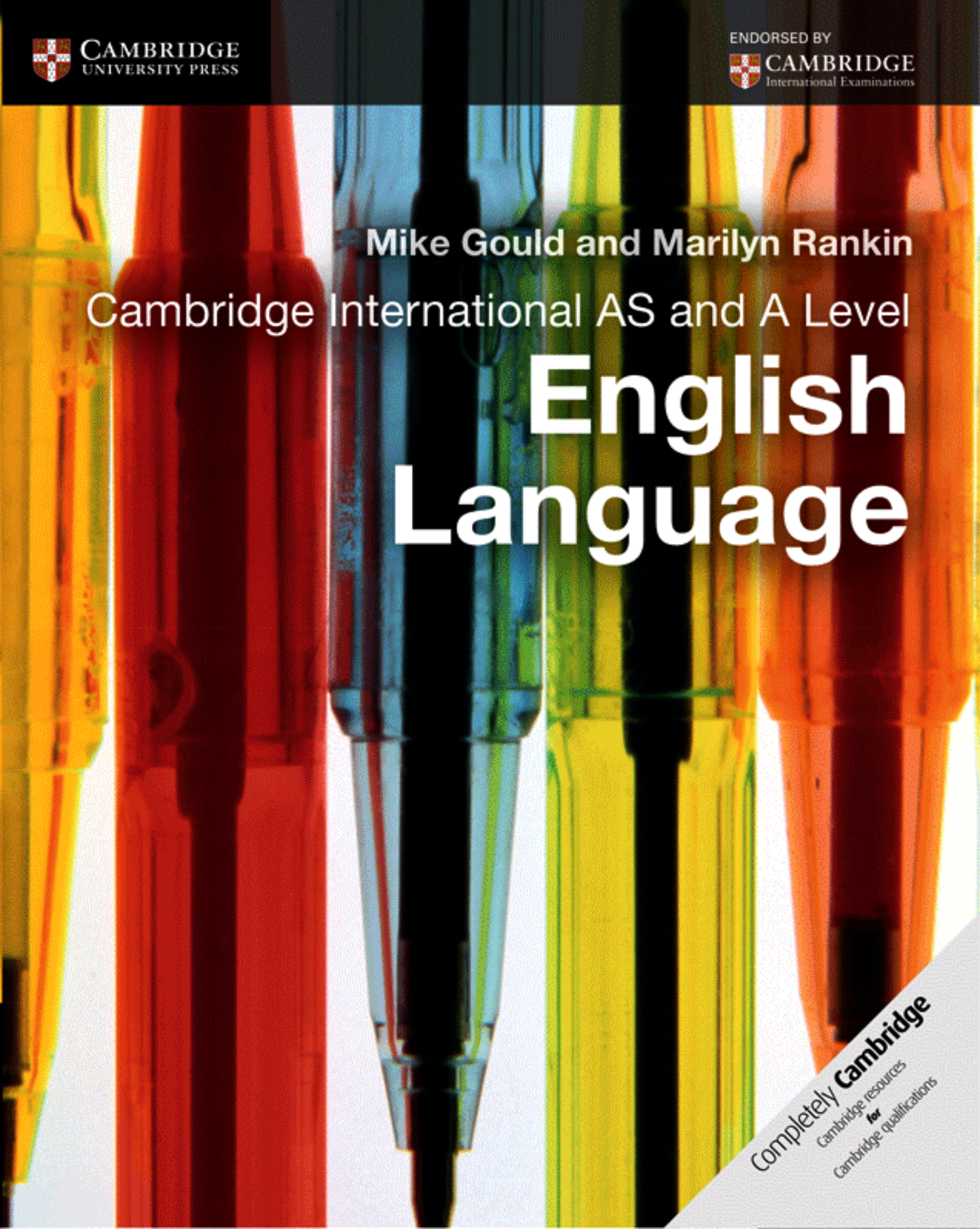

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Introduction

The core aim of this book is to help you to develop and apply the key skills in reading and writing you need to succeed in your AS and A level English Language course; it is particularly designed for those working towards the Cambridge International Examinations syllabus 9093. The book covers a wide range of reading skills, such as decoding questions, drawing out important words and phrases, and understanding aspects of style, voice and tone. It addresses the conventions of certain kinds of written and spoken language, from scripted speeches to travel articles, from memoirs to letters, and looks at how you can capture these conventions and writers' techniques in your own work. In writing, you will learn how to plan and structure shorter and extended responses, either for specified audiences or for a more general readership. You will learn how to adapt content from one text for a new purpose or context, and to write with originality and flair where appropriate. Most importantly, you will read model or sample responses which will help you evaluate your own work.

The AS Level section of the book is divided into three units:

- In **Unit 1** you will focus on responding to non-fiction texts as a reader, developing skills such as locating evidence and developing commentary. In particular, you will look at personal, descriptive and persuasive writing.
- In **Unit 2** the focus shifts to writing non-fiction with a strong emphasis on planning responses and on the range of text types you will need to master, for example letters, diaries, promotional texts, biography and character portraits.
- In **Unit 3** you will focus on imaginative writing with attention given to key areas such as characterisation, voice, setting, symbols, imagery and related linguistic techniques.

The A Level section of the book builds on the reading and writing skills you have learned at AS Level and applies them to significant areas of English language study.

The features of spoken language underpin much of the A Level course and you will focus on the conventions we use in our discourse with others. You will link these spoken language studies to an examination of the historical and cultural influences which have influenced the style of spoken and written English and which continue to do so today. You will find out about the variations of English along with people's attitudes to how the language is used, for example in relation to gender differences and political correctness. You will examine the many different varieties of English as a global language and, in the final unit, learn about the processes and theories of child language acquisition.

These are all very broad topics which lend themselves to further research beyond the core material covered in this book. You will therefore have many opportunities to research information as it applies to your own region.

A Level studies require extended essay writing using informed, clearly validated viewpoints and case studies. You will find examples and commentaries to help you develop an analytical framework.

There are a number of features in the book to help you in your study:

LINK – This suggests related sections or pages from the book which will help you make connections between skills or texts.



LINK

There is a follow-up task in the section on **Planning directed writing responses** on page 71.

TIP – This provides focused advice to help your study and revision.



TIP

An unusual or older character – often a relative – can be represented in memoirs or autobiographies by the writer creating a sense of mystery and offering no real **narrative**.

KEY TERMS – This defines important words that you need to understand or use in your studies.



KEY TERMS

assert state something as a fact with no real support or proof

FURTHER RESEARCH/READING – These suggest additional guidance or supporting material that can be accessed elsewhere, for example on the web.



FURTHER RESEARCH

You can usefully practise your understanding of *audience* by looking at four or five types of magazine (either online or in a shop) and trying to work out what their target readership is.



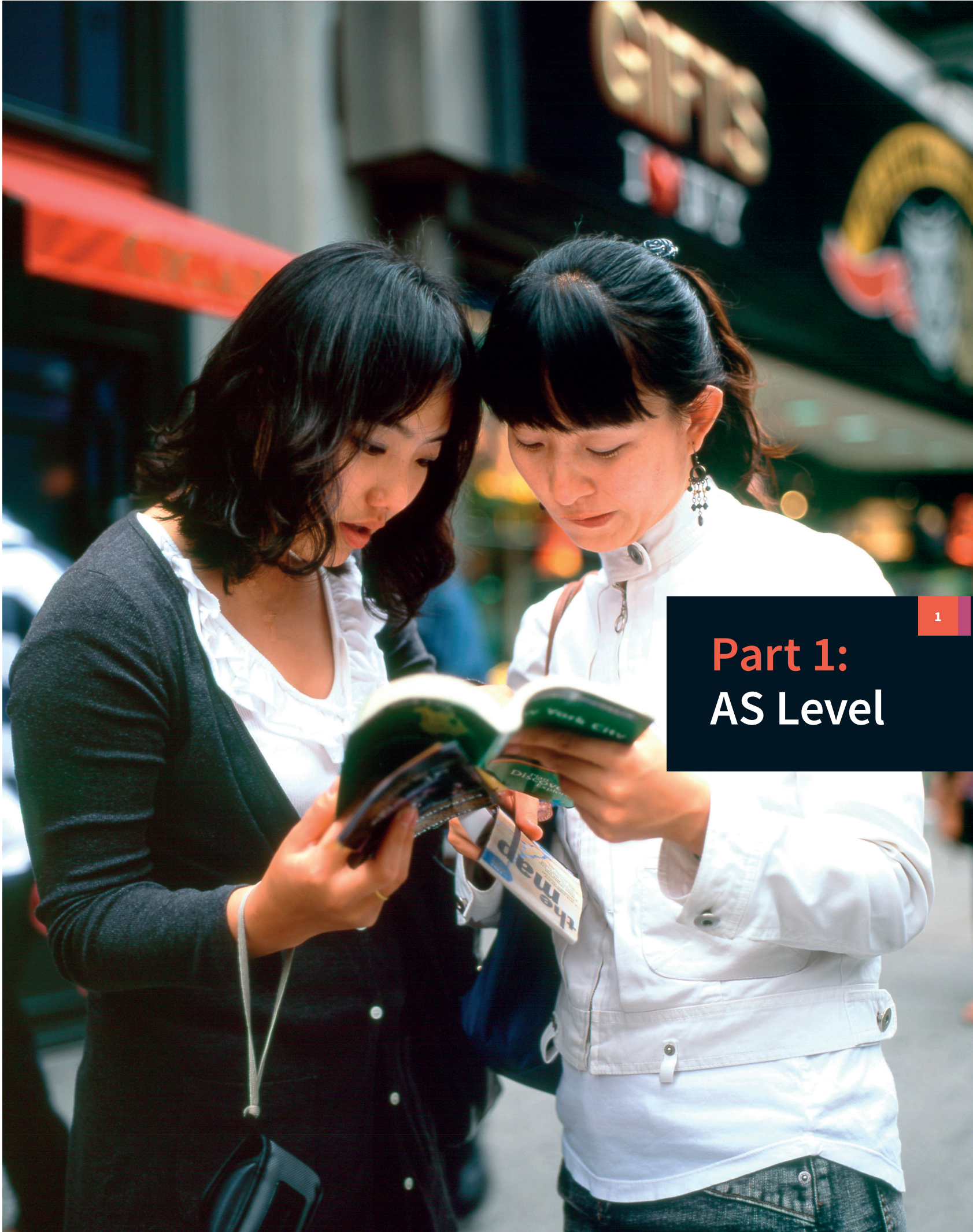
FURTHER READING

For more examples of war diaries visit **http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/index.htm**

Throughout the book, you will be given the chance to build and develop skills in small steps or stages, as well as writing extended, full responses to examination-style tasks and questions. Many of the texts you will encounter are challenging, but they come from a wide range of cultures, contexts and times. All have been included to engage and enrich your reading and writing experience and we hope that you will take the chance to explore some of them more fully.

In conclusion, we believe this book will provide a rich, enjoyable and useful course of study that will enable you to succeed in AS and A Level English Language.

Mike Gould
Marilyn Rankin



Part 1:
AS Level

Unit 1: Reading non-fiction

Reading is a core skill which underpins both AS and A2 English Language. It helps you to understand a range of different types of writing and also helps you to shape your own written responses in the light of the effects and techniques that you encounter.

In this unit you will explore different forms and genres of non-fiction writing. You will have opportunities to:

- analyse and interpret texts in a range of ways
- explore the techniques writers use and the effects they create
- plan and develop the skills needed to write your own extended commentaries on language and style
- link what you have learned to the requirements of the 'Writing non-fiction' aspect of the course.

LINK

The techniques, effects and forms of writing you will meet in this unit will inform and help you with your own writing in **Unit 2: Writing non-fiction**.

READING AND WRITING SKILLS
Types of question, language and style

In this section you will:

- consider what *non-fiction* is and the sorts of texts you might encounter
- look at a range of commentary-style questions
- explore what *language* and *style* are.

What is non-fiction?

When we talk about non-fiction, we generally mean writing which is rooted in real experiences and which draws on factual information for its core content. Fiction generally refers to writing that is largely imaginative or invented. Yet non-fiction writing can share many of the same features as fiction writing, for example a description of a real-life trip to a vibrant city might share many of the same vivid style features as the depiction of an imagined city in a novel.

However, most of the extracts you are likely to encounter for examination would be largely categorised as 'non-fiction' though they will be drawn from a wide range of sources.

TIP

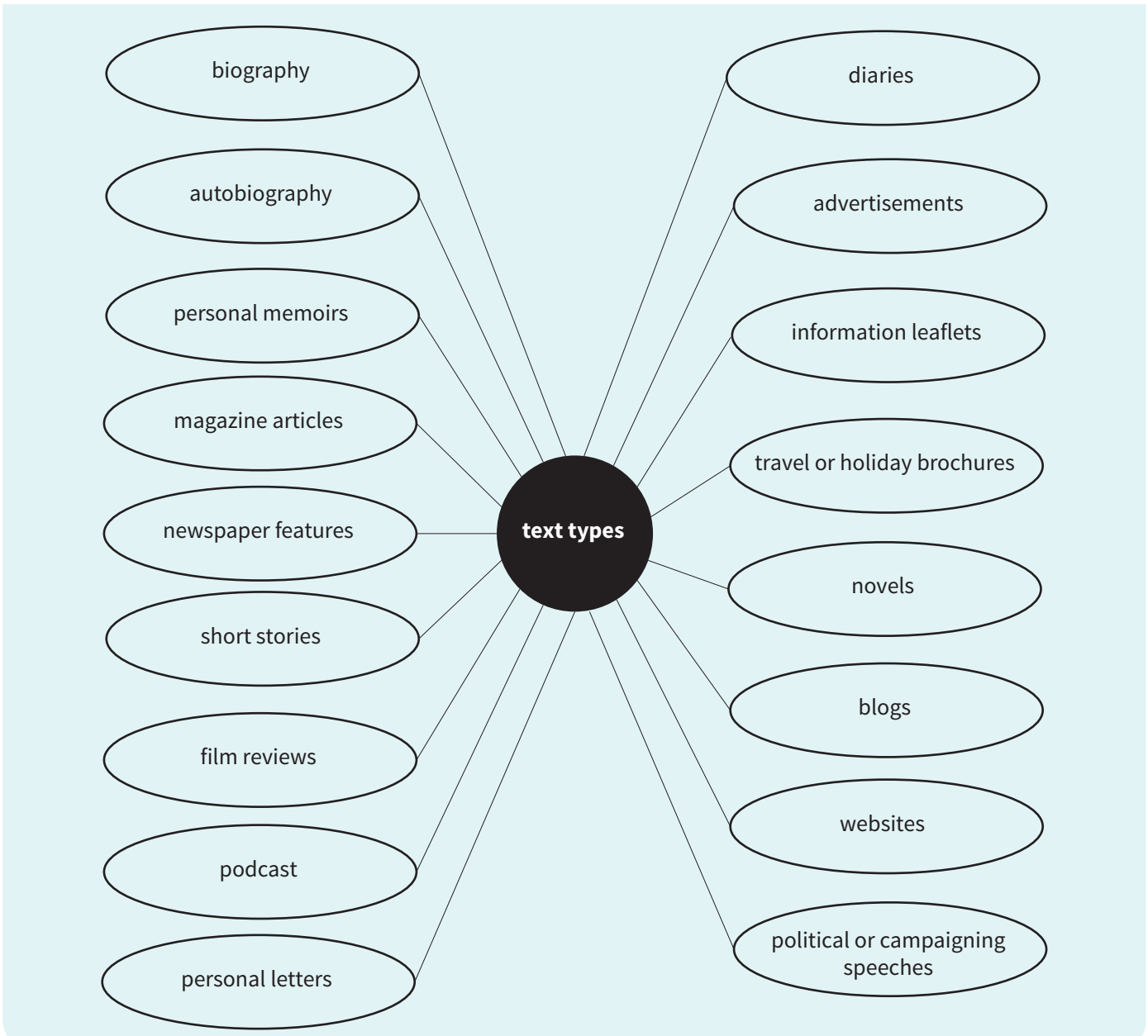
Look for the common features that fiction and non-fiction writing share; the division between them may be less wide than you think.

ACTIVITY 1.1

With a partner, look at the diagram opposite.

1 Which of these would you generally consider to be 'non-fiction' – that is, largely based on real-life events, people or places?

2 Which of the non-fiction texts you have identified do you think would be *closest* in style to fictional writing? Why?



Types of question

This section of the book deals mainly with your understanding of and commentary on non-fiction passages you read, but bear in mind that what you take from these passages will also inform your 'Directed writing' tasks. More importantly, though, you need to understand what it is you are being asked to do.

Passage-based questions may ask you to:

Comment on the style and language of the set extract.

In this case, the questions are fairly open and would expect you to range widely in your response, covering a number of factors.

Or these questions may go further and ask you to address your analysis towards a particular angle, for example:

- *Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to present the relationship between …*
- *Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to persuade the audience to …*
- *Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to present the writer's attitude towards …*

In the latter examples, you are given more guidance with references, perhaps to comment on:

- *the writer's purpose or attitude* (i.e. to present, to persuade, etc.)
- *particular aspects or focuses* (i.e. a relationship, a place, an event).

ACTIVITY 1.2

On your own, look at this question about a passage taken from a travel account:

> *Comment on the ways in which style and language are used by Paul Theroux to present his attitude towards the people he meets in the stadium.*

With a partner discuss:

- **Whose** style and language should you focus on?
- **What** particular **purpose** of the writer should you address?
- **What** or **who** in the passage must you consider?

TIP

Aspects such as purpose, audience and context will not always be apparent, or even relevant, when you read passages for analysis, but keeping them in mind is useful and can help you focus your analysis.

