

Original writing

This guide is written for students who are following GCE Advanced level (AS and A2) syllabuses in English Language. This resource may also be of general interest to language students on university degree courses, trainee teachers and anyone with a general interest in language science.

What the exam board says

The aim of this coursework module is to develop candidates' own expertise as writers, by requiring them to write for different audiences and purposes. Although the specification avoids prescribing any single model or definition, the following are examples of the types of original writing which candidates might choose to submit

Writing to entertain

- a short story
- a stand-up comedy routine
- a radio script

Writing to persuade

- a piece of journalism
- a moral fable
- texts for an advertising campaign

Writing to inform

- an account of an event
- an explanation of a process
- an article about an area of special interest

Writing to advise/instruct

- planning for an event or occasion
- making better use of computer software
- advice on managing money.

Candidates are advised to choose tasks that reflect their own interests and for which they perceive a realistic audience. The tasks chosen should allow candidates to demonstrate achievement in AO1 and AO2. The accompanying commentaries should be sufficiently detailed to demonstrate achievement in AO4.

Assessment Objectives

This module requires candidates to

- AO1 communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to the study of language, using appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression (5% AS, 2½% AL)
- AO2 demonstrate expertise and accuracy in writing for a variety of specific purposes and audiences, drawing on knowledge of linguistic features to explain and comment on choices made (20% AS, 10% AL)
- AO4 understand, discuss and explore concepts and issues relating to language in use (5% AS, 2½% AL).

Original writing

Content

Candidates will choose their own programme of coursework in consultation with their teachers. In support of that programme and in order to develop their own styles of writing, they will study

- the use of appropriate register and style
- characteristics of genres and sub-genres
- the purposes and skills of drafting and re-drafting
- appropriate choice of lexis, syntax and discourse strategies
- the skills involved in analysing and reviewing the production of their own texts
- the skills involved in analysing and reviewing the reception of their own texts.

Candidates will be required to submit a commentary with their writing for which they should adopt a form which will permit them to analyse and review

- their choice of vocabulary and syntactic structures
- their style of writing
- the overall structure and organisation of their text
- any changes made during drafting and re-drafting.

Assessment will be by the production of a coursework folder. The work will be assessed by the candidate's teacher and these assessments will be moderated by the Board. The coursework folder will contain **two** pieces of work and the associated commentary will exhibit the following features:

- the total length of the two pieces together should be between 1500 and 3000 words
- the total length of the commentary should be approximately 1000 words
- each piece of work should be differentiated in terms of primary purpose, audience and form
- the adoption of any form or genre.

The weighting of Assessment Objectives is given in the following table.

- AO1 Writing 2½
- AO2 Writing 7½ Commentary 2½
- AO3 Commentary 2½

The final mark (out of 90) will be scaled to achieve the correct weighting for the module (see para. 8.4). A mark (out of 60) should be awarded to the two pieces as a whole, making allowance for balancing strengths and weaknesses within each piece. It is expected that candidates following a two-year course would spend approximately 30 hours of study time on this module. This would normally include time for class contact, individual contact, private study, research, drafting and redrafting. It is recognised, however, that the amount of study time available to candidates will vary from one centre to another. Assessment criteria may be found in Section 20.2 of this specification.

Learn from others

Writing is not a natural activity (like breathing or sleeping) – you can learn to do it, and you can learn to do it well (or at least better). If you are the next Charles Dickens, then you can probably teach yourself without using this guide. For anyone else, it may be helpful.

The models you use will vary, according to your task and purpose. If you are going to write to entertain, then read the stories of a good writer or screenplays by a good writer for film, TV or radio. All good writers borrow from, or imitate others – this is not the same as lifting material directly from others (which is plagiarism, or theft of intellectual property).

Finding suitable models is not hard. This guide gives suggestions for many things which are available online. If you want to learn from the best political speeches, the best short stories or the best advertising copy, they are all easy to find. Look at them, and try to work out why they are good. Better still, use the recommended headings for writing a commentary to give a structured evaluation of these examples.

Know the conventions

Creating texts does not exist in a cultural vacuum. The audience already has expectations. 21st century readers are used to characters who speak in the first person – in novels and stories, but also in advertisements. We expect to see the speaker (at least at first) on a news broadcast, but in a documentary we are comfortable with hearing the voice of an **unseen** presenter or commentator.

An established writer can be radical and novel in his or her work. But this may not be a good idea for a learner, especially in work which you are writing for assessment. Your task is to show what you can do, in terms of established and familiar writing practices. Being **good** is far better than being **original**.

The conventions of a form are far too many to list here – the point, anyway, is for **you** to learn **to see them in the examples you study**. But here's one to show you what this means. This is a transcript of the screenplay for **The Silence of the Lambs**.

INT. CHILTON'S OFFICE - BALTIMORE STATE HOSPITAL FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE
- DAY

CLOSE ON an ID card held in a male hand. Clarice's photo, official-looking graphics. It calls her a "Federal Investigator."

CHILTON (O.S.)

It's so rare to capture one alive. From a research point of view, Dr. Lecter is our most prized asset...

