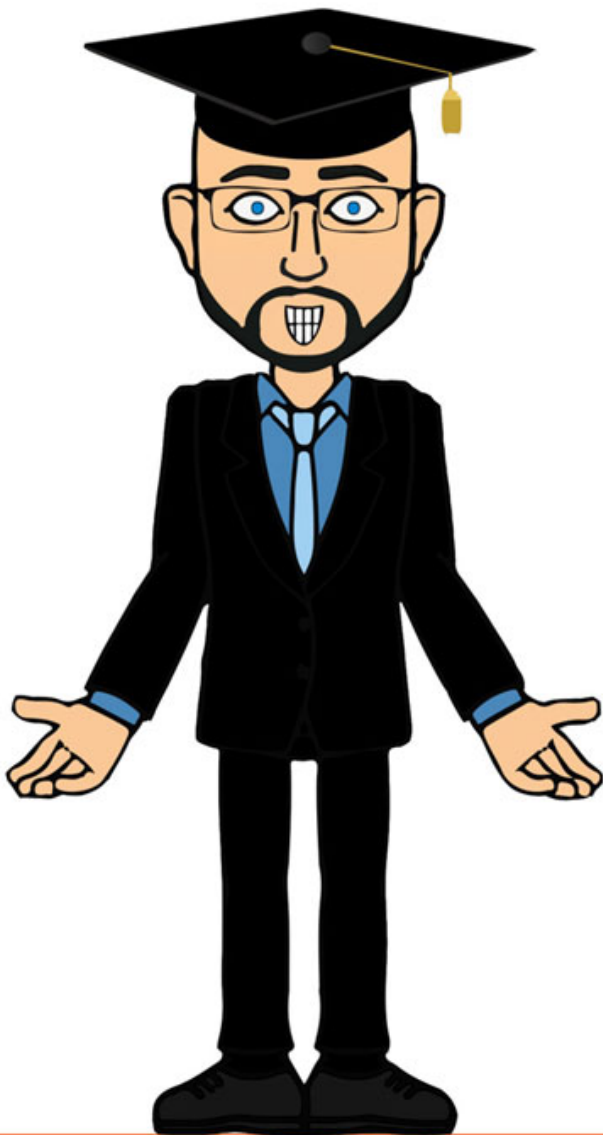


Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

MR Bruff's Guide To

A' Level English Literature



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SAMPLE

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Introduction

First of all, congratulations on choosing to study English literature at AS or A' Level! Both qualifications aim to produce confident, critical students who can express original ideas. This is excellent preparation for university.

Whether you choose the AS or A' Level route, this practical ebook is relevant to all of the exam boards because their A' levels in English literature have the same assessment objectives.

There's a big gap between GCSE and A' level, and we want to help you to bridge that gap. Be aware that there's a lot packed into the pages that follow. Don't let this put you off! Think of this guide as a reference book containing helpful advice and practical examples: dip into it if you're not sure what a particular assessment objective means or if you're not sure how to approach a task.

In this updated edition of the ebook, references to the legacy specification have been removed. If you are beginning an AS or A' level in English literature, you should be tailoring your work to the assessment objectives below, which came into effect in September 2015.

Assessment Objectives*

AO1	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.
AO2	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.
AO3	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
AO4	Explore connections across literary texts.
AO5	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

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The chapters in this ebook focus on the above assessment objectives.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

You might not be assessed on every AO in every unit that you study; your teacher should provide you with more details. You can also check your exam board's specification online.


NOTE ON PUNCTUATION

The exam boards lack consistency with abbreviating *Advanced levels*. You might come across the hyphenated *A-levels* or the letter *A* as in *A levels*.

The word *Advanced* abbreviates to *A'* and the apostrophe shows that the letters *dvanced* are missing. As an ardent supporter of the Apostrophe Protection Society, I'm using the apostrophe to show that *Advanced* is abbreviated.