KEY TERMS

register the type of language used for a particular purpose, or in a particular setting

context the background, setting, form or culture in which the text was written or is set

What are style and language?

Understanding what *style* and *language* are may seem obvious, but it is important you understand the sort of areas you are being expected to comment on.

Style

Style might be considered as everything that gives a particular text its unique and individual 'flavour'. The ingredients that make up style will include:

- **form:** the shape, organisation and overall structure of the text
- **language:** the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, variety of sentences, choice of tense, **register** and so on.

To understand the particular style and language of a text, or that a writer employs, it is also helpful for you to explore:

- the **purpose** of texts (which may be explicit or implied), for example to persuade, inform, or describe
- the **audience** or reader at whom the text is aimed (which can be specific or general)
- the **context** of the text, for example when, where and how it was produced.

To get yourself thinking about style and language, begin by reading these three different paragraphs from texts.

A I had never felt so alone. The wide sweep of the Andes stretched in front of me, a seemingly infinite expanse of ice and rock. The air cut into my cheeks, and blinded me, as I stood unsteadily looking down on the valley below. Then, for a moment, the skies cleared above me, and I saw a single, solitary condor rise on the breeze, effortless and free. I would be that condor. I would rise above my despair.

B Do not be put off by the noise and smell of the city as you arrive. This is one of its charms, and just part of the heady brew that makes it such a wonderful and magical place to visit. The narrow streets, the Old City with its minarets, the street-vendors who shout out their wares – these simply add to the intoxicating recipe. You will soon be hooked!

C All I can say is that the décor was more tasteful than the food ... and more colourful. My starter was brown paté on brown toast ... the effect was, how shall I put it ... er, brown and, if it is possible for a colour to be a taste, it tasted brown, or perhaps beige, which is even less powerful. The starter's lack of taste was only beaten by the gloopy slop that came with my steak. The menu said 'Celeriac purée', my plate said, 'Wallpaper paste'.

KEY TERMS

voice the distinctive tone and perspective of the writer

tone the 'feel', mood or emotion present in a text

formality language which observes agreed conventions, which would be used in business or professional contexts, particularly in less personal contexts

informality language best suited to close or personal contexts, in which accepted rules or conventions can be adapted, abbreviated or otherwise altered, for example, in writing that sounds more like speaking

symbol a word or phrase that can represent an idea; for example, in paragraph A above the condor represents freedom

imagery language that draws on visual depictions to suggest ideas, for example, *The road through the mountains was a necklace of lights that shimmered and twinkled*

ACTIVITY 1.3

1 With a partner, talk about each text in turn. Consider:
   - the **voice** of the writer (Who is speaking? Do we know? What form of address do they use? What tense? Is the **tone** humorous, reflective, angry?)
   - the **formality** or **informality** (How 'close' to the reader is the tone? Is it chatty? Does it use speech-like language or punctuation?)
   - other language choices (e.g. use of particular vocabulary)
   - the **types or variety of sentence** used (Short? Long? Simple? Complex?)
   - **symbols** or **imagery**
   - the **order or structure** of the text (Does it matter? What can we learn from it?).
2 Share your ideas with another pair and then feed back responses to the rest of the class or group.
   - Did you find a way of describing the style and language for each of these texts?
   - Did any of the texts share similar elements of style and language? Which? How?

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Questions can be general and focus broadly on style and language, or can be more specific and direct you towards key aspects.
- Understanding what style and language consist of will help you focus on the key elements you need to comment on.

Key reading skills for responding to passages

In this section you will:

- understand key success criteria for commenting on passages
- explore how to interpret selected words and phrases from texts
- evaluate commentary skills.

How to approach passage-based questions

Having a system for approaching passage-based questions is key to a successful commentary on them. But what kind of things should you do in the reading and writing stages?

Here are some key success criteria:

Do:

- read the text at least twice
- list or highlight key words and phrases from the text before you begin to write
- start your commentary with a clear, brief introduction in which you offer an overview or framework for your interpretation of, or commentary on, the set passage
- focus on what the writer **does** (the techniques he or she uses) and the **features** presented
- describe the **effects** of those techniques and features on the reader
- support what you say with well-chosen, **selective evidence** and **apt quotation**
- write in a **coherent**, **fluent** way which **links** rather than lists ideas
- keep your focus on style and language
- check your work as you write and tweak or adapt carefully to make sure your expression is succinct, yet sufficiently detailed.

Don't:

- start writing before you have read the text properly
- simply list or highlight everything in the text (!) – be selective
- **assert** an idea or opinion without supporting evidence
- simply 'feature-spot' – that is, point out a technique or a language device without explaining its effect or purpose (for example, mention that the writer has used alliteration without saying what its effect is)
- just summarise what happens or paraphrase without offering any commentary or interpretation
- list points or ideas in an unconnected way
- drift off into discussing aspects outside the question set.

KEY TERMS

assert state something as a fact with no real support or proof

Read these two short paragraphs from students' commentaries. You do not need to have read the original passage but they are based on the extract from *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell on page 9 of this unit.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

A On the whole, this is an easy-to-read passage in which the writer uses short and long sentences to good effect. It is a direct and descriptive account of how an animal was shot. The writer lets the readers get acquainted with the scene and the atmosphere. The writer uses *if* clauses which add variety.

B Orwell gives a direct, straightforward account in broadly chronological order, establishing the setting and then the events that ensue. He demonstrates the thought-processes he went through at the time, using *if* clauses to consider the consequences of what he might do, for example, saying *If he charged, I could shoot* ... to explain how the situation would be taken out of his hands.

ACTIVITY 1.4

1. On your own, based on the relevant success criteria on page 6:
   - note down which of the success criteria are evident
   - decide which of the responses is more effective
   - decide what is wrong with, or could be improved in, the other response.
2. Once you have done this, compare your ideas with a partner.
   - Did you agree on which extract was better and why?
   - What two important things, in particular, should have been done?

Highlighting or listing key words or phrases

Passages of writing contain an enormous variety of possibilities which you can choose to comment on. In fact, you could probably comment on every single word or phrase! However, this is not practical, nor desirable. By highlighting or listing key words and phrases you will be able to interact with the text, however dense and complex it might first appear, and focus on key patterns or features that create the tone or mood.

You will be looking at how to plan and structure responses to texts later in this unit but first, read the extract below. The annotations in the first four paragraphs provide an idea of the sorts of aspects you might draw from a text.

Short, simple sentence introduces the focus for the piece.

Metaphor captures the sense of mental imprisonment.

The writer's appetite to find out as much as he can.

I never met my grandfather. He died nine years to the day before I was born. What I knew of him was pieced together from conversations with my grandmother...

We gathered in her garden on the day of her funeral, steeling ourselves against the encroaching sadness of final farewell. I left the stilted conversation that caged in our grief and walked through her house, drinking in every detail of a place I would never see again. I paused in front of an old cedar-wood bookcase where my grandmother had arranged her most prized photos. Amid all the weddings, Christmas dinners, birthdays, graduations, grandchildren

Withholds the name of the grandfather till the end of the sentence; he comes alive at this point, following the list of items viewed.

The repeating structure mimics the sense of the writer's eyes moving from one image to the next, as if we are seeing them too.

Long, extended noun phrase captures Bryan's charisma and achievements.

Return to the first person, *I*, relocates the text as being as much about the writer as the subject.

Final clause creates a sense of drama; suggests something mysterious or interesting is to be revealed.

and great-grandchildren were pictures of Bryan. They were sundry keepsakes of a life of staggering high achievement.

Here was Bryan at the foot of a satellite whose construction he oversaw, moments before a rocket launched it into outer space; here he was in a park in Leningrad at the height of the Cold War, the delegate representing Australia at an international space conference; here he was in Maralinga, the distinguished scientist observing the atomic-bomb tests; here he posed for his official photograph as director of Australia's Antarctic Division; and here he was looking like **Errol Flynn**[1], the decorated squadron leader with moustache neatly clipped and hat rakishly angled.

I had never felt as remote from my grandfather as I did at that moment. There were no photos of him holding a baby or laughing with his children or smiling with his bride on his wedding day. He was on his own in all of them, but for one exception.

The photo was smaller than the others, discreetly placed at the edge of the bookcase. It captured my grandfather later in his life standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a man of similar age and proportions, both of them dressed in dark suits and ties. A wintry background of leafless trees and cloudy sky scarcely dimmed the quiet enthusiasm each man exuded in the other's company. I picked it up in the hope that closer inspection might put a name to the man whose life was sufficiently exalted to share space with my grandfather. I took it out of the frame and flipped it around. On the back, my grandmother had scrawled a name in pencil: Hiram Cassedy.

Cassedy. The very sight of the name called forth images formed in my youth. In my mind's eye, I could see a party of emaciated castaways covered in tropical ulcers gathered on a beach, a full moon lighting up the crashing surf. A bare-chested Timorese man moves among the group clutching a fistful of Dutch guilders. A radioman, malaria-ravaged and undernourished, crouches alongside an enormous transceiver, frantically scribbling an encoded message on the back of a corn leaf. Nearby, a crucifix fashioned from palm branches tilts at an angle above a freshly dug grave. And, standing slightly apart – his face bearded and gaunt, his clothes torn and filthy – is my grandfather. In one hand, he clasps a letter sent from the Japanese Army demanding surrender; in the other, he holds a torch. Later that night, my grandfather would meet Hiram Cassedy, the lynchpin in an event that most believed defined my grandfather's life and some thought ended it prematurely.

The photo I held was taken years later, on the occasion of his second encounter with Cassedy. It was a rare souvenir honouring a rescue mission of such implausibility that the Allies covered it up in the hope of using it again. When the press eventually reported the event, the story was lost in a war filled with like tales of bravery, heroism and despair.

I placed the photo back in its frame and drew it close. The key to understanding my grandfather lay at the heart of this photo and in understanding the event it commemorated. I placed it back on the bookcase and returned to my grieving family. That was when I decided to go to Timor.

From *Rescue at 21.00 Hours* by Tom Trumble.

[1] **Errol Flynn** swashbuckling actor from the 1930s to 1950s

TIP

It is vital that you refer to the **effect** of particular language features, devices or patterns when you comment on a text otherwise your comments will reveal little of the mood or tone.

ACTIVITY 1.5

1 Basing your answer solely on the annotations to the text, what do you feel you have learned about the writer and his style and language?

With a partner, discuss how useful the annotations were.

KEY TERMS

juxtapose to place ideas or words/phrases in close proximity to each other to convey an idea, or to balance contrasting points

figurative language language such as imagery, in which the literal meaning is less relevant than what the word/phrase suggests or symbolises. For example, *My heart was stone* does not mean that the writer's heart was literally made of stone, but perhaps that it was unfeeling

2 Now have a go yourself. Read the extract again including the second, unannotated part. Using the **first four paragraphs as a model**, list key words or phrases that stand out to you.

These might include any of the following:

- particularly vivid descriptions (perhaps adjectives and nouns)
- repetitions of words/phrases or patterns of language
- groups of similar or related words
- contrasting or **juxtaposed** ideas or phrases
- imagery, symbols or other forms of **figurative language**
- changes in tone or focus.

3 Once you have done this, choose one or two of these aspects and make your own notes about what they reveal about the writer and his tone. Make sure you are able to:

- relate what you say to the words or phrases you have listed
- refer to the **effect** of these words or phrases on the reader and the mood conveyed.

TIP

Being aware of things to avoid can be as useful as remembering what you should do when answering passage-based questions.

Evaluating commentary skills

What makes a good commentary? While no two commentaries on a text should be the same and while each should reflect the student's own interpretation and 'take' on the text, there are key skills that everyone should apply, as indicated by the success criteria on page 6.

Now read this task and the passage that follows it:

1 *The passage below describes the writer's experience in Burma when he was serving as a police officer at a time when the British ruled the country. He has been ordered to deal with a possible threat posed by an elephant.*
(a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.

Cambridge International AS and A Level English Language 8693 Paper 1 (May/June 2009), Q1a.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal). Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behaviour. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the **mahout**[1] came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller.

There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim. The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-

hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick – one never does when a shot goes home – but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time – it might have been five seconds, I dare say – he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open – I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away.

From *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell.

[1] **mahout** an elephant owner or keeper



ACTIVITY 1.6

1 Discuss with a partner:
   - What happens in the passage?
   - What do you find particularly effective or striking about the account?
   - What kinds of things might you write about if commenting on the style and language?
2 Now read this sample response to the task. As you read it, consider to what extent it meets the success criteria for such a response.

This doesn't really tell us anything other than what the passage is about.

There is no comment on how this is done, and whilst true, does not really offer any overall comment on style or language.

This is an assertion – where is the evidence? A quotation?

SAMPLE RESPONSE

This is an easy-to-read passage in which the writer describes how an animal was shot. The writer lets the readers get acquainted with the scene and the atmosphere. Shooting the elephant was like something he was forced to do. He thought it would be like doing murder to kill the elephant itself. As the passage goes on he begins to care less. His first feelings go away and his worry about killing the animal goes away. He was now obsessed with getting the animal to die. He is confused about what he should do and the elephant could be a possible threat. The police officer was still not that old and unsure what kind of things he should do at this point. He is over-reacting and behaving in a not very good way for a police officer.

The writer uses **stream of consciousness** to describe a memory as seen through a first person view. This can be seen in the way in which the word *I* is used several times in the opening sentences. The writer uses various literary devices and metaphorical tools. For example, in the first paragraph, the author uses a **metaphor** in comparing the elephant to someone with a *grandmotherly air*. The **alliteration** of *beating his bunch* creates the harsh mood at the start and there is a sense of the same idea in the way that the author uses the repetition of *never* and *never* in order to show his state of mind.

The almost **anaphoric** contrast between *alive* and *dead* stands out to also show the way the officer was thinking. He is unsure about killing the animal and uses parenthesis around a sentence to show his inner thought. There are also simple sentences which show his inner thoughts and these are placed alongside longer complex sentences which show the action going on outside his stream of consciousness. The punctuation also adds to the dramatic effect. Commas come after certain words to create tension and suspense: *killing animals*, *but … Besides*, *there … Alive*, *dead*, …

The point of view of the passage is **first person** and we see things through the eyes of the writer. The diary dictated style gives an insight into the police officer's thoughts. Yet there are also outside sources, which give another perspective to the first-person point of view. There were *experienced-looking Burmans* and also there was *the beast's owner to be considered*. Besides that there was the excited crowd. While the police officer's thoughts come first, an atmosphere is created by inserting other people's actions and position.

Throughout the passage the author uses many metaphors and **similes** to good effect. The figurative language gives a more entertaining feel to the passage and helps the reader participate as if one is actually witnessing the events as they happen. The reader is fascinated as they hear the *happy sigh* and witness the blood that flowed in the simile *like red velvet*. The passage contains many such descriptive details, which help bring the story to life. The reader can visualise the agony the elephant went through and the excitement of the rather bored and aggressive crowd. With the use of many similes, it implies that the officer feels guilt.

KEY TERMS

stream of consciousness how words reflect the way in which a narrator's or speaker's mind is actually working at a given point

metaphor a direct comparison between two things which is not literally true

alliteration the repetition of the same sounds or of the same kinds of sounds at the beginning of words

anaphoric a reference which depends on, or connects back to, a previous, related word or phrase

first person the mode of narration in which the writer uses the *I* form.

simile a comparison between two things which uses *like* or *as*

ACTIVITY 1.7

Discuss with a partner:

- What works well and what doesn't work in this response?
- Which success criteria have *not* been met?
- What single thing do you feel would most have improved the response?

LINK

See page 17 of this unit for more about how to use the **point/quotation/comment** technique.

TIP

Get into the habit of regularly selecting articles or reports from reputable publications and reading them with an 'exam head' on – in other words, analysing them for style and language as much as for what they have to say.

It is important to support your points with evidence and then provide some sort of comment or further explanation of the point you have made. You will learn more about how to use this technique in a later section of this unit. As a first practice of this skill, write one or two sentences about the passage with one aspect of the style mentioned here – the use of **metaphor** to describe the elephant.

Try to:

- say something about what the use of *grandmotherly* conveys about the writer's feelings towards the elephant
- link this with any other way in which the elephant is described later in the passage.

The writer's use of a metaphor to describe the way the elephant behaves with a 'grandmotherly air' suggests that …

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Non-fiction writing shares many similarities with fiction writing.
- The reading and analysis skills you develop for commentary will help your own writing.
- Highlighting, listing or annotating key words and phrases in a text is an essential part of commentary.
- The best responses to texts always support the points made with apt, direct quotations.
- These should always be explained in terms of their effect on tone, mood or the perspective of the writer.

Planning and structuring a commentary

In this section, you will:

- learn how to read and plan your response
- select key words to help shape your introduction and response
- learn how different introductions can focus on different elements in the text.

It is important to have a mental or actual plan of how your commentary will be organised. Without it, you may spend too long on one aspect and not enough on another.

A process for response

In order to respond to a passage effectively, you should follow this guidance.

1. Read the passage closely **at least twice**.
   Why? The first reading should be to get the overall sense of the passage, what happens and how it all fits together. The second will allow you to focus on the way the passage works, the specific language style and the mood created.
2. **Divide the passage into equal sections**. This can be done quite easily if the paragraphs are of regular and fairly equal length. If they are not of equal length, then divide the passage into roughly equal sections based on dividing the number of lines into, say, four parts.
   Why? In this way, you will give equal attention to the different sections.

3 **Divide the time** you have to write about the extract into, say, four equal sections, too, so that you can give equal attention to each part of the passage.
Why? Often, candidates write impressive material about the first part of an extract but you need to ensure that you deal with **all** the passage – especially the conclusion – in the same depth.

