

MR Bruff's Guide To

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION



2017 EXAMS ONWARDS

OVER 100 PAGES

**INCLUDES LINKS TO
EXCLUSIVE VIDEOS**

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SCHOOL LICENCE EDITION

PRAISE FOR MR BRUFF'S PREVIOUS GCSE ENGLISH REVISION GUIDE & YOUTUBE VIDEOS:

A straightforward guide with a really helpful intro telling the child exactly what will be on each paper - sounds simple but cleared the skies for my boy. Then lots of clear instructions and tips so that even though my child lacked confidence he began to think he could grasp enough to pass the exam - no result yet but he came out of both exams feeling he had done much better than imagined possible before we found this book. Less conventional than other study guides so more accessible. Well done Mr B.



Since the start of year 11 I went through tuition, a year and a half of revising, practising and buying almost every revision guide on the market. I received my mock results and I saw on my paper that I got a U: 33/80. I was disappointed to say the least. 5 months to go before I sat the exams which determine whether I can make it somewhere in life and I was currently sitting on a U. I had tried everything.

Anyways, off with the sob story. My skills in English Language were not improving at the rate I hoped; with 4 months left my teacher wanted me to do foundation tier but I begged her not to. Suddenly, I bumped into Mr.Bruff's YouTube videos. Amazing! Absolutely amazing!(see that, guys? Mr.Bruff taught me how to use repetition, short sentences and alliteration for effect whereas before that I probably would have described his resources as 'very good'). After watching all his videos over and over and over again and reading all his revision guides and looking at his example answers I was able to produce "astounding"(quote from teacher) pieces of work which allowed me to move from an U grade to 60/80 in the march mocks which, despite only being 75%, is an A* grade. I cannot thank you enough Mr.Bruff for how quickly your services changed my life, as they not only gave me hope for English but you actually made the subject seem extremely straightforward and suddenly everything glued together and I began to thrive in English so much that I am even considering English A' level. Can you imagine going from a U and then considering doing the A' level within 4 months?

Lewis Smith



Thank you so much; this book proved to be an amazing and invaluable resource last year when I was preparing for my GCSE English. This wasn't my first or even second attempt, but rather my third. I gained, at first a Grade E, followed two years later by a Grade D. A Grade C seemed to prove elusive to me. Until last year.

I came on to Amazon, like so many before me, and began my search. Luckily, I didn't need to look far, as I quickly discovered Mr Bruff. I bought the eBook and it was literally the best purchase I made throughout my time on the course; it was like a breath of fresh air for me. Quickly I discovered his videos, which really enhanced my revision, along with podcasts. I soon shared them with my fellow students-one of the highlights of the course was of myself and several fellow students returning to our cars one night, singing one of Mr Bruff's podcasts!

Finally, after months of hard work, with the coursework submitted and the exam sat, I joined hordes of teenagers collecting my results. I decided I was playing it cool, I was predicted a B, but I was extremely doubtful that I would achieve such a grade. I felt that it was best not to get my hopes up and be disappointed when the results came out, if I didn't get the grade I hoped for. So, I predicted myself a Grade C as I felt I had not had done as well in the exam as I'd hoped, though I had applied many of Mr Bruff's tips and advice.

On the big day, I duly ripped open my envelope, then stood and stared; I literally could not believe what I was seeing. There was absolutely no way and there had to be a mistake. I had become one of only three students out of fifty-seven who took GCSE English at the college who gained a Grade A in the Summer of 2014. I laughed, cried, danced up and down and celebrated!

It is thanks to Mr Bruff that this achievement was made possible; without his simple and easy to understand revision guide, which guided me through the exam and explained what the examiner is looking for, I know my grade would have been lower. Not only that, but I would have found myself really struggling at times, throughout the course and falling behind. What else can I say, but thank you. It's taken from 1990 to 2014 to achieve my goal and I finally did, thanks to Mr Bruff.



Dear Mr Bruff,

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the YouTube GCSE tutoring videos. My daughter had failed her English Language and Literature three times; she was underachieving at grade U and her teachers lost all faith in her even to get a grade C. However, even with all the resources and revision guides I purchased for her they didn't equate to your phenomenal teaching standards! She started watching your videos two weeks before her English exams, from being predicted grades E/F she managed to achieve Grade A* and Grade A. This feeling was out of this world for her and us, being dyslexic and a visual learner your style of teaching was appropriate to her learning. She believes you're the best virtual teacher that she never had.

Mrs De Silva



Mr Bruff,

I would like to thank you for your infectious enthusiasm and passionate dedication to your subject, which without doubt guaranteed me my A*s in both English Literature and Language. Stumbling across your wise, witty and wonderful videos was like discovering an educational gold mine. I learned so much but in such a fun and enjoyable way that it didn't even feel like studying.

Francesca



Hi Mr Bruff. First things first: I cannot thank you enough for helping me achieve a high grade for my English Language. Having watching your videos day and night I managed to get a grade A. This was an amazing achievement as everyone else in my class got a C or below. I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart because honestly you are an AMAZING teacher! THANK THE LORD that I have discovered your videos because they are honestly the best videos ever... by far!



Mr Bruff's resources are absolutely amazing! I used these throughout studying my GCSEs and they helped me achieve an A! These videos and revision guides are so in depth yet still very accessible and easy to understand! They are perfect for students of all abilities; for those trying to secure that C or even those pushing to get an A*. Even throughout my A-levels I still used resources like those written about 'Frankenstein'. Mr Bruff's passion and knowledge flows throughout his videos and revision guides. The best thing I can say is that these resources, if utilised to their full potential, will give results! If you're not using Mr Bruff - you're a fool!

Eilis Coughlan



Mr Bruff's resources, his book and You Tube channel really helped my son who struggles with English. He got a Grade B for English which was fantastic and down to the help we had from using Mr Bruff.

Patricia Pemberton



Ever since I found Mr Bruff's YouTube channel (which was a day before my GCSE English mock exam) I instantly went from a C grade to an A+ grade! I couldn't believe that I achieved an A+ grade for my mock just by watching one of the videos uploaded by Mr Bruff! Since then I've continued to watch all of the videos in order to help me secure at least an A or A* grade for GCSE English Language and Literature. I must say Mr Bruff is definitely the best English teacher you'll find in the entire world! On that note, thank you Mr Bruff for all of your videos that you have uploaded on YouTube.

Anisha Yasmin



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INTRODUCTION:

Dear Reader,

In 2011, I began creating online tutorial videos at youtube.com/mrbruff, with a vision to share my GCSE expertise in English language and literature. As I write, these videos have been viewed over 5 million times across 214 different nations. To accompany these videos, I have published over 15 revision guide eBooks--one of which you are currently reading! My guide to the previous GCSEs in English language and literature sat at the top of the Amazon bestseller's list for over 45 weeks and achieved huge acclaim; this book aims to build on those strengths.

In this ebook, you'll receive detailed guidance on every question in the AQA GCSE English Literature exams. Please note that this ebook is not endorsed by or affiliated to any exam boards; I am simply an experienced teacher using my expertise to help students.

Over the past five years, I have received thousands of messages of praise and support like those you've just read in the preceding pages. I've heard from students, teachers, parents and the authors themselves, all of whom have offered gratitude for my work.

As an extra bonus, this ebook contains links to two special video tutorials, totalling 33 minutes of my teaching, which are only available to those who purchase this guide.

I hope you enjoy the ebook. If you want to contact me for any reason, please do not hesitate to do so. My personal email address is abruff@live.co.uk

You should also purchase the accompanying eBook which covers the English Language exams, available at mrbruff.com.

Andrew Bruff

www.mrbruff.com

DEDICATION:

I would like to thank a number of people who have been instrumental in supporting my work:

Sunny Ratilal and Sam Perkins, who worked on the front cover design.

Rajni Verma and the rest of the team at Owl Education Ltd, who have been fantastic sponsors of my work.

Noah and Elijah, who lost their 'daddy' to the office far too many times in the completion of this eBook.

Peter Tobin, Kerry Lewis and Georgie Bottomley - three of the integral members of the mrbruff.com team. Your behind the scenes work enables me to keep up the 'front of house': thank you!

Claire, my lovely wife, who got behind me in my vision and supports me in it every day.

Chris - a brother who has put his money where his mouth is and supported the work which so many benefit from.

A WORD FROM OUR WONDERFUL SPONSORS:

The Owl Education Institute is an established and unique company. Based in West London we have been offering intensive tuition in the core subjects—English, Mathematics and Science—for over 25 years. The company shamelessly promotes academic, traditional teaching with an emphasis on examination success. We offer high level tutoring in small, focused groups with each teacher head-hunted and selected for his or her individual expertise and brilliance. An excellent centre with an exceptional reputation, we are now proud sponsors of Mr Bruff and look forward to working with him in the year ahead.

For more information, please visit www.owleducation.co.uk

Quotations from AN INSEPECTOR CALLS AND OTHER PLAYS by J. B. Priestley (these plays first published by William Heineman 1948-50, first published by Penguin Books 1969, Penguin Classics 2000). 'An Inspector Calls' copyright 1947 by J. B. Priestley are reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

Paper 1: Shakespeare and the 19th-Century Novel

Paper 1 assesses one Shakespeare play and one 19th century novel. Your teacher will select the texts you are studying from the following:

Shakespeare:

Macbeth

Romeo and Juliet

The Tempest

The Merchant of Venice

Much Ado About Nothing

Julius Caesar

19th Century Novels:

Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'

Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'

Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'

Charles Dickens' 'Great Expectations'

Charlotte Bronte's 'Jane Eyre'

Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Sign of Four'

In this eBook we shall look at examples from most of these set texts.

The exam length is 1 hour 45 minutes. The paper is marked out of 64. There are 30 marks available for section A, 30 marks available for section B, and 4 marks available for your spelling, punctuation and grammar in section A. You should spend around 50 minutes on each section, with an additional 5 minutes spent checking section A for technical accuracy.

This is a closed book examination, which means that students are not allowed to take copies of their chosen texts into the exam. This is one of the big changes from the previous GCSE and it makes life a lot harder for students, although there will be extracts provided for analysis.

These extracts will be around 10-20 lines in length and will be printed in the question paper. Students will be asked to analyse the extracts and then to refer to the wider text. Bearing in mind that this is a closed book exam, students will need to memorise key quotations from the text as part of their revision process.

A NOTE ABOUT MEMORISING QUOTATIONS

When it comes to memorising quotations, it's essential to select quotations which apply to a broad range of themes and topics. For example, consider the opening line of 'Pride and Prejudice':

'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.'

This is an excellent quotation to memorise as it lends itself to so many topics: attitudes to women, attitudes to men, the importance of marriage, different views of love, the use of narrative voice etc. In fact, there is almost no occasion where this quotation could not be used in an exam answer. These are the quotations you need to find - ones which can be applied to all areas of the text.

The best way to find these quotations is to first write out all of the major themes which a text contains. Sticking with 'Pride and Prejudice', that list might look something like this:

- Genre: romance and satire
- Context of 19th Century England
- Attitudes to women
- Attitudes to men
- Attitudes to love and marriage
- Attitudes to class
- Importance of setting
- Importance of the title
- Austen's use of structure

Once you have listed the major themes of a text (which should be the areas you are studying in school), you should look for quotations which apply to as many of these as possible. You can create a table like this one on the next page:

THEME	QUOTATION	HOW IT APPLIES
Genre: romance and satire	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This is a tongue in cheek, satirical comment used to mock Victorian attitudes to marriage.
Context of 19 th Century England	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	Austen uses this quotation to mock the prevalent attitude in Victorian England that all rich men must be married because of their wealth.
Attitudes to women	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This quotation suggests that women are an object to be sought.
Attitudes to men	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This quotation suggests that what men want, men get. It highlights the theme of male dominance.
Attitudes to love and marriage	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This quotation suggests that marriage is for wealth and status rather than love. Also suggests that money, rather than love, makes a person marriage material.
Attitudes to class	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This quotation suggests that riches and wealth make a man good marriage material. Highlights attitudes to class.
Importance of setting		No relevance to this theme!
Importance of the title	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	This quotation links to the prejudice referred to in the title – prejudice towards those with money.
Austen's use of structure	'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'.	By using this as the opening line, it highlights just how important this notion is to our understanding of the rest of the novel.

As you can see, the quotation fits almost all of the themes. As it doesn't easily fit into the theme of 'setting', I would then begin to look for a good quotation which applies to setting. Now, by memorising just two quotations, I am able to give a quotation for any possible question in the exam. Try to fill in a table for your own set texts - email it to me at abruff@live.co.uk and perhaps I will include it in future editions of this guide!

LINKING CHARACTERS TO THEMES

Another key tip to follow is to link characters to themes. What if the question in the exam is based upon the presentation of Mr Collins? How would I use my memorised quotation now? Students often panic when the characters named in exam questions seem to be minor, obscure or unimportant. The key thing to remember here is that all characters relate to themes. The writer (in this case Jane Austen) has a number of themes and messages she is exploring in her novel. Characters are used to explore these themes. So, let's take the rather obscure character of Mr Collins. At first glance he might seem to be nothing more than a comic interlude in a novel which is otherwise quite serious. However, if we look at Mr Collins in light of the themes we've written out we can see that he plays three major theme linked roles:

1. Mr Collins is used to highlight the necessity of marriage for the Bennett daughters.

It is Mr Collins who is so rude as to mention the income which would be available to the Bennet family after Mr Bennet's death. Mr Bennet's income of £2,000 a year, along with his house, would go to Mr Collins. Mrs Bennet would have to live off the 'one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents'. What does this mean? Well, with Mr Bennet's income entailed to Mr Collins, all that would be left is the interest on Mrs Bennet's £5,000 marriage settlement which would equate to £200 a year. Of this, Elizabeth could expect an equal daughterly share of 1/5, leaving her with just £40 a year if she were not to marry before her father's death. This helps the reader to understand the necessity of marriage for the Bennet girls, and also to respect more the strength of Elizabeth's convictions in refusing both Collins and Darcy. If the girls fail to marry before their father's death, they will have an allowance not much different to that of a farm labourer! Therefore Mr Collins links to the themes of marriage, women and men.

2. Mr Collins is used as a satirical attack on class.

There are many hilarious sides to Mr Collins, but my favourite has to be his obsession with the fact that 'the chimney-piece alone [at Rosings] had cost eight hundred pounds'. This is a ridiculous point, made all the more humorous for its regular repetition. Similarly the way in which Lady Catherine seems to feature so heavily in Mr Collins' life is also laughable. That Lady Catherine had "vouchsafed to suggest...some shelves in the closet up stairs" in Mr Collins' house is ridiculous. However, behind these passages are the serious issues of undeserved respect to higher classes and an obsession with wealth.

Austen's novel can be seen as a scathing criticism of class based snobbery, society's expectations of women and attitudes to marriage. The genius of the writer is to disperse all of these themes into a very comic tale. As a result, readers get the point but also enjoy themselves whilst they are getting it. Austen is like that funny teacher at school who manages to make you laugh and get great grades at the same time.

3. Mr Collins is used to criticise the patriarchal society in which Austen was writing.

If the life of a woman in Austen's era is unfair, it is also unavoidable. In chapter 13, Mr Bennet reminds his daughters that Mr Collins has a right "when I am dead...to turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases". What Mr Bennet refers to in this chapter is the act of entailment.

As the Bennets were a rich family, Mr Bennet's father entailed his property. This means that the entire wealth went to one person - the eldest son. That way, the wealth and property would remain strong and undiluted. What does this mean? Well, if Mr Bennet's father had five sons, the wealth would soon be divided into such small amounts that it would not count for much at all. So Mr Bennet, as the eldest son, inherited everything. Mr Collins' father (Mr Bennet's brother) inherited nothing. This tradition passes on to future generations too, but Mr Bennet has no sons and so the nearest male heir inherits everything. The big point here is that women were seen as so inferior that they were not recognised in entailment laws. This is further explained in chapter 50:

'When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come; and Mrs.

Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income.'

An estate did not have to be entailed, as we see with Lady Catherine's estate which will be inherited by her daughter. However, once an estate was entailed, there was no room for females to inherit anything. This left many women in a very tough situation - they simply had to marry a rich man in order to live a rich life (see the chapter on marriage for more on this).

So there we have it: Mr Collins is quite important after all! Why not try this with all of the major and minor characters in the text you are studying - you should be able to link each of them to at least one of the text's major themes.

After mapping out the key themes of a text, try to find a small number of quotations which apply to as many of the themes as possible. Finally, try to link all characters to the themes / meanings they convey. If you know your text well, there is no way you can be shocked by something unexpected in the exam.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES:

The assessment objectives for this exam paper are:

A01: Read, understand and respond to texts

A02: Analyse language, structure and form

A03: Understand the contexts in which texts were written

A04: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for effect.

I will explore each of these in detail throughout this guide. However, let's start by looking at A03: context.

The term 'context' can be understood in a variety of ways and will vary depending upon which text you are studying. Context can mean: when the text was written, when and where the text was set, literary context and genre or

responses from different audiences. Let's begin with thinking about the events and circumstances surrounding when a text was written.

EXAMPLE: Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'

'Frankenstein' was written in the early 1800s, at a time of great social and historical change. In the 1760s, Jean Jacques Rousseau's 'Emile' explored the nature of education and human beings. In this text, the writer argues that humans are born harmless, and that it is society which makes people either good or bad. Today we might call this the 'nature vs. nurture' debate, and it is certainly one of the major themes in 'Frankenstein'. Turn to part 17 of this guide for a detailed chapter.

The novel 'Frankenstein' is a horror text, and to make something truly horrific it needs to tap into the fears of its readers; Shelley did this brilliantly. In order to create a truly terrifying book, Mary Shelley based the foundations of her tale on a recent scientific development which had been frightening the public: Galvanism.

Luigi Galvani was a scientist who experimented on dead animals with electricity. He found that the limbs of animals could be caused to spasm if touched with an electric current. Giovanni Aldini, Galvani's nephew, took these experiments one step further and tried them out on the body of a human being. In 1803 a man named George Foster murdered his wife and child and was hanged for the crime. Shortly after the hanging, Aldini took the body and experimented on it with electricity! The results were detailed as follows:

'On the first application of the process to the face, the jaws of the deceased criminal began to quiver, and the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened. In the subsequent part of the process the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion '.

As you can see, this bears quite the similarity with the novel 'Frankenstein' where, in chapter 5, we read:

'By the glimmer of the half - extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.'

The similarities are uncanny - even down to the opening of just one eye! Mary Shelley based the ideas in her novel on real-life events: the experimentation of electricity with dead bodies. This made the novel extremely terrifying as

readers would worry that what happened in the novel (the creature goes on an unstoppable murderous rampage) would happen in real life too. It could be argued that this is why the novel is still so popular. Today we experiment with cloning, stem cell research and artificial intelligence. Behind it all is the fear that the results of our creation will overpower us and cause chaos and devastation.

Buy my guide to 'Frankenstein' here: www.mrbruff.com/frankenstein/

AN IMPORTANT NOTE:

Sometimes a writer will choose to set their text in a different historical period to the one in which they are writing. When this happens, we need to ask ourselves *why* they have done this. Let's explore this idea further, through taking a look at JB Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls' which was written in 1945 but set in 1912. I know this text is part of paper 2, but I will explain the contextual factors here as that's our current topic of study. Before you read on, think about the significance of those two years.

An Inspector Calls is set in 1912.	An Inspector Calls was written in 1945.
The First World War is yet to start. Birling's view that "the Germans don't want war" is known to be incorrect by all audience members as the play wasn't performed until 1946.	World War II ended on 8 May 1945. People were recovering from nearly 6 years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.
The Titanic was in production but hadn't made its ill-fated maiden voyage.	It was known that the Titanic sank in 1912.
There was a patriarchal society – men were seen as more powerful than women, women were seen as cheap labour, their main concern was to get married, be a housewife and look after the children.	As a result of the wars and the Suffragette movement, women were more valued in society.
The ruling classes saw no need to change their position. There was a strong divide between the upper and lower classes.	There was a great desire for social change and, primarily as a result of the wars, there were less divisions between classes

In 1912, when the play is set, the ruling classes saw no need for change; they were keen to stay in power. The Birlings, a wealthy family, represent others of a similar social status. They are heavily criticised by Priestley in the play (via the role of the Inspector) as they initially take no responsibility for their actions

and the effect they have on others. An audience at the time -from 1946 to the present day, are aware that a family such as the Birlings would soon hear about the sinking of the Titanic and would then have to endure two world wars.

Priestley, having witnessed two world wars which were fought to save society, questions what kind of society people were fighting to save. The very idea of 'society' suggests a group working together and looking out for one another; taking social responsibility is vital. Seeing characters before the wars may provide some hope to Priestley's audience who had been through a very difficult period. The attitude of the Birlings and the way they are so quick to dismiss any involvement with the unpleasant nature of Eva's suicide would, no doubt, speak to an audience at the time who had lived through the result of such complacency and ignorance. An audience in the late 1940s would still have been deprived of many of the luxuries that the Birlings enjoy at the beginning of the play as rationing continued into the 1950s, so the wealthy Birlings can be seen as materialistic and superficial.

Priestley may well have set his play in 1912 because it started a time of great change. In the period between the two dates, class and gender differences were not so pronounced and there was hope for a better future if young people could be educated and take responsibility for their actions and their treatment of others.

You can buy 'Mr Bruff's Guide to 'An Inspector Calls'' at www.mrbruff.com

WHERE A TEXT IS SET:

Once we understand *when* a text is set, it may be helpful to look at *where* it takes place. Often, a writer will set their text in a different place to that in which they live. Why do they do this? It could be that the writer is criticising the society in which they live, but wants to make their criticism subtle and less obvious, by distancing themselves from the action. In Percy Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias' (more on that later in the book), the poet criticise King George III. However, he sets his poem in the 'distant land' of Egypt, supposedly criticising the pharaoh Ozymandias. Shelley begins 'Ozymandias' by detaching himself from the story being told because he wants to immediately make the point 'this is not an open criticism of the British monarchy'. However, the poem is clearly a thinly veiled attack.

Sometimes there are numerous reasons for a foreign setting. With Shakespeare plays, settings often reflect the source of a text. Shakespeare sets 'Romeo and Juliet' in Verona, Italy. Similarly, 'The Merchant of Venice' is set in...Venice.

Why is that? Although many students assume that William Shakespeare created the storylines of his plays, the truth is that it was often someone else who came up with the original plot.

The Italian writer Matteo Bandello (1480-1562) is the original creator of what we now know as 'Romeo and Juliet'. He wrote the short story 'Giuliette e Romeo', supposedly based on a true life story which had taken place in his home country of Italy (hence the Italian setting of Shakespeare's play). In 1562 the English poet Arthur Brooke translated the short story into a poem (along with some small plot changes which affected minor characters such as the Nurse and the Friar). Brooke died a year after publication and the now classic tale was picked up by the English novelist William Painter, who adapted it into a novel entitled 'The Palace of Pleasure' (1567). Finally, around the year 1590, William Shakespeare adapted the story for the stage, writing the play 'Romeo and Juliet'. In the 400+ years that followed, the play would go on to become one of the best known stories in the world.

So, it is possible that Shakespeare set 'Romeo and Juliet' in Italy because that is where the story originated. Also, the setting of Italy 'makes sense' for the story - Italy was known as a romantic city just as Paris is today. The streets are narrow, which creates the perfect intense setting for street fights, and the weather is hot, which will raise the tension and violence in the characters as their 'blood runs hot'. But what if Shakespeare is using the play to criticise elements of Elizabethan England?

I explore this more fully in my guide to 'Romeo and Juliet', but the play can be read as a scathing criticism of Catholicism. England had only just become a Protestant nation, so perhaps Shakespeare felt it would be too controversial to set such a powerful attack in his native country. Similarly, the play can be seen to criticise the English ritual of arranged marriage which was prevalent in the upper classes. Once again, perhaps Shakespeare did not wish to so openly attack the conventions of his own country, so he detached it from England through its foreign setting. When Capulet calls his daughter a "wretch" for refusing to marry Paris, Shakespeare is clearly pointing an accusatory finger at English fathers. In the 1500s, arranged marriages were the norm for upper class families. It was very acceptable for your parents to choose whom you married. Once again, Shakespeare uses a foreign setting to distance himself slightly from complete open criticism of Elizabethan England.

'The Merchant of Venice' is another of Shakespeare's plays where we can ask why the playwright chose the foreign setting. Just like 'Romeo and Juliet', it is a story which Shakespeare did not himself create. The 14th Century writer Ser Giovanni wrote 'Il Pecorone' way before Shakespeare was born. This story tells

of a rich young man who travels to Belmont and meets a rich widow. To win her over he borrows money from a Jewish moneylender, which is ultimately paid for with a pound of flesh! Yes, it seems clear that one explanation for the Venetian setting is the fact that the story originated there. It also, like 'Romeo and Juliet', ties neatly into the plot. In Elizabethan England, Venice was a key trading centre. Exotic goods were traded in the city, which was home to the explorer Marco Polo, so Venice is a great setting for a story where trading is essential.

It is also possible that Shakespeare set the play in Venice to distance himself slightly from the criticism of England we find within the play. 'The Merchant of Venice' contains many themes, but one is the treatment of Jews. In Shakespeare's time, Jews had been banished from England. One interpretation is that Shakespeare uses the play to attack the unjust treatment of the Jews. When Shylock asks "if you prick us do we not bleed?" it is easy to hear the voice of Shakespeare challenging his audience with the fact that Jews are no different to them.

Another key theme of 'The Merchant of Venice' is the role of parent and child. Even after his death, Portia's father controls whom she is going to marry. When Portia asks Nerissa 'isn't it a pain that I can't choose or refuse anyone?' it is once again easy to hear the echo of Shakespeare's own challenge to the audience just as we found in 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Whatever conclusions we draw, it is important to ask ourselves 'where is the text set?' and 'why is this important?'

You can buy Mr Bruff's guide to 'The Merchant of Venice' at www.mrbruff.com

SO WHY IS CONTEXT IMPORTANT?

Now you understand some of the ways in which we can study context, let's look at how our understanding of it shapes meaning.

At GCSE, relevant contextual factors often revolve around attitudes to gender, religion, marriage and love. Understanding these factors helps us to understand the text so much better. For example, let's take a look at Act 1 Scene 3 of 'Romeo and Juliet'. At first glance it seems to be a simple comic scene, but when we understand contextual attitudes to women and marriage, it becomes clear that it is so much more.

Act 1 Scene 3 offers a welcome dose of comedy to the play. The Nurse is a fantastic character with a bawdy, sexual sense of humour. Whereas the servant

in Act 1 Scene 2 offered some light comedy, the Nurse is all out slapstick in this scene. Perhaps the funniest part of this scene is where she tells a long anecdote from Juliet's childhood:

"For even the day before, she broke her brow: And then my husband—God be with his soul! A' was a merry man—took up the child: 'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face? Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit'".

After telling this long story the Nurse, proving that she is a forgetful woman, repeats the whole thing once more! The juxtaposition of the uninhibited Nurse and the reserved Lady Capulet and Juliet makes the comic effect even more powerful.

However, this scene also offers an insight into the role of women in Shakespeare's time. When the baby Juliet falls over onto her face, the Nurse's husband remarks 'Thou wilt fall backward when thou comest to age'. The meaning of this line is clear: when you grow into a woman you will fall onto your back to have sex. To a modern audience this line may seem shocking - the Nurse's husband is talking to a baby girl about the sexual future that awaits her. However, an Elizabethan audience would see nothing odd here.

In Shakespeare's time, women were seen as little more than mothers and objects of male desire. Most women were denied anything beyond a basic schooling. Even when girls did go to grammar schools, many classes had 'male only' signs on the doors; girls would only be taught the most basic subjects. Upper class families (like Juliet's) would hire tutors to teach their children, but even then the prospects for an educated woman were very slim: women could not enter any profession or even vote, but instead were being prepared for domestic lives. Upper class girls were taught how to cook, sew, play instruments and do anything else which might be seen to make domestic life more attractive.

The only option for a woman was to get married and to run the household. With this in mind, we can see that the Nurse's husband was right: Juliet (and all women of the time) was fated to end up being attached to a man. Today women have no need to marry, but failure to find a husband in Shakespeare's time meant a desperate life.

Females could only survive through the men who provided for them. As children, girls would rely on their father for financial support and protection. When married, this responsibility passed on to the husband. It was almost unheard of not to marry - if a woman didn't wed there were only two other options available: become a nun or become a prostitute. This shocking contextual detail helps us to see the situation Juliet is in here.

At the time 'Romeo and Juliet' was written it was illegal to marry without parental consent, meaning you needed Mum and Dad's permission to get married. Juliet's mother and father want her to marry Paris, an eligible bachelor. It is an example of dramatic irony (where the audience know more than the characters on the stage) that we already know Juliet is fated to be with Romeo, not Paris.

As you can see, it is only through our understanding of context that we are able to fully appreciate the meaning of this scene. Now let's look at a sample question.

Section A: Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of Romeo and Juliet and then answer the following question.

At this point in the play Romeo and Juliet have just met.

ROMEO

If I profane with my unworthiest hand,
This holy shrine; the gentle fine is this;
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

QUESTION: Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards love in Romeo and Juliet.

Write about:

What Romeo says to Juliet in this conversation

How Shakespeare presents love in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

The mark scheme is divided into 6 levels for both Section A and B of this exam. Level 6 (26-30 marks) is distinguished by three key areas:

1. Exploration of task, text, effect on reader, and context
2. Conceptualised response to task and text
3. Analysis of writer's use of language, structure and form

There are two key points to make here. Firstly, students aiming for top marks will present a well-structured argument. Secondly, top marks can only be achieved by those who analyse language, structure and form. Let's look at those two points in detail. These points apply to both Literature papers, so what I am about to explain applies to the entirety of this revision guide.

A WELL STRUCTURED ARGUMENT:

When analysing a text, most students will be able to pick out a few different ideas. However, the majority of students write exam answers which consist of four or five disjointed ideas that bear no relation to each other. Consider the following answer to the Shakespeare question:

EXTRACT FROM A 'GOOD' SAMPLE ANSWER:

'In this extract Shakespeare uses language to suggest that love is a spiritual and Godly emotion. We see this through Shakespeare's use of language where Romeo continually uses religious imagery when explaining his feelings to Juliet. He calls Juliet a 'holy shrine' which suggests that Juliet is a deity. Romeo also professes that he himself is a 'pilgrim' - someone on a religious journey to visit a sacred site. This extended metaphor continues throughout the extract and is used by Shakespeare to suggest that the love felt by Romeo and Juliet is pure, holy and sacred.

Shakespeare uses form to convey the importance of the love between Romeo and Juliet. The combined conversation between the two joins together to complete a perfect sonnet. Sonnets are a form of love poetry

which have fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, with the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Shakespeare's employment of form is here used to symbolise that the couple are perfect for each other, and complete each other. Only when united together do their words create a sonnet, symbolising how they can only find true love when joined together. The audience would feel delighted that these two, both so clearly unhappy with the way their lives were heading, have found perfect happiness.

In the wider context of the play as a whole, Shakespeare presents love as a very sexual experience. We see this in Act 1 where Romeo laments that Rosaline would not 'ope her lap to saint seducing gold'. Romeo is here explaining that Rosaline would not have sex with him, even when offered money. This suggests that love is a very sexual experience.'