DR. FREDERICK CHILTON looks up from her card. A smarmy little peacock, behind a vast desk; he's conceived an instant, hopeless lurch for Clarice. He smiles, stroking her card with his beloved gold pen.

CHILTON (CONT'D)

You know, we get a lot of detectives here, but I must say, I can't ever remember one so attractive...

NEW ANGLE - REVEALS CLARICE

Now wearing a more feminine skirt suit. Hair neatly coiled, elegant shoulder bag, briefcase. He has rudely left her standing.

CHILTON (CONT'D)

Will you be in Baltimore overnight...? Because this can be quite a fun town, if you have the right guide.

Clarice tries, unsuccessfully, to hide her distaste for him.

Original writing

Some things you might note are:

- how little of this is dialogue
- how the writer gives the recommended camera angle or POV (point of view)
- how directions are in the present tense (finite verbs or present participles)
- how much visual detail is given (gesture, expression, clothes, accessories and so on)

It's not a strict set of instructions, and the director can ask the writer (or writers) to revise the scene while filming, but it is a clear indication of how to shoot the episode. You can see how it's done, also, by comparing it with the corresponding text in Thomas Harris's original novel.

Working to a brief

A few writers are lucky enough to be able to write what they want. Usually this is a privilege earned over years of bringing in money for their publishers. Alternatively it might come from not having to earn money and not having to satisfy a publisher – a situation many teachers and Web site authors may recognize.

But if someone is going to pay a writer, this changes things. In this case there is a client and the writer is working for this person or, more likely, this organization. The client will usually have some requirements that the writer must fulfil, even if it's for something as modest as your school report. For work in the category of original writing, you should ideally have (or invent) a client, for whom your writing will be published. Put this another way – try to think of people other than you who would want (or need) to read what you write, and of someone (perhaps the reader, perhaps the publisher, perhaps some other group) who would be ready to pay you for it. If the answer is no one, then perhaps you should start again.

Most clients will publish general guidelines for different kinds of article. You can find examples by going to the BBC Web site, or contacting publishers of magazines and newspapers. Particular tasks will normally be given a brief or specification – how many words the text should run to (usually this is set as a maximum, not a minimum). In the case of assessed work for this course there **is** a minimum **and** a maximum for a complete portfolio – it must be between 1500 and 3000 words. This is not negotiable – in any other subject there might be some slight tolerance of a mild over-run. But not with a writing exam – because one of the measures of your work is your ability to edit and summarize in order to hit a target word-count. (In the “real” world of publishing, if you over-run, you won't be paid, and you won't receive any more commissions.)

In writing work for a commission, I will usually write a draft that exceeds the word limit - sometimes by 50% or more. I assume that my draft will be more expansive than it strictly needs to be. Then I go to work and cut it down to size. This is a useful exercise, which normally yields a tighter, more focussed piece of writing. It will also be helpful for examined work in editorial writing. If you have never had to do this, then it's time you started. Using word-processing software makes it far less messy, as you read through, deleting this and rewriting that.

Publishing your work

The best way to sort out your writing is to write real texts for real audiences – especially in forums where readers, clients and editors can respond to it. If you are studying the subject then you should at least be doing some of the things on the course at a higher level, or even for a living. So how and where can you publish things? Here are a few suggestions:

- write letters to the editors of magazines you read, especially those which allow you to write at some length on a subject of interest
- offer to write news reports or arts reviews for your local free newspaper – editors are often happy to accept copy for which they do not have to pay
- enter competitions, like those run by the BBC to discover new talent
- write scripts for performance – such as poetry, comic routines and drama (you can perform them yourself, or write for others who are better than you at doing this)
- write with other people in collaboration – this is quite good for comic writing, and each writer can help the other quickly to see what works and what does not
- send sketches or jokes to broadcasters who can use them
- try to arrange some work experience with suitable organizations – advertising agencies, broadcasters, marketing companies, newspaper publishers, theatres and drama groups
- use the World Wide Web – this is a very democratic forum, where you can be judged by the quality of your work, rather than your age and education.

Guidance on writing in given forms

Different categories

The examiners have suggested a number of headings under which to categorize texts, according to the writer's purpose. This division is rather crude in practice, for several reasons. First, there are many texts which will fall into more than one of these categories. And many texts written to persuade, inform or advise will do so in ways which also entertain. A good example is TV and radio listings. These are written principally to inform (to inform a potential audience of programme details). But it is quite common for them to have mini-reviews and summaries. These may refer to a shared knowledge of characters in, say a soap opera. Or they may be written with a comic, ironic or parodic intent. Here is an example from the Guide, a weekly listings magazine which is an insert to the **Guardian** newspaper on Saturdays. This is a review in the "Watch this" column, which accompanies the TV listings for satellite, cable and digital broadcasts:

Rancid Aluminium, Ed Thomas, 1999, 10 pm, SkyMovieMax

Unspeakably poor British film that's neither thriller nor comedy nor romance, though it probably aspires to all these things. Anyway, it's got lots of sex and drugs and guns in it. Direction is part arthouse, part shithouse, and the script pulls off a rare feat in being both pretentious and brainless at once. Rhys Ifans, Joseph Fiennes, Steven Berkoff and Tara Fitzgerald ham away maddeningly with the one characteristic they've been given, while Dani Behr seems to be auditioning for **Grange Hill**. Turn the video off to make sure you don't record it by mistake.