4 **Make a list of key words and phrases** (no longer than six or seven words).
Why? You cannot write about everything, but you do need some particularly powerful, vivid or meaningful words or phrases to hang your key ideas around. You may wish to colour-code words and phrases which seem to be related to each other.

5 **Plan your response**.
Why? Even if you do not have time to write out a plan, mentally you need to consider the structure of your response. You have a list of key words/phrases and you have divided up the passage, but you also need to consider your own writing. You can, of course, write one paragraph on point of view, one on the use of imagery to convey the setting, etc. However it is probably better to plan to show the **progression of the passage**. This is the way it **develops** and **unfolds** and this approach allows you to:

- comment on similarities and contrasts within the passage
- show how attitudes develop or change
- explain how focuses shift from one thing, person or place to another.

TIP
Remember that you are not expected to comment on everything!

KEY TERMS

mood atmosphere, feeling

perspective the viewpoint or 'angle' the writer has on a situation, person or experience

voice the individual or specific tone or perspective of a writer

What kind of words or phrases should you list?

You should make a list of words or phrases that:

- suggest a particular **mood** or attitude of the writer at that point in the passage
- seem to suggest certain qualities or ideas
- seem to echo others in the extract
- seem to contrast with others in the extract
- you can use for your introduction.

How should you use the words and phrases you have listed?

Focus on the following four ideas:

- what **voice** or **perspective** is exemplified through these selected words?
- what is the passage or writer implying or what kind of message is being given?
- what relationships and/or social positions in the passage are presented and how do they change or develop, if at all?
- what **contexts** are shown? Are they, for example, cultural, social, economic, geographical or historical?

Sometimes all four of these ideas might apply, sometimes two or just one. You should prioritise them according to the passage. These ideas will form the basis for your introduction/overview and the framework for your analysis as a whole.

Imagine you have been given the following task and need to plan your response. For the purposes of this practice, you have 45 minutes for the plan and the writing. You are **not** going to write the commentary, this is about how you would approach it.

Comment on the ways in which language and style are used in the following extract to persuade readers to visit Kenya.

Remember, you will need to follow this process:

- Read the extract twice.
- Divide the passage into equal sections – perhaps three or four.
- Divide the time you have equally (so, perhaps 12–15 minutes on each part).
- List your key words or phrases.
- Colour-code or link any of these according to contrast/similarity/use, etc.
- Decide how you will approach your response. (Will you write one paragraph on your first section?)

ACTIVITY 1.8

This is the first part of the process. Read the following text twice. It is an extract from a website advertising a destination in Africa. Then complete the rest of the planning process – the other stages in the list.

When you have finished reading and planning, evaluate how well you dealt with the task.

- Did you do all the parts of the process that were recommended?
- Were you able to select enough key words and phrases?
- Would your planning make you feel confident enough to answer the set task? If not, what do you need to do better?



The coastline south of Mombassa is a tropical paradise of palm fringed white sand beaches, where the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean meet beautiful coral reefs. The protective reefs have created ideal beaches with calm, inviting waters.

Days are filled with sunshine and nights are balmy and warm with gentle sea breezes. The offshore reefs are alive with coral, myriad fish, sea turtles and dolphins. Both outer and inner reef walls offer world class diving with spectacular coral gardens and drop offs. At Kisite-Mpunguti, a Marine Reserve has been established around beautiful Wasini Island, an ideal day trip for divers and snorkellers.

The beaches are bordered by lush green coastal rainforests with prolific birdlife and variety of wildlife including baboons, rare colobus monkeys and even leopard. A wide range of World Class resorts, centred around Diani Beach, allow visitors to relax and enjoy this natural paradise with the best standards of accommodation, service and cuisine.

The south coast also has many smaller quiet getaways such as Tiwi Beach, ideal for travellers looking for a low key break. Inland, the fertile hinterland of Kwale District consists of small villages inhabited by the Wakamba, Digo and Duruma tribes.

Further south, the small fishing village of Shimoni is home to a series of deep, mysterious coastal caves that stretch from the sea to deep into the jungles. Historically, these caves were long used as a refuge for Dhow Sailors and explorers. Shimoni is also an excellent base for big game fishing in the waters of the Pemba Channel.

Whether you are looking for a base to actively explore this fascinating region, or just somewhere to unwind and find peace, Kenya's south coast has everything you could wish for.

Kenya Tourist Board

Further practice

If you wish to, write the commentary based on the process you completed. Alternatively, come back to the passage after you have worked on the skills in the rest of this section.

Introductions to commentaries

Now that you have considered how to plan for your commentary, it is time to deal with a commentary itself.

Your response should begin with a **brief introduction** to the passage so that an overview or framework is established. It is the framework outlined in this introduction which shapes the analysis of the piece. The words and phrases you select when planning will help shape your overall interpretation of the passage and can help shape your introduction.

Read this new introduction to the commentary based on the Orwell passage on page 9.

COMMENTARY

The writer gives a direct, straightforward account in broadly chronological order, establishing the setting and then trying to make sense of the events that ensue. However, he seems to be out of place in the world he finds himself in. His feelings for the elephant appear not only to be fighting against his own conscience but also against the contrasting and alien emotions of the crowd. As a result, he struggles to come to terms with his situation on both a practical and mental level.

This works well because:

- it is **brief** – four to five lines long
- where it talks about **purpose** it does so in a general way which does not close down other possibilities
- it does **not** use any quotations or unnecessary linguistic terminology
- it tries to offer an overview/interpretation of the **entire** extract
- it looks for some sort of **contrast** or **development**
- it does not fall into the trap of offering one final and fixed interpretation – words such as *seems* and *appears* are carefully used. As you begin your answer, you may not be aware of things that become clearer to you the more you study and write about the extract. Such words allow for some flexibility as your answer unfolds.

KEY TERMS

contrast opposites or differences between things, such as contrasts in characters or places (either within a character – here the writer himself; or between different characters – here the writer and the crowd)

LINK

You may wish to refer to this example as you write introductions in response to other extracts in the book.

ACTIVITY 1.9

Write your own introduction to the commentary on the Kenya tourism passage on page 14. You can keep it and then have another go once you have completed more work on writing introductions.

- it does not focus on audience – as this is not something referred to in the original task.

The introduction works particularly well because the introduction 'sets up' what the commentary might focus on:

- the sense of cultural contexts meeting (being out of place in the world the writer finds himself in)
- his relationships in the extract (with the elephant and with the crowd).

Different types of introduction

The focus you choose for your introduction can reflect the focus of your commentary.

Read two more introductions to commentaries on the Orwell passage:

COMMENTARIES

A The writer seems to explore the contrasting attitudes of the police officer. Initially, the officer seems aware that he has a job to do, although there is some reluctance on his part to do so. However, as the extract develops, this underlying reluctance seems to grow in strength and undermine his professional approach to the situation and eat away at his very conscience.

B In the extract the writer seems to begin with a negative and almost hostile attitude towards the task he has been given. He appears to be at war with himself mentally, his instincts battling his conscientious sense of duty as a police officer. As the passage develops this struggle becomes even more intense and the officer views the experience with increasing horror and revulsion, with a sense of disbelief at what he has seen and done.

TIP

You can use conjunctions or adverbials such as *However, as … develops*, etc. to signal your use of contrasting or additional ideas. They can also guide **how** you divide your commentary. For example, in Introduction A, *however* could signal the second part of the commentary.

ACTIVITY 1.10

Which of these two introductions:

- suggests the *Shooting an Elephant* passage develops and becomes more and more powerful in terms of the feelings experienced by the writer?
- suggests there is a marked contrast between the writer/officer's feelings at the start and at the end?

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Plan your response to the passage in the methodical way you have learned.
- Select words and phrases from the passage which will help to shape your response.
- Write an introduction which uses its focus to help set the framework for the commentary.

Using evidence and quotations

In this section you will:

- learn how to analyse specific language features and explain their effects
- quote effectively and selectively.

Being able to select specific language features or devices, quote directly from the text and explain or analyse their effect in a fluent way, is fundamental to successful commentary.

Point/quotation/comment

In the previous section, you looked at how selecting specific words and phrases could guide your interpretation of a passage and help to structure your response. However, you also need an approach to these words and phrases that allows you to comment on them *and* explain their effects.

One simple way of doing this is to follow this sequence:

- Make a POINT.
- Support it with a QUOTATION.
- Explain or develop it with a COMMENT, usually on the effect created or the meaning suggested.
- **Connect** or link your point with other points or observations you make.

TIP

The way you express your ideas must not become a list of unconnected PQCs (point, quotation, comment) followed by more PQCs.

Do not allow your use of the PQC structure to become robotic and list-like. Use connectives and other **cohesive devices** such as pronouns (they/it etc) or demonstratives (that, those, this etc) to make your writing fluent and to link your points together.

When writing your commentary, you should ensure that you **avoid**:

- **using quotations as a substitute for your own words**. For example: 'We see in this extract that the officer is going to shoot *an elephant* but he does not *want to*. He feels that it *would be murder to shoot him* and he realises he *had never shot an elephant*. He also realises that *there was the beast's owner to be considered* and this creates a problem for him'. This kind of material is really just another form of paraphrase or narrative summary of the content of the extract.
- **relying on phrases such as *this means, the writer explains* or *this tells us***. You will end up offering a kind of translation of the quoted word or phrase rather than commenting upon it. You may also suggest there is only one 'right' meaning to a selected phrase; it is better to suggest your ideas.
- **comments which rely on vague generalisation**. Try not to use phrases like *this draws the reader in, this makes the reader want to read on,* or *this engages the reader.* These phrases tend to lead nowhere and could be applied to almost any word or phrase used in the extract!

TIP

Use modal verbs such as *could*, *should*, *might*, *would* to help you suggest ideas in a non-definitive way. For example, consider the difference between, *This means …* and *This **might** mean…*

In order to avoid these pitfalls, you may find it helpful to use the following phrases to introduce ideas:

- *This suggests …*
- *This evokes a sense of …*
- *This conveys …*
- *This implies …*
- *This conjures up …*
- *This establishes a sense of …*

Applying the skills

Here is another example of a response to the Orwell passage on page 9.

Examples of point/quotation/comment are highlighted in the first paragraph.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

The first paragraph seems to introduce a sense of indecision and a conflict between private and public responsibilities at once. The writer is directly honest about the problems he is facing [point], accepting that he has a negative attitude towards the issue placed before him – *But I did not want to shoot the elephant* [quotation] – which immediately appears to establish a dilemma for him. He is torn between his natural empathy for the creature and the public role he is expected to follow. The strong attachment, moreover [linking word], which he has for the animal [point] is shown by the use of *the* instead of *that elephant* or *an* [quotation]; this conveys how he considers it an individual, a separate being, instead of just one of a kind [comment].

This apparently subconscious sense of human attachment is exemplified further by the *grandmotherly air*, a rather unusual phrase, evoking a sense of extreme gentleness and slowness. His internal dilemma is hinted at by the choice of the harsh and stark word *murder* which seems to highlight his awareness from the beginning that to commit such a deed would be a kind of sin. Furthermore, this dilemma is reinforced by the addition of the single word *Besides* which suggests that he is still hesitating, trying to persuade himself against his will.

He is aware of his own ineptitude, the reference to *at that age* suggests he is still relatively young for the position he is in. He recognises that he *has to act quickly*, suggesting he is aware he might be wasting time. Indeed, his almost thankful reference to *experienced-looking Burmans* could indicate further delaying tactics, as well as implying his own youthful innocence compared to the knowledge and awareness they seem to possess.

ACTIVITY 1.11

1 With a partner, read the unannotated remainder of the response and identify:
   - all the other examples of the point/quotation/comment approach
   - any examples where the writer (of the commentary) has used linking or contrasting words or phrases to emphasise or develop points.

2 Now look at these notes made by the same student about Orwell's attitude to what he has to do.
   - Copy and complete the table opposite, adding a comment or effect to the last two points.
   - Then, take any of the last three points and turn them into a longer sentence, like this (the sections from the table are highlighted):

The second paragraph introduces ***a more definite tone*** *in the use of the phrase* ***'perfectly clear', implying he has moved on from a sense of doubt****.*

Here are three possible sentence starters to help you:

- *The apparent certainty in the repeated phrase, 'I ought' …*
- *Yet, immediately a sudden change of tack and the writer's mood is indicated by …*
- *The vivid simile to explain his dilemma in which he compares his chances to those of a '…'*

Point	Quote	Comment/effect
More definite tone (2nd paragraph).	*perfectly clear*	Implies a change from earlier sense of doubt.
Apparent certainty in repeated phrase.	*I ought …*	Suggests initial confusion between private feelings and public responsibility has passed.
Sudden change of tack indicated.	*But I also knew I was going to do no such thing.*	Implies he is feeling …
Uses a vivid simile to explain his dilemma.	*I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller.*	Conveys a sense of his …

Further practice

For further practice of the selection of key words and phrases and the use of the point/quotation/comment approach, read the final text in this section. The extract describes some of the writer's feelings when she visited Bolivia in South America.

But the area is also a spectacular place for hiking. We roamed higher, over plains of green moss and quinoa fields, among herds of llama and alpaca. The world's highest forest grows here and there were bubbling multi-coloured geysers and hot springs where we swam down peaty channels. And then, one late afternoon, as the sky turned purple behind the snow-capped volcanos, the village suddenly came out. The boys mounted wild-looking ponies, women in frilly shiny skirts began to dance, and the men got out their flutes. They all formed a small but beautiful procession on the cold muddy streets and we followed them as they blessed each corner of their shabby little village for what had passed that year, and what might lie ahead.

Gemma Bowes, *The Guardian*.

ACTIVITY 1.12

1. Highlight four or five key words and phrases which you think are central to the perspective of the writer and her experiences.
2. Write a paragraph in which you explain what feelings are evoked by the description and the effects created. You could begin:

   There is a sense of movement, energy and freedom that emerges from this passage. At the start, for example, the travellers …

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Highlight or list key words or phrases with a view to the mood, perspective, tone and changing effects across the text.
- Use the point/quotation/comment approach but in a way that allows for fluent expression.
- Always comment on the effect of particular words or phrases.
- Use a range of expressions (such as *suggest*, *appears to*) or modal forms (*might*, *could*, etc.) to make what you say suggestive rather than definitive.

TYPES OF NON-FICTION TEXT

Reading or encountering a wide variety of different forms and types of text is vital. Only by familiarising yourself with the individual styles of different writers will you be able to deal with an unfamiliar text you are encountering for the first time.

As you have already seen, you will come across a range of non-fiction texts, some of which will share features with aspects of fiction writing.

Descriptive writing

In this section, you will:

- consider what descriptive writing is
- read a range of passages which contain descriptive writing
- explore a range of features which are typical of much descriptive writing.

Descriptive writing is a 'catch-all' term that seems to encompass many forms and types of text. You may see descriptive writing in newspaper reports and in imaginative narratives, but what are the shared conventions and features you should look out for? Here are some possibilities:

Descriptive writing often:

- tries to create a very particular or vivid mood or atmosphere
- conveys a strong sense of individual settings, people, events or experiences
- focuses in on detail but can also 'zoom out' to over-views or panoramas
- draws on a range of sensory experiences, such as taste, sight, sound, touch and smell.

Examples of descriptive writing might include:

- an account of an incident from an expedition across the Antarctic
- an advert for a city and its key attractions on a tourist website
- a diary entry describing attendance at a World Cup match
- a biographical account of a historical event such as the eruptions at Pompeii
- a newspaper report of a natural disaster such as a tsunami
- a fictional description of a memorable character.

Introducing key aspects of descriptive writing

The following passage exemplifies many of the language techniques and elements we might expect to see in descriptive writing.



Camp 6 near Pacchanta in the Andes Mountains, Peru.

Vivid visual detail immediately locates reader in tent.

Snoring – the sense of sound adds to the overall picture.

Close detail of individual items and events draws all the senses together.

Filmic sense of 'cutting' from an interior to exterior shot.

Writer's own imaginative sense – he cannot actually see the condor at this point.

Geographical, factual detail adds to the whole picture being built up.

Long noun phrase uses several adjectives to convey the scene's majesty.

I was lying in my sleeping bag, staring at the light filtering through the red and green fabric of the dome tent. Simon was snoring loudly, occasionally twitching in his dream world. We could have been anywhere. There is a peculiar anonymity about being in tents. Once the zip is closed and the outside world barred from sight, all sense of location disappears. Scotland, the French Alps, the Karakoram, it was always the same. The sounds of rustling, of fabric flapping in the wind, or of rainfall, the feel of hard lumps under the ground sheet, the smell of rancid socks and sweat – these are universals, as comforting as the warmth of the down sleeping bag.

Outside, in a lightening sky, the peaks would be catching the first of the morning sun, with perhaps even a condor cresting the thermals above the tent. That wasn't too fanciful either since I had seen one circling the camp the previous afternoon. We were in the middle of the Cordillera Huayhuash, in the Peruvian Andes, separated from the nearest village by twenty-eight miles of rough walking, and surrounded by the most spectacular ring of ice mountains I had ever seen, and the only indication of this from within our tent was the regular roaring of avalanches falling off Cerro Sarapo.

I felt a homely affection for the warm security of the tent, and reluctantly wormed out of my bag to face the prospect of lighting the stove. It had snowed a little during the night, and the grass crunched frostily under my feet as I padded over to the cooking rock. There was no sign of Richard stirring as I passed his tiny one-man tent, half collapsed and whitened with hoar frost.

Squatting under the lee of the huge overhanging boulder that had become our kitchen, I relished this moment when I could be entirely alone. I fiddled with the petrol stove which was mulishly objecting to both the temperature and the rusty petrol with which I had filled it. I resorted to brutal coercion when coaxing failed and sat it atop a propane gas stove going full blast. It burst into vigorous life, spluttering out two-foot-high flames in petulant revolt against the dirty petrol.