Whilst this answer is quite sophisticated (particularly in the points concerning form) it fails to come across as a well constructed argument. There is no link between the three paragraphs; it reads as three totally different ideas: love as religious, love as perfect, love as sexual. To hit the top marks, you need to create a line of argument in which all of these points can fit together. Is there a way of interpreting these quotations which allows us to present all of them as different aspects of the same point? Perhaps the point could simply be that love is all encompassing, filling both the physical, sexual side of life and the spiritual, religious side? Re-phrasing the answer in this way would then allow us to present a well structured argument:

EXTRACT FROM A 'BETTER' SAMPLE ANSWER:

'Both in this extract and the wider play, Shakespeare presents love as all encompassing, filling every aspect of life. To begin with, Shakespeare uses language to suggest that love is a spiritual and Godly emotion. We see this through Shakespeare's use of language where Romeo continually uses religious imagery when explaining his feelings to Juliet. He calls Juliet a 'holy shrine' which suggests that Juliet is a deity. Romeo also professes that he himself is a 'pilgrim' - someone on a religious journey to visit a sacred site. This extended metaphor continues throughout the extract and is used by Shakespeare to suggest that the love felt by Romeo and Juliet is pure, holy and sacred. This is the first time the audience has seen Romeo use such religious language, and as result we are inclined to believe in the love he has for Juliet. As the play is set in Italy, a very religious city, the use of religious language seems all the more appropriate for the time and place in which the action takes place.

If the spiritual aspect of love is one side, the other side of love is the physical and sexual aspect, which is presented as being just as important by Shakespeare. Earlier in the play, Romeo lamented how Rosaline would not 'ope her lap for saint seducing gold'. This line is ambiguous, but seems to suggest that Romeo had offered Rosaline payment in return for sexual gratification. Here Shakespeare is presenting a different side to love - not only is it spiritual, but also physical. The message is clear: love is all encompassing and all-consuming. The audience would note that two seemingly contrasting topics are used to discuss the theme of love, suggesting that in true love there is no contrast: all is united. At the time in which the play was written, arranged marriages were the norm between the middle and upper classes. To an Elizabethan audience they would understand Shakespeare's message here: true love transcends the conventions of society.

Finally, Shakespeare uses form to convey this all-encompassing nature of love. The combined conversation between the two in the extract joins together to complete a perfect sonnet. Sonnets are a form of love poetry which have fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, with the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Shakespeare's employment of form is here used to symbolise that the couple are perfect for each other, and complete each other. Only when united together do their words create a sonnet, symbolising how they can only find true love when joined together. The audience would feel delighted that these two, both so clearly unhappy with the way their lives were heading, have found perfect happiness. Perfect love, it seems clear, is the joined combination of spiritual and physical romance'.

As you can see, I didn't have to do much to join my points together into one well constructed argument. It just required a little thought. Throughout both Literature papers this is something you need to do in order to achieve the highest marks available.

ABOUT THE QUESTIONS:

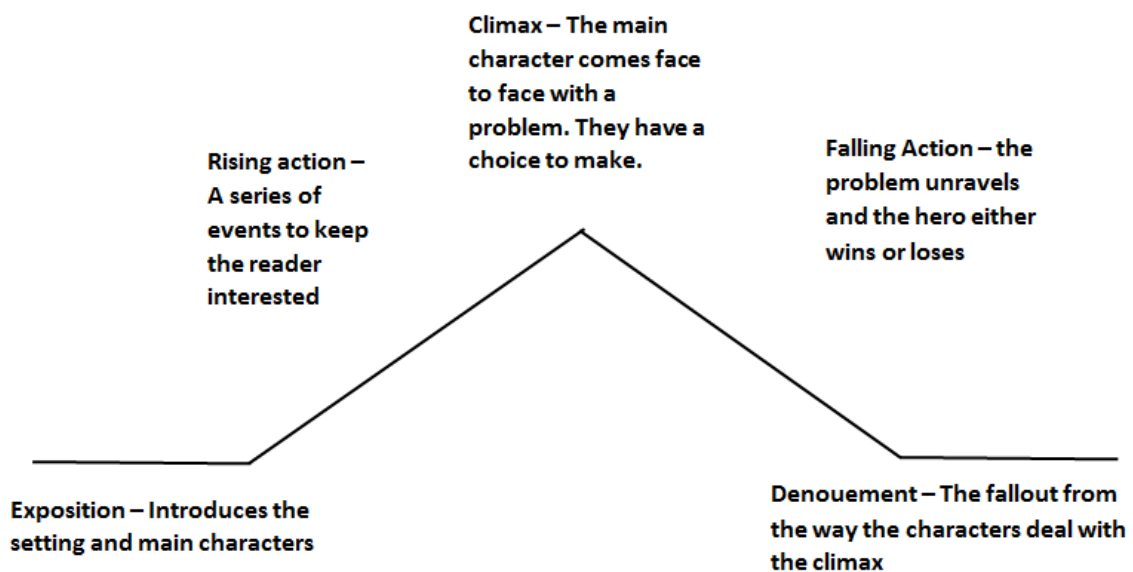
Many students fail to realise that every exam question can elicit a conceptualised, well argued response. Whoever writes the exam questions has to spend a lot of time thinking about the possible responses, so you too must give yourself at least a few minutes of planning time to think about a line of argument you can take in the exam.

ANALYSING LANGUAGE, STRUCTURE AND FORM

We've seen it in my sample answer, but let me just clarify the difference between these three areas of analysis:

Language refers to the words which are used. This is the simplest line of analysis, and the one which most students write about first. Whether you are picking out language devices such as similes and metaphors, or just picking out words/phrases which seem important, it's all language analysis.

Structure refers to the organisation of a text. The Greek philosopher Aristotle, around the year 335 BC, wrote 'Poetics', a book which included theories on narrative structure. Aristotle believed that drama could be divided into three sections. In the 19th Century, building on the work of Aristotle, the German novelist Gustav Freytag proposed that all five act plays follow the same format:



In the literature exam you can think about the structure of an extract or poem, but also the structure of where that extract occurs in the text to begin with.

Form refers to the times when writers follow particular rules about the organisation of a text. For example, Shakespeare's use of the sonnet form in this extract.

My whole-hearted advice is to look for points related to structure and form to make first. Remember: the examiner will mark hundreds of papers. Most students will be writing about language, so for you to stand out and be recognised as perceptive, you need to make points which most students don't notice. The best way to do this is to at least start with points on structure and form.

ANALYSING LANGUAGE / STRUCTURE AND FORM: AN EXAMPLE

William Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' contains a wealth of moral dilemmas and themes for students to explore. Also, it is rich in structural and language techniques that students will explore through the analysis of each scene.

Shakespeare makes use of dramatic irony, often presenting the audience with situations where we know more about what is going on than the characters do. This enhances both the tension in the play and also the audience's involvement. There is also a lot to be said about the language Shakespeare employs throughout the play. For example, Shakespeare uses iambic pentameter to distinguish between different types of characters. In many parts of the play, language also reflects the state-of-mind of characters, mainly Macbeth.

Language is also used in a devious way and links to one of the main themes in the play, the idea of appearance versus reality. In many of the key scenes of the play, there are half-truths being told, characters hiding behind masks (metaphorically speaking) and pretending to be one thing while doing another.

Many of the metaphors we see surround being one thing while doing or saying or meaning something different. We also see metaphors dealing with clothing - putting on or taking off different garments meaning or suggesting that the character is putting on different personalities or pretending to be different people.

As with many of Shakespeare's plays, there is also a strong link to nature. Many of the language techniques he uses for comparison invoke natural imagery. When he is talking about the witches, Shakespeare uses base or lower creatures such as toads, rats and snakes. There is also a very interesting parallel that Shakespeare sets up between nature and the play. Often, we see the effects of what men do in the play carried out in nature. So, for example, if a man kills a king, then we see something equally "unnatural" in nature - a small bird killing a hawk, a horse kicking against his master.

This natural order also relates to why this play is seen as one of Shakespeare's tragedies. For his play to be a tragedy, the main protagonist or central character must fall from a high position (socially) because of some tragic flaw

(hamartia) within themselves. In Macbeth, the main protagonist decides to kill the king to fulfill his ambitions and this leads to his downfall. According to the strict hierarchy in Shakespeare's time, the king was at the top and no one from below him (lords, noblemen, soldiers or peasants) could move up. This is what Macbeth does and in order to put the social order back to normal, he must be removed (killed) and the rightful heir must take the throne.

This opens up some of the key questions in the play. Academics have long argued some of the finer points of this play and some of the issues that arise time and again are questions about motive. Would Macbeth have killed his king without the presence of female characters in the play (Lady Macbeth and the witches)? Is Shakespeare making a comment on the power or influence of women? Is Macbeth's fatal flaw ambition or greed? Or is Macbeth simply a weak man who gives in to the desires of others and allows himself to be caught up in their wishes and plans?

Structure is another key element to this play and, throughout, Shakespeare makes use of things like foreshadowing and echoing. Often, ideas or imagery are used at one point in the play to signal a later development. At the beginning, for example, the Thane of Cawdor is executed for being a traitor. His title, Cawdor, is given to Macbeth - who also turns out to be a traitor.

These links strengthen the narrative of the play and can also act like signposts for the reader/audience to follow on their journey through the story. They are also useful for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the play. When speaking about a significant part, it can be related to a later event demonstrating both textual knowledge and awareness of structural techniques.

Finally, one of the overriding questions that persists throughout the play is whether or not the audience can have sympathy for Macbeth. For it to be a tragedy, we must feel some sympathy for him at the end, otherwise it's just a story of a very bad person who gets what he deserves. Shakespeare, as you will see through the analysis of each scene, works very hard on the structure and the language to present Macbeth as a character for whom we can feel sympathy. By shielding him from some of the most horrific moments and using language to expose his despair and isolation, Shakespeare is trying to present a multi-faceted character who, despite his actions, holds onto the reader's emotions and sympathy until the very end.

You can buy 'Mr Bruff's Guide to 'Macbeth'' here:

<http://www.mrbruff.com/macbeth/>

NOTE:

Remember, this is a closed book exam. Because of this, the bulk of your answer should focus on the given extract. Although the bullet points ask you to write about the theme's presentation in the text as a whole, there is no requirement to write an equal amount as you do about the extract. In fact, it is fine to write more about the extract and perhaps one good paragraph about the rest of the text.

PEE PARAGRAPHS:

You must structure all of your paragraphs in the PEE paragraph format. What does this mean? Let me explain:

P: Point - This is where you answer the question.

E: Evidence - This is where you find a quotation from the text to prove your point

E: Explain - This is the most important part, where you explain HOW your quotation proves your point.

Let's take a look at one of my previous sample answer paragraphs and break it into its PEE components:

Point: Shakespeare presents love as a religious and sacred experience.

Evidence: We see this through Shakespeare's use of language where Romeo continually uses religious imagery when explaining his feelings to Juliet. He calls Juliet a 'holy shrine' which suggests that Juliet is a deity. Romeo also professes that he himself is a 'pilgrim' – someone on a religious journey to visit a sacred site.

Explain: This extended metaphor continues throughout the extract and is used by Shakespeare to suggest that the love felt by Romeo and Juliet is pure, holy and sacred.

NOTE:

As you can see, it is vital that you know your set text in detail. Not only should you study the text in class, you should read it yourself at home too, perhaps looking for points about structure and form. In a closed book exam there is no way you can achieve top marks without knowing your text thoroughly. Opinion

varies, but I know that as a teacher I have read and taught a certain text ten times and STILL found different points each time I read it. At the very least, read your texts twice. Search online for free audiobook versions and listen to them whilst tidying your room (if you ever do such a thing).

DOES THE QUALITY OF MY WRITING MATTER?

A04 is assessed in Section A only. To gain the full 4 marks, you should achieve consistent accuracy in spelling and punctuation. You must also use sentence structures and vocabulary which allows them to clearly express their meaning. Let's spend some time looking at the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The assessment objectives for this paper are weighted. This means that some have more importance than others. A01 and A02 each count for 15% of the 40% total awarded for this paper. A03 is worth just 7.5% and A04 only 2.5%. In simple terms, this means that writing about context should be present but not overly focused upon. The greatest focus should be given to analysis of language, structure and form.

TECHNICAL ACCURACY

4 of the marks available in section A of both papers are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Because of this, you need to learn the following technical skills.

CAPITAL LETTERS

Capital letters may seem like a very easy place to start, but in actual fact there are many uses of a capital and if you make mistakes with these supposedly 'simple' pieces of punctuation then you will struggle to get a high grade. Despite their hidden complexities, there is little more off-putting and instantly recognisable to an examiner than the incorrect use of a capital letter.

You should use a capital letter for:


1. The start of a sentence e.g. 'Today is Monday'.
2. Names of people, brands, days of the week and months e.g. 'Andrew, Nike, Monday, January'.
3. Countries and cities e.g. 'America, Plymouth'.
4. Languages and religions e.g. 'French, Buddhist'.
5. Holidays e.g. 'Christmas, Easter'.
6. Titles. The first and significant words in a title need a capital e.g. 'The Lord of the Rings'. In this example the words 'of' and 'the' are not significant- they don't hold the meaning, so they are not capitalised.
7. The personal pronoun 'I' e.g. 'I love Owl Education's revision guide'.
8. Abbreviations e.g. 'BBC'.
9. Emphasising words: if you wish to show strong emotion such as anger you can put whole words or sentences in capitals e.g. 'I HATE YOU!'

As you can see, capital letters are not as simple as you might have thought. Why not try writing a paragraph which incorporates all nine types?

APOSTROPHES OF POSSESSION

Apostrophes of possession show us who or what owns something in a sentence. For example:

Mr Bruff's guides are an amazing resource.



Because the guides belong to Mr Bruff, we put an apostrophe after 'Mr Bruff'.

There is a technique worth learning here, as it makes it all very easy when we get to advanced level apostrophes:

1. Ask yourself who the thing belongs to. Whatever the answer is, the apostrophe goes after that e.g. who do the revision guides belong to? The answer is *Mr Bruff*, so the apostrophe goes after *Mr Bruff*.

If you can understand that simple technique then we can apply it to the advanced level of apostrophes of possession.

APOSTROPHES OF POSSESSION (ADVANCED LEVEL)

The thing about apostrophes of possession is that they very quickly become difficult. Consider the following two sentences:

- **The students work was awesome** (when talking about an individual student).
- **The students drama show was a real let down** (when talking about a group of students).

Where would you put the apostrophes in these sentences? Well, if you apply the technique above it's simple:

In the first sentence who does the work belong to? The answer is **the student**, so we put the apostrophe after the word **student**, making the correct answer: *the student's work was awesome*.

In the second example, who does the drama show belong to? The answer is **the students**, so we put the apostrophe after the word *students*, making the correct answer: *the students' drama show was a real let down*.


This simple reversing technique should help you to work through the following tricky sentences:

The womens movement was a seminal event in history.
The childrens park was in need of some repair.
The babies hats were so cute.

APOSTROPHES OF OMISSION

These are the simplest type of apostrophe, used to show where letters or words have been taken out. Look at the following example:

I didn't even know that spiders could bite.



Here we have shortened the words 'did' and 'not' into the one word 'didn't'. In doing so, we have taken out the letter 'o', so we put an apostrophe of omission in its place to indicate this.

The only challenge with apostrophes of omission is that there are some words which have been shortened for so long that you might not realise it. For example: 8 o clock should be written 8 o'clock, as it was originally shortened from '8 of the clock'.


SENTENCE VARIETY

The following is an absolute must for those students aiming to achieve grade 9 in their English Language exams. So many students fail to vary their sentence structure, and the result is pure boredom for the examiner. If you incorporate the following into your answers for section B, your work will stand out from the rest and impress that examiner.

Two adjective beginnings

The aim here is to start your sentence with two adjectives which describe the subject of the sentence. For example:

Informative and entertaining, Mr Bruff's eBook was a worldwide bestseller.



The adjectives 'informative' and 'entertaining' transform this sentence into something much more engaging than 'Mr Bruff's eBook was a worldwide bestseller'. Simple but effective.


Here is another example:

Exhausted and frustrated, the students finally finished their GCSE exams.

2. Starting with an 'ing' word

Starting your sentence with an *ing* word, leads into a clause which tells us more about the subject of the sentence. For example:

Straining with the effort, Grandma did a back-flip.

