

Investigating Language

This guide is written for students who are following GCE Advanced level (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. This guide is specifically written to support students preparing for the **Investigating Language** module of the AQA (syllabuses A and B), but should be helpful to those doing comparable tasks on other syllabuses (such as Edexcel's **Spoken or Written Study** and OCR's **Language Research**).

What the (AQA) exam board says

Introduction

The aim of this module is to encourage candidates to apply their knowledge of conceptual frameworks gained in Module 1 and Module 2 to a small research project in a chosen aspect of spoken or written English in use.

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 (2½%)
- AO2 demonstrate expertise and accuracy in writing for specific purposes and audiences, drawing on knowledge of linguistic features to explain and comment on choices made (2½%)
- AO3ii understand, discuss and explore concepts and issues relating to language in use (2½%)
- AO4 apply and explore frameworks for the systematic study of language at different levels, commenting on the usefulness of the approaches taken (5%)
- AO5ii analyse and evaluate variation in the meanings and forms of spoken and/or written language from different times according to context (2½%).

Content

Candidates' own choices of topics and data are recognised as valuable aspects of learning, but their choices must be manageable and assessable. The following are examples of the types of investigation which candidates might choose to submit.

- An analytical study of some differences between spoken and written English.
- A study of transcribed examples of a regional variety of spoken English.
- A study of examples of the English spelling system.
- Observations of the speech (or writing) of individuals in the process of language development.
- A study of norms and variations in everyday uses of English.
- A transcription (with commentary) of a stretch of everyday discourse.
- A description of some characteristics of the written and/or spoken English of a distinct occupational, professional or other social group.
- An exploration of stylistic features of popular media.
- An analysis and comparison of contrasted texts.
- A study of language choices made by bi-lingual or multi-lingual individuals in the community.
- An exploration of some features of a particular language in use in the community, compared with English.
- An analysis of a particular area of semantics in English.

Investigating language

Candidates will choose their own topic for investigation in consultation with their teachers. In preparation for this module, they will have studied how to

- establish an appropriate context for investigation collect data or select texts for investigation, in a principled and sensitive way
- identify significant linguistic features in data or texts
- record observations and describe data accurately
- transcribe and annotate spoken English, as appropriate
- apply a knowledge of systematic frameworks to data/texts in a sustained, reflective and practical way
- apply and evaluate different approaches and methodologies for the study of language
- draw conclusions to show an awareness of both the limitations and value of investigations into data
- organise material coherently and use an appropriate style of writing
- present findings in an accessible format, ensuring accuracy and relevance
- use standard conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

More specific guidance on appropriate opportunities to apply, explore and evaluate frameworks is provided in the Teachers' Guide.

Mode of Assessment

Assessment will be by the production of a written investigation. The work will be assessed by the candidate's teacher and these assessments will be moderated by the Board. The length of the investigation should be between 2000 and 4000 words, excluding data and appendices.

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 recognized, however, that the amount of study time available to candidates will vary from one centre to another.

Getting started

In a sense, any investigation has two kinds of subject. The first is the data or text(s) to be studied. These may be written or spoken (in which case, you will need transcripts). The second kind of subject is the theoretical linguistic approach to the text. As you should now know, any text may be studied in terms (among other things) of “phonology, lexis, grammar, semantics, pragmatics and discourse”. Your theoretical method will usually fall under one (perhaps more) of these (or other) broad headings.

To show this, your investigation should have a title that includes both elements, the theoretical method usually coming first, e.g.: **Operation of the metaphor in political speech writing** or **Lexical change in girls’ comics 1970 to 1998**. Titles should be simply indicative of content – don’t go for snappy, cryptic or clever titles.

The whole course requires you to develop understanding of **language theory**. In the language investigation, you will apply what you have learned. While your teacher should introduce you to essential areas of theoretical knowledge, you should work independently, using your course textbooks and other authorities to gain a more thorough understanding of language theory in doing this work.