As the pan of water slowly heated, I looked around at the wide, dry and rock-strewn river bed, the erratic boulder under which I crouched marking the site at a distance in all but the very worst weather. A huge, almost vertical wall of ice and snow soared upwards to the summit of Cerro Sarapo directly

in front of the camp, no more than a mile and a half away. Rising from the sea of moraine to my left, two spectacular and extravagant castles of sugar icing, Yerupaja and Rasac, dominated the camp site. The majestic 21,000-foot Siula Grande lay behind Sarapo and was not visible. It had been climbed for the first time in 1936 by two bold Germans via the North Ridge. There had been few ascents since then, and the true prize, the daunting 4,500-foot West Face had so far defeated all attempts.

I turned off the stove and gingerly slopped the water into three large mugs. The sun hadn't cleared the ridge of mountains opposite and it was still chilly in the shadows.

From *Touching the Void* by Joe Simpson.

The writer builds this detailed and evocative picture of the environment by focusing on **three** particular things: the world inside the tent; the world outside the tent; his actions as he wakes and prepares tea. How does he do this?

ACTIVITY 1.13

1. Re-read the un-annotated section of the passage. Note down:
   - any further examples of actions or observations which involve the senses
   - references to specific objects/items rather than general reflections
   - use of imagery or figurative language to describe the writer's actions or the world around him
   - places where, as a writer, he **positions** the reader to look at or turn their attention to certain objects, natural places, etc., rather like a camera.
2. Now think about the style of the piece in terms of the tone or mood that it creates. What impressions do you get of how the writer **feels** about his experiences? Do these change at all as he wakes, moves around the tent and goes outside?
3. Write two or three paragraphs in which you consider the language of description *and* the style and mood created.

TIP

When you come to write your own descriptive pieces (for example for the Unit 3 task on page 114 when a character is confined within one place), consider how you could use the technique of moving from describing an internal to external setting.

KEY TERMS

external or **exterior location** a place or setting outside

Describing an external location

Descriptive passages, such as the one above, can mix internal and **external location** descriptions. This can be literal – for example, inside a building and outside in the street, or more emotional – a writer's private thoughts versus his or her public expressions or behaviour. However, similar skills apply when it comes to commenting on the effect of language.

It can be especially important to look for how groups of similar words or usages (for examples **adjectives**, or **noun phrases**) convey a particular mood or atmosphere. This mood or atmosphere can be broadly positive or negative, but you will need to go beyond generality and try to be more specific. For example, for the text above, you might write that:

> *The writer creates a very positive impression of the landscape with his reference to the mountains which are 'spectacular and magnificent castles,' showing how much he likes the scenery.*

None of this is 'wrong' but it does not really capture the style of the language. It would be more effective to write:

> *The writer focuses the reader's attention on the mountain peaks which he describes as 'spectacular and magnificent castles.' This metaphor, containing these two powerful adjectives, suggests there is something glorious, almost mythic, about the landscape.*

This second version is more effective because it is able to refer to the specific words/phrases used and their linguistic function, but more importantly it comments in a more specific way on the particular effect of the chosen words.

ACTIVITY 1.14

Look at these words and phrases taken from the extract describing Kenya on page 14.

Discuss with a partner what overall effect or mood you think is created by each set of words and phrases. Then copy and complete the table.

Adjectives or adjectival / noun phrases	Effect or mood the writer wishes to create
protective, ideal, calm, inviting, balmy, gentle	
filled with sunshine alive with coral myriad fish lush green coastal rainforests	

KEY TERMS

list of three a sequence of three items, one after the other, often used to create a particular effect

Key technique: lists of three

Lists or patterns **of three** ideas or items in texts are often used for rhetorical impact, in that they help build and emphasise an idea. For example, in the Kenya text, the idea of a complete variety of wildlife is conveyed in the three references to *baboons*, *rare Colobus monkeys and even leopard*, suggesting a sense of diversity and an area teeming with life.

ACTIVITY 1.15

Read this sentence from the extract about Kenya on page 14.

> *A wide range of World Class resorts, centred around Diani Beach, allow visitors to relax and enjoy this natural paradise with the best standards of accommodation, service and cuisine.*

Discuss with a partner:

- What list or pattern of three is referred to here?
- What is the message the writer intends to convey about the resort?

Now, read the following text about an external landscape and location. As you do so, begin to think about the overall tone and mood that is created.

A pair of scarlet macaws breaks out of the treetops and soars over a beach where the only tracks are those of last night's nesting turtles. You ride your horse over the sands to a small stream where blue butterflies play over brilliant pink flowers. Sounds of jungle and surf are strangely intermingled. This is where rain forest and beach meet in Costa Rica's Corcovado National Park, the day-glo tropical version of "**Where the Wild Things Are.**"[1] But could any writer's imagined fantasyland be as wondrous as this?

The Pacific Coast of Costa Rica is shaped like a giant crab with two great claws. Within this wide embrace lies a natural paradise so dazzling and diverse that it defies any adequate description. With 9,000 higher

plant species, 850 bird species, hundreds of frogs and reptiles and 10 percent of all mammals on earth, today it is human visitors who find welcome refuge.

From the stunning volcanic peaks of Nicaragua down to the rustic scenery of Panama, Central America's breathtaking beauty allows you to just sit, stand, lie or look in any direction and watch nature perform around you. Howler monkeys roam freely through the jungle canopy above while manta rays weightlessly glide through the waters below.

Join us in a rare adventure of nature unbounded.

A Star Clipper's voyage is everything a conventional cruise is not. Thousands of square feet of cream-coloured sails billowing above you, warm teak decks under your bare feet and with a good wind, no sound apart from the splash of the waves against the hull.

They are the stars of the sea, as fleet as the wind and as graceful as swans.

These are true clipper ships reflecting their proud heritage in every inch of their polished brass and gleaming brightwork. Step aboard these unique vessels and discover a new age of sail, where the traditions of the past are happily married to the comforts and amenities of the present day. They are modern cruise ships in every way, created for luxury-loving passengers who also love the traditions and romance of the legendary era of sailing ships.

Life aboard is blissfully relaxed, much like traveling on a private yacht. You'll never feel confined. Each ship offers spacious accommodations and expansive teak decks with ample space and not one, but two swimming pools. In fact, you'll find that these ships offer more outdoor space per passenger than most conventional cruise ships.

When you rise, help yourself to a continental breakfast with croissants, toasted English muffins or sweet Danish pastries. Or savor a full breakfast with fresh tropical fruits and crisp bacon, grilled sausage, smoked salmon and omelettes cooked to order in the dining room. At lunch, a marvellous buffet of seafood, salads and grilled favourites awaits your pleasure. If the day includes a stop at one of the paradisiacal islands we frequent, you might also be treated to a festive outdoor barbecue on shore.

When evening comes, our elegantly appointed dining room featuring a splendid collection of paintings of sailing ships becomes the setting for the chef's finest culinary presentations, designed to please the eye and the palate. All complemented by equally fine wines. You'll find our service to be friendly and gracious, befitting a sophisticated restaurant. Of course, we would not presume to dictate your seating preferences. On all three ships, you are free to dine when and with whomever you wish – including officers, who join our guests in the dining room most nights. The dress code? No need for formal gowns and black tie, casual elegance is the order of the day and each night.

Friends gather round the Piano Bar and join in singing a few favourites. And in the Tropical Bar, the bartender shakes a pitcher full of some delicious cooling concoction. Now, is there anything more relaxing than this? Up on deck, a couple watch the sun drop slowly into the sea as gulls circle one last time in the sky.

Like a fine resort, all the amenities are here: double bed or twin beds that can be converted to queen, marble bathroom, private safe, television with in-cabin video, DVD player, direct-dial telephone, hairdryer and comfortable furnishings. The décor is tastefully traditional. You'll find the accoutrements of a luxurious classic yacht, where everything is ingeniously designed for comfort, ease and efficiency. Burnished brass fittings and mahogany brightwork recall our nautical heritage. Soft natural fabrics reflect the colors of the sun, sea and sky. Prints of famous clipper ships and sailing yachts grace the walls. Everything is immaculately maintained and your steward knows exactly when to appear or disappear.

There's nothing so easy and pleasurable as falling asleep to the gentle rhythms of the ship and sea – unless it's awakening refreshed the next morning to a newborn day.

Star Clippers, www.starclippers.com.

[1] ***Where the Wild Things Are*** is a 1963 children's picture book by Maurice Sendak



ACTIVITY 1.16

1 Working on your own, look at the first half of the passage up to *Join us in a rare adventure of nature unbounded.* List the key words or phrases that stand out in this part of the text. For the purposes of this task you could focus on:

- the **positive** adjectives used to describe landscape and nature (e.g. *dazzling*)

- particular **nouns** or **noun phrases** related to the natural world (*scarlet macaws*)
- **verbs** suggesting what can be done, or the behaviour of people and natural elements (*ride your horse*).

2 Then, compare your list with a partner.
- Can you see any connections or groups of words/phrases that seem to go together?
- Are there any key patterns of language such as lists of three?
- Does the writer use descriptions to create contrasts of any sort?

3 Once you have discussed and made notes on these issues, agree with your partner two or three key observations about the style and language based on the words, phrases and patterns you have highlighted.

Key technique: simile and metaphor

In the text, the writer does not just use specific nouns, verbs, etc. to convey the experience of a holiday with Star Clippers; he or she also uses some evocative imagery. For example:

Simile compares the shape of the coast to a huge crab.

Metaphor suggests the crab's clutches are more like a kiss or hug.

The Pacific Coast of Costa Rica <u>is shaped like a giant crab with two great claws</u>. Within this <u>wide embrace</u> lies a natural paradise so dazzling and diverse that it defies any adequate description.

This might be expressed in a commentary as follows:

COMMENTARY

The two ideas of the traveller being in the heart of the natural world, and yet being welcomed by it are expressed in the two phrases which describe the coast. In being *shaped like a giant crab with two great claws* the writer conflates the landscape with the wildlife that inhabits it; yet, by referring to the crab's *wide embrace* it is suggested that the landscape, and by association the people and wildlife, welcome the visitor, thus making the description doubly attractive.

ACTIVITY 1.17

1 Identify in the commentary:
- the point/s, quotations and comments
- the effect of the selected words.

2 Now, look at this sentence from the text:

From the stunning volcanic peaks of Nicaragua down to the rustic scenery of Panama, Central America's breathtaking beauty allows you to just sit, stand, lie or look in any direction <u>and watch nature perform around you</u>.

KEY TERMS

personification giving human characteristics to animals, objects and so on

- On your own, look at the underlined section.
- Decide how the writer has used **personification** here.
- When you have done so, write a sentence or two making a point, quoting words or phrases and then commenting on the effect. Remember, you need to go beyond saying whether it is a positive mood or message.

TIP

Remember not to use excessive linguistic terminology or try to spot techniques and features of language (for example, alliteration) just for their own sake.

Further practice

Now work through the remainder of the Star Clippers extract on page 24 and follow the plan you learned about in Section 1:

- Divide what remains into sections.
- Highlight key words and phrases and identify groups or patterns of words.
- Practise writing two paragraphs based on this section of the text, commenting on: the style and language; how this links to the purpose or perspective.

Remember to use phrases such as *this suggests/seems/appears…*

Key technique: understanding voice

You can use the same techniques of analysis and commentary regardless of the mood, tone or voice of the text.

Read the passage below which describes the author's feelings when he visits a particular place in India, looking for a particular drink called a *toddy*. As you read, consider the mood or tone created by the voice of the writer.

Kariumpumkala today is a slightly ghastly brick-and-mortar structure, painted in shades of green and pink. Its top two storeys are air-conditioned, every floor is tiled, and the tabletops are made of granite. Over the billing counter is a shelf full of trophies that Kariumpumkala has won in something called the Philips Food Fest. But most heartbreaking of all is a perverse remembrance of times past—a sign that says 'Smoking, alcohols strictly prohibited.'

Kariumpumkala's present owner would talk of none of this. He was obsessed, instead, with his legal battle with Karimpinkala, the upstart establishment down the road that, he claimed, had stolen and only slightly modified his restaurant's name. 'That isn't the real one,' he said repeatedly. But Karimpinkala still serves toddy, and Kariumpumkala does not. That little edge makes all the difference in the sweeps to win Kerala's hearts and minds.

In the leafy parking lot of Karimpinkala, a 'Toddy Shop And A/c Family Restaurant,' we found Maruti Swift cars and gleaming SUVs, and cabanas that were closer in size to a middling dorm room. We sat under fans, on plastic chairs that skidded on the tiled floors, and drummed our fingers on a glass-topped table. We were handed a menu, laminated in clear plastic. Apart from the 'Sweet and cold coconut toddy,' we could have ordered Diet Coke, Fanta, the enigmatic 'Soda B & S,' or ice cream. We could even have asked for that most pan-Indian of dishes, *Gobi Manchurian*. As we sat staring a little disbelievingly at that menu, another SUV pulled up outside. A family dismounted—parents, little children, and even a grandmother—and stormed into one of the other cabanas.

From 'Shaaaping in God's Own Land' by Samanth Subramanian.

Now read this initial response to the first part of the passage.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

The initial feeling which comes through the voice of the writer is one of dislike and appalled horror. This disdain is apparent when the writer describes the location as *a slightly ghastly brick-and-mortar structure*, words which suggest not only his detachment and repulsion (*ghastly*) but his inability to see the building in any particular shape or form – it is simply a *structure*. The **adjectives** in *shades of green and pink* add to this sense of a rather unattractive combination of features.

ACTIVITY 1.18

1 Discuss with a partner:
- What 'voice' does this commentary suggests emerges from the text?
- What evidence does the student provide to support this view?
- Do you agree with the commentary?

2 Now, look at the rest of the text. Can you find evidence to support the points made in the table?

Point	Evidence/quotation	Comment
There are some **unexpected** compliments in the way the building is described.		However, it is implied that …
The writer, however, qualifies what he says, and this undermines the compliments.		

KEY TERMS

unexpected something which surprises the reader or comes as a shock

qualification casting some uncertainty on an initial statement or a way of undermining what is apparently being said

ambivalent being undecided or having contrasting feelings about something

TIP

Making a list of key individual words, groups of words, phrases and ideas which contrast or oppose each other, can help you, as the reader, to pull out opposing strands of style and language.

TIP

In texts, look out for the use of **qualification** – a way of undermining what is apparently being said. This can point to the writer's **ambivalent** or less positive perspective or viewpoint.

Key technique: connotations

You have already been using your knowledge of word/phrase connotations, even if you were not aware of it! But what are connotations?

Many words, phrases or sentences do not simply describe literal or surface meanings. They can also suggest, or bring to mind, other words, phrases, ideas, feelings and so on.

For example, on a simple level, *green* denotes a colour we can all recognise. However, it also **suggests** all sorts of other ideas: some of these might be concrete images such as lawns, grass, trees and so on; others might be abstract notions such as freshness, innocence (and possibly naivety), organic concerns, or 'Nature' more generally. It may also bring to mind idioms, such as *green with envy*. All of these ideas might be said to be 'carried' by the word *green* without being stated directly.

Connotations are often linked to positive or negative views. For example, imagine these choices when writing a letter to an employer:

ACTIVITY 1.19

Discuss with a partner:

- what each of the underlined adjectives suggests/connotes
- how each one is subtly (or perhaps completely) different from the alternatives (e.g. what is the difference between someone who is *cunning* and someone who is *clever*?)
- which are broadly positive and which are negative. (Take care: this may depend on the context – what may not be suitable or relevant to a job application might be entirely suitable in a less formal context.)

I believe I am ideal for this challenging post as I am very assertive/confident/pushy/dominant/self-possessed. My academic record also shows that I am brainy/geeky/intelligent/clever/cunning, so will be able to deal with the complex demands of the role.

In longer descriptions, we can see the greater range of language choices available and also the wider connotations these imply. For example, read these two descriptions:

- *the thin urchin fading without trace behind twisted posts in the suffocating traffic*
- *the lithe youth moving effortlessly from lamp to lamp in the busy avenue.*

Both describe a broadly similar event, but the first has connotations of hunger, poverty and invisibility in a choked-up town; the second suggests health, athleticism and an energetic environment.

Positive and negative aspects of a place can occur within the same text of course. For example, read this extract which is taken from an autobiography and explores the writer's memories of living in a certain part of Australia.



Above the plants that creep across the ground are the bushes, which grow wherever an indentation in the earth, scarcely visible to the eye, allows for the concentration of more moisture from the dew and the reluctant rain. There is the ever-present round mound of prickly weed, which begins its life a strong acid green with hints of yellow, and then is burnt by the sun or the frost to a pale whitish yellow. As it ages, its root system weakens so that on windy days the wind will pick it out of the earth and roll it slowly and majestically about like whirling suns in a Van Gogh painting. Where the soil contains limestone, stronger bushes grow, sometimes two to three feet high, with the delicate narrow-leaved foliage of arid climates, bluish green and dusty grey in color, perfectly adapted to resist the drying sun. Where the soil is less porous and water will lie for a while after rain, comes the annual saltbush, a miraculous silvery-grey plant which stores its own water in small balloonlike round leaves and thrives long after the rains have vanished. Its sterner perennial cousin, which resembles sagebrush, rises on woody branches and rides out the strongest wind.

From *The Road from Coorain* by Jill Kerr Conway.

ACTIVITY 1.20

1. Read through the text again and pick out any words or phrases that suggest contrasting moods, such as a weakness/strength in nature.
2. Can you identify what sorts or words you have selected? (e.g are some verbs? Nouns? If so, which?)
3. What part, if any, does imagery play in the world described? (Think about similes or metaphors.) What connotations are suggested by these images?