Andy Bodle, review for **The Guide**, supplement to **the Guardian**, July 21 2001.

This clearly goes well beyond informing the viewer that the film is on a given channel at a given time – it appears to be written to **dissuade** us from watching (despite its appearance under the heading "Watch this"). But its effect is likely to be to make us check the film out anyway, to see how far it deserves its reputation as a "turkey".

The categories set by the examining board are therefore broad categories, to suggest ideas, rather than a straitjacket in which your writing must be restrained. But some of them give you more licence than do others – there are situations (instructions to accompany a prescription medicine, say) where it would be inappropriate to try also to entertain the reader.

The categories are writing to entertain, writing to persuade, writing to inform and writing to advise/instruct.

Writing to entertain

The examiners give three examples for this category: a short story, a stand-up comedy routine and a radio script. There are many other possibilities – drama in various forms, comic or dramatic monologues, reviews, poetry, and song lyrics.

It's very hard to make readers laugh, but it's well worth trying. You can attempt pastiches and parodies of other writers or styles, or character-driven comedy.

Serious fiction is very difficult to achieve within your word-count, but it can be done. Perhaps the best of all writers of very short stories is Saki (H.H. Munro) – you can find many of his stories online (they are out of copyright). One of them is **Sredni Vashtar**, which appears below as an appendix – and weighs in at less than 1,800 words. You need a story worth telling and a structure – usually explained as a beginning, middle and end. But they need not be in that order, and you may be able to do without much middle. A really skilful writer can reduce a story to a few hundred words. Some of Jesus's parables are amazingly good models, especially (both in the Gospel of St. Luke) the stories of the Good Samaritan and of the Prodigal Son (Luke 10.29-37; 15.11-32). For a more modern example look at the story below, by Somerset Maugham, which has fewer than 200 words. (Arguably the “middle” is a single sentence – “The merchant lent him his horse...” – while most of the story is beginning and end.)

Death Speaks or Appointment in Samarra

There was a merchant in Baghdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, "Master, just now when I was in the market-place, I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me." The merchant lent him the horse and the servant mounted it and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?" "That was not a threatening gesture," I said, "it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

W. Somerset Maugham

There are plenty of magazines that publish examples of short fiction – these can serve as realistic models (you may be able to do as well or better). Some of these magazines invite submissions from readers.

If you have the interest and ability you can use text with images in a number of ways – a traditional comic strip format, a graphic novel or a photo-story.

Writing to persuade

The examiners give three examples for this category of writing: a piece of journalism, a moral fable or texts for an advertising campaign. Other possibilities would include texts for political speeches and broadcasts, a summing up statement for the conclusion of a trial, a speech for a debate, an opinion column or editorial for a newspaper or Web site, and a briefing pack for a lobbying organization.

This category is, above all, one where there is a well-established set of techniques (rhetoric) which is mostly thousands of years old, and which you can readily learn. These appear in a separate section of this guide, because they may be useful in other kinds of writing.

It is very easy to find published examples of such texts – speeches, advertisements, persuasive journalism all abound online. Use the links below to locate them. One example of such a text appears as an appendix – this is the opening of US President George W. Bush's Inaugural Address.

Writing to inform

The examiners give three examples for this category of writing: an account of an event, an explanation of a process and an article about an area of special interest. This does not tell you much – you need to think of events, processes and subjects which would lead to something worth reading (and therefore worth writing). It is a potential trap, as you mistakenly try to depict your home village as profoundly interesting – it isn't, but you can do a good job with **fictions** about village life as Joanna Trollope has shown.

The attraction of this category is that it is quite easy to give it structure – though an account of a process may force you to be more or less chronological. The hard part is to give it style, without losing sight of the main purpose – and this can be very tough. Travel writing, for example, is very difficult to do well – you need to be able to establish some common ground with the reader, and not just list places, prices, hotels and restaurants.

This category includes most of the texts that are written – if it's not fiction, it probably belongs here. Persuasion and instruction are narrower and more easily defined. Some ideas for this category, to be more specific than the examiners, might be:

- scripts for short documentary broadcasts (radio or TV)
- public information broadcasts
- journalism of all kinds in all media
- arts reviews
- magazine features on a given subject (horses, tanks, motorcycles, sexual health, cosmetics – anything)
- some kinds of text for lifestyle broadcasting (though this may overlap with writing to instruct)

One very obvious approach here is to stick to what you know – use a form with which you are familiar and a subject on which you are well-informed already, or which you have learned about in another taught course. Do not try to learn about a new subject in order to write about it. You do not have the time. But there will be something about which you know more than the ordinary reader (including examiners).