Choosing a suitable task

Many students start with an idea of the texts they wish to study, but with no sense of an approach to investigation. Often these are texts you know (or think you do) already. One reason to study language is to learn about **different** kinds of text – so do you really want to spend time investigating rap lyrics? If so, you need to think of something worth trying to find out in your investigation.

Work to your own strengths – if you are skilful in analysing, say, clause structures, then it makes sense to choose an investigation that allows you to do this. But it’s not a good idea if you barely understand how these structures work.

Whatever you do, you should work in an objective and scientific way – such that other people could repeat your investigation (to see whether their findings support yours or not). Avoid vague and general statements. If possible, examine objective data, which can be illustrated by statistics or charts.

Rather than think of a task and then try to justify it, you should work the other way round. Here is an area of language use about which I really want to know more (e.g. changes in the lexicon in a given time period or attitudes to gender). I can then devise an investigation that uses appropriate data to give objective evidence that may in turn allow some broad interpretation and conclusion – e.g. frequency of usage of gender-neutral pronouns may reflect greater awareness that the pronoun should be inclusive, or, weakly, that the writer is aware that a masculine form (for both sexes or either) may give offence.

Although conclusions may include some subjective or relative comment, this should be plausible – that is, inferred from objective data, as in the example above. Your investigation must at some point contain objective explanation.

For example, you should not attempt to measure the frequency in a text of “hard” or “long” words – as these descriptions have no objective value. You may, on the other hand, analyse a text against a given language corpus – incidence of occurrence of words among the 1,000 or 3,000 (or whatever) most commonly written (or spoken) according to a given corpus. For more help on this subject, see David Crystal’s **Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language**, pp. 436-446.

Are all texts of equal value?

Exam boards publish guidance for examiners and teachers about what candidates need to do, to be awarded certain grades. In theory you can achieve these, by studying any text. But with some it is harder than with others. If you want to investigate discourse structure or stylistics, then you may find a script or literary text (anything from a TV advert to a poem) is more appropriate than unrehearsed conversation, say. Of course, in any language data, there is a lot going on – but it can be a lot harder to find in spontaneous utterances, than in speech or writing which is (explicitly) planned, drafted or edited.

One student, recently, began to study Christmas cards. A very able linguist might investigate grammatical structures or stylistic features of the short texts that appear on these. But this is more or less a cul-de-sac for an investigation in which any candidate hopes to produce his or her best work.

Spoken or written data?

If you wish to study spoken data, then you must be ready for a lot of extra work – in producing transcripts. And this work does nothing to raise your mark for the investigation – it's the equivalent of arriving at a room to take an examination – you still have to go in and do the business. For some tasks (such as investigating stylistic features of public speech), it's fine to take transcripts that are already available to you (for example, transcripts of political speech in Hansard or on the White House Web site). Of course, even with written data, you may need to produce selections, which you have marked in some way, for purposes of analysis.

If you know that you do not wish to spend a lot of time in gathering the data, then stick with print or written texts. If time is short, then you cannot afford to gather spoken data – you will almost certainly run into time trouble. Collecting print sources is easy – there are plenty that come through your letterbox every week, while others are lying about everywhere.

Keeping to the subject

This is very hard to do. It is easy to stray from an exploration of language features into responding to the meaning of a text – and before you know it, you are doing sociology, literary criticism or journalism. It's fine to analyse the use of metaphor to establish character. It is NOT fine to describe or comment on the character thus established. It is fine to compare (statistically) Roald Dahl's and Enid Blyton's use of qualifiers; it is not fine to say that, if Dahl qualifies nouns and noun phrases more frequently than Blyton, then he is a better writer.

At a more basic level, try not to write about the pictures (if there are any), which accompany a text. There is something to be said about typography, but unless you are very well informed on the subject, then it may give you difficulty.

The “so what?” factor

A zoologist could, in a daft moment, decide to investigate the number of ears found on domestic cats. Ultimately, this might lead to a “theory” to explain those instances where the cat had fewer than two. More sensibly, he or she could investigate different markings on the cat. We would be impressed by a scientist who disproved or even seriously questioned what we always thought was obvious. But we would not be impressed by one who appeared to confirm what we already thought we knew.

