Taverham Sixth Form
One vision. Our passion. Your future.

A-Level
English Language

AQA English Language A-Level

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

Entry Requirements

Six GCSEs at Grade 4 or above including at least Grade 4 in Maths and Grade 5 in English Language.

Preparation for September

Please complete all tasks and bring with you to your first lesson in September.

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

Complete tasks on separate paper – excluding annotations

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: *big, yellow, thin, amazing, beautiful, quick, important*
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 –ly. Examples: *slowly, intelligently, well, yesterday, tomorrow, here, everywhere*
Pronouns	A pronoun is used instead of a noun, to avoid repeating the noun. Examples: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they*
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: *on, in, by, with, under, through, at*
Conjunctions (connectives)	A conjunction joins two words, phrases or sentences together. Examples: *but, so, and, because, or*
Determiners	These words come before nouns and refer to them directly. The most common determiner, *the*, is called the definite article. The indefinite article is *a/an*.

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.

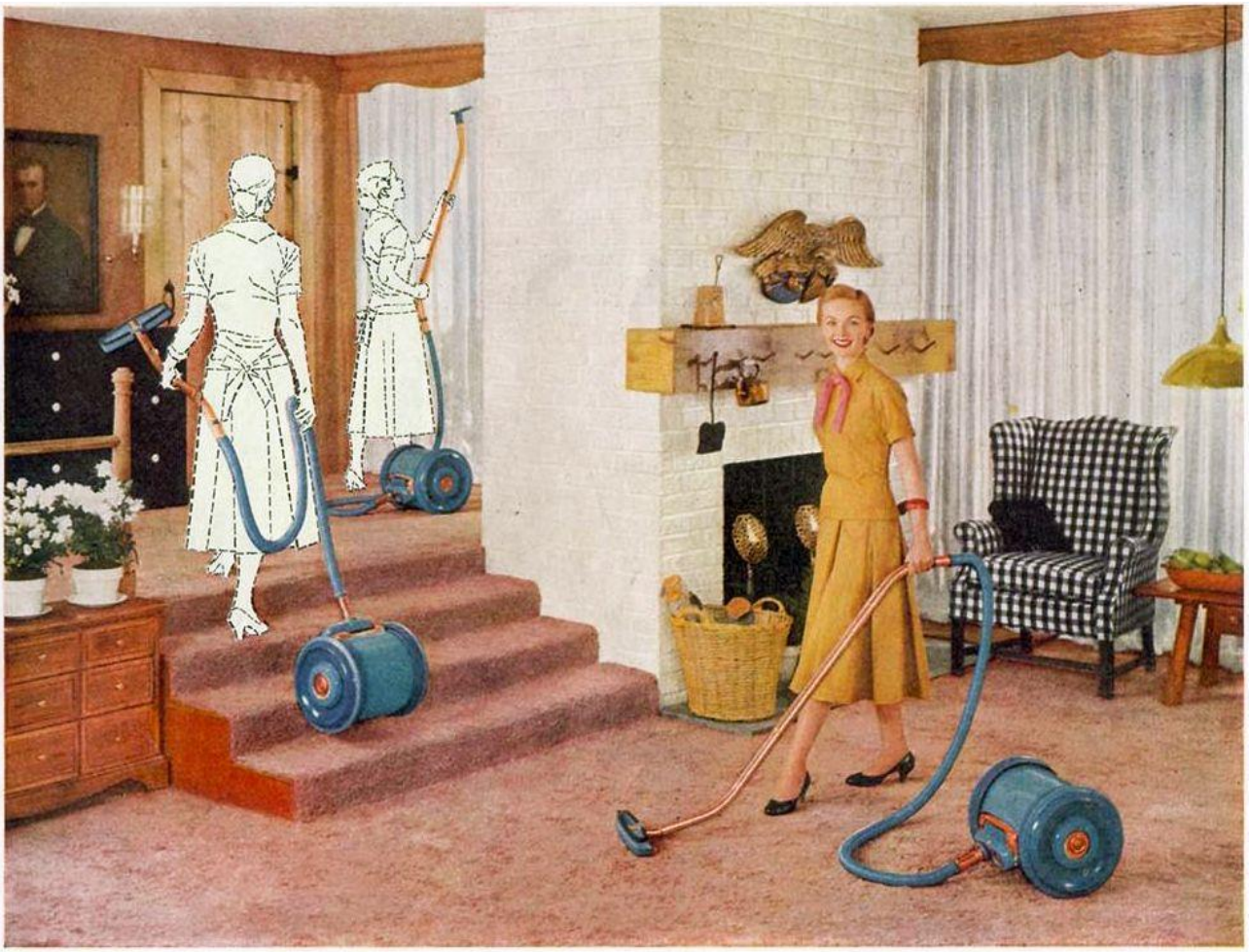
I swipe the water from my hands and turn. Grey stands a few yards back, holding the reins of Ironheart, the fastest horse in the stables. The animal is blowing hard, its chest and flanks damp with sweat despite the early-morning chill.