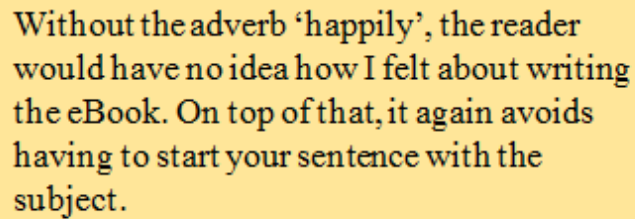


Rather than the simple sentence 'Grandma did a back-flip', the 'ing' clause at the beginning makes the sentence so much more interesting.

3. Beginning with an 'ly' word

For this third example of sentence variety, we begin the sentence with an adverb (an 'ly' word) which gives us more detail on how the verb is performed. For example:

Happily, Mr Bruff wrote a revision guide for the students of the world.



Without the adverb 'happily', the reader would have no idea how I felt about writing the eBook. On top of that, it again avoids having to start your sentence with the subject.

So what would it look like if you were to use these three types of sentence variety in an exam response? Let's begin by looking at a piece of writing which fails to use these elements.

This is our starting text:

'In a recent article the writer argued that her make do and mend generation knew something about how to save the environment. Of course, what she failed to mention was why they were make do and mending in the first place: World War 2. Oh yes, whilst grandma was washing her tin-foil, grandad was being shipped off to Poland, destroying natural landscapes with tanks, clogging up the Polish air with fuel emissions from the machinery of war (not to mention the killing).'

Here's the same text with some sentence variety added in:

Disillusioned and despondent, the writer recently argued that her make do and mend generation knew something about how to save the environment. Curiously, what she failed to mention was why they were make do and mending in the first place: World War 2. Hoping to be economical, grandma was washing her tin-foil whilst granddad was being shipped off to Poland, destroying natural landscapes with tanks, clogging up the Polish air with fuel emissions from the machinery of war (not to mention the killing).

The most notable thing here is that altering the sentence structure does not alter the content of your answer - the content stays the same, but the quality of written communication is dramatically improved.

SEMI-COLONS

The semi-colon is the undisputed king of punctuation; use it correctly and you are bound to impress the examiner. Surprisingly, it is a very simple to use piece of punctuation. In your section B answers you should aim to use one at the beginning and one at the end; you never want to commit semi-colon overkill.

Semi-colons are used to join two sentences, where both sentences are about the same topic.

For example:

Mr Bruff is a writer; he has written over a dozen revision guides.

In this example there are two separate sentences:

Mr Bruff is a writer.

He has written over a dozen revision guides.

However, both of the sentences share a common topic - they both focus on Mr Bruff and his writing. Because of this, a semi-colon can be used.

Here are some examples where a semi-colon should not be used. Can you work out why it is not correct to use a semi-colon?

I like Christmas; because I get lots of presents.

It is Thursday today; my Christmas tree is fake.

In the first example, the clause 'because I get lots of presents' is not a complete sentence (it is a subordinate clause). Remember: semi-colons can only be used to join two complete sentences.

In the second example, although they are two complete sentences, the sentences are not about the same topic. There is no direct link between stating the day in one sentence and the nature of your Christmas tree in the next.

So there you have it: use a couple of semi-colons in your section B answers. Ideally you should use them in the first and last paragraph (that way they stick in the examiner's head and remind him / her just how great you are).

COMMAS

Commas direct us on how to read a piece of writing and are an incredibly complex piece of punctuation to use correctly. As with capital letters, there are a number of uses of commas.

1. Listing commas

This is the one everyone knows: we use commas to break up the items in a list, except for in-between the last two items where we use the word 'and'. The comma is correct if it can be replaced with the word 'and' or 'or'.

The four flavours of Starburst are: orange, lemon, lime and apple.

2. Commas for compound sentences

Commas are used before the FANBOYS conjunction in a compound sentence.

The boys wanted to stay up and see Santa, but they grew tired and fell asleep.

If the sentence is very short, you don't need to use a comma:

I love you but you're annoying.

3. Bracketing commas

This is my own personal favourite use of the comma, largely because it is a simple way of making your written work seem very impressive.

Bracketing commas are used to mark off the beginning and end of a weak interruption to a sentence. In other words, you can lift the words out from between the two commas and the sentence still makes sense. Let me show you what I mean:

My grandmother, although aged 108, still lives with her parents.

The above sentence would still make sense if we took out the bit between the bracketing commas, leaving us with:

My grandmother still lives with her parents.

Like the previous section on sentence variety, the weak interruption is giving us more information about the subject of the sentence- in this case my amazing grandmother.

4. Commas for complex sentences

When we start a complex sentence with a conjunction, we always break up the clauses with a comma:

Because I woke up at 5AM this morning, I am very tired.



On either side of this comma is a clause. The independent clause 'I am very tired' makes sense on its own, whereas the dependent clause 'because I woke up at 5AM this morning' requires more information to make sense. The clauses are divided with a comma.

PARAGRAPHS

Paragraphs are often misunderstood. Students tend to skip a line when they have written quite a lot of text, but that is not what paragraphing is all about.

To start with, you should start a new paragraph when you change to a new idea or focus in your writing. Therefore, it helps if you are following a plan for your answer; you simply start a new paragraph when you move onto a new part of your plan.

Every paragraph needs a topic sentence. A topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph; it explains what the paragraph will be about. The rest of the paragraph then goes into more detail on this point.

For example:

Here is our topic sentence which explains what this paragraph is about: the lack of comfort in the school uniform,



You should be able to wear what you want to school because the uniform is too uncomfortable. The jumper is 90% asbestos; you don't stop scratching yourself the whole day. The ties have you half choked and the trousers – don't even talk to me about the trousers; they cut you at the waist and the ankle. It's a joke.



Here is the rest of the paragraph which goes into more detail on the topic of just how the uniform is uncomfortable.

If you find yourself drifting onto a topic that is not the same as the topic sentence then it is time to start a new paragraph.

You can find out so much more about spelling, punctuation and grammar by purchasing 'Mr Bruff's Guide to Grammar' at mrbruff.com or on Amazon.

Paper 1 Section B: The 19th Century Novel

Just like section A, section B also requires you to present a line of argument and to analyse language, structure and form. Because of that, this section of the eBook will be quite brief - you simply need to incorporate the skills demonstrated in section A. However, we will look at a sample question, based on Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'.

Read the following extract from Chapter 5 and then answer the following question.

In this extract the Bennet and Lucas families are discussing the assembly-room dance they attended the previous evening. "Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson's asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room, and which he thought the prettiest and his answering immediately to the last question: 'Oh! the eldest Miss Bennet, beyond a doubt; there cannot be two opinions on that point.'

"Upon my word! Well, that is very decided indeed--that does seem as if--but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know."

"My overhearings were more to the purpose than yours, Eliza," said Charlotte. "Mr. Darcy is not so well worth listening to as his friend, is he?--poor Eliza!--to be only just tolerable."

"I beg you would not put it into Lizzy's head to be vexed by his ill-treatment, for he is such a disagreeable man, that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half-an-hour without once opening his lips."

"Are you quite sure, ma'am?--is not there a little mistake?" said Jane. "I certainly saw Mr. Darcy speaking to her."

"Aye--because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and he could not help answering her; but she said he seemed quite angry at being spoke to."

"Miss Bingley told me," said Jane, "that he never speaks much, unless among his intimate acquaintances. With them he is remarkably agreeable."

"I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how it was; everybody says that he is eat up with pride, and I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise."

QUESTION:

Starting with this extract, write about how Austen presents attitudes towards women.

Write about:

How Austen presents attitudes to women in this extract

How Austen presents attitudes towards women in the whole novel.[30 marks]

Clearly any point about attitudes to women is going to lend itself very well to comments on context. Just remember: contextual analysis is worth less than analysis of language, structure and form. You should say **SOMETHING** about context, but don't get carried away on the topic. Also, you may be overwhelmed by a question like this: the whole novel concerns attitudes to women. How are you supposed to write for just 50 minutes? In your planning, you should aim to jot down numerous ideas, then pick those which seem most perceptive and intelligent. Also think about the quotations you've memorised - which of those fit the question?

SAMPLE ANSWER

In this extract, Austen presents women as givers of pleasure to men. One of the earliest points established is the fact that women are there to be admired physically by men. In this extract, Charlotte Lucas explains that she overheard Mr Robinson asking Mr Bingley "whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room". It is perhaps odd to see even high society acting in such a sexual manner - the men surveying the women and judging who is the most attractive. It is surprising how open and indiscreet this conversation between the men was; all of the surrounding women could hear how they were being talked about. Even more shocking is the fact that the women, on recounting the story in this chapter, are proud and celebratory of the comments Jane received.

Whilst men may act as improperly as they feel, brazenly and openly judging women on their looks, women may not. It is Charlotte Lucas once again who explains the role a woman must take if interested in a man. She argues that "in nine cases out of ten a woman had better show more affection than she feels". The role of women is here made very clear - they must work hard to attract the men they are interested in. Men may act with a careless nonchalance, but women must 'fight for their man'. Here we see that attitudes to women are biased based purely on their gender.

Another attitude towards women is that their physical appearance is of vital importance. The importance of physical appearance is further explored in the same chapter in Austen's description of Mary who 'having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for

knowledge and accomplishments'. This once again enforces the idea that a woman's looks are vital in all pursuit of marriage. If you suffer the misfortune of not being beautiful, you will have to make up for it with knowledge. In the patriarchal society in which the novel is set, women were beholden to men to succeed in life. As a result, this sexist judgement of women was difficult to avoid: women needed men, even men who treated them poorly.

When Mr Darcy comments on Elizabeth's eyes, also in the same chapter, he explains that women's eyes can give a man "great pleasure". Once again we see that women's physicality serves the purpose of giving pleasure to men.

However, women put a great deal of pressure on themselves too. When Elizabeth walks to Longbourn to see the sickly Jane, the Bingleys mock the fact that she decided to "walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt". Here we can see that the Bingley sisters reinforce the concept that a woman should be attractive to the eye at all times.

Austen also suggests that much of pressure women feel is self-inflicted. In chapter 39 Lydia exclaims "Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three-and-twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be, of not being married before three-and-twenty!" The words of Lydia are used by Austen to criticise how women of the era were so accepting of their plight. We know from the author's own life and her rejection of a marriage proposal, that Austen did not see marriage as something to be eagerly grasped at upon the first chance.

Austen's presentation of the treatment of women, much of it self inflicted, can be read as a scathing criticism of a society which had such unrealistic and unfair expectations of women. The manner in which these views of women are presented throughout the book, and not just on one or two occasions, is Austen's deliberate use of structure. The writer fills her novel with examples of this attitude in a bid to make it very clear to the reader that these attitudes are prevalent in all areas of society.

NOTE:

As you can see, a detailed knowledge of your set text is essential. You might not remember dozens of quotations, but must at least be able to refer to these moments.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENRE

Many of the texts in section B are part of a specific genre. Knowing about the genre and its conventions can help you to understand and analyse a text. Let's take a look at Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Sign of Four' as an example.

Just as with the gothic, romance or science-fiction genres, detective fiction has its own conventions and devices which appear regularly throughout the novels it produces. The Sherlock Holmes novels were some of the earliest detective stories and they certainly helped to shape many of the literary structures we would identify as belonging to the detective fiction genre.

Edgar Allen Poe, writing in the 19th century, is widely credited as being the first proponent of detective fiction in the West. While detective stories, historically, have existed in other cultures - such as in China and the Arab world, the detective genre as we know it today stems from the early 19th century. Poe, while being influenced specifically by a short story by E.T.A. Hoffman written in 1819, wrote *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* which was first published in a magazine in 1841. This story presents for the first time many of the devices we would recognise in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories - specifically the close friend as narrator (Watson) and the devilishly crafted barriers to detection.

In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, a mother and daughter have been murdered in a fourth-floor room of a building on the Rue Morgue, a fictional street in Paris. The door was locked from the inside, the mother's throat was slashed and the daughter was strangled and stuffed in the chimney. The case baffles the police and Dupin, the story's amateur detective, offers his assistance. He ultimately unravels the story and solves the mystery, much to the embarrassment of the local police chief.

In the Sherlock Holmes story there is the constant tension between Holmes, who engages in reason, science and logic, and the police who are depicted as bumbling, brutish and clumsy. This gives Holmes an air of superiority over the police who, although being put out by his obvious superiority, are usually glad of his help by the end of the story. Holmes also displays his astonishing abilities in the field of deduction and reasoning which are key characteristics of the detective genre.

Some of the most basic conventions of the genre in general are:

1 The detective must be intriguing for the reader

It's important that the detective appears an outsider to those involved with the case. This is often presented through strange "quirks" or mannerisms the detective displays. Holmes, in many of the stories, displays many strange habits - rushing off unannounced, disappearances, asking strange questions and, of course, his party trick of being able to deduce the most remarkable facts about a person simply by looking at them. Add to this Holmes' abhorrence of "the dull routine of existence", his predilection for heroin and cocaine and you have a consulting detective which, according to Holmes is a profession he "created... for I am the only one in the world."

The crime must be something worthy of investigation

The crime to be investigated must be important enough to attract the attention of such an important detective. The majority of cases in the detective genre involve either murder or the theft of incredibly valuable items. It also must be significant in terms of the background. A case that is simple to solve is of no interest to the detective. Holmes himself admits that he "craves for mental exaltation" and, in *The Sign of Four*, he rubs his hands together and his "eyes glisten" when he hears the outline of the case.

The facts must be presented to the reader at the same time as the detective

To keep the reader engaged, the detective story must present the facts of the case to the reader at the same time as to the detective. This gives the reader a chance to interpret the clues and solve the case before the detective can.

There is almost a sense of competition between the reader and the detective as to who can solve the mystery first.

In the case of Sherlock Holmes, it only serves to underline his amazing abilities even further as he utilises his powers of deduction and logic to solve a hitherto impenetrable puzzle.

All the loose ends must be tied up by the end of the story

All good detective stories wrap up all of the different plot strands by the end of the story but, most importantly, always in a logical and understandable way. The end of the story is the opportunity for the detective to explain to the

reader and usually Watson and the police in the case of the Sherlock Holmes novels, just how he solved the case and put all the clues together. The ending should make sense to the reader and further impress on him or her the skills of the detective in unlocking the mystery.

Buy 'Mr Bruff's Guide to 'The Sign of Four" at mrbruff.com

English Literature Paper 2: Modern texts and poetry

This examination is the longest of all: 2 hours 15 minutes. It contains three sections:

Section A: Modern prose or drama

Section B: Poetry

Section C: Unseen poetry

The paper is marked out of 96. Section A is worth 34 marks (4 of which are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar). Section B is worth 30 marks and section C is worth 32 marks. You should spend around 45 minutes on each section.

The assessment objectives for this exam paper are:

A01: Read, understand and respond to texts

A02: Analyse language, structure and form

A03: Understand the contexts in which texts were written

A04: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for effect.

The assessment objectives for this paper are weighted. This means that some have more importance than others. A01 and A02 each count for 25% of the 60% total awarded for this paper. A03 is worth just 7.5% and A04 only 2.5%. In simple terms, this means that writing about context should be present but not overly focused upon. The greatest focus should once again be given to analysis of language, structure and form. We have already fully explored these assessment objectives earlier in the text, so let's get straight into looking at the exam.

SECTION A: MODERN PROSE OR DRAMA

Let's take a look at a typical section A question. You will answer one question based on one of the following texts:

Willy Russell: 'Blood Brothers'

Alan Bennett: 'The History Boys'

Dennis Kelly: 'DNA'

JB Priestley: 'An Inspector Calls'

Simon Stephens: 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'

Shelagh Delaney: 'A Taste of Honey'

William Golding: 'Lord of the Flies'

Exam board Anthology: 'Telling Tales'

George Orwell: 'Animal Farm'

Kazuo Ishiguro: 'Never Let Me Go'

Meera Syal: 'Anita and Me'

Stephen Kelman 'Pigeon English'

As it is one of the most commonly studied texts, I shall base my answers on JB Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls'. Each set text will contain two questions; you must choose one to answer.