A common example comes with students who wish to study child language acquisition. It is now more or less certainly established that, while individuals learn at different rates (some are precocious and others late), most learn according to the same schedule. And where they don't, there is a good reason for it – such as a parent who has a speech disability or is not a native speaker of the language the child is learning. So there's not a lot of point in “investigating” data from the same child, over time, and concluding that he or she has “developed”, unless there was some reason to expect this not to happen. On the other hand, there might well be a point in a more thorough study of a child's lexicon – such as investigating the relation between what is used and what is understood, or the frequency with which abstract nouns occur as a proportion of all nouns. (Are children more likely, for example, to use an abstraction in speech than in writing? And does this probability change over time?)

Before you commit yourself to an investigation, check (with your teacher, your fellow students, and the most sceptical of your friends or relations) whether it really is worth doing. Another good test is to ask if it will lead to anything you can use in an exam. Given that you may be examined on, say, language and occupation or language change, then the investigation is a good opportunity to gather useful data, and analyse these – and you can recycle much of this for use later.

A good example is the alleged (in fact, well established) differences in language use by men and women. We think we know that women use more grooming talk or have a more precise colour lexicon. But what light can language use throw on the belief that men are from Mars and women are from Venus? Can we devise an investigation that will yield some objective information about this? If so, it seems worth doing, because it helps provide answers to real questions which people repeatedly ask. (Devising a clear investigation here is in fact quite hard, given that any gender difference is likely to be obscured by a huge amount that both sexes have in common.)

Comparative tasks – a warning

Don't put the cart before the horse. Any comparison should arise out of a genuine language issue. It should be one where there is only one significant variable.

For example, comparing a text in the King James Bible (early 17th century) with the equivalent passage in the Revised Standard Version (mid 20th century) is an appropriate (and much-used) exercise in showing language change. (Though even here, variables emerge as the translators bring in ideas from their own time, culture or religious understanding.)

Comparing reports on the same event in a tabloid and in a broadsheet newspaper is of doubtful value. Why? First “tabloid” and “broadsheet” are, objectively, descriptions only of the paper size. Second, the writers are not the same – this introduces a vast range of variables into the alleged comparison. Third, we lack essential information (pragmatics and context) – did each writer work to a word count? How far did each writer's work get sub-edited? How much time did each have? Was the report done on the spot or worked up from an agency report? And so on. But more to the point, what area of language study were we investigating anyway? Popular notions of “quality” in the broadsheet, insofar as they make sense at all, are value judgements about the truth or balance or thoroughness or whatever of the reporting (that is the informative content of the report) – which is not our subject at all. To find significant differences in objective language use (e.g. statistical analysis of clause structures) is likely to be too taxing for even the most gifted of students.

Comparing texts may leave you without a suitable framework, or set of measurements, for analysis – as each text takes it in turn to be the reference point for the other.

Presenting your investigation

Ideally, this should be word-processed. This is not yet compulsory, but you will have to use computer software at university and in your job. Why not start now?

Title page. This should contain essential information – your name, candidate number (when you know it), exam centre number, syllabus, component, date of completion and so on:

2180 Kylie Minogue
44215 South Bronx School
AQA English Language (Advanced) 4111
A2 Module 4: Language Investigation
Lexical change in girls' comics: 1970 to 1990
Completed January 2015

The body text should be in a **Times Roman font** (if available) and justified (like this paragraph) or left aligned (like the panel above). Try not to split paragraphs over a page (“widows and orphans”). Use double or 1.5 line spacing (as in the panel above). It may be helpful to write an abstract (outline or synopsis) of your investigation as your first paragraph. Conventionally this is marked off from what follows by smaller type size and/or indentation.

If you quote an authority (ideally you will) use superscript numbers (“CTRL” + [shift] “+”) to show this, and give the full reference¹ at the end:

References:
Simpson, B (2020). **Eat My Shorts**, Springfield Press

You are also expected to give a full bibliography, to show texts studied directly, and those (academic works, probably) used to inform your explication of the texts studied.

