Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Analysing language

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What the questions want

- (AQA) Paper 1 Question 2 (8 marks) and Paper 2 Question 3 (12 marks) ask how the writer uses language to create an effect. You're marked on what you say about the words, not on how many techniques you can spot.
- Think about three things: words and phrases, language features and techniques, and **sentence forms**. You don't need all three in every paragraph, but the best answers show range.

How to zoom in on a word

- Pick one to five words. Ask: what does this word suggest? What would be lost if the writer had used a plainer one?
- 'Crept' suggests secrecy or fear, where 'walked' suggests nothing at all. 'Marched' suggests purpose, or aggression.
- Say what kind of word it is when that helps: a verb shows action, an adjective gives a quality, an abstract noun names an idea.
- Give more than one possible meaning when you can, using 'perhaps' or 'could'. It shows you're thinking, and examiners reward it.

Techniques: what to say about them

- **Simile** or **metaphor**: what's being compared, and what does it make us feel? Calling a stone path a 'long grey spine' makes it sound bony and fragile.
- **Personification**: what kind of person does it become? Water that's 'unhurried' seems patient and knowing, which is frightening.

- Repetition: what's being hammered home, and why? **Semantic field** (a group of linked words): what mood does it build?
- Sound (alliteration, **sibilance**, **onomatopoeia**): what does the sound do? Harsh sounds jar, and soft 's' sounds can feel sly or soothing.
- Naming a technique earns very little. Explaining what it does earns the marks.

Sentence forms

- A short sentence after long ones creates shock or tension, or emphasises a point. A one-word sentence isolates an idea.
- A long sentence can build detail, show a rush of thoughts or overwhelm the reader. A list can suggest plenty, or chaos.
- Questions draw the reader in, and exclamations show emotion. Always say why it's there at that moment.

A top paragraph, step by step

- Your idea: 'The writer presents the sea as quietly menacing.'
- A short quotation, inside your sentence: 'The water "slid in from both sides, unhurried".'
- Zoom in: 'The verb "slid" suggests something smooth and deliberate, like a predator that has no need to rush.'
- The reader: 'We feel that she's up against something that can't be reasoned with, which is more frightening than a storm.'

Exam tip

- Two or three well-explained ideas beat eight techniques. Aim for three paragraphs in about 10 minutes on Paper 1 Question 2, and about 15 minutes on Paper 2 Question 3.
- In non-fiction, think about the writer's purpose and who they were writing for.

Common mistakes

- 'This makes the reader want to read on' or 'this creates a picture in the reader's mind'. Both could be said of any text.
- Long quotations: you can't zoom in on a whole sentence.
- Writing about the whole source when the question names only some of the lines.

On your exam board (Edexcel, OCR and Eduqas)

- (Edexcel) Language and structure are asked about together: Paper 1 Question 3 (6 marks) on the fiction extract, and Paper 2 Question 3 (15 marks) on the first non-fiction text.

Your notes

- (OCR and Eduqas) You analyse language in both fiction and non-fiction texts, often together with structure. The skills are the same.

Key terms

Connotation	An idea or feeling that a word suggests.
Imagery	Language that creates a picture in the reader's mind.
Simile	A comparison using 'like' or 'as'.
Metaphor	A comparison that says something is something else.
Personification	Giving human qualities to something that isn't human.
Semantic field	A group of words linked by the same topic.
Sibilance	Repeated 's' sounds.
Onomatopoeia	A word that sounds like what it describes.
Hyperbole	Deliberate exaggeration.
Sentence form	The type and length of a sentence.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is a simile?
2. What is a metaphor?
3. 'The wind howled angrily.' Which technique is this?
4. What are connotations?
5. What effect does a very short sentence often have?
6. What is a semantic field?
7. What is sibilance?
8. Which verb best suggests someone moving secretly?

Answers

1. A comparison using 'like' or 'as'
2. A comparison saying something is something else
3. Personification
4. The ideas and feelings a word suggests
5. It creates tension or emphasis
6. A group of words linked by a topic
7. Repeated 's' sounds
8. Crept

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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