Question:

How does Priestley use the character of Mr Birling to explore ideas about class?

Write about:

The ideas about class in An Inspector Calls

How Priestley presents these ideas by the way he writes.

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

As with paper 1, you need to analyse language, structure and form to achieve the highest marks. With a text like 'An Inspector Calls' there are only really one or

two contextual points which run throughout the entire text: the author's views on social responsibility and critique of capitalism. You will probably find yourself writing about this in any answer. In the same way, answers on William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' will almost always lend themselves to points about the innate evil in mankind. Not all texts are like this: some have a range of contextual themes, so make sure you are aware of all of them.

Unlike in paper 1, there are no extracts given for these questions. I suppose the exam board feel that they make up for this by giving you two questions to choose from. You should memorise key quotations where possible, using the same method presented with 'Pride and Prejudice' earlier in this guide.

You should aim to write your answer in PEE paragraphs too, also covered earlier.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Priestley presents the character of Mr Birling as a symbol of the capitalist ruling class and the need for socialist ideals.

Priestley begins by presenting Mr Birling as a successful, albeit 'hard-headed businessman'. It is clear from the stage directions which describe 'The dining room... of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer' that Birling is rich and materialistically successful. In terms of capitalism, he is therefore a role model in the fact that he has reached the capitalist goals of making a financial profit. The use of structure is key here: Priestley begins his play in a manner which seems to suggest that the capitalist ideals are a success. By starting his play in this way it allows the reader to see just how untrue this is by the end of the text.

Once Birling's worldly success is established, Priestley undermines his character through presenting Mr Birling as ignorant. With the play being set before WW2, dramatic irony is used when Birling exclaims 'there isn't chance of war'. Here the audience know he is wrong, and therefore realise that Birling's confidence is misguided- he is an ignorant man. This is further proven when he claims that the soon to sail Titanic is 'absolutely unsinkable'. The audience may feel that there is a contradiction in this character - worldly success and power coupled with stupidity and ignorance. However, Priestley has deliberately presented Birling in this way to criticise the capitalism for which Birling stands. Being a co-founder of the Socialist Commonwealth Party, Priestley felt that his political views on socialism were very important and the play 'An Inspector Calls' is his vehicle from which to promote these views. The structural juxtaposition here is startling. Only moments before, we were led to believe that Birling

was a success. Now we realise that we were wrong. To structure the play in such a way that it undermines a character so quickly, is Priestley's method of completely undermining the ideals of capitalism.

It is clear that Mr Birling disagrees with socialism in the way he criticises 'community and all that nonsense'. However, the Inspector proves that this capitalist and selfish viewpoint ends in the death of Eva. Priestley wrote in 1945, and was aiming to use the post WW2 vulnerability of the audience as an opportunity to project his views. Socialism is the belief that a society has the responsibility to look after one another. Socialists believe that the rich should be heavily taxed to look after the poor. In the play, this equates to rich characters such as Mr Birling taking care of poor characters such as Eva. This view is disregarded by Mr Birling as 'nonsense'. Socialists also want to see the collapse of the class system. In the play, a socialist Birling family would have cared for Eva, and Mr Birling would have acted in a radically different way.

Priestley also presents Birling as egotistical. He is so pompous that he cannot help but brag about his advantageous connections, bragging that "I might find my way into the next Honours List". The use of language is highly ironic here; when the definition of the word 'honour' is to have allegiance to moral principals, it is clear that this is not an award Birling is deserving of. Indeed, the Honours List supposedly rewards those who are committed to serving and helping Britain, and Priestley is indicating that the whole system is farcical. It is clear here that Birling cares how others view him, but does not care about others. Priestley is criticising this selfish behaviour, reminding the audience that they should respect those with honour, ideals and determination - not those who selfishly and egotistically have made a financial fortune.

In order to completely vilify capitalism, Priestley presents Mr Birling not only as ignorant, but also as inherently selfish; Birling believes that 'a man has to make his own way'. This self obsessed element to his character makes the audience dislike him thoroughly and see clearly the need for a move from capitalist ideals to socialist ideals.

In conclusion, Priestley uses the character of Mr Birling to criticise capitalism. Through his selfishness and ignorance, the audience cannot side with Mr Birling or the capitalist ideals that have made him so wealthy. In seeing no morality or goodness in Mr Birling, and therefore the capitalist ideals he metaphorically represents, Priestley hopes to sway the audience towards the values of socialism.

NOTE:

This answer is a great example of avoiding one of the key pitfalls in Literature exams: acting as if the characters are real. With a question on Mr Birling, it would be easy to write about Mr Birling and the kind of character he is.

However, all characters are used by writers to convey themes, so you must make sure you write about the author (in this case Priestley) and how he/she USES the character to convey themes. It is more important to write about the author and their themes than the characters.

SECTION B: POETRY

This section of the exam will require you to compare two poems. One will be a named poem, and the other one must be chosen by you. In class you will study 15 poems taken from one of two clusters: 'Love and Relationships' or 'Power and Conflict'. Unfortunately, your teacher is likely to choose the cluster for you, so you're stuck with whichever one you get. The named poem will be printed in the exam paper, along with a question.

The first thing you need to do in the exam is find the question which focuses on the cluster you've studied in class. Some students wonder if it's worth studying both clusters, but as each is made up of 15 poems, it would be too much to attempt to learn 30 poems (particularly considering you need to memorise quotations). In this section I will give detailed examples from both the 'Love and Relationships' cluster and the 'Conflict and Power' cluster.

HOW TO ANALYSE POETRY:

Many students find the original analysis of a poem to be very confusing. Let's take a detailed look through two poems from the 'Conflict and Power' cluster: 'My Last Duchess' and 'Ozymandias'. We will use them to focus on this question:

Compare how poets present attitudes towards power in Robert Barret Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and one other poem. [30 marks].

ROBERT BROWNING'S 'MY LAST DUCHESS'

Based on the video: https://youtu.be/T9h_csKEwxg

THE POET:

When analysing any poem, it is important to only study those biographical details of the poet's life which seem key to understanding the poem itself. With 'My Last Duchess' this poses quite a challenge: Browning's dramatic monologue was not written from his own point of view but from that of a fictional character. 'My Last Duchess' is set in the Italian Renaissance and focuses on a controlling and possibly insane Duke - how can that possibly link to the poet's own life?

Nevertheless, there are some biographical details worth looking at which might help us understand the poem a little better:

1. Browning was born in 1812 in London. He died in 1889 in Venice.
2. Browning didn't enjoy school much, and ended up being home-schooled by tutors who educated him using his father's collection of 6,000 books. This brave move paid off: by the age of fourteen, he was fluent in Latin, Greek, French and Italian. Aged twelve, Robert wrote his first book of poetry.
3. In 1845, Browning married Elizabeth Barret. Barret is a famous poet herself. However, the marriage was kept secret to begin with, as Elizabeth's father was domineering and controlling.
4. In 1838 Browning visited Italy for the first time. He would live there for much of his adult life. In his poem 'De Gustibus', he wrote 'open my heart and you will see graved inside of it, Italy'.
5. 'My Last Duchess' was published in 1842.

What can we conclude from these details? Well, firstly we can see that the poet lived during the Victorian era. I will look at the importance of this in the next section of this eBook.

Secondly, the details of Barret's controlling attitude towards his daughter pose a striking resemblance to the Duke in 'My Last Duchess'. However, this is a red herring: Browning did not meet Barret until 1846, four years after the publication of the poem. As much as it might seem a nice comparison, the character of the Duke is clearly not based on Browning's father in law!

The fact that Browning visited Italy shortly before the publication of the poem would suggest that it might be based on a story he heard whilst travelling (more on that later).

THE CONTEXT

By the term 'context' we essentially mean 'what was going on at the time the poem was written?' Although 'My Last Duchess' is set in the Italian Renaissance (14th-16th century), it was written and published during the Victorian era in 1842. We should therefore examine the Victorian era to see if there is anything which seems important to our understanding of the poem.

Some exams do not award any marks for analysing context, and some exams do. For example, the 2015 AQA GCSE in English Literature does not assess context, but the 2017+ AQA GCSE English Literature does. If you are studying this poem for an exam or essay, check whether context is awarded by your exam board. If it is not, you should not write anything about Victorian England in your exam. However, just because an exam doesn't reward it, that doesn't mean we shouldn't look at context in our own studies.

One of the major issues with studying context is that it can take hundreds of hours of study, much of which might revolve around topics which are irrelevant to the poem being studied. My advice is to look at the general contextual topics and think carefully about which you should study further. Let's try that with the poem 'My Last Duchess':

1842 was the early part of the Victorian era. During this period of time there was an array of changes in society, including:

1. Industrialisation saw mass migration from the country to the city. In 1837, 80% of the population lived in the countryside. Most people worked on farms or spun wool etc. With the Industrial Revolution came machines which could complete this work in a fraction of the time. As a result, people began moving to the cities to get work, and within a dozen or so years, 50% of the population lived in the city. As interesting as this is, industrialisation doesn't seem to be a relevant factor in 'My Last Duchess'.
2. Attitudes to religion were being challenged due to the theory of evolution and scientific developments which seemingly disproved some Biblical passages. There are some minor ways in which religion can be linked to the poem, but mostly in terms of the treatment of women which is a topic in its own right.
3. Attitudes to women were changing. A woman's role as the 'angel of the house' who existed to serve and entertain her husband was beginning to

be challenged. Women were not given the same education as men, but the suffrage movement was growing and the battle for equality was growing fast.

Firstly, let me give you a few brief notes on the treatment of women in 1800s England:

- When a woman married, she became the legal property of her husband
- Women could not testify in court
- Women could not vote
- It was believed that women were incapable of rational thought
- Many female writers published their works anonymously or under male pseudonyms in order to boost book sales (Jane Austen published all of her novels anonymously). Although women could publish, women's literature was not taken as seriously as that written by men. In order to be taken seriously, many women published anonymously.

This topic of attitudes to women seems to be the relevant contextual factor in the poem - the whole poem explores attitudes to women. Could it be that Browning uses the poem to explore his opinion on this topic? I think so!

It is possible to see the poem as a criticism of Victorian attitudes to women and their effort to suppress female sexuality. It can be argued that the Duke's obsession with fixing the behaviour of his wife links to Victorian society's obsession with the reputation of women remaining perfect.

A feminist interpretation of the poem would suggest that Victorian men are weakened by their dependency on the power they have over women. The way in which Victorian men are obsessed with their power over women certainly links with the poem. Men in Victorian England saw their wives as a reflection of themselves.

CONTEXT 2: THE ITALIAN LINK

The historical basis of the poem has been speculated about since the poem was first published. There are many ideas about the poem but nothing which is actually known for sure other than the following details:

Many of Browning's poems, including 'My Last Duchess', were set in Ferrara, a town in Italy. Browning seemed obsessed with the place, researching the medieval history of the area. It seems likely that 'My Last Duchess' was based on the true story of Alfonso II, fifth Duke of Ferrara. Alfonso's first wife died

in suspicious circumstances, so there is a strong case for the poem being based on this Duke. However, this kind of detail should never be mentioned in an exam - it's not at all relevant to the poem's use of language, structure or form, which is all you should ever write about. Whether it's a true story or not is irrelevant to our understanding of the poem.

Browning is not the first poet to focus his work on the lives of despotic Italians. Dante's *Inferno* recounts a number of stories of various cruel Italians. John Keats was another poet who focused on a similar topic in his poem 'Isabella'.

THE LITERAL MEANING

Once we understand the important details about the poet and the context we should look at the poem itself. All poems that are studied for exams have a simple literal meaning and at least one hidden deeper meaning. Our starting point should be to make sure we understand the basic meaning of the poem. It's a useful exercise to translate the poem into simple, understandable English. Where a line is ambiguous or has different meanings, you should aim to give the simplest at this point. Here is my translation of the poem, with the original version in italics.

LINES 1-4

*That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.*

That's a painting of my last wife on the wall there,
It looks lifelike / like she is still alive. I would say
That painting is a very realistic portrait. A famous artist
Worked hard all day painting it, and there she is.

*Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,*

*The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there;*

Will you please sit down and look at the painting? I name dropped

The famous artist on purpose, because people never look at it without wanting to ask me how the passionate look on her face was arrived at. They always ask this question to me, because I am the only one who pulls back the curtain which covers the painting.

You are not the first person to ask (how the look was arrived at).

*so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy.*

No, it was not only me (her husband) who could make her look so happy.

It might be that the artist flattered her in some way, perhaps saying that her shawl was too long (and should be pulled up a bit),

Or maybe he told her it would be impossible for paint to reproduce such a beautiful woman. She was delighted to hear this and blushed.

*She had
A heart -- how shall I say? -- too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace -- all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least.*

She was a woman who was too easily impressed by things.

She liked everything she looked at, and she looked at everything.

It was all the same - the effect I had on her was the same effect as the sunset, or some cherries an admirer brought to her, or her horse - everything impressed her and made her happy, blushing with delight.

*She thanked men, -- good! but thanked
Somehow -- I know not how -- as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech -- (which I have not) -- to make your will*

*Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' -- and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
-- E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop.*

She thanked people, which was good, but she thanked people in such a way that it made me feel as if she wasn't sufficiently grateful for the ancient and honoured surname which became hers when we married.

Who would lower themselves to argue with her? Even if I was a good enough communicator to do it (and I am not) I would not do it. It would mean that I had to lower myself, and I never lower myself if I were to tell her that this or that in you disgusts me, or here you are going too far etc.

*Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive.*

Oh, sir, she smiled whenever I passed her, but she gave the same smile to everyone! This continued, and I gave commands.

Then there were no more smiles. But in this painting she looks alive.

*Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below then. I repeat,*

*The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!*

Will you please stand up? We'll meet the other downstairs.

I repeat, the Count, your boss, is so rich that I'm sure he will give me a nice financial incentive for his daughter,

But what I want is the daughter, not the money.

See this statue? It's of Neptune, taming a sea-horse. It's a rare statue by another famous artist.

THEMES:

Now we understand the basics of the poem, it's important to consider the major themes - what is this poem trying to say? We need to move beyond what happens in the poem (the subject) to what the poem is trying to say (its theme).

'My Last Duchess' has a number of themes, but all of them revolve around one major theme: power.

There are many types of power demonstrated in the poem:

Political power - the Duke's political power is demonstrated through the ambiguous line 'I gave commands'. The reader is left wondering who these commands were given to - no doubt to a social inferior / servant of some kind.

Domestic power - the Duke asserts his power over his former wife, linking to themes of gender roles and sexism.

Now that we have the major theme defined, we shall look at how the poem explores that theme through the three poetic study areas of language, structure and form:

'Language' refers to the words which are used by the poet. This is the simplest type of analysis, and the one which most students write about first. Whether you are picking out language devices such as similes and metaphors, or just picking out words/phrases which seem important, it's all language analysis.

'Structure' refers to the organisation of a poem. Analysis of structure should consider where the verses break (if at all) and why, variations in verse length, use of enjambment, repetition, rhythm, changes in stress patterns, use of rhyme scheme, free verse and punctuation. However, it's not just a case of identifying these features - they need to be linked to the theme of the poem. So, we only want to analyse that exclamation mark at the end of the poem if we can somehow link it to the theme of power (or the exam question you are answering).

'Form' refers to the times when poets follow particular rules about the organisation of a text. For example, is the poem a sonnet, a dramatic monologue, a ballad etc.? Again, this needs to be linked to the theme of the poem (or exam answer). With 'My Last Duchess', the question would be 'how does the use of the dramatic monologue form help explore the theme of power?'

LANGUAGE:

Let's begin by establishing whether or not the Duke had any cause for concern with his last wife. When the Duke explains that "her looks went everywhere", the reader is left wondering if he is implying that his wife was promiscuous. However, the doubts he has about the artist (more on that in a moment) should help the reader decide that this was not the case.