Texts can be transcribed where features of graphology, typography etc. are not important (this will depend on what you are looking at). Spoken texts should be transcribed, observing conventions for this – the amount of information shown will depend upon the theoretical focus of your investigation.

Original material should be photocopied (or scanned) and presented on separate pages or in an appendix. If the language data are found in, say, a child’s exercise book, you may wish to include this in the folder of your work for the examiner. Similarly, you may need to submit original audio or video tapes, where this supports understanding of spoken language data.

Use your software to give a word count. You may exclude your title page and any appendixes, but must state this. You **do** include quotations in the count.

Word-count: 3,798 words (counted by Microsoft Word; excludes title page and appendixes)

Please avoid handwriting directly onto your printout, unless it is absolutely necessary (it never is).

Examples of investigations

The examples below are tasks that were undertaken by students for the 2000 exam. In each case the student achieved a mark for the investigation in line with, or better than, the mark for other papers. You are welcome to adapt these tasks for future use. In each case there is some explicit general guidance, although the students received close personal supervision of their work.

Student A

Comparing commentaries: language features of two broadcast commentaries on the 1999 British Grand Prix.

Abstract: This investigation considers structural features of spoken English. The data are two broadcast commentaries (Radio 5 Live and Mach 1 for ITV). These are analysed in terms of:

- lexical choice,
- semantics,
- syntax and
- structures of short discourses.

The investigator will look for special or restricted language uses and for evidence of differences that may arise from absence/presence of images.

Appendices: Details of speakers and context; transcripts of spoken extracts, using appropriate conventions to show pauses – do not supply punctuation as for written data; acknowledgements.

Student B

Persuasive language features in election leaflets: structural and stylistic features of election leaflets produced for the May 1999 European and local elections.

Abstract: This investigation considers lexis, semantics and discourse structure, stylistic rhetorical devices and typography, if relevant.

Introduction – you may need to look for a theoretical model or description of political advertising, against which to evaluate your data. You may find something in Crystal's encyclopedias, but very up-to-date stuff is harder to find. You really need guidelines from the parties themselves. For help in doing so, try writing to (names of local MPs). This should give you a starting point. You must also look for evidence of purpose – does the leaflet try to alter your party allegiance, or simply get already committed voters out to cast their vote? Evidence will be found in use of imperative (command forms).

- Lexis – look for distinctive lexicon, such as terms peculiar to political context (if any). Compare incidence (frequency) in different leaflets. Look at frequency of use of party's name and of other party names.
- Collocations – look at distinctive forms such as "New Labour".
- Semantics – look at special meanings for political/electoral context. How are these used to support the leaflets' purposes?
- Stylistics – look at things that you can quantify as well as explain (e.g. incidence of metaphor, type of metaphor, colloquialism etc.)
- Syntax – look at use of phrases and clauses outside complete sentences; look at use of different sentence types – declarative, interrogative, imperative etc.

Conclusions – how far does each leaflet fulfil purposes or intentions identified in your introduction? Are they effective means of persuasion or used simply because canvassers expect to use them?

Appendices: Relevant documents with copyright and acknowledgements.

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Student C

Lexical, semantic and grammatical change in Bible translations in the King James tradition

Abstract: This investigation will look at a very few passages in a range of translations. These will be studied for examples of lexical and semantic change, for changes in syntax patterns and stylistic features (e.g. cultural or gender bias or neutrality in metaphor, pronouns, titles and so on).

Introduction: The **King James Version** of the Bible was translated as a Bible for public worship, and for reading aloud. Subsequent revisions have been made within this tradition, using the KJ text where possible, but altering it where language change requires this. These are the **Revised Version**, **Revised Standard Version** and **New Revised Standard Version**. In this investigation, taking the KJV as the standard or reference point, you will study changes to the text, organizing these by appropriate language categories.

