

You are reading a sample from the eBook 'Mr Bruff's Guide to GCSE English Language'. You can purchase the full eBook for just £3.99 at mrbruff.com or on Amazon.

This sample explores question 2 of the English Language Paper 1.

QUESTION 2:

Question 2 assesses the language element of A02:

'Explain, comment on and analyse how different writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views'.

So what do we mean when we refer to language analysis? Put simply, we mean to investigate a writer's use of: words, language features and sentence forms. You are looking for occasions where it seems that the writer has deliberately used these to achieve a specific effect on the reader. If that sounds confusing: don't worry - I'm about to break it down for you.

Question 2 is worth 8 marks, and you should spend around 10 minutes on it.

To achieve full marks you need to give answers which are perceptive. 'Perceptive' basically means thinking beyond the obvious. Remember, examiners mark hundreds of papers. They will read hundreds of responses to the same question. If you are to achieve top marks, you need to be making points which most other students do not make.

Here's a sample question:

2. Take a detailed look at this extract from lines 1-6 of the source:

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, 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.

How does the writer use language to describe the weather?

You could write about:

- Individual words and phrases
- Language devices
- Sentence structures.

[8 marks]

The bullet points in this exam paper serve as a useful reminder of exactly what you should be writing about. Before you look at my sample answer, re-read the extract and think about which language features you might write about. Remember, the question is focused on the description of weather, so any language used to describe characters is not important here.

Let's look at the three bullet points in detail, starting with individual words or phrases.

One approach to this question is to consider the word classes used by the writer. Some things you might write about:

1. Use of adjectives: **dreary**
2. Use of nouns: **night, November,**
3. Use of verbs: **pattered,**

4. Use of adverbs: *Dismally*,

It doesn't take a genius to work out that the weather is being described in negative terms in this extract. All of the words selected above are used to create this atmosphere. Let's put some of them into a paragraph and construct a sample answer:

SAMPLE ANSWER PARAGRAPH 1:

Shelley uses a wide range of negative language to describe the weather. To begin with the rain not only falls, but it patters 'dismally'. This is a very negative word which creates the feeling that something bad is going to happen. Similarly, the night is described with the adjective 'dreary'. These words create a sense of danger.

OK, that paragraph was adequate, but it certainly wasn't perceptive. The more perceptive points are likely to come from looking at language devices and sentence structures. Let's now look at language devices.

LANGUAGE DEVICES:

As this question is based on a literary extract and not a piece of non-fiction, the language devices we should look out for are examples of figurative language. Figurative language is where a writer goes beyond the literal meaning of a word or phrase. You will probably be familiar with many of these examples from your work on poetry analysis. Although it is tempting to create an acronym which covers a few of the key examples, it will be much more useful for you to learn them all:

Alliteration: Repetition of the same sound at the beginning of words. For example: *The man made mountains with his hands.*

Assonance: Repetition of vowel sounds in words which start with different consonants. For example: *Light the fire up high.*

Consonance: Repetition of consonant sounds in words which are close together in a sentence. For example: *I think I thanked the wrong doctor.*

Note: consonance is often a tricky device to spot, because the repetition does not have to occur at the beginning of the word (that's alliteration). Remember, consonance is repetition of sounds, not necessarily letters. Can you spot the consonance in this sentence:

I picked the pocket of the police-man.

Euphemism: An indirect or mild word/phrase used to replace one which is thought to be too harsh or offensive. For example: *I'm going to have to let you go* (instead of 'sack you').

Hyperbole: Deliberate exaggeration for effect. For example: "I've told you a million times, no Xbox after 10pm!"

Idiom: An expression that holds a different meaning to its literal meaning. For example: *Granddad kicked the bucket*. This idiom means 'died', and does not refer to any literal bucket kicking.

Metaphor: Describing something by stating that it is something else. The two things must be different, but contain a line of similarity. For example: *He flew down the road in his car*. He did not literally fly, but the metaphor suggests the idea that he drove so fast that he achieved speeds similar to those of an aircraft!

Sometimes you will find a metaphor which is used throughout a piece of writing (or in this case an extract). This is called an extended metaphor.