In almost every case you will want to entertain as well as inform – the trick is to keep the desire to entertain subordinate to the need to inform. And some kinds of “humour” facetiousness or sarcasm, say, have no place in this kind of text, **ever**. The extract below gets this just about right – it is critical of its subject, and makes some jokes as it goes, but the writer always has his eye on the ball. The article from which this extract comes is a review, so it needs to refer to the detail of the film. In this way it prepares readers to see the movie for themselves or, more likely, sets out a critique with which the reader is more or less invited to agree or disagree.

Captain Corelli's Mandolin

As fascist yet sensual invaders go, apparently none could hope to rival Mussolini's troops, portrayed in **Captain Corelli's Mandolin** as a veritable conga line of sun-glazed romantics who would much rather eat, sing, and make-a da love than terrorize their vanquished foes. Set on the shimmering Greek island of Cephalonia, an idyllic enclave nestled in the Ionian Sea, **Mandolin** introduces an Italian conqueror so beneficent that he's survived (and won) battles without so much as aiming his gun at another person. Played with emphatic ridiculousness by Nicolas Cage, whose accent suggests Count Chocula after a heaping bowl of Sugar Crisps, he seems genuinely bruised to learn that his cause is somehow connected to the Nazis, who are very stiff dancers and show little **joie de vivre**.

Scott Tobias, extract from review for **The Onion**

Original writing

Writing to advise/instruct

The examiners give three examples for this category of writing: planning for an event or occasion, making better use of computer software and advice on managing money. This is not an obviously exciting category of writing, but its value is enormous – and it includes a vast number of texts. It also presents some great opportunities, as you can use what you have learned to adapt or improve source texts. You may be able to persuade a business to use your ideas, as they have an interest in communicating with their customers.

One very profitable approach is to take a text designed for one kind of reader or audience and use it to make texts for other readers or listeners. Here is a simple example – take a leaflet which gives advice on some aspect of medicine, hygiene or personal finance. Now produce versions for different audiences, such as speakers of English as a second language or young people.

Another idea is to take a range of existing texts on some relevant subject (law, health, money) and combine them into a new text or document – a leaflet, a Web page, a feature for a magazine or a TV or radio broadcast for a given audience. You could use your own recent experience and understanding of youth culture, say, to produce something like “How to cope with GCSEs” for publication in a magazine like *Sugar* or *Bliss*.

You may think that many existing texts are difficult to follow, boring, patronizing or unclear – so there is a challenge to you to do better.

This is also a category which allows you to test the effectiveness of your work – you can produce alternative versions of instructions, then ask some “guinea pigs” to try them – you can observe what happens, or ask them to report back.

Techniques to try

These techniques can be used for various effects in your writing – in general they can embellish (polish or decorate) a text, but they can also make a text more persuasive or convincing. But you should beware of using them too much or inappropriately.

Simile and metaphor

You may think of these primarily as devices in poetry, but they abound, consciously or unintended, in almost all spoken and many written texts, as when political reporters talk of a “raft” of measures.

Satan (Andy Hamilton) in an episode (from 2001) of *Old Harry's Game* (a radio sitcom set in Hell) remarks of one character that he is “shaking like a Millennium Bridge” and of another that he has “the willpower of Bill Clinton at a cheerleaders' convention”. The first is a simile, the second a metaphor. Both are topical, and exploit assumed attitudes in the audience – that we know (and are amused by) the engineering problems of the Millennium Bridge (good to look at, perilous to walk on) and the reputation of President Clinton.

George W. Bush uses it for more serious effect when he describes the American faith in freedom and democracy as “a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations.”

Mixed metaphor or simile for comic effect

Careless speakers or writers will readily mix metaphors, but some authors will do this deliberately. Even Shakespeare does this, as when Hamlet proposes “to take arms against a sea of troubles” – presumably both the playwright and the Prince realize that this is a strange action, and intends it as a metaphor of an impossible struggle. (W.B. Yeats used this idea in a poem called *Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea*.) Mixing metaphors can have comic effects, as when a character in Mel Smith's 1989 film, *The Tall Guy*, remarks of an attractive woman that: “She's like a hungry leopard in full bloom.” In fiction, mixing metaphors in dialogue is a stock way to make the reader question the intelligence of a character.

Original writing

Extended metaphor

In rhetoric, a speaker may return to or develop a metaphor, to make an argument seem more compelling. In John F. Kennedy's speech to the American people during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, we find an extended metaphor of lighting a fire to give light to the world:

"The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavour **will light our country** and all who serve it, **and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.**"

Allusion

Another powerful technique is to refer to, or even quote, a powerful phrase which the audience may already know. There is some risk in this, as the author needs to be sure that enough of the audience will be aware of the allusion or reference, unless the quoted phrase works well even if its origin is not known. In the lines quoted above, Kennedy seems to allude to the image, in St. John's gospel, of Jesus as the light of the world.