Now read this short commentary on the text:

COMMENTARY

A sense of contrast but also of ideas which echo each other come together to create two opposing moods in the landscape. There are negative connotations in the sense of the struggle for life (*plants that creep … scarcely visible … reluctant rain … burnt by the sun … root systems weakens … wintry days*). The **verbs** here such as *creep* and *weakens* suggest a sense of tentative, fragile life.

The whole scene seems to be a world of elements where the struggle for life is marked out by the colours themselves. The deathly lifelessness of this world is suggested by the *acid green*, the *pale whitish yellow* and the *dusty grey*.

Yet, there are also groups of words which convey life and energy emerging (*delicate narrowed leaved foliage … a miraculous silvery-grey plant … thrives long after … sterner perennial cousin … rises and rides*).

The writer even uses a simile (where two things are compared using *like* or *as*) which gives an unexpected quality to the passage – it conveys how what should be a potential source of life (the sun) seems to be a mixture of beautiful energy and destruction (*the wind will pick it out of the earth and roll it slowly and majestically about like whirling suns*) so that both opposing moods are joined in the image.

KEY TERMS

verb a word that conveys an action, a state of being or a happening

ACTIVITY 1.21

1. Which contrasts has the writer of the commentary picked out?
2. How has the writer of the commentary used connotation to explore particular words or phrases? (Look for words such as *suggest*, *seems*, *convey*, *implications*.)

KEY TERMS

internal inside a particular location

Describing an internal location

As can be seen in the commentaries on the two texts above, descriptions of people and places are not always as straightforward as they seem. The view of the writer may both admire *and* condemn, be shocked and yet spellbound.

Read this extract in which George Orwell describes a visit to an underground mine.

The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do. At those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are if there — heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust.

When you have finally got there... you crawl through the last line of pit props and see opposite you a shiny black wall three or four feet high. This is the coal face. Overhead is the smooth ceiling made by the rock from which the coal has been cut; underneath is the rock again, so that the gallery you are in is only as high as the ledge of coal itself, probably not much more than a yard. The first impression of all, overmastering everything else for a while, is the frightful, deafening din from the conveyor belt which carries the coal away. You cannot see very far, because the fog of coal dust throws back the beam of your lamp, but you can see on either side of you the line of half-naked kneeling men, one to every four or five yards, driving their shovels under the fallen coal and flinging it swiftly over their left shoulders. They are feeding it on to the conveyor belt, a moving rubber belt a couple of feet wide which runs a yard or two behind them. Down this belt a glittering river of coal races constantly. In a big mine it is carrying away several tons of coal every minute. It bears it off to some place in the main roads where it is shot into tubs holding half a tun, and thence dragged to the cages and hoisted to the outer air...

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work without feeling a pang of envy for their toughness. It is a dreadful job that they do, an almost superhuman job by the standard of an ordinary person. For they are not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they are also doing, it in a position that doubles or trebles the work. They have got to remain kneeling all the while — they could hardly rise from their knees without hitting the ceiling — and you can easily see by trying it what a tremendous effort this means. Shovelling is comparatively easy when you are standing up, because you can use your knee and thigh to drive the shovel along; kneeling down, the whole of the strain is thrown upon your arm and belly muscles. And the other conditions do not exactly make things easier. There is the heat — it varies, but in some mines it is suffocating — and the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils and collects along your eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor belt, which in that confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine gun. But the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron hammered iron statues — under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot.

From *Down the Mine* by George Orwell.

ACTIVITY 1.22

Discuss with a partner what evidence you can find that the writer is both appalled *and* impressed by what he encounters?

Key technique: using the senses

We have already seen how writers, particularly of highly descriptive passages, use the senses to convey ideas and feelings. This is especially true in the text you have just read. For example, the very opening sentence:

The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do.

- Noise and sound.
- Colour/sight.
- Possibly taste, touch and smell.

Now read the following commentary which deals with these and other more unpleasant aspects of the visit.

TIP

Look for references to the senses in descriptive passages to find clues about the positive or negative impressions of a place.

COMMENTARY

The writer conveys a feeling of oppression through selection of words such as *roaring* and *noise*, for example, and evokes a world where the senses – physical aspects such as sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing of the visitor – seem to be physically attacked. In addition, the sense of an alien landscape is conveyed by the simile *the place is like hell*, suggesting an almost demonic and corrupting location. The sense of complete oppression is also clarified by the writer's selection of a detailed list (*heat*, *noise*, *confusion*, *darkness*, *foul air*), as if one thing after another hits the visitor to the mine, as if there is no escape.

LINK

Using the senses can be particularly effective when one specific experience or detail is explored. For example, look at the different ways snow is described in Chenjerai Hove's, *A Letter To My Mother* on page 34.

ACTIVITY 1.23

1 Read the text again and note down any *positive* impressions Orwell gets. You should already have some ideas from the discussion activity opposite.
2 Note down whether these are contrasted with other, unpleasant aspects, for example, the strange sense of beauty in the mine.

Key technique: verbs, adjectives and similes

When commenting on a passage, you should look for content ideas such as 'reference to the senses' but also for particular words or linguistic functions, such as action verbs; adjectives related to shape or size; and imagery such as the use of simile.

ACTIVITY 1.24

Read the first four paragraphs of this long extract, listing key words and phrases. Identify examples of **similes**, **adjectives** and **verbs**, and what their effects might be.

A quite different world opens before me when I only just push at the heavy door that separates the shop from our apartment.

It is a door entirely covered with tin. Instead of a latch it has a big key that is always in the lock. In the dark rear shop, into which I tumble first, I grope along the walls as though I were blind. Thick yellow sheets of paper rustle underfoot.

Wrapped-up wall clocks rest on the floor here. Until they are hung on walls, they do not move; they lie quiet and soundless, as if buried alive. But the stuffy air of the dark chamber seems swollen with the voices that seep in from the shop. The voices crowd against the high wooden wall and recoil from it again. I stand behind it as in a prison, and listen to what is being said. I want to make out whose voice is talking. And if I catch mother's voice, I am content.

But wait! Is her voice quiet, calm, or, God forbid, angry? Mother's voice will give me warning, tell me whether to go into the shop or not.

Her high tones encourage me. I touch the curtain of the last door, which leads to the shop. I become dizzy at once because of the mirrors and glass. All the clocks are being wound in my ears. The shop is full of glitter on every side. The flashing of silver and gold blinds me like fire; it is reflected in the mirrors, roams over the glass drawers. It dazzles my eyes.

Two large gas chandeliers burn high up under the ceiling, humming loudly; the sound becomes a moan of pain. Fire spatters from the close-netted caps on the burners that barely hold back the sparks.

There are two high walls entirely lined from top to bottom with glass cupboards. The cupboards reach up to the ceiling and are so solidly built that they seem to

have grown into it. Their glass doors slide easily back and forth. Through the glass one can clearly see all the objects on display, almost touch them with one's hand. On the shelves are goblets, wineglasses, sugar bowls, saucers, braided baskets, milk and water pitchers, fruit bowls. Everything shines and glitters with a newly polished look. Whenever I move, all the objects run after me in reflection. The fire of the lamps and the light of the silver cross each other. Now the silver drowns in a flash of the lamplight, now it re-emerges with an even sharper glitter.

On the opposite wall there is another glass cupboard. Behind its panes are objects not of silver but of white metal, and their gleam is much more modest, and quieter.

In the center of the shop, on three sides, there rise, as if from the floor itself, three inner walls – long counters with drawers. They divide the shop into two sections. All laid out with glass, full of gold objects, they glitter like magical arks. Little stones of all colors, framed in gold rings, earrings, brooches, bracelets, flicker there like lighted matches.

In this air full of fire it is quite impossible to see that the floor is dark. At the front, at the very feet of the customers, entire silver services shine through the glass. And so even the customers' black shoes glitter and catch reflections along with the silver.

The third wall is dim even by day. Overgrown with long hanging clocks, it looks like a forest of dark trees. There are wall clocks of various sizes. Some have big, squat cases with thick hanging chains supporting heavy copper weights. Other wall clocks have narrower, slimmer bodies. Their chains are lighter, more movable, with smaller weights attached. In the bellies of all of them pointed pendulums dangle like swords, swinging restlessly back and forth.

Among the large wall clocks smaller ones are hiding, and even tiny ones; one can see only the white dials, their round moon faces. They have no wooden bellies, and their chain legs move in the open, before everyone's eyes, up and down. The whole wall of clocks sighs and breathes heavily. From each box come smothered groans, as though at every moment someone were being killed on the dark wall.

From *Burning Lights* by Bella Chagall.

Now read the following commentary on the first four paragraphs of the passage.

COMMENTARY

The writer creates a sense of the oppressive nature of the interior (a similar quality to that we saw in the passage about the mine) in the way that the narrator seems to be in a location where there is a sense of slow progress.

The use of adjectives in *heavy door*, *dark rear shop* and *Thick yellow sheets of paper* create a feeling of weight and difficulty. Similar phrases, especially in the use of verbs, add to this sense of limited progress: *just push at*, *tumble* and *grope* convey a mood of stumbling progress.

The atmosphere seems deathly and lifeless; the simile describing how the clocks *lie quiet and soundless*, *as if buried alive* develops this atmosphere and the mood of limited opportunities for escape. Further similes – such as *as though I were blind and I stand behind it as in a prison* – highlight the narrator's suspicion that there is no certainty in or escape from this world.

References to noise add to this sense of a sinister and threatening atmosphere. We are told of *voices that seep in*, implying a gradual and persistent challenge but that gradually they start to *crowd* the shop, as if approaching closer and closer.

- Which of these elements were ones you selected or identified?
- How well does the student link his or her ideas in this commentary? (Look at the connective words or phrases used.)

- Now read the rest of the extract on pages 31 and 32 and list further key words and phrases. You may wish to move beyond looking at verbs, adjectives and similes and draw upon other skills or features you have learned about.

KEY TERMS

present tense form of the verb describing current actions such as *I* ***go***, *he* ***lives***, *we* ***like***

ACTIVITY 1.25

Write a commentary on the style and language of the second part of the text, from *Her high tones encourage me …* In addition to references to similes, metaphors and verb usages, comment on the impact of the **present tense**.

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Whilst descriptive writing can be found in both fiction and non-fiction writing there are specific features and elements which are often common to both.
- Look for specific, rather than general vocabulary; powerful and vivid detail; reference to the senses; patterns and groups of words which build a whole picture.
- Comment on the effect of language use and in particular on imagery.
- The voice of the writer can encompass both positive and negative perspectives; it may be ambivalent or qualify what is said.

Personal writing

In this section you will:

- read a range of personal texts, including diaries, letters, memoirs and autobiographies
- explore the impact of first person accounts
- develop your understanding of 'voice' in texts
- explore a number of key techniques, such as how writers use dialogue.

What is personal writing?

We could say that all writing is to some extent 'personal' in that someone had to author it, but clearly some texts are explicitly personal in that we know who the writer is, what their situation is and, often, why they are writing.

Personal writing can allow the reader to:

- witness characters and events from the point of view of the narrator, especially when written in the first person (that is, using *I*)
- provide a glimpse of the writer's more private thoughts and attitudes
- explore reasons and motives for behaving in particular ways or feeling particular emotions.

Letters

Whilst written and posted letters have been superseded in many places by email or the ease of making a phone call, letters still offer the writer a chance to be reflective and thoughtful.

Read this text which is taken from a letter written by a son, now living in Norway, to his mother back home in Zimbabwe.

Remember the day I arrived in my new town, one of my many stops on this journey that is life. The rains at the airport in Stavanger brought me memories of you working in the fields, not shielding yourself from the warm raindrops. I remembered you then, way back. For, I knew you would have composed an instant poem to celebrate first raindrops, those songs about the fish eagle up in the sky, the harbinger of rain, giving life to people, animals and plants.

Here they still have not stopped cursing the rain. I always remind them that one who curses the rain is a witch who wishes that life should not be brought to this earth. But no, they still curse at their gentle, thunderless rain. They prefer the sun instead. Or the white snow which paints the street white as if cotton wool has embraced the whole earth. My fear of snow still persists, especially when it hardens and becomes slippery ice.

For me, a step on ice is a potential disaster. Ice is more slippery than the muddy clay soils of your maize fields. Norwegians hardly fall on ice. They float on it like Arabs walking on sand, never sinking, never falling. They even run races on the ice and win competitions! Can you imagine?

...By the way, I forget that you have never seen the sea. I remember you telling me stories about the place where all rivers poured their waters, in our language, gungwa (the water to quench all thirsts). It is just that, and Norwegians are people of the sea. They play in it, swim in it, dive in it, ride fast boats in it and fish there. They travel over the sea to many places. All their towns and villages are by the sea: it brings them everything they want, friends and enemies, food from far away places, and petrol which they discovered under the depths of the sea. The sea is full of so many creatures which you find on their plate for almost every meal. According to Norwegians, if you don't eat fish, like me, you are supposed to be miserable...

I hope the thunderous rains have come by now. Maybe the maize you planted is already the height of a small child. Every sun which rises gives me fresh memories of you, and every early sunset reminds me that I am in other lands. Maybe one day we will sit together, switch off the street lights and gaze at the beauty of that lovely African moon which displays the image of a rabbit with large ears. Maybe I will be older, but I will not have given up the idea of being young.

Now I know that there are so many streams to the river of knowledge, and one of them is to live in other lands.

Your Son,
Chenjerai

From *A Letter To My Mother* by Chenjerai Hove.

Key technique: improving your expression

So far, in this book, most of the attention has been on the features you should look for and comment on in a text, but none of this information is of any value to you unless you are able to express yourself fluently and clearly.

ACTIVITY 1.26

1 As for previous passages, begin by listing key words and phrases in this extract which might tell us something about the mood and feelings of the writer.

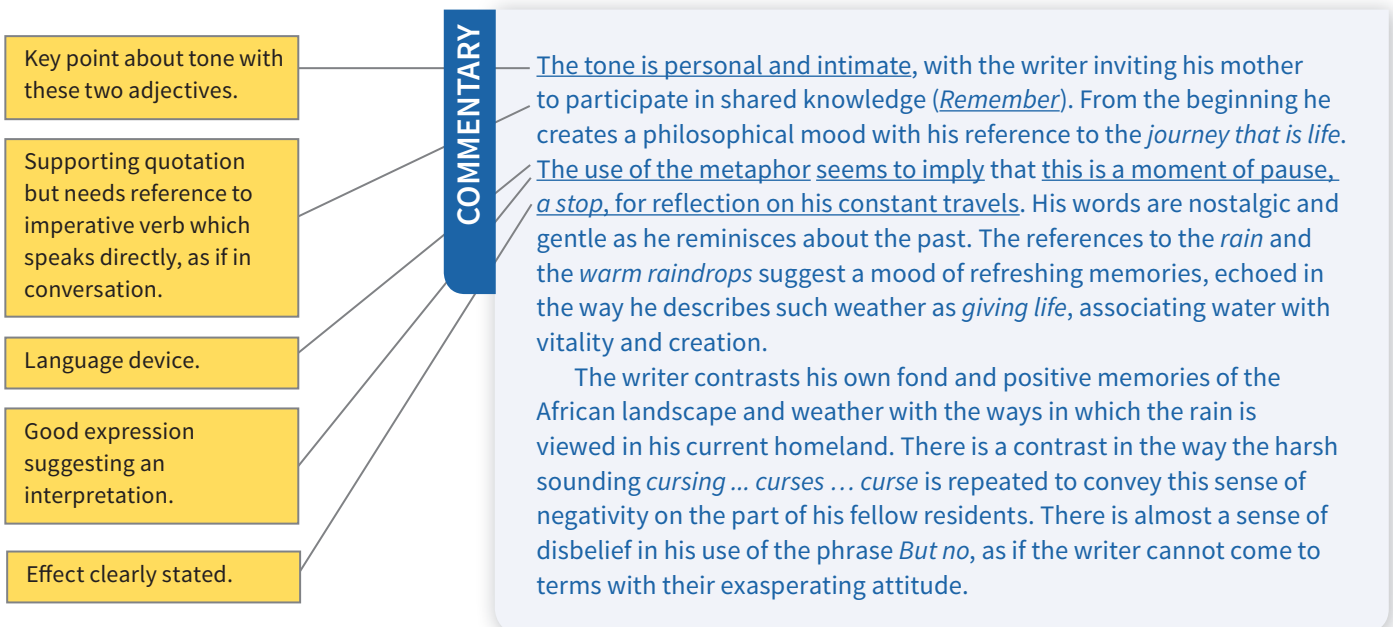
2 Now look at this word bank describing tone and mood. Select the words that you think *best describe the writer's mood* (or moods) in the text.

intimate	personal	reflective	observational	gently comic	nostalgic	angry
anxious	determined	disbelieving	elegiac	ironic	loving	tender
direct	conversational	poetic	sharp	playful	impatient	thoughtful

3 If you think the moods change or develop, write the appropriate word (e.g. *gently comic*) on a copy of the extract alongside the relevant paragraph. Alternatively, write the term down with the number of the paragraph next to it (e.g. *thoughtful*, paragraph 1).

4 Discuss your findings with a partner and then share with another pair. Try to build a clear picture of how the text works and reference your ideas to specific words or phrases in the text.

Now read this extract from a commentary on the text and look at the annotations around it.



Working on your own, find other words in the second part of the commentary which have been used to explain the mood of the writer. These are likely to be, but are not exclusively, adjectives such as the ones in the word bank opposite.

TIP
When writing about a passage, try to use 'mood/ tone' words such as the ones from the word bank opposite, or any others you feel are appropriate to describe the style of the text.

