Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Analysing structure

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What structure means

- (AQA) Paper 1 Question 3 (8 marks) is about the whole source and how the writer has put it together. Language questions look at words. This one looks at the order of things.
- (AQA) Since 2026 the question names one effect, such as 'How has the writer structured the text to create tension?', and says where the text comes from, such as the middle of a novel. Every paragraph you write should be about that effect.

Features to look for

- **Focus**: what are we shown first? Where does it move: from a wide view to one detail, or from the outside world to someone's thoughts?
- Time: **flashbacks**, flash-forwards, and the story slowing down at the key moment.
- Pivotal point: the moment things change. Ask why it comes where it does.
- Contrast and repetition: two things placed side by side, or an idea that comes back changed.
- Paragraphs and sentences for pace: a one-line paragraph that stops the reader, or long ones that slow them down.
- Endings: a cliffhanger, a cyclical ending that returns to the start, or an anti-**climax**.

How to write about it

- Plan in three boxes: start, middle and end. For each, say what the writer **focuses** on and why it's placed there.
- Useful phrases: 'The writer opens with...', 'The **focus** then **shifts** to...', 'By delaying...', 'At this pivotal point...', 'Finally, the writer returns to...'.

- Quote only to show where something happens. Your comment should be about its placing, not the meaning of a word.

Exam tip

- Comment on the ending. Many students run out of time and lose an easy point.
- Think about what comes before the extract and after it. The middle of a novel can start with no introduction and end with nothing resolved.

Common mistakes

- Retelling the story with 'first', 'then' and 'next', and never saying why.
- Analysing language: 'the verb "slapped" suggests...' belongs in Question 2.
- Forgetting the effect the question names.

On your exam board (Edexcel, OCR and Eduqas)

- (Edexcel, OCR and Eduqas) Language and **structure** are often asked about in the same question, so be ready to write about both, and about non-fiction as well as fiction.

Key terms

Structure	The way a text is organised and ordered.
Focus	What the writer draws the reader's attention to.
Shift	A change in focus, time, place or perspective.
Perspective	The point of view from which something is told.
Flashback	A scene set at an earlier time.
Cyclical structure	A structure in which the ending returns to the beginning.
Climax	The point of highest tension in a story.
Foreshadowing	Hints about what will happen later.
Juxtaposition	Placing contrasting ideas close together.

Quick questions

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

1. What does 'structure' mean in Paper 1 Question 3? (AQA)
2. What is a flashback?
3. What is a cyclical structure?
4. What is foreshadowing?
5. A text starts with a wide view of a city, then focuses on one window. What is this?

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6. Why might a writer use a one-sentence paragraph?
7. What is juxtaposition?
8. What is the climax of a story?

Answers

1. How the text is organised and ordered
2. A scene from an earlier time
3. The ending returns to the beginning
4. Hints about what will happen later
5. Zooming in
6. To emphasise a key moment
7. Placing contrasting ideas next to each other
8. The moment of highest tension

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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