Ronald Reagan's speechwriter, Peggy Noonan, borrowed an image from John Gillespie Magee's poem **High Flight** to explain the disaster in 1986 when the **Challenger** space shuttle exploded:

"We will never forget them (the crew), nor the last time we saw them this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye, **and slipped the surly bonds of earth, to touch the face of God.**"

Lists of three

Three-part structures and lists are memorable and resonant in many kinds of text. Here are some examples:

And now abideth **faith, hope, charity**, these three...

St Paul, **1 Corinthians 13.13** (King James Version, 1611)

The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise **that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born.**

George W. Bush, Inaugural Address, 2001

If you're **a daring designer, a budding botanist or simply green-fingered**, we want to hear from you
Alan Titchmarsh, **Gardeners' World Live**, June 2001

Repetition

A useful rhetorical device is to repeat a key idea – this may seem crude, but it may lodge in the minds of the audience. We see it in a speech made by Harold Wilson, during the 1974 UK General Election campaign:

"This election is **not about** the miners; **not about** the militants; **not about** the power of the unions..."

Parallelism

Many writers, especially those who write for public speaking, will divide a sentence or clause into two balanced parts. This was the basic principle of poetry in much of the ancient world. There are almost limitless examples in the pages of the King James Bible, which was translated to be a version for public reading. Sometimes the second half echoes or develops the first half – this is synonymous parallelism. Sometimes the two halves are opposed or contradictory, and this is antithetic parallelism or simply antithesis.

Synonymous parallelism

We see this in some lines from George W. Bush's Inaugural Address, where he refers to US history as:

...the story of a power that went into the world **to protect but not possess, | to defend but not to conquer.** "

In this example the thought of "to protect but not possess", is carried further by "to defend but not to conquer". In speaking these lines, there will be a pause after "possess".

For a more familiar example, look at the British National Anthem:

"God save our gracious queen, | long live our noble queen."

Antithetic parallelism or antithesis

The first example comes from a speech of Winston Churchill, in which he challenges the Luftwaffe (the German air force): “You do your worst – and we will do our best”.

A celebrated example comes from Kennedy’s speech in the Cuban Missile Crisis (quoted above):

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not, what your country can do for you. | Ask what you can do for your country.”

And we can see antithesis in George W. Bush’s images of America’s “faith in freedom and democracy”, first as a rock, then, by contrast, as a seed:

“Through much of the last century, America’s faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. | Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations.”

Puzzled or redundant questions

If you wish to make a statement, it may be a good idea to ask a question or series of questions to introduce it. This is a common technique in information leaflets, which often pose the question from the reader’s viewpoint – “How can I protect my baby from common infections?” and so on. It can also be powerful in political rhetoric – “How can a Labour government raise standards in education?”, leading to an exposition of the party’s policy. For example, *Welcome to the Labour Party*, a booklet which gives information to new members, contains pages on which statements are introduced by questions, each set out as a section heading, such as: “How can I get involved?”, “What happens at local policy forums?”, “Do I have to go along to a local policy forum to have my say?” and “What is the future?”

Alliteration

Using the same initial consonant is a common ploy of poets and advertisers. It can be irritating if it’s overdone, but makes lines quotable or memorable. In George W. Bush’s inaugural speech we note “faith in freedom” and “rock in a raging sea”. Winston Churchill, in his speech about the Luftwaffe addresses the Nazi leaders and refers to the Nazi party as “the grisly gang who work your wicked will”.

Wordplay

You can create some good effects by using similar words but with slight differences of form and meaning - Andy Bodle’s review of *Rancid Aluminium* does this with “part arthouse, part shithouse”. Here are a couple of examples. The first comes from Dorothy L. Sayers’ Introduction to her translation of Dante’s *Purgatory*:

“Between the bishops who assure us that the family is the one and only **seedbed** of all the virtues, and the psychiatrists who warn us that it is a **hotbed** of all the vices, we hardly know how to advise any child to enter upon the hazard of existence.”

The second comes from Vladimir Nabokov’s essay “On a book Entitled *Lolita*”. This is an appendix to his novel of the same name. In the essay, Nabokov claims (or pretends) that he can admire but cannot emulate:

“...the accuracy of judgment of those who pose the fair young mammals photographed in magazines where the general neckline is just low enough to provoke a **past master’s** chuckle and just high enough not to make a **post-master** frown.”

Structure markers

In written documents you should use typography to show structure – this includes such things as headings (in a consistent hierarchy), indentation, changes of type (different size, face or case) and white space. Don't use these randomly – most word-processing software helps you do this.

In a spoken text, there will be other ways to do this – such as the introduction of the final part of a speech, with the formula “and so...” or “and so, my fellow Americans” and so on.

The point of these methods is to allow the audience to see how the parts relate to the whole. We see a good model in all of Shakespeare's plays. There is a basic division into five acts – this corresponds mostly to the way the playwright has organized the story into sections. Within in each act, there may be many scenes or just one – these divisions correspond more to changes in time or place. From the audience's viewpoint, this is shown by entrances and exits, and by simple formulae such as the characters' talking about where they are: “This is the Forest of Arden” or “Ill-met by moonlight” and so on.

In your own writing, think about how you can show the structure of your work by using appropriate methods.