Personification: Giving human characteristics to something which is not human. For example: *The flames danced playfully in the fire*. Flames cannot dance - this is a human characteristic which has been used to describe the way the flames move around.

Onomatopoeia: Where the word imitates the sound of the thing it is naming. For example: *I saved my work with a click of the mouse*. When you say the word 'click', it actually makes the sound of a 'click'. Other examples are *splash*, *hiccup* and *bang*.

Oxymoron: Placing two words together which are actually opposite to each other. For example: *Act naturally, pretty ugly, jumbo shrimp*.

Pun: A joke which plays on different meanings of a word, or similar sounding words with different meanings. For example: *Santa's little helpers are called subordinate clauses.*

Pathetic Fallacy: The use of setting to reflect a character's mood. For example: 'The rain pattered dismally against the panes'. Here the rain reflects the mood of the narrator - more on that in a moment!

Simile: Describing something by stating that it is similar to something else, using the word 'as' or 'like'. The two things must be different, but contain a line of similarity. For example: *He was as cold as ice.* There is only one line of similarity between the man and ice - they are both cold. A simile is similar to a metaphor, but similes describe things as being *like* others, whereas metaphors describe things as *being* others.

Symbolism: Where one thing is meant to represent something else. For example, the colour black is often used to symbolise evil or death.

So, let's look for these devices in the extract. My answers will be covered on the next page, but why don't you see what you can find yourself before turning the page?

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, 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.

Here's what I spotted:

1. Pathetic fallacy: 'rain pattered dismally'
2. Onomatopoeia: 'pattered'

As you can see, these two points are more sophisticated than the simple language analysis from paragraph 1. However, it's not enough to simply identify

the language devices - you have to explain the **effect** on the reader. This bit is the hardest bit. Put simply, you should ask yourself: why did the writer use that device? Does it make me feel a certain way? Does it make me think of a certain thing? Does it emphasise a certain point? The hard truth is that the effect depends on the context of the extract itself. Let's take a look at our two examples:

1. Pathetic fallacy: 'rain pattered dismally'

What is the effect of the fact that it is raining? How does this reflect Doctor Frankenstein's mood? We could argue that the grim weather foreshadows and reflects Dr Frankenstein's mood over his creation.

There are a number of different ideas you can play around with when writing about pathetic fallacy - no single answer is the 'correct' answer. If you can explain your thinking then anything is valid.

2. Onomatopoeia: 'pattered'

The use of onomatopoeia is very effective. By describing the sound made by the rain as it hits the window, the reader can imagine the scene more vividly - it's as if we too can hear the raindrops. This then scares the reader and increases the tension as we begin to experience the events of this chapter as if we are in the room with Dr Frankenstein himself.

Now let's put them into a sample answer:

SAMPLE ANSWER PARAGRAPH 2:

In this extract Shelley uses the literary device of pathetic fallacy, using setting to reflect Dr Frankenstein's mood. Shelley's use of grim weather, with rain which 'pattered dismally' foreshadows and reflects Dr Frankenstein's mood over his creation. The use of onomatopoeia in this quotation is also very effective. By describing how the rain 'pattered' as it hit the window, the reader can imagine the scene more vividly - it's as if we too can hear the raindrops. This then scares the reader and increases the tension as we begin to experience the events of this chapter as if we are in the room with Dr Frankenstein himself.

As you can see, examining the writer's use of literary devices allows us to produce a much more perceptive answer.

Thirdly, let's look at the writer's use of sentence structures. You should scan through the extract, looking for the different sentence types:

Simple sentences:

Simple sentences contain a subject and a verb. Look at the following example:

He laughed.

In this example, we have a verb (an action): 'laughed'. If we ask ourselves who or what is 'doing' the verb, the answer is 'he'. Therefore, 'he' is the subject. Simple sentences are mostly, but not always, short. It's possible to add adjectives and adverbs to simple sentences:

The tired old man walked slowly along the ancient stone path.

Although this sentence is longer, it still only contains one subject and one verb: 'man' and 'walked', so it still a simple sentence.

Compound sentences:

Compound sentences join two simple sentences with one of the following words (called conjunctions):

For

And

Nor

But

Or

Yet

So

You might have heard about them in school as 'FANBOYS'.