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

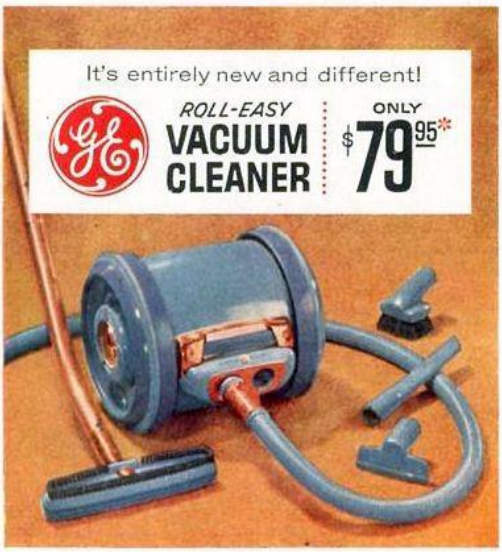
Task 6: Finding Meaning and Exploring Representations

Consider the below text and then answer the following questions.

You will also want to annotate the text for features from the language levels explored earlier in the booklet e.g. lexis, semantics and grammar.



Now–a vacuum cleaner you never have to lift!



It rolls anywhere easily—even up and down stairs—on its smooth-running, 12-inch wheels!

It's powered to clean every inch of every room efficiently and easily. And because its "Throw-Away" Bag is extra large, you have to replace it only a few times a year. This new cleaner stores easily, too! You just roll it away until next cleaning day.

G.E.'s new "Roll-easy" Vacuum Cleaner is beautifully color styled in turquoise and copper by Freda Diamond. See it at your dealer's soon. Vacuum Cleaner Dept., Small Appliance Division, General Electric Company, Bridgeport 2, Connecticut.

*Manufacturer's recommended retail or Fair Trade price.

Only General Electric offers you this amazing attachment!

IT CLEANS RUGS!

IT TURNS ITSELF OVER!

IT CLEANS FLOORS!

Progress Is Our Most Important Product

GENERAL ELECTRIC

1. Who or what is the intended...
   a. Audience
   b. Topic (field)
   c. Purpose (function)
      …of this text?

   Annotate the text to show *how* you know each of the above.
2. How are women represented in this advert?
3. How does the advert successfully achieve the purpose?

Challenge

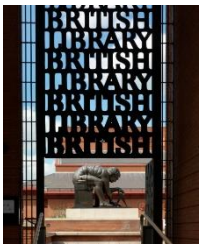
4. What contextual information can help to develop your understanding of the meanings and representations created in this text?

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:



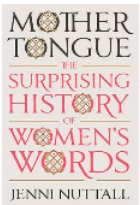
British Library: accents and dialects

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

A historical investigation of feminist language and thought, from the dawn of Old English to the present day by Jenni Nuttall:
Mother Tongue



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:

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