Writing a commentary

When you write a commentary you should explain why you have made particular choices. You can give information about earlier versions of your work, indicating why you have changed the text at various points. You need to be very specific here, and describe things in terms of language forms, rather than vague general effects or intentions. Don't be evasive – be direct and detailed. You may find it helpful to organize the commentary under these headings:

What have you written?

Let the examiners know what kind of text you set out to write – briefly introduce your work. For example:

“I have written a series of texts to be used as advertising copy in a new campaign for a potential client.”

Purpose

Your purpose may be broadly something like informing or persuading. But you may have some more specific purpose, such as to present safety advice on a given product range. You should note broadly any ways in which your purpose has affected your choice of form, lexis, grammar and style – but you will want to comment on these in more detail.

Audience

For whom are you writing? Do you have to attract them (as with entertainment) or do you have a more captive audience (as with an information leaflet or instructions for use of a product)? You should note broadly any ways in which your audience influences your choice of form, lexis, grammar and style – but you will want to comment on these in more detail.

Did you have a real audience for your work? Did you have any comments or response from them?

Context

What is the situation in which your audience will read or hear the text – at home, while eating breakfast; on the bus to work; in a classroom; in a cinema? You should note broadly any ways in which this context affects your choice of form, lexis, grammar and style – but you will want to comment on these in more detail.

Original writing

Subject matter

Your subject may be self-evident, but you will have to decide what to keep in and what to leave out. Comment on how you have chosen this – for example, which things you might have included, but rejected as inappropriate for your audience, purpose and the situation in which they would read your texts.

How have you adapted or re-worked any material you found from other sources?

Form and structure

- What form of text did you choose to write?
- What structure did the work eventually take, and why is this structure appropriate or the best compromise you can manage?

Lexis

What lexical choices have you made in your work?

- How have you checked to ensure that the lexicon is suitable for the intended audience?
- In what ways have you changed and edited your work to make the lexis more appropriate?

Grammar

How have you adapted the grammar of your texts for your audience? Think of such things as

- clause types and structures,
- use of simple, compound and complex sentences,
- word order
- choices of grammatical person
- choices of verb tense and mood

Spelling and punctuation

- Which spelling conventions have you used (e.g. UK English, Oxford spelling; US English, Webster-Merriam)?
- What punctuation rules have you followed and why?

Style

- What features of style have you used in your work? How did you seek to do this? This should be a quite substantial section of comment, referring in detail to examples, and showing how you have revised drafts.

Presentation

- What effects of layout and typography have you used (for written texts) or of sound and other FX (for spoken or broadcast texts)?
- How have these affected the way the audience responds to the text?

Drafting and revision

Ideally you will have asked people other than your teacher to read your work and comment on it. Advice from editors or experienced writers may help you improve your writing – and is worth keeping in your portfolio. Comment on changes you made, both general and specific, and how they have improved the text.

Original writing

Online resources

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/howtowrite/index.shtml> BBC World Service How to Write

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/> The Writers' Room – writing guides from the BBC

<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/> Jack Lynch's Guide to Grammar and Style

<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/> Jack Lynch's Getting an A on an English paper

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide/> Guardian style guide

<http://www.ash.udel.edu/ash/tutor/writing/index.html> Alphabet Superhighway – writing guide

<http://www.stonesoup.com/> StoneSoup Magazine – get your work published

<http://www.adbusters.org/home/> Adbusters – excellent parody and serious critique of global brands

<http://www.tvgohome.com/> TVGoHome – parody of TV reviews from Charlie Brooker

<http://www.theonion.com/> The Onion – spoof news and info portal site

<http://gridley.acns.carleton.edu/~maiwurmj/link1.html> Jim's Link-o-rama – information and resources

www.nybooks.com/nyrev New York Review of Books online

promo.net/pg Project Gutenberg – original download site for classic texts

www.bartleby.com Bartleby Library – classic texts for free downloading

www.bibliomania.com Bibliomania – more texts for free downloading

<http://gwis2.circ.gwu.edu/~gprice/speech.htm> Gary Price's Speech and Transcript Center

<http://www.script-o-rama.com/> Drew's Script-o-Rama for scripts and transcripts

<http://simplyscripts.com/index.html> Simply Scripts – more free scripts and transcripts

<http://www.kelly.mcmail.com/resource.htm#Templates> Free templates for writers

www.teleport.com/~cdeemer/Software.html Screenwriting software

www.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/software.html More screenwriting software.

Orwell's advice

Here are eight simple guidelines for a good writing style (based on advice from George Orwell):

- Never use a metaphor, simile, or figure of speech, when you are used to seeing it in print.
- Never use a long word when a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it out.
- Never use the passive when you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase or jargon if there is an everyday English equivalent.
- Write short sentences. Avoid long, complex sentences.
- Listen to what you write.
- These are only guidelines; break them if to follow them would lead to you saying something barbarous.

