e.g. Lancashire 'th'reet mon' ('the right man'), Somerset 'zo I zaid' ('so I said').

Phonology can even be a characteristic of written English as well as spoken and can be spotted in certain patterns. You will be used to this with the poems that you studied for GCSE, but remember that we are not just thinking about poems anymore. The patterns can include rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm and assonance.

Task 6: phonology in action

- A. Write some headlines for a tabloid newspaper which use phonological devices for effect. Your subjects can be "real", based on current affairs or celebrity gossip, or you could take a school in-house issue.
- B. Imagine that you are a traditional market trader, calling out to attract customers. Write a few lines, using phonological devices for effect.
- C. Record a conversation so that you can look for as many of the characteristics listed above as possible. Note down examples, for example of volume, pauses, fillers etc.

Language Framework 5: Pragmatics

The study of the meanings people are really trying to communicate. For example, "How lovely to see you" can convey different meanings: the speaker is genuinely pleased to see the other person; the speaker is being sarcastic and would prefer not to see the other person; there might be an element of malice because of the appalling dress sense of the second person which provides entertainment etc.

Key features may include:

- specific features of turns in speech, e.g. utterance length, speech acts, indirectives, backtracking, repairing, forms (terms) of address, repetition, reformulation, minimal responses, backchannelling, hedging, mitigating devices.
- recognition of function (force) where different from grammatical form, e.g. use of grammatical declarative to ask question or of interrogative to command.

- Grice's co-operative principle and four maxims.
- politeness and face (positive v. negative), face-threatening act.
- recognition of cultural allusions.
- identification of implied meanings over and above the semantic or more obvious.
- explanation and interpretation as to why speaker(s) or writer(s) make their particular choices of language in the specific context.

Language Framework 6: Discourse

1. *Longer stretches of text, looking particularly at aspects of cohesion (the way different parts of a text are connected through either grammar or lexis).*
2. *The way texts create identities for particular individuals, groups or institutions e.g. the discourse of law, politics, the media.*

Key features may include:

- the written genre
- the context of a conversation e.g. an unequal encounter or a peer group chat
- the speakers' roles
- in a written text, the point of view: perspective and voice
- management by speakers of turn-taking and topics, openings and closings
- register (topic, level of formality and tone), register switching
- external coherence established through consistent reference to the real world
- intertextuality
- use by speakers of frames (scripts or norms of interaction), discourse markers, adjacency pairs, interruptions and overlaps

Language Framework 7: Graphology

Key features may include:

- nature of characters, e.g. handwritten or printed, plain or ornamental, upper or lower case.
- font type e.g. Arial, Garamond, Times New Roman.
- font style e.g. standard, **boldened**, *italic*.
- font size (measured in points – 72 points to the inch, e.g. eight point, ten point, twelve point).
- the concept of the grapheme, the fundamental unit in written language such as letters of the alphabet, numbers, punctuation marks.
- organisation of text, e.g. headings, columns, bullet points, numeration, borders, boxes, paragraph size, line spacing, use of white space.
- other aspects, e.g. use of colour, logos, drawings, photographs, captions, diagrams, charts.

A key word to learn: **semiotics**. It is the study of how we read signs.

Task 7: analysing graphology

Find a leaflet, poster or blog and annotate/analyse its graphological features.

Task 8: defining related concepts

Research the definitions for the concepts listed below:

Register

Mode

Idiolect

Sociolect

Dialect

Accent

Task 9: opinions about language

- A. What do you think Lucy Mangan's viewpoint is about new words being added to the English language?
- B. What are your opinions on this matter? Are there any new words that you would not be able to live without? Are there any new words that you find annoying/pointless?
- C. Write out the terms covered in the article e.g. 'benching'. For each one explore the connotations of that word. Why has it been coined? What does it say about this particular aspect of online dating?



LUCY MANGAN /

Breadcrumbing, ghosting, throning: Lucy Mangan explains why she's all for inventing new words

Posted by **Lucy Mangan** ♦ 11 hours ago

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🐦 TWEET

"Words define us. We need new ones," says Lucy Mangan.

Three new dating terms have arrived (as I'm told by people less married, better looking and altogether more advantageously positioned in the sexual arena than I ever was).

Joining the likes of 'ghosting', 'breadcrumbing' and 'benching' come 'curving' (avoiding someone you're not interested in rather than telling them), 'prowling' (getting in touch with someone you broke up with or ghosted - which I count as a shoddier thing - as if nothing's happened) and 'throning' (going out with someone for the social, or social media, status they bring you).

“Language is so important. It has the power to perpetuate old systems or usher in new ways of thinking”

People often like to mock new words, I've noticed. I've also noticed that those people tend to be the ones most likely to have the new words and the power they bring used against them. The ones who don't want attention drawn to the old behaviours because they depend on them and have much to lose if their shittery stops flying beneath the radar.

This too is uplifting. Sometimes, when I am down, I like to remember the aggression that greeted the introduction of 'microaggressions'. That term which gave women especially a neat, insanely useful way to describe all the tiny things that happen to us that add up to hostility and prejudice at worst and a different experience of life's journey at the very least. Having the word at last made it harder for its practitioners - microaggressors, we could call them - to get away with it.

[Stylist: Lucy Mangan / Breadcrumbs...](#)

Wider Reading Options

Dan Clayton's website is a good place to start. He is an examiner and text book writer for the AQA specification. There is a lot of information here, so start by browsing for different topics using the labels on the right:

[EngLangBlog: for A-level English language students](#)

If your knowledge of grammar isn't up to scratch, improve it by using:

[EnglishBiz: grammar essentials](#)

The British Library has a fantastic site with a vast range of resources. The accent and dialect section is great:

[British Library: British accents and dialects](#)

The timeline is also useful for looking at the history of English:

[British Library: English timeline](#)

Under 'Field of Linguistics' you'll find useful articles e.g. by Deborah Tannen (useful for studying gender theories).

Look up interesting words, sayings and phrases by looking at the index section in

[World Wide Words: investigating the English language across the globe](#)

Listen to a variety of TED talks:

Steven Pinker

[What our language habits reveal](#)

Anne Curzan

[What makes a word "real"](#)

John McWhorter

[Txting is killing language. JK!!!](#)

Please be aware that if you are eligible for a post 16 bursary then the cost of relevant books and resources may be covered depending on family circumstances – please ask in the sixth form office for further details.

If you have any questions please contact us:

Miss Greenacre: c.greenacre@taverhamhigh.org

Ms Webb: j.webb@taverhamhigh.org

Mrs Zappala: e_zappala@taverhamhigh.org

(please note there is an underscore _ in Mrs Zappala's email address)