It is clear that the Duke was disgusted with his previous wife, the Duchess. However, it is ironic to note that the Duchess' faults were actually to exhibit qualities such as humility and gratitude. It seems that the Duchess was pleased by the simple things in life such as 'the dropping of the daylight'. In fact, the Duchess seems to have a childlike innocence to her, but this is not as positive as it may seem. The 19th Century feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft once wrote that while 'children...should be innocent...when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness'. In other words, the wife is presented by the Duke as weak and undeserving of such an amazing husband!

No, it seems that the Duke had no valid reason to dislike his last wife, and so we must examine his character further to discover just what kind of maniac he is. Let's take a closer look at the characterisation of the Duke:

I shall now go through the poem, annotating language points which tell the reader something important about the Duke.

My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

The pronoun 'my' is repeated throughout the poem, showing how **possessive** the Duke is. It also highlights how he objectifies women.

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands

The Duke 'name drops' two famous artists: Fra Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck, demonstrating that he is a **vain** person.

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said

'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read

The title 'Fra' means 'brother' (as in a religious figure). The suggestion here is that the picture was painted by a monk or similar religious figure. Why is this important? Well, it seems that Browning wanted to make it clear that the artist was not at all sexually involved with the Duchess - there is no possibility that they were flirting or even having an affair, which makes it more clear that the Duke had no reason to be so jealous of his wife.

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not

Browning uses language to highlight issues of power in the poem. The manner in which the Duke speaks to the envoy is through the terms 'sir' and 'you'. These are formal terms of address which clarify the Duke's superiority over the envoy. The more personal terms of 'thou' and 'thee' are not used. The Duke is keen to point out that the envoy is socially inferior to him. This behaviour is **condescending**.

*Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart -- how shall I say? -- too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace -- all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, -- good! but thanked
Somehow -- I know not how -- as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name*

The Duke is **proud**, feeling that his wife should be grateful to join in his family heritage and take his surname which is so ancient and esteemed.

*With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech -- (which I have not) -- to make your will*

The Duke is **disingenuous** in this moment. He tells the envoy that he does not possess skill in speaking, whilst at the time using perfect iambic pentameter.

*Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' -- and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
-- E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose*

The Duke is **self obsessed**, seen through the repetition of the pronoun 'I' - it's all about him!

*Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;*

*Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet*

What the Duke wants from the envoy is presented as a question: 'Will't please you sit?' and 'Will't please you rise', but these are not questions at all - they are demands. The Duke frames his demands as questions but make no mistake - this is a social superior demanding something from an inferior. He is a **controlling** character.

*The company below then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!*

As you can see, the language employed by Browning suggests that the Duke is proud, possessive, controlling, vain, condescending, disingenuous, self obsessed and irrational! Now let's move on to the form and structure of the poem.

It's interesting to note that the poem is free from almost any poetic imagery such as simile and metaphor. This matches Browning's form - a true to life conversation isn't filled with similes, metaphors and the like. However, there are some examples of poetic devices in the poem.

The painting, hidden behind a curtain which only the Duke pulls back, is a metaphor for the control the Duke wishes to have. In life, his wife's smiling at everyone and everything caused the Duke great distress. Now, with the smiling wife behind a curtain, the Duke can keep the smiles just for him. Again, this symbolises the control the husband wishes to have over his past (and future) wives.

The sculpture of Neptune taming a sea-horse is a metaphor for the domination the Duke wishes to have over his wife. Neptune, Roman god of the sea, was regularly portrayed as a muscular strong-man. In this sculpture he is taming a wild creature, which reflects how the Duke sees his role over his wives.

FORM:

'My Last Duchess' is an example of a dramatic monologue, which means the poem contains a single person who gives a speech to someone else. However, the speaker is not the poet, and the listener is silent throughout. Essentially it means that we are listening to a one-way conversation, and it's a form which allows us to identify the speaker's character from what they say. Usually, the reader works as a detective to analyse clues which reveal key details about the speaker, in this case the Duke of Ferrara. There is a gap between what the speaker wants us to know and what the reader can read between the lines.

The poem is written entirely in iambic pentameter, with ten syllables per line and every other syllable being stressed. The rhyme scheme is also tightly controlled, with the whole poem consisting of rhyming couplets. This tightly controlled form and structure reflects the tight control of the speaker.

STRUCTURE:

As already explained, the poem is written in rhyming couplets. This tight control of structure reflects the tight control of the Duke over his wife. However, the poem also contains enjambment, where sentences don't finish at the end of each line but run over onto other lines. There are a number of reasons why the poet employs enjambment. Firstly, the poem is supposed to be real speech, and if the couplets stopped at the end of each line this would sound mechanical and not at all like real dialogue. An alternative interpretation is that the enjambment reflects the uncontrolled nature of the Duke. Although he does everything he can to control others (reflected in the tightly controlled rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter) the fact is that he cannot control himself, seen through the enjambment. The image created is one of a crazy man who cannot control his outbursts.

It is interesting to note that the poem contains one long, sprawling verse. Why is this? Firstly, the structure suggests that the Duke does not stop to think what is saying - he simply gives his own explanation of events. He cares not for his listener, but spouts out his thoughts in a stream of consciousness style. Secondly, we should consider the effect on the reader. When we read the whole poem aloud with no major breaks or pauses, we are overwhelmed by the immensity of the poem. This overwhelming aspect reflects how the Duke himself is an overwhelming character.

LANGUAGE AMBIGUITY:

Some lines in the poem are ambiguous - the reader is unsure of the intended meaning. An example of this is found in the line 'I gave commands.' The reader

infers that the Duke commanded the death of his wife, but it is ambiguous - we cannot be sure. However, Browning did give an interview where he explained "Yes, I meant that the commands were that she be put to death".

More ambiguity is found in the speaker's description of the painting looking "as if she were alive". This could simply mean that the painting is 'life-like', or it could suggest that she is no longer alive.

When the Duke explains that "her looks went everywhere", the reader is left wondering if he is implying that his wife was promiscuous.

AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION:

It is possible to read the poem as a portrayal of the Duke's weakness, not power. His insecurity can be seen in his comment that 'her looks went everywhere'. Similarly, his sprawling dialogue seems uncontrolled and careless. But even if we read the poem at face value, the Duke still appears to be weak. Why is it so important to the Duke that he have control over his wife?

Browning's poem can be read as a message that Victorian men are weakened by their dependency on the power they have over women. It can be argued that Victorian men saw their wives as a reflection of themselves, but that this disempowered them.

Of course, we never hear the wife's side of the story - this silenced voice again reflects the absolute control the Duke has. This reflects the Victorian society in which the poem was written, in that women were effectively silenced in society through their inability to vote, testify in court etc. In this way, the Duke's desire to control his wife's behaviour can be read as a metaphor for Victorian society's obsession with the behaviour and reputation of women. The fact that the Duchess did not reserve her 'smiles' for her husband alone is seen as a huge problem by the Duke. In the same way, Victorian women were considered to be failures if they did not give their lives over exclusively for their husbands.

PERCY SHELLEY'S 'OZYMANDIAS'

THE POET: PERCY SHELLEY

Percy Shelley is one of the most interesting poets that ever lived! Although we should only study areas of a poet's life which are important to our understanding of their poetry, with Shelley it's just too interesting not to look at everything:

1. Born 1792

2. One of 'The Romantic' poets (more on that later)
3. Came from a wealthy family
4. Set to inherit riches and the role of MP
5. Went to Eton and Oxford
6. Was expelled from University for writing in favour of atheism
7. Eloped and married a 16 year old
8. Left his wife and ran off with Mary Shelley, writer of 'Frankenstein'
9. In 1816, his wife committed suicide. 3 weeks later he married Mary Shelley.
10. Drowned at sea whilst sailing to Italy, aged 29.

See? I told you he was a fascinating person! It's also interesting to note that Shelley was not very successful as a writer during his own life-time. He was associated with the much more successful poets Byron and Keats, but was nowhere near as popular. Whilst Byron sold as many as 10,000 copies of his poetry in just one day, Shelley wrote almost for himself, with no major interest from the public. However, today he is regarded as one of the finest poets ever.

Shelley was a deeply political person. He was a pacifist who believed in nonviolent protest. He was also a vegetarian, writing widely on the subject.

CONTEXT:

Shelley wrote 'Ozymandias' during the reign of King George III. A lot can be said about this king, who reigned for longer than any other before him. However, the key points for this poem are that King George III was involved in a great number of military conflicts around the globe. Shelley hated oppressive monarchical government and felt that a revolution was needed to overthrow it.

ROMANTICISM:

Shelley belonged to what is known as the second generation of Romantic poets. Romantic poetry can be defined as containing a number of conventions:

1. A dislike of urban life and embrace of the natural world
2. A love of the supernatural

3. Use of ordinary, everyday language

The most famous early Romantics were Wordsworth and Coleridge. However, by the time Shelley was writing, it was felt that the early Romantics had sold out. For example, Wordsworth was now working as a tax-man! So, the second generation of Romantics had to set themselves apart from the old guard. Byron, Shelley and Keats therefore looked to antiquity and foreign lands as the settings of their poetry, in order to distinguish themselves from what had gone before. Of course, we see this in 'Ozymandias', which is set in a foreign land and refers to an ancient historical period. These second generation Romantic poets often wrote against religion and against political control. They used rich language which was full of metaphor and classical allusion.

THE SECOND CONTEXT: RAMESES

It is useful to know a little about Rameses (otherwise known as Ozymandias) too:

Ozymandias, AKA Rameses II, was an Egyptian Pharaoh who ruled from 1279-1213 BC. He is believed to be the Pharaoh who was in charge of Egypt during the Biblical exodus of Moses. Crucially, he was a ruler who led many battles to protect and extend the borders of Egypt. In this way, it is possible to draw a comparison with King George III.

Shelley crafted this poem as part of a sonnet writing competition with his friend Horace Smith. Both wrote sonnets about Ozymandias, and both poems were eventually published. The real-life inspiration of the poem is thought to be the fact that the British Museum had recently announced it would acquire a statue of Rameses II. Weighing nearly 8 tonnes, the fragment of Rameses' head and torso dated back to the thirteenth-century BC.

THE LITERAL MEANING

Now we know about the poet and the context, let's look at a simple translation of the poem itself.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert.*

I met a traveller from a historic land
Who told me there were two huge stone legs
Standing in the desert.

*Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.*

Near the legs, on the sand,
Sunk into the ground a bit, there lay the head of the statue,
Its face shattered and cracked.
It has a nasty look on its face, looking powerful.
The artist made it very life-like.

*And on the pedestal these words appear --
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'*

And at the foot of the statue is an engraving reading
"My name is Ozymandias, king above all kings:
Look at all I have achieved, and feel hopeless!"
Nothing else remains, around the broken
Statue, isolated in
The middle of the lonely desert.'

THEMES:

The major theme of 'Ozymandias' is that those with power are deluded in their belief that their power is supreme and invincible. The might and power of leaders does not last, but art (as represented through the

statue) does. It is also possible to read the poem as a critique of Christianity and religious belief in general.

Now that we understand the themes of the poem, it's time to analyse the language, structure and form to detect where those themes are present and how they are explored by the poet.

THE FORM: SONNET

'Ozymandias' is a sonnet. The sonnet is a genre of love poetry which originated in Italy in the 13th Century. The 14th Century poet Petrarch is the most recognised Italian sonneteer. Falling in love with a woman known only as 'Laura', he wrote 366 sonnets to her. However, she rejected his proposals. The Italian Sonnet follows a strict form:

- 14 lines
- The first 8 lines (known as the octave) present a problem
- The last 6 lines (known as the sestet) present a solution to the problem
- Line 9 (known as the Volta) introduces a sharp twist, or turn, which brings about the move to the resolution
- ABBA ABBA rhyme scheme.

THE SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

In the 16th Century, the sonnet made its way into English poetry. Sir Philip Sidney developed it, but it came to be known as the Shakespearean sonnet (after Shakespeare made it truly famous). This form is quite different to the Petrarchan sonnet.

- It is written in iambic pentameter (lines of 10 syllables, with alternating stressed and unstressed syllables).
- It is divided into 3 verses of four lines each, known as 'quatrains', and finished with a rhyming couplet which also served as the Volta.
- Its rhyme scheme is also different: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

However, the topic of Shakespearean sonnets remains the same: they are all about love.

Interestingly, 'Ozymandias' is a mixture of the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms. As a Petrarchan sonnet it follows the format of having an octave which presents details about the powerful Ozymandias as represented through

his broken statue. The sestet then focuses on how the power of Ozymandias has disappeared - nature outliving the powerful ruler.

Secondly, there are elements of the Shakespearean sonnet in the poem's form. Consider the rhyme scheme of these first four lines:

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,*

Here we see the rhyme scheme ABAB ('land, stone, sand, frown'). This, then, is evidence of the Shakespearean sonnet. But it doesn't stop there! The rhyme scheme then changes:

*And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear --
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'*

Now the rhyme scheme becomes ABABACDCEDEFEF. This, then, is a 'new' structure for the sonnet. It is key to our understanding of the poem.

As we have established, the major theme of the poem is how those with power are deluded in their belief that their power is supreme and invincible. Shelley's clever use of form here suggests the same thing - just as Petrarch's sonnet form gave way to Shakespeare's, and (in this poem) Shakespeare's form gives way to the 'new' form, all power ultimately gives way to new power. Nothing remains forever - not even the form of the sonnet.

It is also worth considering why the sonnet form is employed in the first place. Remember, sonnets are exclusively poems about love. Perhaps Shelley uses this

form to point out the fact that Ozymandias (and the arrogant rulers he represents) are in love with themselves.

LANGUAGE

Now let's analyse the language used by Shelley. When analysing language, we are looking for any occasion where words seem to have been deliberately chosen by the poet for effect.

Ozymandias

'Ozy' comes from the Greek 'Ozium', meaning 'to breathe'. 'Mandias' comes from the Greek 'mandate', meaning 'to rule'. Even the title suggests power and control.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,*

Shelley begins 'Ozymandias' by detaching himself from the story being told. He wants to immediately make the point 'this is not an open criticism of the British monarchy'. However, the poem is clearly a thinly veiled attack.

Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,

This plethora of deeply negative language is used to make it very clear that the poem is an attack and not a praising up of the powerful.

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

The alliterative repetition of the hard 'c' sounds reflects the harsh nature of Ozymandias.

*Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear --
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:*

Here's one of the religious references I will explore a little later on.

*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare*

Alliteration is used to emphasise the emptiness.

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The desert outlives the statue.

One of the key skills to demonstrate in your English Literature exam is the ability to offer perceptive and original analysis. Put simply, this means that you need to stand out from the other students. Your examiner will be marking hundreds of papers, and your job is to be a rare gem in the pile. One of the simple ways to achieve this is to analyse form and structure rather than language. Most students analyse language in their answers, as this is the easiest approach to poetry. However, as the following sample answer demonstrates, it is possible to analyse form and structure.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Compare the ways poets present ideas about power in 'Ozymandias' and 'My Last Duchess'.

In both Shelley's 'Ozymandias' and Browning's 'My Last Duchess', the poets use form to present power as being eternal and domineering. However, both poets then use structure to undermine these assertions.

In 'Ozymandias', the statue itself asserts that the 'king of kings' will have eternal power. Shelley employs the sonnet form of classic love poetry to reflect the self-obsessed nature of the powerful. Just as the poetic form is all about love, Ozymandias is full of love for himself. However, Shelley uses structure to undermine this notion of the eternal nature of power.

Interestingly, 'Ozymandias' is a mixture of the classic Petrarchan and more modern Shakespearean sonnet forms. As a Petrarchan sonnet it follows the form of having an octave which presents details about the powerful Ozymandias as represented through his 'shattered visage'. The sestet then focuses on how the power of Ozymandias has disappeared into the 'lone and level sands' as nature outlives the powerful ruler.