FINAL IMPORTANT NOTE:

This ebook is not endorsed by or affiliated to any exam boards. The writer is simply an experienced teacher, using her expertise to help students.



Chapter 1

Building on GCSE English Literature

When you were preparing for your GCSE exams, you might have bought revision guides to help you with particular texts. You're probably familiar with the excellent range of ebooks, for example, that Mr Bruff and his team have written.

Unfortunately, you can't depend solely on these for A' level English literature. If you do this, you won't gain a high mark.

Your informed thoughts about the texts are far more important. This is the difference between GCSE and A' level English literature.

At A' level, you're expected to give an informed personal response. This means that you become more of an independent learner, so there's more emphasis on research. To support your classroom studies, you'll be reading around the texts and demonstrating how your new knowledge informs your views. You'll learn fascinating facts about the contexts in which the texts were written and understood. You'll also learn critical theory and how to apply it. Finally, you'll research the views of other people, consider what they say and decide whether or not you agree with them. All of your wider reading will help you to argue your point of view—in an informed and knowledgeable way.

It goes without saying that these excellent research skills are invaluable for university.

A' level literature also prepares you for higher education by developing your essay writing skills. This guide teaches you how to reference your wider reading, write footnotes and a bibliography. You'll be using these skills in the non-examined component of your course.

Before we focus on the assessment objectives, however, we need to explore the requirements of independent reading in more detail.

Chapter 2

Independent Reading

This might be stating the obvious but, as an A' level literature student, you're expected to like reading!

As part of your programme of wider reading, you might sample texts of a particular genre or literary movement. Alternatively, you might choose to read texts with a similar theme to the ones that you are studying in class. You might also investigate historical events, cultural references and political movements—the list is endless.

It's impossible to do all of this reading within the classroom, so how much of your free time should you dedicate to this?

Different schools have different policies. Some recommend a minimum of five hours of independent study a week; others recommend double this number. Bear in mind that the more you read, the more you increase your chances of success.

The process of reading around a text isn't as arduous as it might sound: many students relish it because it's interesting and rewarding. It also develops their confidence when discussing texts and producing informed personal responses.

If the thought of independent study leaves you cold, however, just remember that A' levels are your passport to university, a well-paid job and a good lifestyle.

In short, independence.

Think about where you want to be in 2 - 5 years' time. Every time you don't want to do that independent reading, look at your goals.

Then read.

A' levels are only two years of your life.

They're worth the effort.

Chapter 3

AO1: Writing Skills and Language Terminology

Assessment Objective 1 (AO1) requires you to:

Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

But what does this mean? Let's examine one clause at a time.

Articulate Informed, Personal and Creative Responses to Literary Texts

This means that the examiner is assessing your critical understanding of the text(s) that you are studying.

In an academic context, 'critical' is a word that describes how you think. It doesn't mean being negative just for the sake of it. You have to consider your points carefully and express an evidence-based point of view that might agree or disagree with part or all of an exam question. Your response should be:

Informed: you know the text very well and have reflected upon the thoughts and ideas that it contains. This has involved analysing and evaluating different ideas and positions.

Personal: once you are informed, you are now in a position to think for yourself, ask questions about the text, evaluate ideas, and express your point of view.

Creative: you are showing the examiner that you are actively engaged with the text. You have thought carefully about the text and are expressing your own ideas, thereby providing evidence of independent thought.

Always remember to link your ideas to the question: don't write everything that you know about the text, regardless of relevance. Also consider a *yes, but* or *no, but* approach to answering questions, as this is a good way to demonstrate your informed, personal and creative ideas.

Using Associated Concepts and Terminology

The examiner is assessing your knowledge of **concepts**. This means your knowledge of ideas and theories; for example, ideas associated with *ballad*, *narrative method* and *comedy*. If I were to demonstrate my knowledge of ballads, I might talk about their history, common themes, their structure and rhyme scheme. These are all **associated concepts**.