To make the task manageable, you will study a relatively short sample of the text (initially the last two chapters of *Acts*, but this may be reduced). This book has been chosen as (according to the translators) St. Luke has better command of Greek than other New Testament writers. The chosen sections do not contain abstruse theological terms (such as **grace**), which may lead to widely differing translations (although there are some nautical terms not found elsewhere in scripture). For reference, you will look at other contemporary translations (e.g. J.B. Phillips, NEB, Good News) that have other intended purposes and audiences (private devotional use, readers in the UK etc.) to see how translation differs.

At all times, you should be aware that you are studying translations made for **spoken delivery in public worship**

Headings under which you should organize your comment will be:

- Lexical change – nouns, proper nouns, pronouns (esp. 2nd person forms) verbs, conjunctions and prepositions
- Verb forms, especially tenses to indicate sequence and chronology (important when read aloud)
- Semantic change – to explain lexical substitutions; use of archaic and literary forms in revised Version
- Syntax – phrase and clause structure; use of relative and subordinate clauses
- Discourse structure and Typography – use of verses/numbers, paragraphs, columns, typeface and size, maps and so on

Appendices: Relevant extracts with acknowledgements of copyright-protected sources.

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Student D

(Note – this task was chosen by a very able student. This task would not be suitable for many candidates.)

The “F-word” in film: derivational morphology of obscene words in popular feature films.

Abstract: Beginning with compounds of the F-word the investigator will look at the morphology of new and variant forms, studying these in context, with regard to pragmatics, metaphor and implication.

Intro: You need some theoretical model here. Clearly there are multiple derivatives and compounds of the F-word, as well as grammatical conversion (use in word class other than verb). You may wish to consider how these developments are not only evidence of change, but signal gradual shift in social implication – a lessening over recent time of taboo value. This can be “measured” (loosely) by reference to wider publication in mainstream spoken and written media.

Look at:

- Inflection of verb to produce “F-er”, “F-ing” etc.
- Derivation (morphology) using F- word as root, prefix and suffix.
- Compounds of F-word.
- Conversion – use of F word as noun or attributive adjective, and so on
- Semantic shift or widening – less restricted or precise meaning (e.g. vague pejorative rather than denoting sexual congress)
- Contexts of use and publication – broadcast spoken and print contexts.

Conclusion – is the F-word becoming less of a taboo? Give reasons for your view.

Question – what language data used? How can you ensure that these are used objectively? You may need, for example, to use Word to produce document statistics on a range of texts – total word count and frequency of use of F-word (use other taboo words as reference?)

Appendices:

- Language data with acknowledgements of copyright-protected sources;
- entries in contemporary dictionary to indicate earliest recorded usage (to check for degree of invention or borrowing);
- statistical information in tables or graphs.

Examples of teacher assessment

These are the assessments really given for three of the students whose work appears above. This kind of assessment is not required by exam boards, but can help inter-school assessors agree with, and support, the assessments made by teachers in the exam centre.

Candidate: 44215 1630; **Student B**

Data, task and method: The primary data chosen for this investigation form a coherent and manageable sample. The task undertaken is appropriate – it is challenging but not exceptional.

The candidate's method is sound, and presentation of the investigation, data and appendices is exemplary.

Analysis: The analysis of the data is thorough and meticulous. The candidate gradually accumulates observations about the data, then makes good use of these in comparing the texts. The candidate applies suitable theoretical models to the data. These are helpful, especially where she uses objective measurements to support her observations. The presentation of the analysis is especially helpful – it is very easy for the assessor to see what is going on. Occasionally the analysis may seem simple or descriptive, but it is mostly very clear. The study is technical yet free of jargon and irrelevance – it seems rather lean and hungry.

Conclusions: The conclusions at which the candidate arrives are clear, persuasive and fairly interesting. The study has led to explicit and convincing results.

Rigour and Objectivity: This study is sound in both respects.

Conforming to academic conventions: referencing, bibliography and appendices: The candidate observes these mostly, but does not observe the academic protocol for references. Typography is particularly helpful to the reader. The appendices are thorough and those on readability especially informative.

Summary: This candidate occasionally lapses into description but is mostly highly focussed, and always objective. Although it is not at all elegant, this study is controlled, rigorous and coherent. It fulfils all the criteria in the highest band albeit unspectacularly, but clearly avoids the failings described in the next band ("scope" too large, "superficial", "irrelevant" and "lack of open-mindedness"). For these reasons it is placed at the lower end of the band.