Elmore Leonard's advice – ten deadly sins to avoid

- Never open a book with weather
- Avoid prologues
- Never use a verb other than 'said' to carry dialogue
- Never use an adverb to modify the verb 'said'...
- Keep your exclamation marks under control
- Never use the words 'suddenly' or 'all hell broke loose'
- Use regional dialect, patois, sparingly
- Avoid detailed descriptions of characters
- Don't go into great detail describing places and things
- Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

"My most important rule is one that sums up all 10. If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it. Or, if proper usage gets in the way, it may have to go. I can't allow what we learned in English composition to disrupt the sound and rhythm of the narrative. It's my attempt to remain invisible, not distract the reader from the story with obvious writing. Joseph Conrad said something about words getting in the way of what you want to say.

If I write in scenes and always from the point of view of a particular character (the one whose view best brings the scene to life), I'm able to concentrate on the voices of the characters telling you who they are and how they feel about what they see and what's going on, and I'm nowhere in sight."

Writing to entertain

Sredni Vashtar

Conradin was ten years old, and the doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years. The doctor was silky and effete, and counted for little, but his opinion was endorsed by Mrs. De Ropp, who counted for nearly everything. Mrs. De Ropp was Conradin's cousin and guardian, and in his eyes she represented those three-fifths of the world that are necessary and disagreeable and real; the other two-fifths, in perpetual antagonism to the foregoing, were summed up in himself and his imagination. One of these days Conradin supposed he would succumb to the mastering pressure of wearisome necessary things---such as illnesses and coddling restrictions and drawn-out dulness. Without his imagination, which was rampant under the spur of loneliness, he would have succumbed long ago.

Mrs. De Ropp would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin, though she might have been dimly aware that thwarting him ``for his good" was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. Conradin hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask. Such few pleasures as he could contrive for himself gained an added relish from the likelihood that they would be displeasing to his guardian, and from the realm of his imagination she was locked out---an unclean thing, which should find no entrance.

In the dull, cheerless garden, overlooked by so many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that, or a reminder that medicines were due, he found little attraction. The few fruit-trees that it contained were set jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste; it would probably have been difficult to find a market-gardener who would have offered ten shillings for their entire yearly produce. In a forgotten corner, however, almost hidden behind a dismal shrubbery, was a disused tool-shed of respectable proportions, and within its walls Conradin found a haven, something that took on the varying aspects of a playroom and a cathedral. He had peopled it with a legion of familiar phantoms, evoked partly from fragments of history and partly from his own brain, but it also boasted two inmates of flesh and blood. In one corner lived a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen, on which the boy lavished an affection that had scarcely another outlet. Further back in the gloom stood a large hutch, divided into two compartments, one of which was fronted with close iron bars. This was the abode of a large polecat-ferret, which a friendly butcher-boy had once smuggled, cage and all, into its present quarters, in exchange for a long-secreted hoard of small silver. Conradin was dreadfully afraid of the lithe, sharp-fanged beast, but it was his most treasured possession. Its very presence in the tool-shed was a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin. And one day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion. The Woman indulged in religion once a week at a church near by, and took Conradin with her, but to him the church service was an alien rite in the House of Rimmon. Every Thursday, in the dim and musty silence of the tool-shed, he worshipped with mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch where dwelt Sredni Vashtar, the great ferret. Red flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the winter-time were offered at his shrine, for he was a god who laid some special stress on the fierce impatient side of things, as opposed to the Woman's religion, which, as far as Conradin could observe, went to great lengths in the contrary direction. And on great festivals powdered nutmeg was strewn in front of his hutch, an important feature of the offering being that the nutmeg had to be stolen. These festivals were of irregular occurrence, and were chiefly appointed to celebrate some passing event. On one occasion, when Mrs. De Ropp suffered from acute toothache for three days, Conradin kept up the festival during the entire three days, and almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache. If the malady had lasted for another day the supply of nutmeg would have given out.

The Houdan hen was never drawn into the cult of Sredni Vashtar. Conradin had long ago settled that she was an Anabaptist. He did not pretend to have the remotest knowledge as to what an Anabaptist was, but he privately hoped that it was dashing and not very respectable. Mrs. De Ropp was the ground plan on which he based and detested all respectability.

Original writing

After a while Conradin's absorption in the tool-shed began to attract the notice of his guardian. "It is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers," she promptly decided, and at breakfast one morning she announced that the Houdan hen had been sold and taken away overnight. With her short-sighted eyes she peered at Conradin, waiting for an outbreak of rage and sorrow, which she was ready to rebuke with a flow of excellent precepts and reasoning. But Conradin said nothing: there was nothing to be said. Something perhaps in his white set face gave her a momentary qualm, for at tea that afternoon there was toast on the table, a delicacy which she usually banned on the ground that it was bad for him; also because the making of it "gave trouble," a deadly offence in the middle-class feminine eye.

"I thought you liked toast," she exclaimed, with an injured air, observing that he did not touch it.

"Sometimes," said Conradin.

In the shed that evening there was an innovation in the worship of the hutch-god. Conradin had been wont to chant his praises, tonight he asked a boon.

"Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar."

The thing was not specified. As Sredni Vashtar was a god he must be supposed to know. And choking back a sob as he looked at that other empty comer, Conradin went back to the world he so hated.