Further practice

Look at the rest of the extract and write two further paragraphs.

- In the first, comment on what the writer has to say about the Norwegians' love of the sea and what mood this creates.
- In the second, comment on his thoughts about his homeland and his thoughts for the future.

Diaries

Diaries can provide windows into people's thoughts whilst at the same time conveying narrative accounts of events and people encountered. As one might expect, a strong sense of voice is often present.

Here are the most common key conventions found in diaries:

- Like personal letters, we expect diaries to have an element of reflection and thought.
- They also share elements of narrative texts in that they recount events.

- They are usually organised into chronological 'chunks' so that entries follow consecutively.
- They mix factual detail with personal observation.
- They often mix tenses, so that we are taken 'into the moment' with present tense: glimpse events that have just happened (past) or are in the process of happening (present continuous). We also get the sense of what *might* happen or is about to occur (future tenses).

Key technique: understanding tenses

It is important to understand how a writer positions the reader through the use of tenses. Whilst you do not need to show detailed knowledge of the names of specific tenses, understanding how tenses differ can help you interpret voice and perspective.

ACTIVITY 1.27

Look at this entry by a student in his/her diary. It displays several tenses.

1. Can you identify what they are? The first two have been highlighted for you.
2. What do these tenses and what they describe tell us about the situation and the events?

Today the most terrible thing happened.[1] Our beloved teacher, Miss Li, has disappeared, and so, apparently, has the school money! We had been waiting[2] in the classroom for her when the Principal rushed in. His face was ashen. He asked us if we had seen Miss Li.

I am so upset! I cannot believe she has done this. She must have a very important reason. I am going to see what I can find out tonight when I go for piano lessons with Miss Cheung. She is a friend of Miss Li's and will tell me what she knows. Outside, the little flame-coloured bird that sits on our white fence and sings is silent. He knows how I feel!

[1] past simple
[2] past perfect continuous

ACTIVITY 1.28

Write the next diary entry from the student's point of view. In it he/she reveals more information about Miss Cheung's disappearance. Use the past, present and future tenses.

Knowledge of the tenses used (or at least of the past, present and future situations) can help you make sense of the text. For example, the writer is able to inform the reader:

- what definitely **happened**
- what is **yet to happen** (which creates a sense of uncertainty)
- what is **happening now**. (The final reference to the bird who is *silent* now, in the present, creates an ongoing, feeling of unhappiness.)

Now read the extracts below which are taken from the diary of Captain Scott, a British explorer whose expedition to the South Pole in the early 20th century ended in tragedy and loss.

FURTHER READING

Search in a library and online to find extracts from a range of different personal diaries. Read these extracts to gain an appreciation of how writers respond to different conditions and situations.



March 17th, 1912
...I can only write at lunch and then only occasionally. The cold is intense, –40° at midday. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don't think anyone of us believes it in his heart.

We are cold on the march now, and at all times except meals. Yesterday we had to lay up for a blizzard and to-day we move dreadfully slowly. We are at No. 14 pony camp, only two pony marches from One Ton Depot. We leave here our theodolite, a camera, and Oates' sleeping-bags. Diaries, &c., and geological specimens carried at Wilson's special request, will be found with us or on our sledge.

March 18th, 1912
To-day, lunch, we are 21 miles from the depot. Ill fortune presses, but better may come. We have had more wind and drift from ahead yesterday; had to stop marching; wind N.W., force 4, temp. –35°. No human being could face it, and we are worn out *nearly*.

LINK

Look back to page 27 for more about connotations

ACTIVITY 1.29

1. Make a list of key words and phrases in the first two of Captain Scott's diary extracts. Also note down the tenses that are used.
2. Now answer these questions independently:
   - What do these words, phrases and tenses tell us about Scott's past, current and future situation?
   - How do they help us to understand Scott's mood and state of mind?

TIP

'Reading between the lines' is a useful way of describing the act of looking for what is suggested rather than stated directly.

Key technique: inference and deduction

One of the key reading skills that you have already begun to develop is that of being able to **infer** meaning from what is said, especially when information or feelings are implied rather than stated directly.

Read these further extracts from Scott's diaries.

March 18th, 1912
My right foot has gone, nearly all the toes – two days ago I was proud possessor of best feet. These are the steps of my downfall. Like an ass I mixed a small spoonful of curry powder with my melted pemmican – it gave me violent indigestion. I lay awake and in pain all night; woke and felt done on the march; foot went and I didn't know it. A very small measure of neglect and have a foot which is not pleasant to contemplate. Bowers takes first place in condition, but there is not much to choose after all. The others are still confident of getting through – or pretend to be – I don't know! We have the last *half* fill of oil in our primus and a very small quantity of spirit – this alone between us and thirst. The wind is fair for the moment, and that is perhaps a fact to help. The mileage would have seemed ridiculously small on our outward journey.

March 19th, 1912
Lunch. We camped with difficulty last night, and were dreadfully cold till after our supper of cold pemmican and biscuit and a half a pannikin of cocoa cooked over the spirit. Then, contrary to expectation, we got warm and all slept well. To-day we started in the usual dragging manner. Sledge dreadfully heavy. We are 15½ miles from the depot and ought to get there in three days. What progress! We have two days' food but barely a day's fuel. All our feet are getting bad – Wilson's best, my right foot worst, left all right. There is no chance to nurse one's feet till we can get hot food into us. Amputation is the least I can hope for now, but will the trouble spread? That is the serious question. The weather doesn't give us a chance – the wind from N. to N.W. and –40° temp, to-day.

March 23rd, 1912
Blizzard bad as ever – Wilson and Bowers unable to start – to-morrow last chance – no fuel and only one or two of food left – must be near the end. Have decided it shall be natural – we shall march for the depot with or without our effects and die in our tracks...

R. Scott.

ACTIVITY 1.30

Discuss with a partner:

- What does Scott tell us directly (i.e what he tells us as plain fact or **direct statement**)?
- What can we *infer* from what he says, by understanding the clues or hints in what he writes?

KEY TERMS

direct statement something stated as a definite fact, opinion or truth, with no sense of doubt

syntax the order of words and phrases in a sentence

Work through Activity 1.30 then read this commentary about Scott's diaries.

COMMENTARY

There seems to be a sense of conflict in the moods right from the start. Scott himself seems negative and pessimistic from the opening without any doubt or qualification: *The cold is intense* is a direct statement allowing no doubt at all to his thoughts and feelings and his reference to how *I don't think anyone of us believes it in his heart* reveals his very private thoughts and beliefs expressed to himself but not his colleagues.

Yet those around him are more positive, trying to be *unendingly cheerful*, the first word a contrast to Scott's own sense of certainty and finality. His sense of foreboding is illuminated by his use of words like *dreadfully* (repeated later on) but at times he tries to see the more optimistic frame of mind conveyed by his colleagues: *Ill fortune presses, but better may come*, perhaps the **syntax** suggesting that his first view is the one that dominates his mind. Indeed, his negativity seems to take over again as he resorts to direct statement without qualification once more: *No human being could face it*, words implying the dark state of his mind and a sense that little hope remains and that the shadow of death hovers over everything they do.

LINK

Inference and deduction are skills you can apply to almost any text: in R. H. Tawney's *The Attack* on page 41, we are not told what happens to the officer but consider how inference might help you draw your own conclusions.

ACTIVITY 1.31

Working with the same partner, discuss:

- how effectively the commentary picks up on what is directly stated and what is implied
- whether the commentary captures Scott's mood and how it changes.

Other diary writers, especially in times of crisis like wartime, may respond to a particular experience using opposing moods as in Scott's diary entries, yet with a more psychological and reflective outlook.

The following diary extracts were written at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War.

ACTIVITY 1.32

1. Read the diary extracts. As you do so, consider how they link back to some of the descriptive passages you have already encountered, in particular the extract from *Touching the Void* on page 21.
2. List key words and phrases and identify the ways in which the writer creates opposing moods in his writing.
3. Find examples of lists of three or any other techniques or features you have encountered in the book so far (e.g. imagery, moving from an internal to an external location).

20 April

Yesterday, up early in the morning – the washing, the dressing, the brushing, then to the station on my bicycle. Everything planned, everything done, the ticket bought, the clean gloves in the pocket.

How late the train was – waiting, waiting there. Then the bursting carriages and all the passage filled with soldiers – their tin hats, bottles, knapsacks hitting on the walls when they turned. I wondered how I could stand ... I tried to sit down in the loop of a strap, then on a fire extinguisher. Sore, painful, I felt desperate. How ill and tired I would be if I could not sit down. I gazed at the fat suitcase for some time, then at last I dared to sit down on it. Pleasure, bliss, gazing out of the window, sitting down at last.

The fields, the feathery trees, wonderful poison green, fresh as new lettuce. The large lonely young man carrying a huge implement across unending fields. Then the long, long tunnel with its whistle and the belching white smoke, not escaping, flowing over the train in a thick cape. Sparks flew and faded. The red demon glow on the white smoke belchings and the growing of it till I was really ready for some catastrophe. Can something be on fire? Will the engine burst and the driver be burnt to death in the steam, as I have read? Will I be groping in wreckage in the dark tunnel? All this through my mind and more. No change from early childhood.

Then the sooted wall seen faintly, the lamps of some workers, like miners' lamps or the lamps of gaolers in a dungeon. It is like a haunted house ...The green, luminous skeleton should descend, champing its terrible jaws, grinning. The concrete grime, then at last the air, on, on. Quite happy now, almost peaceful.

From *The Journals of Denton Welch*.

ACTIVITY 1.33

Now write a short commentary on the passage. You could use the following prompts to help you structure what you have to say:

The account begins briskly, almost matter-of-factly with routines such as …

Then, there is a change of mood as the writer recounts the physical aspects of the journey …

After that, the description is laced with striking, often nightmarish images and visions, as shown by …

FURTHER READING

For more examples of war diaries visit http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/index.htm

Now read this somewhat different diary entry.

I look back and see visions of my country as for twenty-three years I have known it, peaceful, blooming, full of abundance, its vast plain an ocean of waving corn amongst which diligent peasants move to and fro gathering in the harvest, the land's dearest pride.

I see its humble villages hidden amongst fruit trees, I see the autumn splendour of its forests, I see the grand solitude of its mountain summits, I see its noble convents, corners of hidden beauty, treasures of ancient art, I hear the sound of the shepherd's horn, the sweet complaint of his ditties.

I see long roads with clouds of dust rising from them, many carts in a file, I see gaily clad peasants flocking to market. I see naked plains and long stretches of sand by the sea.

I also see our broad, proud Danube rolling its many waters past quaint little villages and boroughs inhabited by motley crowds of different nationalities, past towns of which the rising industries are a promise of future wealth. I see our port of Constanza with its bustle, its noise and its hopes.

From the diaries of Queen Marie of Romania.

TIP

Remember not to organise your answer around each technique (e.g. a paragraph on first person and then a paragraph on the use of lists), but work through the extract in sections.

FURTHER READING

For more examples of different types of diaries look at *The Penguin Book of Diaries* selected by Ronald Blythe (Penguin, 1991).

ACTIVITY 1.34

1 Identify where and how the following techniques are used in this diary extract:
   - the use of the **first person**, repeated in the same form of **syntax** and sentence
   - the sense of the writer's **voice**
   - how the writer also uses the **present tense** and what it tells us about the past
   - the use of **lists of three**
   - the use of **adjectives** and **verbs** to create a certain kind of mood.
2 Now, referring to the techniques you have identified, write a short commentary on this diary extract, ensuring that you use point/quotation/comment and words and phrases like *seems*, *appears*, *this suggests*, *this implies*.

Memoirs and autobiographies

Memoirs and autobiographies are generally first-person accounts of a real person's life or of a specific time or event from their life.

All memoirs differ but most share common conventions such as:

- reference to particularly memorable or vivid events or experiences that had an impact on the life of the narrator
- the evocation of past times or places, sometimes seen nostalgically, but also with regret, gratitude, anger, etc.
- the 'bringing back to life' of people or interesting characters from the past
- reflection on one's earlier life through adult eyes.

ACTIVITY 1.35

Write a short passage about your own life recalling an experience or event from when you were very young. Try to evoke what you felt then, as a child, and how you look at the same event now as an older person.

You need not share this work with anyone, as it may be something you would prefer to keep private. However, keep in mind the skills you had to deploy in writing it as you read the accounts that follow.

Writers may express their thoughts and feelings in memoirs and autobiographies, often relying on descriptive language to convey the sense of a particular location in which their experience occurred.

Memoirs tend to focus on a particular memory or heightened experience in the author's life. For example, the text below the photo is not a diary entry about war, but a memoir recalling a very dramatic experience in the writer's time as a soldier. The external world he found himself in seemed to encapsulate his intense feelings at the time.



A British trench during the Battle of the Somme.

ACTIVITY 1.36

Look at the extract below. List key words and phrases from the passage. Are there any you could group together or link by a particular mood? For example, *wonderful* and *peaceful* would be in a different mood category from *agonised*.

Beside, something wonderful was happening outside. Some evenings before, I had watched with some friends from a peaceful little **butte**[1] some miles behind our front the opening hours of the great bombardment. We had seen it from above, beneath a slowly sinking sun, as a long white line of surf breaking without pause on a shore that faded at its extremities into horizons beyond our sight, and had marveled that, by some trick of the ground, not a whisper from that awe-inspiring racket reached us. Now, at the tremendous climax of the last hour of the inferno – the last, I mean, before we went over the top – another miracle was being worked.

It was a glorious morning, and, as though there were some mysterious sympathy between the wonders of the ear and of the eye, the bewildering tumult seemed to grow more insistent with the growing brilliance of the atmosphere and the intenser blue of the July sky. The sound was different, not only in magnitude, but in quality, from anything known to me. It was not a succession of explosions or a continuous roar; I, at least, never heard either a gun or

a bursting shell. It was not a noise; it was a symphony. It did not move; it hung over us. It was as though the air were full of a vast and agonized passion, bursting now into groans and sighs, now into shrill screams and pitiful whimpers, shuddering beneath terrible blows, torn by unearthly whips, vibrating with the solemn pulse of enormous wings. And the supernatural tumult did not pass in this direction or that. It did not begin, intensify, decline, and end. It was poised in the air, a stationary panorama of sound, a condition of the atmosphere, not the creation of man. It seemed that one had only to lift one's eyes to be appalled by the writhing of the tormented element above one, that a hand raised ever so little above the level of the trench would be sucked away into a whirlpool revolving with cruel and incredible velocity over infinite depths. And this feeling, while it filled one with awe, filled one also with triumphant exultation, the exultation of struggling against a storm in mountains, or watching the irresistible course of a swift and destructive river.

Yet at the same time one was intent on practical details, wiping the trench dirt off the bolt of one's rifle, reminding the men of what each was to do, and when the message went round, "five minutes to go," seeing that all bayonets were fixed. My captain, a brave man and a good officer, came along and borrowed a spare watch off me. It was the last time I saw him. At 7:30 we went up the ladders, doubled through the gaps in the wire, and lay down, waiting for the line to form up on each side of us. When it was ready we went forward, not doubling, but at a walk. For we had nine hundred yards of rough ground to the trench which was our first objective, and about fifteen hundred to a further trench where we were to wait for orders. There was a bright light in the air, and the tufts of coarse grass were gray with dew.

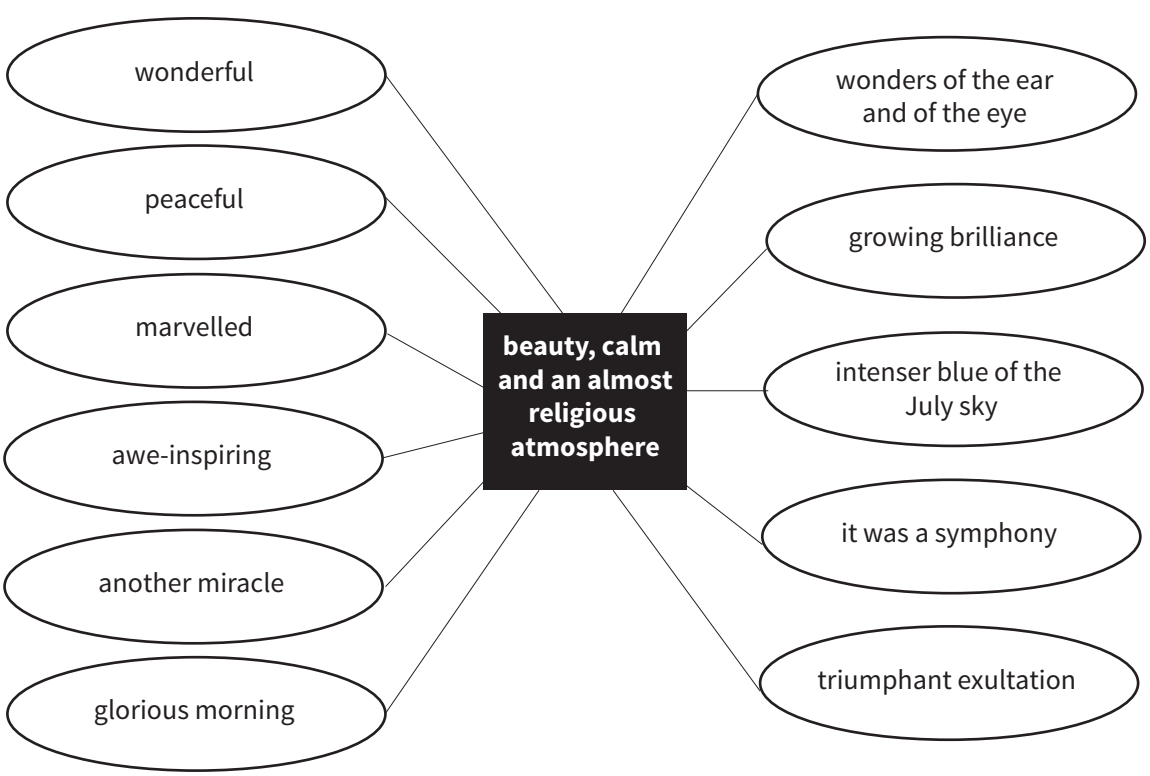
I hadn't gone ten yards before I felt a load fall from me.