NOTE: The conjunction 'for' is a slightly old fashioned word which is used to mean 'because'.

Example:

The man laughed and his wife cried.

Here we have two simple sentences:

The man laughed (subject = man, verb = laughed)

His wife cried (subject = wife, verb = cried).

All we've done is join them together with one of the FANBOYS conjunctions.

Complex sentences:

Complex sentences also join two sentences together, but with different conjunctions such as:

Although

Because

Even if

If

While

Let's look at an example:

I love you, although you drive me crazy.

Here we have two simple sentences:

I love you

You drive me crazy

We've joined the two sentences with a conjunction, but it's not a FANBOYS conjunction. What we've made is a complex sentence.

Complex sentences can be divided into two parts:

- 1) The part which makes sense on its own. We call this the 'main clause'. In the example above the main clause is 'I love you',
- 2) The part which does not make sense on its own. We call this the 'subordinate clause'. In the example above, the subordinate clause is 'although you drive me crazy'.

The exciting thing about complex sentences is that you put the main clause first or the subordinate clause first:

I love you, although you drive me crazy.

Although you drive me crazy, I love you.

Compound complex sentences:

A compound complex sentence consists of a complex sentence with an additional compound sentence added to it. It is both compound (with two simple sentences joined with a FANBOYS conjunction) and complex (with a subordinate clause). Here's an example:

I bought this book because it looked useful, but now I am confused.

Let's break it down:

'I bought the book' = main clause

'because it looked useful' = subordinate clause

'but' = FANBOYS conjunction

'now I am confused' = Simple sentence, made a compound sentence with the 'but' which preceded it.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It's not enough to just identify the sentence types used in an extract. You need to think about **why** they are used. Probably the easiest way to do this is to think about sentence length. Writers often use very long sentences to create an overwhelming or depressing atmosphere, and very short sentences to create a sense of energy, pace and panic. Why? Because long sentences are hard to read (overwhelming you could say) and short sentences create pace as you are forced to take so many short breaths to time the punctuation. **But be careful: the exam board doesn't want you writing about the length of sentences; you need to write about the sentence types which are employed (simple, compound or complex).** Looking at sentence length first can be useful, but you must then work out exactly which sentence types are employed.

So, let's look back at the extract and consider the sentence types. Remember, we're just looking at the bits which describe the weather. See if you can work out the sentence types and spot anywhere where Shelley is using them for effect:

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, 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.

How did you do? Did you notice how the final sentence is a (very confusing) compound-complex sentence:

It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, 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.

To see just how long this sentence is, try and read it aloud in one breath. Hard isn't it?

OK, so what can we say about the description of the weather and this compound complex sentence? Did Shelley really do it deliberately to describe the weather? We'll never know the real answer, but for the purpose of this exam the answer is a resounding YES!

SAMPLE ANSWER PARAGRAPH 3:

Shelley uses sentence structure to convey the overwhelming power of the bad weather in the extract. The compound-complex sentence 'It was already one in the morning...a convulsive motion agitated its limbs' is made up of numerous clauses and is so long that it is difficult to read aloud without becoming breathless. This is a deliberate technique used by Shelley who wants to convey the fact that the weather was overwhelming, just like the use of sentence structure. With two semi-colons and five commas, this sentence is chaotic. The chaotic sentence structure is a reflection of the chaotic weather, reflecting the chaos of the experiment taking place.

NOTE: You'll see that I did not quote the whole sentence. To do so would take too much of my precious 10 minutes. If you're quoting a really long section of the text just quote the start and end and place an ellipsis in the middle.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER:

As you can see, the easiest approach to this question is to look at single words and phrases. However, my suggestion for those aiming for top marks is to look at sentence structures and language devices first. It might be that you can write about all three areas in your ten minutes, but my advice is to start with sentence structures first.

First impressions are important - explaining your most perceptive points first is going to leave a lasting impression on the examiner. If the first two paragraphs are basic but the final paragraph is great, it is less likely you will achieve high marks. However, start with an amazing point and the examiner will be more likely to award a top score.

-----End of sample-----