Literary **terminology** is technical vocabulary that is used to analyse literary texts; for example, *simile*, *onomatopoeia* and *metaphor*. In this chapter, we'll review and hopefully extend your knowledge of terminology in more detail.

Why is knowledge of literary terminology so important? If you use it accurately and appropriately, you are demonstrating an academic style of writing.

You should be familiar with some of the following terminology from your GCSEs in English literature and English language, but other terminology and concepts might be new.

IMPORTANT! This guide aims to be a handy reference book so that you can dip into it when you need to check something. There's a lot of terminology in this chapter: don't panic! Your teacher should advise you on which is the most relevant for the particular text that you are studying.

BASIC GRAMMATICAL TERMINOLOGY

Adjective: describes a noun or pronoun. For example: *A happy student is smiling OR He is happy.*

Adverb: describes a verb. For example: *She walks slowly to school.*

Clause: part of a sentence. A **main clause** makes sense by itself because it has a subject and verb (for example, *I sang*). A compound sentence has two subjects and two verbs, creating two **independent clauses** (*I sang, so the window shattered*). A **subordinate clause** does not make sense by itself (*I sang, thinking about my cat.*) There are also **relative clauses**, which are like subordinate clauses except they are introduced by relative pronouns. For example: *I sang a song, which made everyone cry. I stared at the people, who asked me to stop singing.*

Conjunction: a word that joins sentences together. You might be familiar with the FANBOY conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* which join independent clauses to make compound sentences.

Determiner: introduces a noun. For example: *a, the, this, that, these, those*.

Interjection: expresses sudden feelings and emotions. For example: *Wow!*

Noun: the name of a thing. **Abstract nouns** are things that you cannot touch, see, smell, hear or taste; for example, *beauty, love* and *anger*. **Collective nouns** describe a group of things; for example, *a gaggle of geese, an anthology of poems* and *a staff of teachers*. You can touch, see, smell, hear or taste **concrete nouns** such as *chair, keyboard* and *water*. Finally, **proper nouns** are the names of specific people, places, organisations or things. They always begin with a capital letter: *Jim Smith, Swansea, Buckingham Palace* and *the Statue of Liberty*.

Object: receives the action of a verb. There is a **direct object** and an **indirect object**. For example: *She gives a book (direct object) to him (indirect object)*.

Preposition: tells you where something is. For example: *The cat sat on the mat*.

Pronoun: takes the place of a noun. For example: *I, you, he, she, it, we* and *they*.

Participle: a verb that behaves like an adjective; for example, *a smiling boy*.

The *-ing* part of a verb is a **present participle** and it shows an unfinished action. For example: *They are whistling merrily, walking to school and looking forward to their English lesson*. There are also **past participles**, which usually end in *-ed* if they are regular. These show that something has just been completed (*they have finished their lesson*) or has been done at some unspecified point in your life (*I've visited Spain a lot*). Finally, past participles are used in passive sentences, as in *the book was finished*.

Sentence: a group of words that begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop. At the barest minimum, a sentence has a subject and verb although this is not the case with minor sentences or fragments (for example: *Shocking*.) There are simple, compound and complex sentences as well as compound-complex sentences that contain at least two independent clauses and at least two subordinate clauses. For example:

We downloaded some books because they were cheaper than hard copies, and we also wanted to travel light when we went on holiday.

The independent clauses make sense by themselves and are underlined. The FANBOYS conjunction 'and' joins the two halves of the sentences. The remaining two phrases do not make sense by themselves and are therefore subordinate clauses.

Subject: The person, thing or place that the verb in a sentence is about. For example: We went on holiday.

Syntax: the way that words and phrases are arranged to create sentences. The syntax of an active sentence, for example, is *subject, verb, object* for example, (the dog eats the bone) while the syntax of a passive sentence is *object, verb* and sometimes *subject* (the bone is eaten by the dog).