From *The Attack* by R. H. Tawney.

[1] **butte** a small hill

Key technique: grouping words and phrases

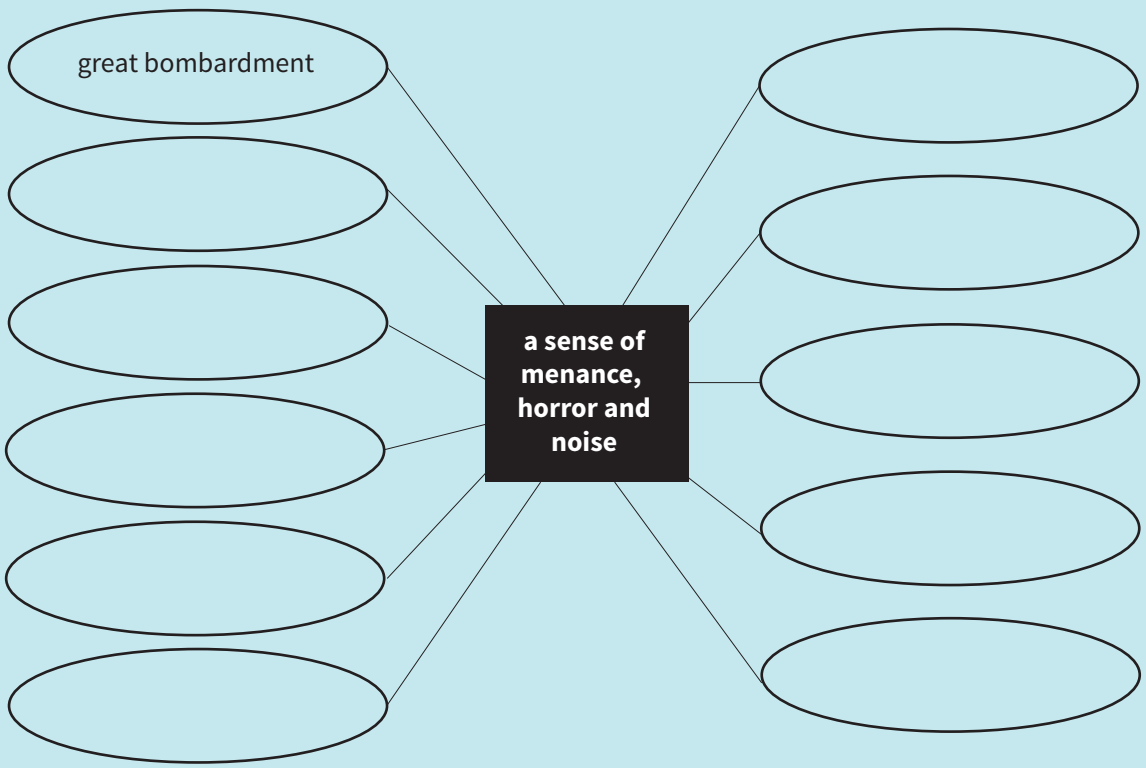
Look at how grouping words and phrases together by mood can help make sense of the passage. The following diagram shows how one set of words and phrases has been linked.



ACTIVITY 1.37

1 Now do the same for the aspect shown below. Copy and complete the diagram, finding as many words or phrases as you can.

2 Once you have completed the diagram, write a paragraph on that particular aspect. Select three or four words from the diagram and, in your paragraph, comment on them and the effects created.



Further practice

Notice how towards the end of the extract, where the writer refers to how *one was intent on practical detail*, the rest of the passage seems to change in style and mood. Write a sentence explaining how and why this happens.

Characters in memoirs

Writers of memoirs and autobiographies sometimes use descriptive language to portray a certain location as a way of telling us about a particular character who lives there and their own reactions to the world in which they find themselves.

When we speak about 'character' what we are really talking about are the various elements that contribute to the 'picture' of someone. These might include:

- their appearance
- what they say and do
- what others say to them, about them, etc.
- how others respond to them
- the circumstances or locations they are found in.

Places as reflections of character are very common in both fiction and non-fiction. This is most obviously the case when the place is the home of the person described.

ACTIVITY 1.38

Make a list of key words and phrases in the extract on page 44 to explore what the language and style imply about the character of the writer's godmother.

For example, the following extract describes the place where the writer's godmother (Stella) lives in India.

The houses all had high ceilings and sloping roofs made of corrugated asbestos that monsoon rains would drum on, then slide off in vertical lines. (Once in a while, during a storm, milk-heavy coconuts or even an entire head of a coconut tree would crash through a roof amid torrents of water.) All the houses had a sense of space, light and circulating air, with open porches. Long flat windows set high under the roofs made frames for swirling palm fronds against sky. Lower down, there were windows with black panes, rectangular bars, and white wooden shutters. The doors to all the houses were always open, except for the hours of sleep at night.

Stella's open door, though, did not mean free visitation rights. "Stella doesn't like children" was an adage that I grew up with. There were occasions when we were formally taken over to visit Stella, scrubbed and brushed and admonished to be on best behavior. Otherwise, we observed Stella from afar: through hedges, across porches, from the other ends of gardens, or even by actually creeping into her own well-tended garden when the air hung heavy with afternoon siestas of adults...

"Going over to Stella's" was an occasion that came twice or thrice a year. Coming from our house, with too many children and never quite enough money, Stella's house — so similar with its white walls and high windows — seemed dreamily opulent. An entire table was often set aside for a jigsaw puzzle she was working on, at her own speed, with no one to tell her to pick it up. She read the latest expensive books with glossy covers. On the walls, or simply hanging from lines, were the latest black and white pictures she had developed: beach patterns, jungle ruins, animals from temple friezes, interesting looking people. The servants, Zachariah and Raghu, in their white uniforms, exuded faint disapproval at us, the raggle-taggle ensemble. It was at Stella's house that I would feel the most acutely that my mother did not remember to trim or groom, let alone paint, her toe-nails.

If we were invited for tea, we were served on china that had belonged to Stella's mother. The delicate plates, saucers and cups had floral patterns in brown and black along the edges. We were given little forks with shell handles. In an early memory I have of such an occasion, I must have been about four. Whoever was beside me — my grandmother, or mother or elder sister Maya — was trying to make sure that I ate leaning forward towards the glass-topped table without sending that precious china crashing to the floor.

From *Stella in Bombay* by Kirin Naravan.

Key technique: characterisation through setting

You may have noticed how the writer creates a sense of freedom (*had a sense of space, light and circulating air, with open porches*) and the way in which a sense of order is suggested (*flat windows set high under the roofs made frames for swirling palm fronds against sky*).

The interior world seems to offer a sense of regularity and protection from the intrusion of the wilder elements of the outside world, an idea echoed in the way that the roofs would make the threatening rain *then slide off in vertical lines*. Such a sense of an ordered and safe world is echoed by the description of how *there were windows with black panes, rectangular bars, and white wooden shutters.*

TIP

An unusual or older character – often a relative – can be represented in memoirs or autobiographies by the writer creating a sense of mystery and offering no real **narrative**.

KEY TERMS

narrative the development or unfolding of a plot, account or story

ACTIVITY 1.39

Having read the explanation about characterisation above, and the extract as a whole, discuss with a partner:

- What might the description of the location suggest about its occupant?
- What do we learn about the children's thoughts about their grandmother from the descriptions of the location? (For example, why the words *black* and *white* are repeated and what this suggests.)

The next extract describes another writer's attempts to work out her identity and origins.

My grandfather said he knew what people we came from. I reeled off all the names I knew. Yoruba? Ibo? Ashanti? Mandingo? He said no to all of them, saying that he would know it if he heard it. I was thirteen. I was anxious for him to remember.

I pestered him for days. He told me to stop bothering him and that he would remember. Or stop bothering or else he would not remember. I hovered about him in any room in which he rested. I followed him around asking him if he wanted me to do this or that for him, clean his glasses, polish his shoes, bring his tea. I studied him intently when he came home. I searched the grey bristles of his moustache for any flicker which might suggest he was about to speak. He raised his *Sunday Guardian* newspaper to block my view. He shooed me away, telling me to find some book to read or work to do. At times it seemed as if Papa was on the brink of remembering. I imagined pulling the word off his tongue if only I knew the first syllable.

I scoured the San Fernando library and found no other lists of names at the time. Having no way of finding other names, I could only repeat the ones I knew, asking him if he was sure it wasn't Yoruba, how about Ashanti? I couldn't help myself. I wanted to be either one. I had heard that they were noble people. But I could also be Ibo; I had heard that they were gentle. And I had followed the war in Biafra. I was on their side.

Papa never remembered. Each week he came I asked him had he remembered. Each week he told me no. Then I stopped asking. He was disappointed. I was disappointed. We lived after that in this mutual disappointment. It was a rift between us. It gathered into a kind of estrangement. After that he grew old. I grew young. A small space opened in me.

From *A Map to the Door of No Return* by Dionne Brand.

ACTIVITY 1.40

Highlight key words and phrases in this extract. Then discuss with a partner what we learn about the grandfather and the narrator's perspective towards him.

KEY TERMS

repeated syntactical structures or **patterning** the use of the same types of word or phrase order

inner thoughts ideas in the mind of a character or narrator

The first person usage (*I*) keeps the focus on the narrator throughout, but there are other aspects and techniques you might have identified:

- **lists of three** (*clean his glasses, polish his shoes, bring his tea*) to create a sense of everything the writer does in a frustrated attempt to please her grandfather
- **repeated syntactical structures** such as *I hovered about him… I followed him…* in order to create the sense of perseverance and repetitive obsession of the author's search
- **short sentences and repeated vocabulary** as a way of expressing the limited amount of progress she made and the sense of an ongoing routine that prevents any possible progress being made (*Papa never remembered. Each week he came I asked him had he remembered. Each week he told me no.*)
- a sense of **voice** expressed by conveying her **inner thoughts**.

ACTIVITY 1.41

Can you find further examples of the techniques of short sentences, syntactical patterns and repetitions in the text by Dionne Brand?

LINK

Drawing conclusions about people from the settings or locations is something you can apply to a range of texts. Look back at the extract from *Touching the Void* on page 21. What does the environment, and the narrator's response to it, tell us about him?

KEY TERMS

third person singular *she or he*

Third person memoirs

The memoirs and autobiographies you have analysed so far in this section have been written in first person. Writers of these types of texts may also choose to write in **third person singular** in order to distance themselves from their subject.

For example, the writer may adopt the voice of a child to convey how she or he was feeling (rather than the events which were happening around them) at certain points of their upbringing.

Read this autobiographical account in which a South African writer looks back to a time earlier in his career when he visited London, aspiring to become a poet.



The British Museum Library Reading Room.

ACTIVITY 1.42

By listing key words and phrases in this extract, explore the use of present tense, voice and expression of inner thoughts in the first two paragraphs.

It is three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. He has been in the Reading Room since opening time, reading Ford's *Mr Humpty Dumpty*, a novel so tedious that he has to fight to stay awake. In a short while the Reading Room will close for the day, the whole great Museum will close. On Sundays the Reading Room does not open; between now and next Saturday, reading will be a matter of an hour snatched here and there of an evening. Should he soldier on until closing time, though he is racked with yawns? What is the point of this enterprise anyway?

What is the good to a computer programmer, if computer programming is to be his life, to have an MA in English literature? And where are the unrecognised masterpieces that he was going to uncover? *Mr Humpty Dumpty* is certainly not one of them. He shuts the book, packs up.

Outside the daylight is already waning. Along Great Russell Street he trudges to Tottenham Court Road, then south toward Charing Cross. Of the throng on the sidewalks, most are young people. Strictly speaking he is their contemporary, but he does not feel like that. He feels middle-aged, prematurely middle-aged: one of those bloodless, high-domed, exhausted scholars whose skin flakes at the merest touch. Deeper than that he is still a child ignorant of his place in the world, frightened, indecisive. What is he doing in this huge, cold city where merely to stay alive means holding tight all the time, trying not to fall?

The bookshops on Charing Cross Road stay open until six. Until six he has somewhere to go. After that he will be adrift amid the Saturday-night fun-seekers. For a while he can follow the flow, pretending he too is seeking fun, pretending he has somewhere to go, someone to meet; but in the end he will have to give up and catch the train back to Archway station and the solitude of his room.

From *Lost in London* by J.M.Coetzee.

ACTIVITY 1.43

1 Find examples of the following techniques in the extract:
   - the sense of endless boredom conveyed by the present tense
   - how the writer uses certain phrases and adjectives (like *tedious*) and verbs (such as *soldier on*) and what this expresses
   - how he vocalises his inner thoughts through a series of questions.

2 Now write a paragraph explaining what you think the effect of the writer using the third person is. What does Coetzee achieve through this? (Think about when in his life he might have actually written this account and also about the dual perspective of narrator and 'character'.)

Further practice

Look at the final two paragraphs of the extract and the ways in which it starts to draw on more descriptive language.

Dialogue and action

KEY TERMS

dialogue speech or conversation of, or between, characters

actions things done or decisions taken

When writers focus descriptions on other people, they can reveal as much about themselves as the people they present. **Dialogue**, is of course, a key signal of character and behaviour. Writers do not use dialogue as 'filler' but to convey important ideas about people or, in narratives, to forward the plot/**action**.

For example, in the following extract the writer visits her apparently high-achieving sister and her family. Through the dialogue, and what happens around it, a number of things emerge about the narrator.

When I arrived at my sister's new home, she was still at work. I was greeted at the door by my 7-year-old niece, Sophie, still recovering from a cold, and the nanny who, I later found out, makes more money than I do.

"Aunt Tobin, come see my room!" said Sophie, grabbing my hand and pulling me up the stairs to her room, which was bright, clean, organized.

"It's amazing," I said with a tinge of sadness she's too young to have noticed.

Sophie continued the tour around the home – not ostentatious or a mansion, by any stretch, but big and two stories and beautiful. She took me into my sister's room, a gigantic spread with a king-size bed and large flat-screen TV hanging above a fireplace. Her bathroom has two sinks, the biggest bathtub I've ever seen, marble counter tops, and makeup drawers that stop short of the cabinet then slowly, quietly close on their own, like the trunk lids on fancy cars...

The morning after I arrived in Los Angeles was frenetic. The rustling began at 6 a.m., when my brother-in-law got up to make the kids' lunch.

"Can you wake up Sophie and make sure she gets dressed?" my sister asked.

"Sure, no problem," I said, needing to be useful in some way, wanting to feel like a part of the family, and hoping to disprove my sister's conviction that I'm wholly incapable of being functional before 10 a.m.

But my niece didn't want to get out of bed. Apparently, acquiescence costs $2.

On the drive to school, Sophie sat behind me, elevated by a kid seat that I needed her help to install in my manual-windows-only Kia rental. I was wearing old jeans and the sweat shirt I'd slept in, trying and failing to engage in a conversation through the rear-view mirror. Then the Violent Femmes came on the radio. "Kiss off," I love that song, so I started singing, hoping she'd appreciate the entertainment. *I said one one one cause you left me / And two two two for my sorrow / And three three three for my heartache ...*

"Stop!" said my niece. "You're weird, Aunt Tobin."

From *My Sister's Perfect Life* by Tobin Levy.

Read this commentary which focuses largely on the dialogue.

KEY TERMS

imperative order or command

understatement phrasing ideas so that they do not sound as impressive as they might appear; offering faint praise or a sense of disapproval

COMMENTARY

At first the niece uses positive, inviting language which is in fact an **imperative** without any sense of formal greeting, an indication that she is at ease with her aunt. The enthusiasm and urgency of the invitation is accompanied by the child's instinctive *grabbing* and *pulling* which suggest a sense of intimacy and an equal level of familiarity. The aunt's reply (*It's amazing*) does not seem to mirror the initial enthusiasm of the niece's words; the absence of the exclamation mark in comparison to Sophie's greeting an indication of this sense of **understatement** or sense of inferiority as the writer realises the kind of environment Sophie and her family inhabit.

ACTIVITY 1.44

1 Discuss with a partner:
- Which character does the commentary focus on?
- What particular actions and spoken words does the commentary pick up on to explore the relationship?
- Why does the commentary draw attention to the omission of the exclamation mark?

2 Now, working on your own, copy and complete this table which selects some other aspects of dialogue and actions from the passage:

Point	Quotation	Comment/effect on how we view narrator/Sophie
Mother's words in morning echo Sophie's opening words	*"Come see my room."* *"Can you wake up Sophie …"*	Suggests both mother and daughter are telling the compliant narrator what to do
Sophie's refusal to do what she's told at first	*But my niece didn't want to get out of bed…*	Suggests …
Sophie helping her aunt to fix the car seat		
Sophie telling her aunt not to sing		Implies that …

3 Look at some of the other elements of the passage and make notes on:
- the physical descriptions of the house and the gadgets in it
- the appearance and behaviour of the narrator herself
- asides or apparently 'throwaway' comments which reveal something about the writer and her situation.

4 Finally, write a full commentary on the whole passage in answer to the following task:

How does the writer present her situation and relationships in the passage through the style and language used?

Include the notes you have made on *all* the aspects you explored, including dialogue.

