Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Retrieval and inference

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What these questions test

- Finding information (**retrieval**) and working out what's suggested (**inference**). They come first on the papers and they're the quickest marks you can get.
- **Explicit** information is stated directly. **Implicit** information is only hinted at: 'She slammed the door' tells us she's angry without saying so.
- (AQA) Paper 1 Question 1 (4 marks) is four multiple-choice questions on a named part of the fiction source. You shade one circle for each.
- (AQA) Paper 2 Question 1 (4 marks) gives you eight statements about part of a source. You shade the four that are true.

Making an inference

- Ask yourself: what does this tell me that it doesn't say? Then say it in your own words, and back it up with a few words from the text.
- Useful phrases: 'this suggests', 'this implies', 'we can work out that', 'perhaps'.
- A good **inference** goes one step beyond the words. 'The bin overflowed and the plates were piled up' doesn't only mean it's messy: it suggests nobody has cared for this home for some time.

Differences between two sources: Paper 2 Question 2, 8 marks (AQA)

- The question names something that's different in the two sources, and asks what you can infer about the differences. Since 2026 it no longer uses the word 'summary', but the skill is the same.
- Start with the difference. Then give a short quotation from each source, and say what each one suggests: 'The children in Source B are worn down physically, whereas the daughter in Source A...'.

- It's marked on what you can work out from both sources together. Comments on language earn nothing here.

Exam tip

- Draw a box around the lines you're told to use. For multiple choice, find the exact words that prove your answer before you shade it.
- Two or three developed differences are plenty for Paper 2 Question 2. Spend about 10 minutes, then move on.

Common mistakes

- Using details from outside the named lines, even if they're true.
- Putting two details side by side with no link. It isn't a difference until you say what each one suggests.
- Analysing language in Paper 2 Question 2.

On your exam board (Edexcel, OCR and Eduqas)

- (Edexcel) The short questions at the start of each paper (Paper 1 Questions 1 and 2; Paper 2 Questions 1, 2, 4 and 5) test **retrieval** and **inference**. Paper 2 Question 7(a) asks what the two texts have in common.
- (OCR and Eduqas) The reading sections open with short **retrieval** and **inference** questions, and include a question that brings together information from two non-fiction texts.

Key terms

Retrieval	Finding and selecting information from a text.
Inference	Working out what is suggested but not directly stated.
Explicit	Stated clearly and directly.
Implicit	Suggested or hinted at, rather than stated.
Synthesis	Bringing together information from two texts.
Evidence	A quotation or detail from the text that supports a point.

Quick questions

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

1. How many marks is Paper 1 Question 1 worth? (AQA)
2. What does Paper 1 Question 1 ask you to do? (AQA)
3. What is an inference?
4. 'His hands shook as he opened the letter.' What can you infer?
5. What does 'explicit' mean?

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6. What does 'implicit' mean?
7. What does Paper 2 Question 1 ask you to do? (AQA)
8. What should an answer to Paper 2 Question 2 focus on? (AQA)

Answers

1. 4
2. Answer four multiple-choice questions on a named part of the text
3. Working out something that is suggested but not stated
4. He is nervous
5. Stated clearly and directly
6. Suggested rather than stated directly
7. Choose four true statements
8. Differences between the sources, with inferences from both

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

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

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