Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Language techniques and terminology

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Word classes

- Nouns name things; verbs are actions or states; adjectives describe nouns; adverbs describe verbs (often ending in -ly); pronouns replace nouns; prepositions show position or time; conjunctions join clauses.
- Knowing them lets you be exact: 'the verb "slid"' is stronger than 'the word "slid"'.

Imagery: making us see

- Simile: a comparison using 'like' or 'as'. Say what it makes us feel about the thing described.
- Metaphor: saying one thing is another. An **extended metaphor** carries on over several lines.
- Personification: giving something human qualities. Ask what kind of person it becomes.
- Pathetic fallacy: weather or setting that reflects mood. **Symbolism**: an object standing for a bigger idea.
- Hyperbole: deliberate exaggeration. **Oxymoron**: contradictory words together, such as 'deafening silence'.

Sound: making us hear

- Alliteration: repeated consonant sounds at the start of nearby words. Say what the sound adds.
- Sibilance: repeated 's' sounds, which can be soothing or sinister. **Assonance**: repeated vowel sounds.

- Onomatopoeia: words that sound like what they mean, such as 'slapped'. **Plosives**: harsh 'b', 'p', 't', 'd' and 'k' sounds, which can sound angry or violent.

Sentences and narrative voice

- Simple sentences have one main clause; compound sentences join main clauses with 'and', 'but' or 'or'; **complex sentences** have a main clause and a subordinate clause; **minor sentences** have no main verb, such as 'Silence.'
- Sentence functions: statements, questions, commands (**imperatives**) and exclamations.
- Narrative voice: first person ('I') brings us close to one mind; second person ('you') pulls the reader in; third person ('he', 'she', 'they') can see more.

In non-fiction

- Anecdote: a short personal story, which makes an argument feel human. Rhetorical question: a question that makes the reader think, and doesn't expect an answer.
- Direct address ('you'), inclusive pronouns ('we'), facts and statistics, the rule of three, and emotive language.
- Tone is the writer's attitude: formal, sarcastic, nostalgic, angry, weary. Always say what tone a technique creates.

Exam tip

- Never stop at the name. 'This is a metaphor' earns almost nothing; 'the metaphor makes the path sound fragile, and so Mara seems more at risk' earns marks.
- If you can't remember a technique's name, describe what the writer's doing instead. You'll still get credit for the effect.

Common mistakes

- Spotting alliteration and saying 'it makes it stand out'.
- Confusing simile and metaphor: only a simile uses 'like' or 'as'.
- Thinking more techniques means more marks.

Key terms

Oxymoron	Two contradictory words placed together, such as 'bittersweet'.
Extended metaphor	A metaphor developed over several lines or a whole text.
Symbolism	Using an object to represent a bigger idea.
Assonance	Repeated vowel sounds in nearby words.

Your notes

Plosive	A harsh consonant sound, such as 'b', 'p', 't' or 'd'.
Imperative	A command, such as 'Stop now.'
Complex sentence	A sentence with a main clause and a subordinate clause.
Minor sentence	A sentence without a main verb, used for effect.

Quick questions

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

1. What is an oxymoron?
2. What is assonance?
3. What is alliteration?
4. What are plosive sounds?
5. What is an imperative sentence?
6. What is a complex sentence?
7. What is a minor sentence?
8. What is an extended metaphor?

Answers

1. Two contradictory words together, such as 'deafening silence'
2. Repeated vowel sounds
3. Repeated consonant sounds at the start of nearby words
4. Harsh sounds such as 'b', 'p', 't' and 'd'
5. A command, such as 'Stop now.'
6. A sentence with a main clause and a subordinate clause
7. A sentence without a main verb, such as 'Silence.'
8. A metaphor developed over several lines

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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