Humour and hyperbole

One of the key techniques writers use is to take a situation or experience and use exaggerated language or ideas for effect. This device is often used by feature writers in magazines or newspapers who reflect with an element of amusement upon their own lives, or those of people they know well.

KEY TERMS

hyperbole exaggeration

anecdotal relating to minor personal events or moments

In the following extract, the writer uses a number of devices to paint a vivid portrait of his father. These include:

- **anecdotal** accounts – examples of things his father has said and done
- **hyperbole** – exaggerated images, descriptions or comparisons
- the use of a variety of tenses to convey past behaviour or experiences with his father, and the current situation.

There is little description, if any, of his father's physical appearance, other than his voice. It is therefore important to understand how the writer is able to convey such an effective portrait of his father.

ACTIVITY 1.45

Read the extract and make your usual list of key words and phrases, ready to write up for a commentary on the style and language.

"Try not to overdo the exercise," I tell my dad. "I'M FINE," he replies, loudly. "I'VE ALREADY BEEN FOR A SEVEN MILE RUN, SWAM FORTY LENGTHS AND CHOPPED A BIG LOAD OF WOOD THIS MORNING." I live over a hundred miles from my parents, and I haven't seen them since two months ago, when my dad first reignited his exercise regime, but I already feel tired merely from hearing about it. Could he not just do the same things in moderation? I ask him.

I know from historical evidence that this is a bit like trying to persuade a lion to ignore a gazelle carcass and eat some tapas with a fork, but it has become my job to worry.

He has been having violently energetic sporting dreams again. This is a customary byproduct of the punishing regimes of physical exercise he plunges into every couple of years or so. "LAST NIGHT'S ONE WAS ABOUT A WINNING HEADER IN A FOOTBALL MATCH," he told me. "I WOKE UP ON THE FLOOR. I HIT THE BEDSIDE TABLE ON THE WAY. I EMAILED THE BBC WEATHER TEAM TO SAY THEY'RE RUBBISH AND COULDN'T FORECAST THE DAYS OF THE WEEK. THEY HAVEN'T GOT BACK TO ME."

A few years ago, my dad successfully completed a marathon in a superhero suit, seventeen months shy of his sixtieth birthday. During his warm-up for this, his nocturnal adventures included another top flight football clash, which left him with a deep cut on his forehead (same bedside table) and a rugby match which climaxed with him drop-kicking my mum across the bed. After a slightly sedentary period, he's started exercising a lot again of late: running several miles a day and getting up at 6am to swim competitively against his friend Malcolm.

As my dad reports incidents from his recent athletic life to me, he will switch subjects mid-flow, without pausing for breath. He might come back to the original subject, but you never know for sure, or at what point. "I LET THE POSTWOMAN FEEL MY STOMACH TODAY," he told me on the phone yesterday. "SHE SAID IT WAS REALLY FLAT. I RUN AROUND THE VILLAGE CRICKET PITCH BECAUSE THEN YOUR MUM KNOWS THERE'S ROOM FOR AN AIR AMBULANCE IF I HAVE A HEART ATTACK."

He is the worst kind of wing man to have as a storyteller, constantly charging in and riding roughshod over the crescendo of my mum's gently told anecdotes. "Mick," she'll say. "Who's telling this story?" But it has little effect. We've now almost cured him of his habit of quietly picking up their second telephone and adding his bellowing input to our conversations at comically inopportune moments, but a chat with him in the flesh can leave you feeling spent and dizzy.

My parents come from families of vastly contrasting volumes: one excitable, one deferentially quiet. Whereas my late nan – my mum's mum – tended to pick up the phone in the manner of a woman who'd been hiding from an angry dragon for her entire life and was worried it might have finally tracked her down using the phonebook, my dad's parents would often bellow for several minutes into answer phones before realising they weren't speaking to a real human, so accustomed were they to their voices drowning out those of others. My grandma and granddad are gone now, and my dad doesn't have a similarly loud spouse, or siblings, so he makes up for it by adding two or three extra raucous conversations to every room he's in.

"THAT WAS THE OTHER THING ABOUT MICK GALLAGHER FROM MY GANG IN THE EARLY SIXTIES," my dad – who, though still some way from his dotage, has definitely reached his anecdotage – will explain. "HE LATER WENT OUT WITH THREE WOMEN. LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THAT BUZZARD! I DON'T LIKE THAT BLOKE OFF ***GRAND DESIGNS***[1]. HE OWNS TOO MANY JACKETS."

Being at the wheel of the car will not stem the flow. "IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE TO LIVE ON THAT FARM IN THE SEVENTEEN HUNDREDS," he'll say, slowing down his VW Golf.

"BRILLIANT! I USED TO MAKE GREAT DENS AS A KID. SEE THAT SPEED CAMERA? IT'S FAKE."

Of course, with all this exercising, the adrenaline is pumping all the harder, and his storytelling even more enthusiastic and freeform. My mum claims my dad "doesn't have an off switch" but I'm not sure that's strictly true. He can fall asleep instantly in pretty much any environment, on any vaguely horizontal surface. When he's off, he's completely off. It's just that when he's on, he's also completely on. He's like a TV in that sense: an old one, without the standby function.

From *Loud Dad* by Tom Cox.

[1] ***Grand Designs*** a UK television programme

ACTIVITY 1.46

Write a commentary on the style and language of the extract:

- Write a brief, focused introduction for the extract.
- Work through the extract in sections, looking for contrasts, differences and similarities between them.
- Use the words and phrases that have been highlighted as the basis for the quotations commented on.
- Try not to assert ideas but use words like *seems*, *appears* and *apparent*.
- Don't use excessive linguistic terminology or try to spot techniques and language features for their own sake.

Summary

Remember these key points from this section:

- Personal writing can take many forms and will contain elements of other types of text.
- A sense of 'voice' is central to personal writing.
- Characterisation, whether of the writer or of the people they are describing, is an important component of much personal writing.
- Exploring the use of a variety of tenses can provide insights into the writer's perspective.

Persuasive writing

In this section you will:

- read a range of **persuasive** texts
- explore some of their key features.

KEY TERMS

persuasive trying to convince others about a particular idea, viewpoint or product

review a critical assessment of something – such as a film, book, television or radio programme

What is persuasive writing?

Persuasive writing can take many forms:

- **reviews** of cultural events or experiences such as plays or films
- reviews of texts such as novels, poetry or non-fiction

- feature articles in magazine or newspapers which tackle a particular issue or topic
- opinion pieces with a more direct and straightforward angle on a subject of debate
- letters in newspapers or other media.

The style and language of persuasive writing is driven by the form, the audience and the stance of the writer. Some use highly emotive, charged language to create maximum impact; others employ a more balanced tone, using measured argument to make their point. Other writers might take an amused or slightly ironic approach.

The conventions writers use in persuasive writing will therefore change according to the tone they wish to strike. These might include:

- loaded, emotive language (e.g. *he gives an appallingly dull, wooden performance*)
- rhetorical effects and devices, for example, rhetorical questions (e.g. *Are we really meant to believe so many men would fall for her?*)
- humour or **ironic** comment (e.g. *The only chemistry between them was the hot air they kept on speaking*)
- expanded noun phrases, especially in reviews (e.g. *'He is the usual all-American downtrodden fall-guy we all root for*)
- hyperbole, or exaggeration for comic, **sarcastic** or dramatic impact (e.g. *The music continues to rattle the lonely glassware. This is a very quiet restaurant.*)
- direct appeal to the reader through a conversational tone, for example using **question tags** or other informal forms (e.g. *You'll come out of the cinema smiling, which can't be a bad thing, can it?*)
- technical or specialist/subject-specific vocabulary that casts the writer as an expert (e.g. *The opening montage clearly shot on location in Turkey features a roof-top chase which introduces our charismatic protagonist*)
- often, but not exclusively, expressed mainly in the present tense to describe the immediate experience.

KEY TERMS

ironic suggesting the opposite to what is expected

sarcastic sharp and mocking

question tag a verbal addition to statements to add rhetorical emphasis or to elicit a reaction (e.g. *We'll be home by tea, **won't we**, Mum? It's a terrible indictment of our government, **isn't it?***)

FURTHER RESEARCH

In some cases a writer may try to persuade in a balanced piece of writing such as a newspaper article, but sometimes editorial opinion can be much more biased. Try to find examples of:

- a balanced news article
- a biased editorial or opinion piece
- a blog in which the writer expresses his or her opinion.

In each case, try to identify the techniques and language the writer uses in order to persuade their readers towards their point of view.

A theatre review

Read the following text which describes the writer's experience of watching a particular show in a theatre.

Taken on its own terms, however, my first brush with the show on stage (I saw the film version with Madonna) leaves little impression. Most of the numbers blend together and the strongest melody is reprised throughout beginning with "What A Circus," the famed peak "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina" and the finale. This unfolding of a melody throughout a show can climax with a powerful "reveal" of the number. Here it simply feels like leaning on a good tune too often.

Still, this is a handsome production with a full orchestra sounding marvelous. One can imagine a hungry, attention-grabbing actress like Patti Lupone making the most of the spotlight. Unfortunately, the acclaimed actress Elena Roger can barely hold the stage. Her voice is not remotely equipped for the part and her stage presence is minimal. You look at the spectacle of this *Evita* when you should be riveted on Eva Peron herself. An entire nation prostrates itself at her feet? You doubt they'd even notice her...

Evita should be a fiercely ambitious character as embodied in her singing. But Roger's voice is so thin and small (she played Edith Piaf in another hit show in London) that it simply disappears in the higher register. You're more worried for her than intimidated or magnetized. Her best moments occur when she can stay in that lower register and speak-sing a song, such as the duet "I'd Be Surprisingly Good For You," with Cerveris. He, by the way, is a marvelous performer, but paired with Roger and singing what is essentially a dull and uninteresting role, even Cerveris can't do much. Also less demanding vocally (though during this song she's dancing quite a bit) is "Buenos Aires" with Martin. He's an amiable presence on stage albeit with little of the ability to give Che the edginess and cynicism the role desperately needs.

When it comes to that iconic number "Don't Cry For Me Argentina," Roger simply makes you feel nervous. It works better at the end when her frail voice can be seen as in character, since Evita is dying when she reprises the tune from her deathbed (where, frankly, it makes more emotional sense than it does on the balcony anyway). She's especially exposed on "You Must Love Me," the ballad written for the film which she sings alone on a stage with Cerveris. Without sets and dancing and other cast members to distract, you have nothing to focus on but her unconvincing vocals.

Frankly, it's difficult to understand why she was cast in London, much less here, where the standards for musicals are and should be the highest in the world. Roger unquestionably does not possess the pipes to sing this part. Since this isn't a dance show where dancing might be the most important talent and she certainly doesn't act anyone off the stage, why would her ability to—at best—get through the big numbers rather than nail them be acceptable? The entire show is built around what should be the fiery performance at its heart, making this *Evita* very cool indeed...

'Do Cry for Argentina' by Michael Giltz, from *The Huffington Post.*

ACTIVITY 1.47

Make brief notes on the following questions:

- What is the writer's viewpoint on the show?
- Which of the techniques or language features mentioned on page 51 can be seen here? (Look particularly for examples of loaded language – either positive or negative.)

KEY TERMS

expert a person who is a great authority on a subject

Key technique: the expert view

One key feature of many reviews is the **expert** view. This can be seen in:

- specialist or technical terms which the writer is competent in using
- the perspective or viewpoint expressed (a confidence that they know what they're talking about)
- references to other, similar texts, plays, etc.

Read the extended commentary opposite, which begins by commenting on this aspect in particular.

Reference to the expert tone of the piece.

Evidence in the **modal form** *should be* – what the production ought to have and in the specialist terms, *melody* and *reprised.*

Additional noun phrases emphasise the writer's knowledge.

COMMENTARY

In the passage, the writer expresses his views by seeming to develop a clear sense of voice, that of someone who is an expert, someone who knows what should be expected as evidenced in the **modal** form ('*Evita should be… the strongest melody is reprised throughout*') and appears to further demonstrate that knowledge by offering some apparent compliments(*this is a handsome production with a full orchestra sounding marvellous … is a marvellous performer … the acclaimed actress … an amiable presence on stage*).

Yet, a number of direct statements (*leaves little impression … it's difficult to understand why she was cast*) leave no doubt about his real opinion. Indeed, an apparent compliment (*This unfolding of a melody throughout a show can climax …*) is sometimes undermined straight away by such a direct statement – *Here it simply feels like leaning on a good tune too often* – so that the syntax creates a rather downbeat tone with the final words here suggesting a lack of effort on the production's part.

The more forthright comments leave little doubt about the writer's true sentiments as he highlights the central performer, in particular, as his target. She is described in negative terms and there is little attempt to offer any apparent compliments as the reviewer draws on contrasts between the expectations of the audience and the unexpected experience they come across: where the lead character should be *fiercely ambitious* the performer's voice *is so thin and small*, suggesting a sense of frailty and inadequacy symbolic of her entire performance and not just her voice. A further contrast is used to suggest how low the reviewer estimates her. He employs strong adjectives to describe one of her rivals – a *hungry, attention-grabbing … Patti Lupone* – conveying her sense of passion and self-centred demands in comparison to the current star who *can barely hold the stage*, the **adverb** implying her limitations and frailty once more.

Other adverbs are also used by the writer, as if he is taking us into his own private thoughts and opening up to us – he repeats the word *frankly* as if reaching a decisive and revealing moment of recognition and understanding about his feelings for the show. Yet, there are some occasions where he cannot hide his sense of voice, his rather sarcastic tone, expressing his inner thoughts. He follows the rhetorical question *An entire nation prostrates itself at her feet?* – where he blurs the line between the real Eva Peron who was adored by some of her followers in her lifetime – with the actual actor playing her so that there is again an answer which adds to the other aspects of the downbeat tone in the article: *You doubt they'd even notice her…*

KEY TERMS

modal a form or type of verb that modifies the meaning of another one (e.g. *I **might** go* alters or modifies the meaning of the verb *to go* so that it suggests possibility; another modal, *will*, when added to *go* modifies the meaning again, so that it expresses certainty)

adverb a word which tells us more about a verb

ACTIVITY 1.48

1 Which of the *other* features or techniques you picked up in the activity opposite have been identified in the commentary?
2 Which have been missed, if any?
3 What comments are made in the commentary about the mood and perspective of the reviewer?

A film review

By reading other reviews for different art forms, you can begin to pick up on common conventions that they share, whilst at the same time beginning to appreciate the distinctive voice of individual critics.

ACTIVITY 1.49

Read this extract from a review of a different art form – a film about Princess Diana. Begin by listing key words and phrases, preparing to comment on the kinds of techniques and effects the writer employs to express her opinions about the film.

What was Naomi Watts thinking? No sooner has she landed her second Oscar nod for tsunami drama *The Impossible* than she's in over her head trying to pass herself off as **Princess Diana**[1]. She must have some nerve, too, tackling the last days of "the most famous woman in the world" when no film-maker in this country would dare touch the story.

As it turns out, Watts and Hirschbiegel aren't that plucky at all. Their approach to Diana is tentative, like a couple of tourists on a British beach, dipping their toes in shallow water and running out again at the first nip of cold. For Hirschbiegel there is a more bitter irony in that almost a decade after making Hitler look human in *Downfall* (and earning an Oscar nomination), he has failed to do for Diana what he did for the most evil man who ever lived.

The cocked head, the tilted chin, the searching gaze beneath fluttering eyelashes; it's as if Naomi Watts is being mildly electrocuted to reproduce all the ticks and quirks that Diana exhibited in her **1995 interview with Martin Bashir**[2]. It's easy to imagine Hirschbiegel behind the camera with his finger on the buzzer, pressing every time he wants an emotional reaction. Unfortunately, it does not have the desired effect.

What was Diana thinking? It's difficult to tell behind the mascara and the nervous mannerisms. This rendering is very blonde and very bland.

That interview with Bashir is a flashpoint for the film, but it's Diana's romance with Pakistani heart surgeon Hasnat Khan (much too earnestly played by *Lost* star Naveen Andrews) that provides its framework. He falls hook, line and sinker for that eyelash thing, but if this is a love story between sinner and saint, he's the one wearing the halo. "I save lives," he says (more than once) and Diana is suitably impressed.

Not to be outdone, though, she wanders through minefields, kisses sick children and invites an old blind man in a crowd to touch her face. Her humanitarian work is reductively portrayed – just another way to elicit sympathy for her troubles, because long eyelashes will only get you so far.

It's tempting to think that Diana's charitable efforts were, in some way, an attempt to redeem her less attractive features, but Hirschbiegel doesn't bridge the gap between the conflicting sides of her character. He doesn't even try. He only hints at her manipulative tendencies. Diana makes light of being "a mad bitch stalker" after breaking into Khan's flat, donning rubber gloves and proceeding to (shock, horror) clean the kitchen.

She's also seen playing cat-and-mouse games with the press when **Dodi Fayed**[3] enters the picture. Of course no one could sympathise with a bunch of slobbering press hounds, but what of the man who was killed alongside her? He only gets two lines in the script (bad news for jobbing actor Cas Anvar), but according to this film, he was only bait to make Khan jealous. Best to keep him in the background then, in case he starts looking like the forgotten victim in all this.

The thing is, Diana was lonely. Oh so lonely ... That's how Geraldine James explains away her questionable behaviour as acupuncturist and friend Oonagh Toffolo. Diana's relationship with Khan is marked by separation because he firmly insists that he is "a private man", unable to see how he can operate on people's hearts ("saving people's lives!") with paps shoving cameras in his face.

On the other hand, he can't live without Diana and the montage-friendly fun they had: watching telly on the sofa, frolicking on the beach and in the bedroom, her head thrown back in rapturous laughter – often