Verb: a word that describes an action (for example, *run*), state (*be*) or occurrence (*happen*).

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language takes you beyond the literal meaning of a word to provide you with new insights and understandings about meaning. You should be familiar with some of the examples below.

Allegory: a type of **extended metaphor** (see below), where you say one thing but mean another, over an extended length of time. An allegory is usually a fable or story, which has another meaning beyond the obvious surface meaning. C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is a religious allegory, in which Aslan is Jesus and Edmund is Judas.

Alliteration: the repetition of words that begin with the same sound. For example: *The swans are swimming to Sandra the psychology teacher.*

Allusion: an indirect reference to something or someone famous. It does not explicitly name the thing or person. For example, the expression *your nose is growing* is an allusion to the children's story *Pinocchio*, whose hero's nose grows whenever he tells a lie.

Assonance: the repetition of the same vowel sounds, but the consonants surrounding the vowels are different. For example: *Dented wedding bells.*

Consonance: the repetition of the same consonant sound in different words. (This is not to be confused with alliteration, which focuses on sounds at the beginnings of words.) This example is consonance: *His resolution to save her soul is lessening.*

Euphemism: a mild word or expression that replaces something quite harsh or blunt. For example: *My cat has passed away (instead of 'died').*

Hyperbole: deliberate exaggeration for emphasis. For example: *His incredibly loud sneeze blew me to the other end of the room.*

Idiom: an expression that has a different meaning to its literal meaning. For example: *He kicked the bucket.*

Imagery: figurative language that generates ideas, mental images, sensations and emotions. All the examples in this section apply.

Irony: where the speaker means the opposite to what he or she says. An example of **verbal irony** might be *he works really hard*, which means *he's lazy*. This might be interpreted as sarcasm. The main difference is that with sarcasm the speaker intends to hurt the other person's feelings. **Situational irony** is best understood by examining the context that people are in; for example, sailors stranded at sea will be surrounded by water, and yet might be dying of thirst, unable to drink the seawater. With **dramatic irony**, the audience knows something that the characters on the stage do not. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, but the audience knows that she is in a drugged sleep.

Litotes: to deliberately understate a point in order to emphasise it. For example: *I'm not unhappy with my exam result.*

Metaphor: when you compare two things by saying that one thing is another. For example: *My brother's a pig.* He is not literally a pig with four legs and a curly tail, but the metaphor conjures up the idea of a lazy, gluttonous person.

An **extended metaphor** is when a metaphor is used and developed during a literary work, usually an entire poem. For example, *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost is an extended metaphor for the choices we take in life.

Metonymy: a replacement word that has close associations with the original. For example, *Downing Street* is a metonym for the Prime Minister; *suits* is a metonym for business people; and *Scotland Yard* is a metonym for London-based or British detectives.

Personification: where something non-human is described as if it is human. For example: *The inquisitive tree tapped its branches on my bedroom window.*

Onomatopoeia: where the sound of a word suggests its meaning. For example: *I can hear the ticking of a clock.*

Oxymoron: deliberately putting together two words that don't agree with each other. For example: *unfriendly smile, deafening silence and living dead.*

Paradox: a statement that seemingly contradicts itself. For example: 'I can resist anything but temptation.' *Oscar Wilde*

Pun: a deliberate play on words, usually to create humour. For example: *I wondered why the football was getting bigger. Then it hit me.*

Pathetic fallacy: where the setting reflects the mood of the character(s). For example: *While it was raining outside, the girl was sobbing uncontrollably.*

Rhetorical question: a question where no answer is expected.

Sibilance: most commonly, the repetition of the soft *-s* and *-sh* sounds in words. For example: 'And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain' (*The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe). These sounds are often described as hissing and include *-f* (*fall*), *-ch* (*chin*), *-th* (*think*), *-z* (*zoo*), *-x* (*x-ray*) and the soft *-c* (*deceit*). It also includes the sound in *measure*.


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