And every night, in the welcome darkness of his bedroom, and every evening in the dusk of the tool-shed, Conradin's bitter litany went up: "Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar."

Mrs. De Ropp noticed that the visits to the shed did not cease, and one day she made a further journey of inspection.

"What are you keeping in that locked hutch?" she asked. "I believe it's guinea-pigs. I'll have them all cleared away."

Conradin shut his lips tight, but the Woman ransacked his bedroom till she found the carefully hidden key, and forthwith marched down to the shed to complete her discovery. It was a cold afternoon, and Conradin had been bidden to keep to the house. From the furthest window of the dining-room the door of the shed could just be seen beyond the corner of the shrubbery, and there Conradin stationed himself. He saw the Woman enter, and then he imagined her opening the door of the sacred hutch and peering down with her short-sighted eyes into the thick straw bed where his god lay hidden. Perhaps she would prod at the straw in her clumsy impatience. And Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time. But he knew as he prayed that he did not believe. He knew that the Woman would come out presently with that pursed smile he loathed so well on her face, and that in an hour or two the gardener would carry away his wonderful god, a god no longer, but a simple brown ferret in a hutch. And he knew that the Woman would triumph always as she triumphed now, and that he would grow ever more sickly under her pestering and domineering and superior wisdom, till one day nothing would matter much more with him, and the doctor would be proved right. And in the sting and misery of his defeat, he began to chant loudly and defiantly the hymn of his threatened idol:

Sredni Vashtar went forth,
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white.
His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful.

Original writing

And then of a sudden he stopped his chanting and drew closer to the window-pane. The door of the shed still stood ajar as it had been left, and the minutes were slipping by. They were long minutes, but they slipped by nevertheless. He watched the starlings running and flying in little parties across the lawn; he counted them over and over again, with one eye always on that swinging door. A sour-faced maid came in to lay the table for tea, and still Conradin stood and waited and watched. Hope had crept by inches into his heart, and now a look of triumph began to blaze in his eyes that had only known the wistful patience of defeat. Under his breath, with a furtive exultation, he began once again the pæan of victory and devastation. And presently his eyes were rewarded: out through that doorway came a long, low, yellow-and-brown beast, with eyes a-blink at the waning daylight, and dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat. Conradin dropped on his knees. The great polecat-ferret made its way down to a small brook at the foot of the garden, drank for a moment, then crossed a little plank bridge and was lost to sight in the bushes. Such was the passing of Sredni Vashtar.

“Tea is ready,” said the sour-faced maid; “where is the mistress?” “She went down to the shed some time ago,” said Conradin. And while the maid went to summon her mistress to tea, Conradin fished a toasting-fork out of the sideboard drawer and proceeded to toast himself a piece of bread. And during the toasting of it and the buttering of it with much butter and the slow enjoyment of eating it, Conradin listened to the noises and silences which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining-room door. The loud foolish screaming of the maid, the answering chorus of wondering ejaculations from the kitchen region, the scuttering footsteps and hurried embassies for outside help, and then, after a lull, the scared sobbings and the shuffling tread of those who bore a heavy burden into the house.

“Whoever will break it to the poor child? I couldn't for the life of me!” exclaimed a shrill voice. And while they debated the matter among themselves, Conradin made himself another piece of toast.

Saki (H.H. Munro) 1870-1916

Writing to persuade and inform

From President George W. Bush's Inaugural Address January 20, 2001

President Clinton, distinguished guests and my fellow citizens, the peaceful transfer of authority is rare in history, yet common in our country. With a simple oath, we affirm old traditions and make new beginnings.

As I begin, I thank President Clinton for his service to our nation.

And I thank Vice President Gore for a contest conducted with spirit and ended with grace.

I am honored and humbled to stand here, where so many of America's leaders have come before me, and so many will follow.

We have a place, all of us, in a long story – a story we continue, but whose end we will not see. It is the story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, a story of a slave-holding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer.

It is the American story – a story of flawed and fallible people, united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals.

The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born.

Americans are called to enact this promise in our lives and in our laws. And though our nation has sometimes halted, and sometimes delayed, we must follow no other course.

Through much of the last century, America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations.

Our democratic faith is more than the creed of our country, it is the inborn hope of our humanity, an ideal we carry but do not own, a trust we bear and pass along. And even after nearly 225 years, we have a long way yet to travel.

While many of our citizens prosper, others doubt the promise, even the justice, of our own country. The ambitions of some Americans are limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice and the circumstances of their birth. And sometimes our differences run so deep, it seems we share a continent, but not a country.

We do not accept this, and we will not allow it. Our unity, our union, is the serious work of leaders and citizens in every generation. And this is my solemn pledge: I will work to build a single nation of justice and opportunity.

I know this is in our reach because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image.

Apart from materials quoted from other sources, the copyright in this guide belongs to Andrew Moore. You are free to use it for any educational purpose, including making multiple copies electronically or by printing. You may not distribute it in any form other than the original, without the express permission of the author.

andrew.moore@eril.net