

MR Bruff's Guide To

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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SAMPLE

QUESTION 2

Question 2 is based around another section of the same text.

This question assesses the language element of AO2: '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—we'll look at an example.

Question 2 is worth 8 marks, and you should spend around 10 minutes on it. Here's a sample question:

Question 2

Take a detailed look at 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, I 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 features and techniques
- Sentence forms

[8 marks]

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

The bullet points in this exam paper serve as a useful reminder of exactly what you should be writing about. Before you look at the sample answer, re-read the extract and think about which language features you might analyse. Remember, the question is about 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 and phrases.

INDIVIDUAL WORDS AND PHRASES

You need to avoid writing about vague, generalised effects in your answer to question 2. If you write things like 'this makes the reader want to read on', you will fail to achieve high marks. You need to avoid comments that could be applied to ANY text by making your comments specific to the text that you are reading.

So how do you avoid these generalised comments? The best thing to do is this: read the extract and ask yourself, *What is the desired effect the writer is aiming to achieve in this extract?* It could be a sense of boredom, energy, danger, threat, humour, etc. Choose the desired effect, and THEN look for the language uses that achieve this effect. This will help you to focus your analysis and avoid vague comments.

Once you have a clear idea of the effect the writer wishes to achieve, you can scan the extract for words or phrases which achieve that effect. In our example, the weather is described in such negative terms, creating a sense of danger or threat, so you might like to pick words which create this effect:

'dreary'
'night', 'November'
'pattered'
'dismally'

SAMPLE ANSWER 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 that 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 features and sentence forms. Let's now look at language features.

LANGUAGE FEATURES

As this question is based on a literary extract and not a piece of non-fiction, the language features 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 that 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 moved mountains.*

Assonance: Repetition of vowel sounds in words that 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 uncle.*

Note: remember, consonance is repetition of sounds, not necessarily letters. 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). For example,; *Matt picked up the ticket.*

Euphemism: An indirect or mild word/phrase used to replace one that 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. 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 like those of an aircraft.

Sometimes you will find a metaphor that 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 that is not human. For example: *The flames danced playfully in the fire.* Flames cannot dance—this is a human characteristic 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 makes the sound of a 'click'. Other examples are *splash, drip* and *bang*.

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

Pun: A joke about words that sound alike but they have 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.

Sibilance: most commonly, the repetition of the soft *-s* and *-sh* sounds in words. This is like alliteration, but the sounds can be anywhere in a word. For example: *The silken sad uncertain rustling sound.*

Simile: Describing something by stating that it is like something else, using the word 'as' or 'like'. For example: *He was as cold as ice.* The difference between a simile and a metaphor is that a simile describes something as if it is *like* something else whereas a metaphor describes something as if it *is* something else.

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

ANALYSING LANGUAGE FEATURES

So, let's look for these features in the extract:

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I 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 features—you must 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 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 Frankenstein's mood? We could argue that the grim weather reflects and foreshadows Frankenstein's mood over his creation. You can play around with different ideas 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. We begin to experience the events of this chapter as if we are in the room with Frankenstein himself.

Let's put these points into a sample answer:

SAMPLE ANSWER 2

In this extract, Shelley uses the literary device of pathetic fallacy, using setting to reflect Frankenstein's mood. Shelley's use of grim weather, with rain that 'pattered dismally', reflects and foreshadows 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. We begin to experience the events of this chapter as if we are in the room with Frankenstein himself.

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

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

SENTENCE FORMS

Simple Sentences

Simple sentences contain a subject and a verb.

Example: *He laughed.*

In this example, we have a verb (in this case, 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 is a simple sentence.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences join two independent clauses (that look like simple sentences) with one of the following words, called co-ordinating conjunctions:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

You might have heard about them in school as 'FANBOYS'. (The conjunction 'for' is a slightly old-fashioned word, used to mean 'because'.)

We usually have a comma before these conjunctions.

Example: *The man laughed, and his wife cried.*

Here we have two independent clauses:

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 and added a comma.

Complex Sentences

Complex sentences have different (subordinating) conjunctions such as:

although
because
even if
if
while

Example: *I love you although you drive me crazy.*

If the subordinating conjunction is in the middle of the sentence, there is no comma.
If the sentence starts with a subordinating conjunction, there is a comma:

Example: *Although you drive me crazy, I love you.*

Complex sentences can be divided into two parts:

1. The part which makes sense on its own. We call this the main clause and it looks like a simple sentence. In the above example, 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 begins with the subordinating conjunction 'although you drive me crazy'.

The above is just one example of many different types of complex sentence.

Compound-complex sentences

A compound-complex sentence consists of a compound sentence (two independent clauses joined with a FANBOYS, or co-ordinating, conjunction) and at least one subordinate clause.

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

Let's break it down:

'I bought this book' = independent clause
'because it looked useful' = subordinate clause
'but' = FANBOYS (co-ordinating) conjunction
'now I am confused' = independent clause

Minor sentences (or fragments)

A minor sentence, sometimes called a fragment, is a word, phrase or clause that does not have the grammar of the above sentences.

Examples: Yes, please! No pain, no gain. Hi!

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It's not enough just to 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. Very short sentences, in contrast, 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 in time with the full stops. If you're a grammar whizz, you might be able to write about the sentence types that are employed (minor, simple, compound, complex or compound-complex). If not, just write about long and short sentences.

So, let's look back at the extract and consider the sentence types. Remember, we're just looking at the bits that describe the weather. See if you can work out the sentence types and spot 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, I 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? You hopefully spotted how the final sentence is a very long (and very confusing) 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?

SAMPLE ANSWER 3

Shelley uses sentence form to convey the overwhelming power of the bad weather in the extract. The long 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. Shelley deliberately uses this technique to convey the fact that the weather is overwhelming, just like the use of sentence structure. With two semicolons and five commas, this sentence is chaotic. The chaotic sentence structure reflects the chaotic weather, mirroring 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 many of my precious 10 minutes. If you're quoting a long section of the text, just quote the start and end, and place an ellipsis in the middle.

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 forms and language features first. It might be that you can write about all three areas in your ten minutes.

First impressions are important: explaining your most perceptive points first is going to leave a lasting impression on the examiner.

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