Candidate: 44215 2530; **Student C**

Data, task and method: The primary data chosen for this investigation form a coherent sample, but may be too extensive for the investigator to study systematically within the available word-limit. The candidate's method is fairly sound, although the sequence of theoretical models used is not always clear, and she gives too much attention to secondary data (versions outside the King James tradition, which should perhaps have been used as reference points only). Presentation of the investigation, data and appendices is clear and helpful to the assessor.

Analysis: The analysis of the data is rigorous, making appropriate use of semantic, etymological and lexical models. The length of the passage studied, and the range of translations makes Rebecca take a selective approach to the analysis, but her selection is thorough and representative.

Conclusions: The conclusions at which the candidate arrives are persuasive. The study has led to a clear understanding of language change. The penultimate sentence is unfortunate, but happily contradicted by what precedes it – she did not "already" know what she has found here, though she had a general sense of some of this!

Rigour and Objectivity: This study is consistently rigorous and objective; most judgements are supported by interpretation of the evidence.

Conforming to academic conventions: referencing, bibliography and appendices: The candidate observes these mostly, although references are not complete. The presentation is clear and helpful to the assessor.

Summary: This candidate has chosen an interesting subject, which she has investigated intelligently. She arrives at clear conclusions. The investigation fulfils the criteria in the second mark band, near the lower end.

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<http://www.shunsley.eril.net/armoore/>

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Candidate: 44215 2820; Student D

Data, task and method: The primary data chosen for this investigation form a substantial, but coherent and manageable sample, and are suitable for the nature of the study. They are related to a scholarly range of secondary and comparative data.

The task undertaken is challenging, although the candidate makes light of its difficulty. His method is sound, but the pacing of the task could have been better – some haste at the end, although this does not show overtly in the work submitted.

Analysis: The extensive discussion of the cultural and historical function of taboo words may suggest that the analysis is less than thorough. However, the analysis is extensive and rigorous, especially that which appears in the Conclusion. Moreover, the impression of brevity is exaggerated by this candidate's succinctness.

The quality of analysis is first-rate: objective interpretations are convincingly applied to the data, and supported by reference to wider language study. Perhaps the candidate could have made more use of the excellent appendices of objective data.

Although the candidate is comfortable in applying the technical register of linguistic analysis, the investigation is pleasingly free of jargon, and easy to follow.

Conclusions: The conclusions at which the candidate arrives are clear, persuasive and significant. The study has led to interesting results.

Rigour and Objectivity: This study is exemplary in both respects.

Conforming to academic conventions: referencing, bibliography and appendices: The candidate observes these exactly. Appendices are most interesting, especially the tables that record objective or statistical information from the texts studied. The bibliography is extensive, and the analysis of the data shows that it is no invention!

Summary: This candidate defies easy assessment according to the AQA criteria, as he has a wider perspective and theoretical understanding of the subject than many teachers. The facility with which he relates his reading of the data under scrutiny to a comprehensive range of examples is magisterial.

Appendix 1: Planning Form

Student name:

Year of exam: 2000

Please use this form to record your planning decisions as you prepare for working on the language investigation.

Language data: In the box below, please list or describe the sources or texts that you have collected or intend to collect for study. Give as much information as you can about these data (e.g. where you found them; who is the speaker/writer, if known; purpose for which text was written/spoken, if known, and so on).

Authorities and reference: In the box below please list sources of information that you intend to use. You should specify those you have already and those you hope to acquire. In the case of general language textbooks, indicate chapter or section. If you are unable to find suitable reference works, we will recommend others. Note: It is absolutely essential that you give full reference information (publisher, year of publication etc.) for any authority you quote (including Web pages), so be sure you record this before returning a library book, say.

I already have:

I hope to get:

I need more help on:

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Language areas that you expect to study: In the box below, please highlight or circle one or more areas of language that you will study in your investigation.