However, there are also elements of the much later Shakespearean sonnet in the poem's form. Consider the rhyme scheme of these first four lines.

Here we see the rhyme scheme ABAB ('land, stone, sand, frown').

This, then, is evidence of the Shakespearean sonnet. At this point, Shelley has moved from the classic 13th Century model to the popular

16th Century form. But it doesn't end there. In the rest of the poem, the rhyme scheme changes again, to ABABACDCEDEFEF. This, then, is a 'new' structure for the sonnet. Shelley has used three different sonnet forms in this one poem: the classic Petrarchan form, the famous Shakespearean form and a third, new, inventive form.

The major theme of the poem is how those with power are deluded in their belief that their power is supreme and invincible. Shelley's clever use of form here suggests the same thing - just as Petrarch's sonnet form gave way to Shakespeare's, and Shakespeare's form gives way to the 'new' form, all power ultimately gives way to new power. Nothing remains forever - power is not invincible.

Similarly, Browning employs form to convey his message about power being dominant. In 'My Last Duchess', the power in question is male power over women. 'My Last Duchess' is an example of a dramatic monologue, where the poem contains a single person, the Duke, who gives a speech to someone else. However, the speaker is not the poet, and the listener is silent throughout. Thus we never actually hear from the envoy who is asked to 'sit and look'. Of course, we also never hear the wife's side of the story - this silenced voice again reflecting the absolute control the Duke has. This use of form reflects Browning's message about the power men had over women, so much so that their voices were silenced. The lack of voice from the woman presents the Duke's power as complete and domineering.

To further enforce this presentation of power, the poem is written entirely in iambic pentameter, with ten syllables per line and every other syllable being stressed. The rhyme scheme is also tightly controlled, with the whole poem consisting of rhyming couplets such as 'wall/call'. This tightly controlled form and structure reflects the tight control of the speaker, and reflects the notion that power is exhibited through complete control and dominance.

However, just as Ozymandias clearly wanted eternal power but failed to get it, there is a sense that the narrator of 'My Last Duchess' fails to achieve the power and control he wishes to have. As already explained, the poem is written in rhyming couplets. This tight control of structure reflects the tight control of the Duke over his wife. However, the poem also contains enjambment, where sentences don't finish at the end of each line but run over onto other lines. We see this throughout the poem:

'Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now;'

This use of enjambment reflects the uncontrolled nature of the Duke. Although he does everything he can to control others (reflected in the tightly controlled rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter) the fact is that he cannot control himself, seen through the enjambment. The image created is one of a crazy man who cannot control his outbursts. So, in both poems, structural devices are used to undermine the idea that power is eternal and domineering.

Also, both poems contain one long verse. In 'Ozymandias' this is due to the fact that it is following the conventions of a sonnet and therefore must contain one verse. However, this is not the case in 'My Last Duchess'. Firstly, Browning's use of structure suggests that the Duke does not stop to think what he is saying - he simply gives his own explanation of events. He cares not for his listener, but spouts out his thoughts in a stream of consciousness style. Alternatively, when we read the whole poem aloud with no major breaks or pauses, we are overwhelmed by the immensity of the poem. This overwhelming aspect reflects how the Duke himself is an overwhelming character.

To conclude, both poets employ structure and form to present their ideas about power. In 'Ozymandias', the proud assertion that power remains forever is disproven. In 'My Last Duchess', the notion of male power over women is presented and subtly undermined.

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Let's look at a typical question based on the 'Love and Relationships' cluster:

Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem. [30 marks].

The way to approach this question is to begin by looking at the named poem - in this case 'Sonnet XXIX':

Sonnet XXIX

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,

Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere !
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.

Don't worry if this poem makes no sense to you; you'll learn all of the poems in class.

Before choosing the second poem, it's important to pick out a few key points you might make about the named poem. Sonnet XXIX was written by the poet to the man she was engaged to marry. In it, she expresses the idea that thinking of her future husband is such an intense feeling that it ultimately overpowers her.

It is useful to take the wording of the question and put it into a phrase:

The attitude towards love that we find in Sonnet XXIX is one of 'the overwhelming feelings felt when apart from the loved one'.

With this in mind, we can now flick through the other poems in the anthology and make a choice about which one seems to compare well. With comparison, we are ideally looking for a poem which has some similarities but also some notable differences. A good choice seems to be 'When We Two Parted' by Byron:

When We Two Parted

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
Sank chill on my brow--
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame;
I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell in mine ear;
A shudder come o'er me--
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well--
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met--
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee?--
With silence and tears.

'When We Two Parted' is a poem focusing on an illicit relationship Byron was engaged in with a married woman by the name of Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. Apparently, Byron ended the relationship so that Webster would not be shamed. This poem focuses on his pain at losing the woman he loved.

So, there is definitely a line of comparison in the fact that both poems focus on the pain endured when apart from the one you love. However, Sonnet XXIX focuses on feelings for a future husband, whereas When We Two Parted looks at a love affair. This therefore seems a good choice of comparison, as there are similarities and differences in the poems.

HITTING THE TOP MARKS:

This question is marked out of 30 and marking is divided into 6 bands. There are four major differences between band 5 and 6. Band 6 answers need to:

1. Analyse language, structure and form. Band 5 and below requires only one of these to be focused on, but band 6 demands consideration of all three areas.
2. Give an exploratory answer
3. Give precise references
4. Explore context.

By far the biggest challenge with this criteria is to analyse language AND structure AND form. In terms of poetry analysis, the term 'language' simply means 'words' and covers topics such as simile, metaphor and personification. It's the easiest topic area and the one most students naturally gravitate towards as it is the first thing most students notice. However, structure and form are not so simple.

Structure essentially means 'how the poem is organised, and why this is significant'. This could include: how many verses are there, how long are the lines, where do the verses change and why?

Form is something slightly different again: does the poem follow any particular format. For example, is it a sonnet, a haiku, a limerick? All of these forms have specific conventions. Does the poem follow them fully?

My biggest bit of advice for hitting the top grades is to analyse structure and form wherever possible. Have it at the forefront of your mind. Look for it first, and write about it first in the exam. The top marks in the poetry exam are given to those students who stand out from the rest. If 90% of students are analysing language for at least the majority of their answers, you can be different.

Let's take a closer look at Sonnet XXIX:

THE POET

When it comes to biographical detail, it is important that we only look at the details of a poet's life that are relevant to the poem itself. Therefore the following details should be considered:

- Born in 1806 and died in 1861
- A very successful poet who was published from the age of 15
- Suffered great sickness and invalidity for her entire adult life
- Famous in both the UK and USA during her lifetime

- The poet Robert Browning wrote to her as a fan and ended up becoming her husband
- A deeply Christian woman.

THE FORM: SONNET

The sonnet is a genre of love poetry which originated in Italy in the 13th Century. The 14th Century poet Petrarch is the most recognised Italian sonneteer. Falling in love with a woman known only as 'Laura', he wrote 366 sonnets to her. However, she rejected his proposals. The Italian Sonnet follows a strict form:

- 14 lines
- The first 8 lines (known as the octave) present a problem
- The last 6 lines (known as the sestet) present a solution to the problem
- Line 9 (known as the Volta) introduces a sharp twist, or turn, which brings about the move to the resolution
- ABBA ABBA rhyme scheme.

THE SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

In the 16th Century, the sonnet made its way into English poetry. Sir Philip Sidney developed what has come to be known as the Shakespearean Sonnet (after Shakespeare made it truly famous). This is written in iambic pentameter (lines of 10 syllables, with alternating stressed and unstressed syllables). It was divided into 3 verses of four lines each, known as 'quatrains', and finished with a rhyming couplet which also served as the Volta. Its rhyme scheme was also different: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' follows the conventions of the Italian sonnet; perhaps Browning related to Petrarch's intense pre-marriage love more than Shakespeare's mixture of romantic and platonic sonnets? Perhaps she related to Petrarch's spirituality and shied away from Shakespeare's overtly sexual poetry.

THE CONTEXT: 'SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE'

During their engagement, Elizabeth wrote 44 sonnets to Robert Browning, her husband to be. Robert was so impressed with the sonnets that he pushed Elizabeth to publish them. However, the sonnets were deeply personal and

Elizabeth would only agree to publish them anonymously; she didn't want anyone to know that they were written by her.

'Sonnets from the Portugese' was published in 1850, promoted as an English translation of a collection of Portugese poems. The 'Portugese' part is a nod to Luis De Camoes, a Portugese sonneteer who Elizabeth admired greatly. 'My little Portugese' was also Robert's nickname for Elizabeth.

ANALYSING THE POEM

So it is clear that Sonnet XXIX follows the Petrarchan sonnet form, but there are some notable differences. To begin with, the poem is set in iambic pentameter, but occasionally breaks this convention. Consider line three:

Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see

In this line, the words 'out' 'broad' and 'leaves' are all stressed. Why is this? Perhaps Barrett Browning is suggesting how powerful and intense her thoughts are at this moment. Here we can see that the poet is deliberately playing with the form to express her feelings about the intensity of love. Linking back to the question, we might write it into an exam answer like this:

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming in the poem 'Sonnet XXIX'. The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts the form. In line three, there are three stressed syllables in a row, where the poet describes how she will put 'out broad leaves'. This line is used to describe the all-encompassing and all-consuming intensity of the poet's thoughts. By breaking the sonnet conventions we are given a sense of how overwhelming these feelings are. Just as the thoughts can overpower the poet, they can also overpower the form of the poem itself, forcing it beyond its limits.

NOTE:

Now let's consider the structure of the poem. A sonnet should have its 'turn' (a change between the octave and sestet) in line eight. However, in Sonnet XXIX we find the turn straddled between lines 7 and 8:

Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence;

So why does Barrett-Browning deliberately break some of the rules of a sonnet? Well, if the sonnet is a poem of perfect love, perhaps Barrett-Browning refuses to follow the form perfectly to reflect how the love she has for Browning is not perfect and will not be so until the two are together. In other words, 'I can't write the perfect love poem because my love is not perfect - I don't have the one I love with me.

These type of points are complex and difficult, but close study of each poem will reveal something in this area. Let's now look at the form and structure of 'When We Two Parted'.

'When We Two Parted' is an example of accentual verse. This means that each line must contain the same amount of stressed syllables, no matter how many syllables there are in each line. Sound confusing? Let's look at an example:

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken hearted
To sever for years,

Colder thy kiss;

Sorrow to this

Here we see that there are two stressed syllables per line, even though the lines themselves have anywhere between 4 and 6 syllables, but the stressed syllable count remains at 2. However, look at lines 5 and 7:

⁵ Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

⁶ Colder thy kiss;

⁷ Truly that hour foretold

⁸ Sorrow to this

Lines 5 and 7 break the rules of accentuated verse, containing 3 stressed syllables. Like Barrett-Browning, Byron is breaking the rules of form and structure, and he is doing so to make an important point.

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

This line describes the moment when the poet was rejected by his lover. This woman, whom he had loved, was turning 'cold' on him. This action made the poet feel broken and rejected, thus the poem structure is 'broken' too.

So how would we add this to our exam style answer? How about this:

Q: Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

In Sonnet XXIX, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming. The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet form. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts the form. The poem mostly follows the sonnet convention of Iambic Pentameter, but on occasion it does not. In line three, there are three stressed syllables in a row, where the poet describes how she will put 'out broad leaves'. This line specifically describes the all-consuming intensity of the poet's thoughts. By breaking the sonnet convention we are given a sense of how overwhelming these feelings of love are. Just as the thoughts overpower the poet, they also overpower the form of the poem itself, forcing it to breaking point.

Similarly, Byron also breaks the conventions of his chosen poetic form in the poem 'When We Two Parted'. This poem is an example of accentuated verse, with each line containing two stressed syllables and any number of unstressed syllables. However, this is not the case in line 5 where the poet is shocked that 'pale grew thy cheek and cold'. In this line the words 'pale', 'cheek' and 'cold' are stressed. This line describes the moment when the poet was rejected by his lover. This woman, whom he had loved, was turning 'cold' on him. This action made the poet feel broken and rejected, thus the poem structure is 'broken' too. Both Barrett-Browning and Byron deliberately break the form of their poems to show the intensity which can be caused by love.

Of course, the mark scheme requires language and structure and form, so it's important to look at the language too. To me, there are some interesting points to be made about the religious language in Sonnet XXIX:

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,

Here the poet describes her future husband as a tree, and herself as a vine. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus is here saying that he is the tree, his followers are its branches. The image of the tree symbolises the notion that Christians can do nothing if not connected to God. In Sonnet XXIX, the poet describes Browning, her future lover, as 'a tree'. In fact, there is a plethora of religious imagery in the poem. When the poet calls Browning 'my palm-tree' she is referencing the Song of Solomon in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is a poem about the sexual love between a man and his bride. Consider the striking similarities here:

I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples (Song of Solomon, 7:8).

The use of 'palm tree' and 'bough' is certainly lifted from Song of Solomon, but why? As a deeply religious woman, Barrett-Browning is here pointing out that she is looking forward to sex within the context of marriage. The references to Song of Solomon are a reminder that God created sex to be enjoyed between husband and wife. There is a sense that sexual attraction between husband and wife is right, honourable and pure. This is not something we see in the Byron poem. In fact, Byron is bereft of religious imagery, because the relationship he is writing of – an affair with a married woman, is not right, honourable and pure. So if there is no religious imagery, what is there?

Byron uses a large amount of sensory imagery.

When We Two Parted

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
Sank chill on my brow--
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame;
I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell in mine ear;
A shudder come o'er me--
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well--
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met--
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee?--
With silence and tears.

The poem is filled with sensory description. From the sound imagery of 'hear' and 'knell' to the touch imagery of 'colder' and 'shudder', the poem focuses on the language of sensory description. Could this be Byron's way of pointing out that the relationship was about sensory pleasure? There was no sacred or religious element to it, it was all about physical intimacy. If so, how could we write these two conflicting ideas about the nature of love into our exam answer?

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Barrett-Browning uses language to suggest that love is a pure and religious experience. Many of the images are intertextual references to the Song of Solomon in the Bible. When the poet explains that her 'thoughts do twine

and bud about thee, as wild vines, about a tree', there are two obvious Biblical allusions being made. Barrett-Browning describes her future husband as a tree, and herself as a vine. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus is here saying that he is the tree, his followers are its branches. The image of the tree symbolises the notion that Christians can do nothing if not connected to God. In Sonnet XXIX, the poet describes Browning, her future lover, as 'a tree'. What this tells us about the nature of love is that a loved one is so important they can become god-like in the eyes of their lover.

In fact, there is a plethora of religious imagery in the poem. When the poet calls Browning 'my palm-tree' she is referencing the Song of Solomon in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is a poem about the sexual love between a man and his bride. The use of 'palm tree' and 'bough' is certainly lifted from Song of Solomon, but why? As a deeply religious woman, Barrett-Browning is here pointing out that she is looking forward to sex within the context of marriage. The references to Song of Solomon are a reminder that God created sex to be enjoyed between husband and wife. There is a sense that sexual attraction between husband and wife is right, honourable and pure. The use of religious language symbolises that love is sexual and passionate, and that there is nothing wrong with that within the context of marriage.

This is not something we see in the Byron poem. In fact, Byron is bereft of religious imagery, because the relationship he is writing of - an affair with a married woman, is not right, honourable and pure in the eyes of religion. Byron uses language to show us that love is a physical feeling and desire, not a religious one. 'When We Two Parted' is filled with sensory description. From the sound imagery of 'hear' and 'knell' to the touch imagery of 'colder' and 'shudder', the poem focuses on the language of sensory description. This is Byron's way of pointing out that the relationship was about sensory pleasure, not religious connection. There was no sacred or religious element to it, it was all about physical intimacy.