Language acquisition – Language change – Language and society

Language levels: In the box below please highlight or circle the structural or functional features of language that you expect to study in your investigation.

Phonology – Graphology – Semantics – Grammar – Discourse structure

Matching areas to levels: Write in the box below short descriptions of the language functions you intend to study within your chosen area(s) of language (e.g. **acquisition of vocabulary and meanings by child X**).

Working title and outline agenda for your investigation: In the box below, please write down a working title for your investigation, and a suggested agenda of things you expect to do. Please note that the title should not be witty or epigrammatic but as closely descriptive as possible: this is a **scientific** investigation. Your agenda may be over ambitious at this point: where it needs to be reduced to allow you to work in detail without transgressing your word count, your teacher will advise you of this.

Appendix 2: Stages of production

1. Discuss with supervising teacher the language area or variety you would like to research.
2. Agree to collect data by specified date.
3. By negotiation with supervisor, decide on a clear question to ask about your chosen research area. This should be related to the data you have collected. If you have more data than you need, select from what you have.
4. Read appropriate secondary sources (language authorities). Make notes. Identify statements that may be worth quoting – those, for instance, which your research may support or challenge.
5. Work out a plan or agenda for your analysis of the data you have collected. You need to ensure that you cover all relevant structural or stylistic features, and that you keep within word limits.
6. Obtain permission (use the form in Appendix 3) to use data, where appropriate.
7. Transcribe data. For spoken data, use conventions relevant to the analysis you are attempting. Ensure you have a key or legend for any symbols that you use.
8. Begin analysis. Show this to supervisor as soon as you have a sufficiently long and coherent section of comment. You need not work in the order in which your analysis will eventually appear (you may wish to analyse before evaluating, and to leave your conclusions, abstract and introduction until the end of the process).
9. Present findings in a suitable format. Use tables or graphical representations where this is helpful. Ensure that you record data objectively. Evaluation will be at least partly subjective, but should be informed by objective analysis.
10. Try to keep to your chosen theoretical framework – make use of an appropriate register for language science. Avoid popular myths about language – do not characterize non-standard forms as “bad” or “mistaken”, for example.
11. Come to a conclusion – this should show that you have found out something real and worth knowing. Try to avoid stating the obvious – you may also leave open the reasons for or causes of what you have found. Try to bring your conclusion back to statements you have found in (and quoted from) secondary sources – showing how far your research supports these or contradicts them. If your findings do not support the views of these authorities, it does not mean either is mistaken – it may be evidence of language change with time or place.
12. Present your work carefully – observe conventions of writing a scientific report. Make sure all papers are clean and legible. Put your work in a suitable folder or binder, so it is easy for the examiner to assess. Make sure all appendices, letters of permission and original data sources (these may be audio or video recordings) are included, with dates, place of origin and other contextual information.

Appendix 3: Statement of permission to use material

(The text below should ideally be pasted into a document bearing the letterhead of the exam centre.)

To Whom It May Concern:

As part of my GCE Advanced Level work in English Language, I am conducting a Language Investigation. To do this, I am required to find real language data, and interpret them according to theoretical models of language.

As you have kindly supplied such data, I need your consent for the use I will make of them in this task. This letter explains what will happen to the data you have provided, and has a space for you to show your agreement to this. If you have any further questions about the Language Investigation, please contact the supervising teacher or head of department at my school.

If you have provided written data, I may make a typed copy, and may quote from the data. If you have provided spoken data, I will transcribe these.

The data you have supplied will be seen by the teacher supervising the investigation, and may be seen by other teachers running the GCE Advanced Level course, as well as by moderators (examiners) of coursework who assess the work of candidates at the school.

If my teachers or I wish to place the investigation in the public domain (by print, broadcast or Web publishing) they or I will seek your permission. If you give permission, the publication of your data will conform to normal ethical procedures for scientific research – your surname will be shown only as an initial, and other identifying information will not appear

Please show your consent to my use of the data you have supplied by signing the form below.

Thank you for your help,

-Signature-

Student Investigator

-Signature-

Supervising Teacher

Statement of permission

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