OK, let's put all that together and see what our final exam answer looks like:

Q: Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barret Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

In Sonnet XXIX, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming. The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet form. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts the form. The poem mostly follows the sonnet convention of Iambic Pentameter, but on occasion it does not. In line three, there are three stressed syllables in a row, where the poet describes how she will put 'out broad leaves'. This line specifically describes the all-consuming intensity of the poet's thoughts. By breaking the sonnet convention we are given a sense of how overwhelming these feelings of love are. Just as the thoughts overpower the poet, they also overpower the form of the poem itself, forcing it to breaking point.

Similarly, Byron also breaks the conventions of his chosen poetic form in the poem 'When We Two Parted'. This poem is an example of accentuated verse, with each line containing two stressed syllables and any number of unstressed syllables. However, this is not the case in line 5 where the poet is shocked that 'pale grew thy cheek and cold'. In this line the words 'pale', 'cheek' and 'cold' are stressed. This line describes the moment when the poet was rejected by his lover. This woman, whom he had loved, was turning 'cold' on him. This action made the poet feel broken and rejected, thus the poem structure is 'broken' too. Both Barrett-Browning and Byron deliberately break the form of their poems to show the intensity which can be caused by love.

Barrett-Browning uses language to suggest that love is a pure and religious experience. Many of the images are intertextual references to the Song of Solomon in the Bible. When the poet explains that her 'thoughts do twine and bud about thee, as wild vines, about a tree', there are two obvious Biblical allusions being made. Barrett-Browning describes her future husband as a tree, and herself as a vine. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus is here saying that he is the tree, his followers are its branches. The image of the tree symbolises the notion that Christians can do nothing if not connected to God. In Sonnet XXIX, the poet describes Browning, her future lover, as 'a tree'. What this tells us about the nature of love is that

a loved one is so important they can become god-like in the eyes of their lover.

In fact, there is a plethora of religious imagery in the poem. When the poet calls Browning 'my palm-tree' she is referencing the Song of Solomon in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is a poem about the sexual love between a man and his bride. The use of 'palm tree' and 'bough' is certainly lifted from Song of Solomon, but why? As a deeply religious woman, Barrett-Browning is here pointing out that she is looking forward to sex in the context of marriage. The references to Song of Solomon are a reminder that God created sex to be enjoyed between husband and wife. There is a sense that sexual attraction between husband and wife is right, honourable and pure. The use of religious language symbolises that love is sexual and passionate, and that there is nothing wrong with that in the context of marriage.

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NOTE:

Although these poems are complex, the exam answers need simply to do what we've been doing all along: analyse language, structure and form.

SECTION C: UNSEEN POETRY

In section C you will be asked to compare two poems you have never seen before, spending just 45 minutes planning and writing your answer. This section of the exam is likely to intimidate many students, but I have created a system for analysing unseen poems which I shall now share with you. However, before I do that, take a look at this unseen poem and the question that follows it.

BULLY

Your words cut into me, sharp as a knife
The pain that you cause always goes unseen
I curl up defenceless, scared for my life
Why do you always have to be so mean?

We met in our tutor group, class 8E
At first you barely saw that I was there
But soon your attention fell upon me
Your words were flying and always unfair

After a few years we became good friends
Most of the time, you were actually kind
But then those moments of friendship would end
The good times were gone - all kindness behind

But those very good times enriched my life
That's why in the end I took you as my wife

(Andrew Smith, 1981-)

Question: What is the poet's attitude to relationships? How is this presented in the poem? [12 marks].

There are likely to be three questions in this section of the exam, one on each poem and one comparison question. Because students often find unseen poetry analysis so difficult, here are the links to two exclusive videos to help you:

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)

OK, here are the 7 steps to follow with any unseen poem.

Step 1: Think About the Poet

Although you will almost certainly have never heard of the poet in the exam, you can work out quite a lot from the name. To begin with, does it sound foreign or common? In the example above the name 'Andrew Smith' seems to be a British or maybe American name - there are certainly no clues that it may be to the contrary. Secondly think about the sex - the fact that this poem is written by a man may play an important part of the analysis to come.

Step 2: Think About The Date

If there is a date listed you need to think about the life-time experiences of the poet and relate them to what you found out in step 1. For example, a poem from the 1600s written by a woman is going to be based in a context where women's rights were very different to today. In the poem above you can see that the poet is just over 30 years old. This means they have lived through the same sort of things you have lived through and share the same cultural experiences: the internet boom, TV, 9/11 etc. Of course you don't know exactly when the poem was written, but again your first impressions on the date can be important later on.

Step 3: First Reading for Literal Meaning

The exam board will choose a poem in this section which has both a simple meaning and a complex meaning. To begin with, read through the poem looking for the simple meaning. That is: what does this poem literally mean?

Using 'Bully' as an example, we can say that the poem is about two school enemies who later became friends and got married - that is the simple meaning.

Step 4: Look for the Poetic Devices

You should really do this at the same time as step 3, but look for the poetic devices used in the poem. For example: similes, metaphors, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm etc.

Step 5: Look at the Structure and Form

How is the poem organised? When do the verses change and why? Does it follow the pattern of a type of poetry? The poem 'Bully' follows the form of Shakespearean Sonnet. It is clear that Smith uses the sonnet form to back up the message that this poem is about falling in love (albeit with a childhood enemy).

Step 6: Look for the Inconsistencies / Deeper Meanings

The next step is to look for the deeper meaning of the poem. This is often found by looking for words or phrases which don't seem to fit in with the literal interpretation. In the poem above, you might consider the use of the present tense 'cause' which suggests that this bullying is still taking place to this day. Perhaps this poem is more than a simple 'we used to hate each-other and now we love each-other' and is actually about domestic abuse?

Similarly, the form of the poem suggests a deeper meaning. Although it follows the sonnet form religiously, the last line contains 11 syllables not 10. On first reading this is a very happy line which seems to laugh at the way the married couple used to be friends. However, why did Smith choose to break the sonnet form? Does it, perhaps, suggest that the love the couple has is not real?

Step 7: Answer the Question

Steps 1-6 should really only take 4 or 5 minutes to complete.

TOP TIPS FOR THE UNSEEN POETRY QUESTION:

- Analyse language, structure and form
- Write in PEE paragraphs
- Write about the poet's themes and the effect on the reader

With all that in mind, let's look at some sample answers:

A 'GOOD' SAMPLE ANSWER:

The poet's attitude to relationships is that they are complex and multi-faceted. On the one hand, relationships are loving and romantic. This is seen through the use of the sonnet form. The poem follows the form of a Shakespearean sonnet: 14 lines of iambic pentameter, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme etc etc. By using the form of a famous type of love poetry, Smith is showing that the relationship is loving. However, the title of the poem tells another story. By calling the poem 'bully', it is clear that this relationship contains pain and suffering as well. This pain and suffering is clearly seen throughout the poem. The effect on the reader is that they may feel confused about these conflicting emotions, which is probably how Smith himself feels.

Ok, so the part answer above is a good answer. It is structured in PEE paragraph format and comments on the effect on the reader. It analyses language and form, and shows a clear knowledge of the understanding of sonnets. However, it really only focuses on a surface analysis - there is much more that could be said. So, how do you develop that answer into a higher tier answer (or one which would gain full marks at foundation tier?) Using the answer given as a starting point, let's see if we can develop it into something more sophisticated which addresses the deeper meanings and possible alternative interpretations.

A 'BETTER' SAMPLE ANSWER:

The poet's attitude to relationships is that they are complex and multi-faceted. On the one hand, relationships are loving and romantic. This is seen through the use of the sonnet form. The poem follows the form of a Shakespearean sonnet: 14 lines of iambic pentameter, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme etc etc. By using the form of a famous type of love poetry, Smith is showing that the relationship is loving. However, the use of the sonnet form is more subversive in this poem - it isn't until the volta at the end where we actually realise this poem is about a marriage. The effect on the reader of this sharp twist is that they are surprised to see these seemingly combatant people are married. Perhaps Smith himself is surprised at how he has fallen into this marriage. On top of that it is very important to note that the poem is not a perfect sonnet - the last line 'That's why in the end I took you as my wife' contains 11 syllables where it should only contain 10. This suggests that there is more lurking under the surface of this seemingly happy marriage - perhaps it isn't quite so happy at all, but is a façade, just like the forced and ultimately inaccurate use of the sonnet form.

The language of the poem certainly does little to suggest the relationship is a happy one. By calling the poem 'bully', it is clear that this relationship contains pain and suffering as well. This pain and suffering is clearly seen throughout the poem. In fact, in verse one there is a suggestion that the relationship is still not happy, seen in the use of the verb 'cause'. This present tense usage is perhaps a subtle hint that the 'bullying' of their childhood is still taking place in their modern marriage. In this interpretation it could even be suggested that childhood bullying is a metaphor for domestic abuse. Smith might be covering the issue through childish imagery to reflect how he feels immature and childish to be the victim of domestic abuse and yet also be a man.

You can see that this answer is much more sophisticated than the first. It picks out subtleties and inconsistencies and analyses these persuasively. As with all poetry, you don't have to have the right answer - any answer is valid if it can be explained.

But don't rest just yet. You'll remember that the exam requires you to compare TWO unseen poems. Another 12 mark question will assess your understanding of a second poem.

Let's take a look at a second unseen poem:

MY LOVE FOR YOU

My love for you is strong and true,
I could not survive without you,
My love for you is real and strong,
I'll love you with laughter and with song,
My love for you will last forever,
It will not change is sun or bad weather,
My love for you is flying high,
It will last forever - my love will never die

Walt Shapman

1942-1999

Now let's apply the seven step process to this poem.

Step 1: Think About the Poet

Once again this poem is written by a man. 'Walt' could well be an American name, although we can't be sure.

Step 2: Think About The Date

This is a relatively modern poem, although the poet is recently deceased.

Step 3: First Reading for Literal Meaning

The poem is very simple, with one person telling another how much they love them.

Step 4: Look for the Poetic Devices

The whole poem is made up of rhyming couplets, but there is nothing in the way of similes, metaphors etc. Again, the poem seems to be deliberately simple, perhaps to suggest a child-like and innocent love on the part of the speaker?

Step 5: Look at the Structure and Form

No sonnets here, but rhyming couplets all the way through. These could symbolise the two lovers.

The poem is a dramatic monologue: one person seems to be speaking to another, but we never hear from the person being addressed.

Step 6: Look for the Inconsistencies / Deeper Meanings

Each couplet starts with 'my love for you', giving a sense of one-sidedness to the relationship

The couplets start off containing the same amount of syllables, but with each couplet the second line gets longer and longer whereas the first line stays the same. This could suggest a growing apart in the relationship, despite the passionate and heart-felt words of the speaker.

OK, now we're ready to answer a question:

Q: In 'My Love for You', how does the poet present the lovers' relationship?

Once again, I should aim to write about structure and form if possible - these are the most impressive points to make. I should structure my answer in PEE paragraphs, and make sure I am answering the question, not just writing everything I think about the poem.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

In 'My Love for You' the poet uses structure and form to present the relationship as one sided. The poet uses the form of a monologue, with the speaker continually telling the listener how much they love them. The repetition of 'my love for you' suggests a sense of desperation and

negativity, and it seems that the speaker's love is not matched by that of the listener. In this way, the use of a monologue form is perfect as we never hear from the listener but this leads us to question the equality of emotion in the poem. This notion is further enforced by the use of structure.

'My Love for You', on the surface, seems to be a poem about a deeply loving relationship, where the speaker is delighting in explaining their love which is 'real and strong'. However, the poet uses line length to suggest there is a growing distance between the two people in the relationship. The rhyming couplets begin with eight syllables each:

My love for you is strong and true,

I could not survive without you,

However, the second line grows longer with each verse. By the end, the second line is twelve syllables in length, whereas the first line remains at eight syllables. Here the poet uses line length to symbolise the growing distance between the two lovers. The speaker, perhaps represented by the first line, remains the same throughout. However, the second person, represented by line two, gets further and further away. The poet uses both structure and form to suggest an emotional distance between the speaker and listener in the poem.

NOTE:

Remember my point from earlier in this guide about presenting a well structured argument? My answer here essentially uses two separate parts of the poem to make one point. As a result, my argument is both cohesive and persuasive.

Now that we've mastered the art of analysing unseen poetry, let's look at how to compare unseen poems. The comparison question is likely to be very simple, such as:

What are the major similarities and differences between these two poems?

Write about:

- > The feelings in the poems
- > How the writers present these feelings [8 marks]

As you can see, this question is only worth 8 marks, and will probably only require 10-15 minutes of effort. To achieve full marks in the question you need to give an exploratory comparison with precise references. In other words, you need to compare with short, ideally single word quotations.

Now let's look at a specific comparison question:

In both 'Bully' and 'My Love for You' the speakers describe strong emotions. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those emotions?

[8 marks]

Something important to notice here is that the question is not 'what are the strong emotions' but 'how are the strong emotions presented'. This means looking at the use of language, structure and form, analysing how they are used to convey meaning.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Both 'Bully' and 'My Love for You' use structure/form to convey a hidden meaning.

'My Love for You', on the surface, seems to be a poem about a deeply loving relationship, where the speaker is delighting in explaining their love which is 'real and strong'. However, the poet uses line length to suggest there is a growing distance between the two people in the relationship. The rhyming couplets begin with eight syllables each:

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I could not survive without you,

However, the second line grows longer with each verse. By the end, the second line is twelve syllables in length, whereas the first line remains at eight syllables. Here the poet uses line length to symbolise the growing distance between the two lovers. The speaker, perhaps represented by the first line, remains the same throughout. However, the second person, represented by line two, gets further and further away.

Similarly, there is a contrast in the poem 'Bully'. In contrast to 'My Love for You', this poem seems to be explaining a problematic relationship, asking 'why do you always have to be so mean'. However, the form of the poem is a near perfect sonnet - a form of love poetry. Once again the form seems to contradict the topic of the poem.

In conclusion, both poems appear to say one thing but use structure and form to suggest something else.

NOTE:

As you can see, I only really had time in ten minutes to explain one point in full detail. It's better to 'write a lot about a little' than to make five different points very briefly.

PRIVATE TUITION:

At this point in the eBook, I thought I would take a little time out to tell you about the private tuition work I offer to students across the globe.

I live in a remote and secluded spot on Dartmoor, in the UK. Because of this, I don't travel to people's houses to tutor - I complete all private tuition via YouTube. The format I follow is this: once a week I make a private video just for you where I teach a topic and set you a task. You then complete the work and send it to me via email within 7 days. I then go over your work in a video and tell you what you need to do to improve.

The topics for each video can cover past exam papers, homework topics and anything else you like.

I have worked 1-2-1 in this manner with students from the UK, Dubai, Hong Kong, Spain and Malaysia. All of my students achieve excellent results. Here is a testimonial from the mother of one of my students back in 2014 when GCSEs were grade A* (top) to U (bottom).

'Dear Mr Bruff,

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the YouTube GCSE tutoring videos. My daughter had failed her English Language and Literature three times; she was underachieving at grade U and her teachers lost all faith in her even to get a grade C. However, even with all the resources and revision guides I purchased for her they didn't equate to your phenomenal teaching standards! She started watching your videos two weeks before her English exams, from being predicted grades E/F she managed to achieve Grade A* and Grade A. This feeling was out of this world for her and us, being dyslexic and a visual learner your style of teaching was appropriate to her learning. She believes you're the best virtual teacher that she never had.'

Here's another testimonial from a different student:

I would like to give a tremendous thank you to Mr Bruff for his 1st class tuition service he has provided for my son in order for my son to achieve the A* we both wanted for him in English Language. It was a completely worthwhile service that enables you to achieve the highest grade possible. Before my son was using Mr Buff he was only getting B grades. I have no complaints with his service and I am completely satisfied. I would definitely recommend this to any parents who want to see their child attain the highest level in their English Language exam.

From,
A satisfied parent from Barking and Dagenham

I offer 1-2-1 tuition to all age groups, all exam boards and all nationalities. If you'd like further information please email me abruff@live.co.uk

If you've found this eBook useful, please head over to mrbruff.com and look at the other titles available:

