

Lawnswood School English Department

A-Level English Language



LAWNSWOOD
— SCHOOL —

Introduction to A Level English Language

Course Outline

We are delighted you have chosen to study English Language A Level with us! We are with the exam board AQA. The AQA website has more detailed information on the course if you are interested at this stage, but here is a quick outline so you know what to expect.

Over the course of the next two years you will prepare for two exams and one Non-Exam Assessment (NEA)*

Paper 1 – Language and the Individual

- Language and representation
- Child Language Development

Paper 2 – Language Varieties

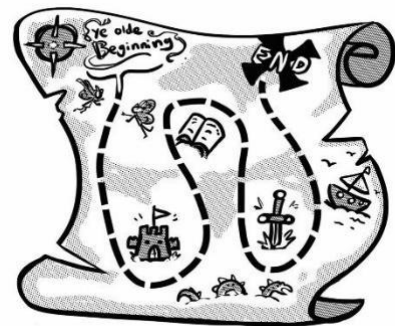
- Language change (English through time)
- Language and gender, power and occupation
- Language Varieties (accent, dialect)

*The Non-Exam Assessment (NEA) is a piece of coursework, done mostly independently, of 2500 words. One piece is a Language Investigation looking at an issue of language that you are interested in and the second piece is an Original Writing piece in a style of your choice.

This booklet has some ideas for activities, a glossary of some key terms and technical terminology and a recommended reading list with some blogs and websites to explore.

1. Introducing the key ideas and skills

There are some important areas that will be the basis of your study of the language of texts taken from everyday sources. You will have to become confident in using them. There are a number of linguistic frameworks and related concepts to come to grips with.



Linguistic Frameworks

Lexis

Semantics

Grammar

Phonetics / Phonology

Pragmatics

Discourse

Graphology

Related Concepts

Register

Mode

Idiolect

Sociolect

Dialect

Accent

Representation

Linguistic Frameworks

Lexis - *The words used in text or spoken data; the words, phrases and idioms of language.*

Key Features may include:

Choice of lexis, e.g. jargon (specialist terms), dialect, slang, colloquialisms, swearing, taboo terms, clichés, euphemisms, dysphemisms, archaisms (deliberate use of old-fashioned terms).

Choices indicating factors such as levels of formality and education, e.g. elevated, literate, sophisticated, Latinate, unusual and polysyllabic terms (largely a reading or writing vocabulary) as opposed to simple, every-day, vernacular and monosyllabic (largely a speaking vocabulary).

The concept of the lexeme.

Types of word, e.g. compound, shortening, abbreviation, acronym, neologism, blend, loan word.

Use of recurring lexis from particular lexical (semantic) fields.

Collocations, whether common (predictable) or uncommon (deviant).

Use of figurative language, e.g. metaphor, simile, pun, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, oxymoron.

Phew! Don't panic, just look up some of these words, begin to compile a glossary and learn a few for now. You might start with jargon and see if it applies to the list of words you have been given so far! Then go to the last bullet point and see how many you recognise from your GCSE studies.

Activity 1: List as many words for 'drunk' as you can, trying to cover as many different registers (levels of formality and informality). Try to think about what your parents and grandparents would say, and also think about different contexts, e.g. what would you say to a police officer / teacher and what would you say to your friends.

Next you need to get your words in rank order, from most formal to least. Once that's done, try applying some lexical labels to them. Do you have examples for each of the following terms? If not, can you add some for the categories you don't yet have?

| | | |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Formal | Technical | Informal |
| Colloquial | Impolite | Slang |
| Taboo | Dialect / Regional | 'Posh' Slang |
| Old Fashioned | Older People's Slang | 'Youth' Slang |

This is a useful activity to think about how different groups of people use language in similar and different ways. The words that you use may be different dependent on your age, where you live, social groups and lots of other factors.

Semantics - *The meaning of language. The semantics of a word is the meaning of it as given in a dictionary. The semantic meaning of a text is not always straightforward, though, because we can add layers of meaning, for example through euphemisms or dysphemisms and through imagery.*

Key Features may include:



Denotation - factual and objective meanings

Connotation - personal and subjective meanings

Types of meaning - positive / negative, specific / vague, literal / figurative

Contrasts in meaning - synonym, antonym, hypernym, hyponym, homonym, homophone, homograph

Changes in meaning - amelioration, pejoration, broadening, narrowing

Activity 2: Look up the meanings of some of these words in a dictionary/online dictionary tool

Euphemisms and Dysphemisms

A **euphemism** is the substitution of a polite expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt (e.g. "spending a penny").

A **dysphemism** is when we use a harsh expression instead of a more neutral one (e.g. animal names when they are applied to people, such as: coot, old bat, pig, chicken, snake, and bitch). We might call someone a pig when we actually mean that his table manners are not very delicate!

Grammar - *The way individual words are structured and arranged together in sentences.*

Key Features may include:

Word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and determiners

Features of the verb: main and auxiliary, tense, modal auxiliaries, active and passive voice

Sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory

Sentence complexity: minor, simple, compound, complex, relative length

Unusual word order

Standard or non-standard forms

Other aspects: ellipsis, pre - and post - modification, subject / object, pronoun use, person, agreement, content and function words, noun phrase complexity

Word structure: prefix, suffix



Phonetics / Phonology

Phonetics is the study of the sounds made by speakers.

Phonology is the use of vocal elements to add extra force to what is being said.

Phonetics:

Part of the study of spoken texts is to record and transcribe conversations yourself, as well as analysing those done by others. This is a skill that you will gradually develop; you will find useful information on Wikipedia, among other sites, and details about the phonetic symbols. You will need

to know that a **phoneme** is the smallest unit of sound in a language and that each phoneme has its own phonetic symbol. The symbols represent the sounds of Received Pronunciation.

Phonology:

Key Features may include:

Characteristics of normal spoken delivery, e.g. volume, stress, pitch, intonation, (pitch pattern or melody), tempo, silent pauses, voiced pauses (fillers, e.g. 'er', 'erm'), alliteration, assonance. These are called **prosodic** features.

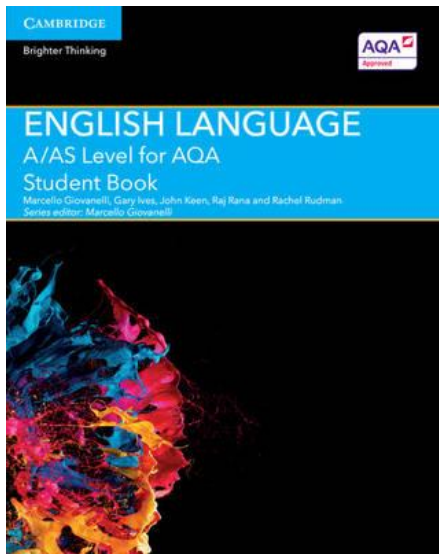
Elision (partial loss of sounds from words in connected speech, indicated through spelling), e.g. I'm, can't, 'cos, fish 'n' chips, livin', cuppa tea).

Phonology can even be a characteristic of written English as well as spoken and can be spotted in certain patterns. You will be used to this with the poems that you studied for GCSE, but remember that we are not just thinking about poems anymore. The patterns can include: rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, assonance.

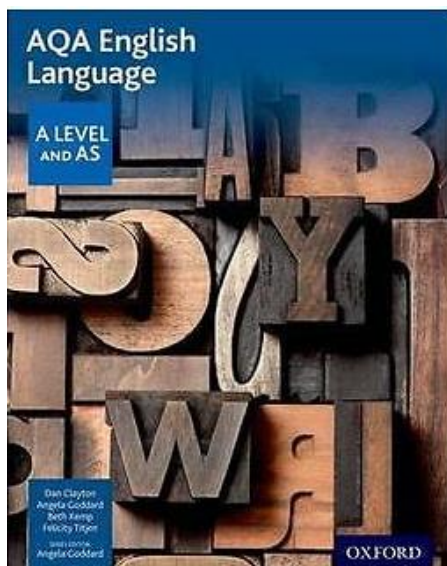
Significant aspects of accent, indicated by means of deviant spelling, e.g. West Lancashire

'th'reet mon' ('the right man'), Somerset 'zo I zaid' ('so I said')

A Level English Language Reading Recommendations

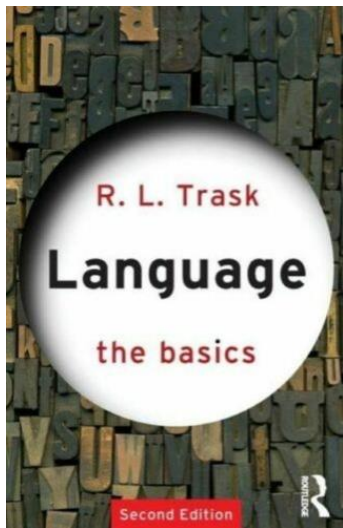


Good for the frameworks, Paper 1 including children's language, and NEA (coursework). Based on the AQA specification. *(Though not much on Paper 2.)*



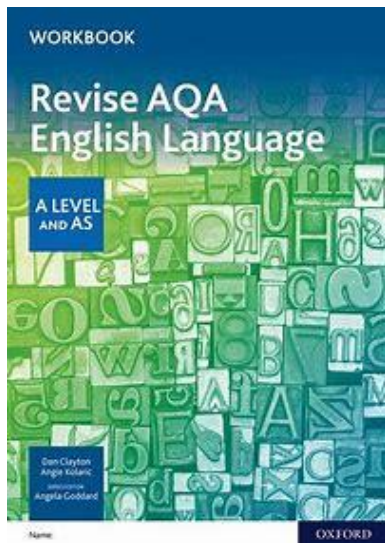
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| 1 | Introduction to the AQA English Language AS level and A level specifications |
| | Language levels |
| 2 | Language and texts |
| 3 | Language and people |
| | 3.1 Language and social groups |
| | 3.2 Language and region |
| | 3.3 Language and occupation |
| | 3.4 Language and gender |
| | 3.5 Language and ethnicity |
| 4 | The language of children |
| | 4.1 Children's spoken language |
| | 4.2 Children's literacy |
| 5 | Language change |
| 6 | Language in the world |
| 7 | Language coursework – investigation |
| 8 | Language coursework – original writing |
| | Preparing for assessment |
| | Feedback on activities |
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Good for Variations (Paper 2 topics), children's language (Paper 1 Section B), and NEA (coursework). Based on the AQA specification.



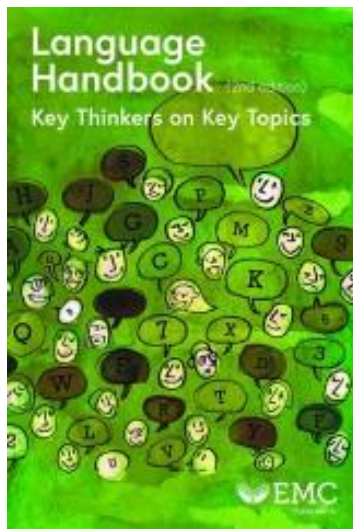
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Comprehensive discussions of key language issues and topics like grammar, semantics, language change, children's language, and attitudes to language.



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Lots of activities and questions to help prepare you for the exams (both papers). Based on the AQA specification.



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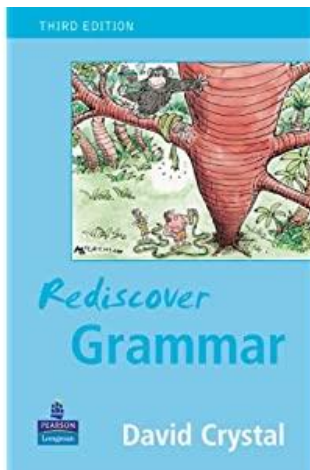
Foreword – Professor Ronald Carter
 Introduction to the 2nd Edition – Dan Clayton

A Note on the Text

1. Gender and Communication
 Professor Deborah Cameron
2. Language Variation 1 – Social Factors:
 Class and Ethnicity
 Professor Paul Kerswill
3. Language Variation 2 – Patterns of Accent Variation in British
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 Dr Kevin Watson
4. English Around the World
 Professor Jane Setter
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 Professor Lynne Murphy
6. Urban Youth Language
 Dr Rob Drummond
7. Spoken Language
 Dr Sue Fox
8. Language Change
 Dr Graeme Trousdale
9. Attitudes to Language Change
 Dan Clayton
10. Language and Technology
 Professor Angela Goddard
11. Child Language Acquisition
 Dr Paul Bibotson
12. Critical Discourse Analysis
 Professor Christopher Hart
13. Textual Analysis and Stylistics
 Professor Peter Stockwell
14. Forensic Linguistics
 Dr Nicola MacLeod

Glossary

We have copies of these in school to be borrowed. Contains great introductory chapters summarising key aspects of topics, including the most significant theorists.



Clear, helpful explanations, definitions and examples of grammatical terms and functions. There are various editions too, which means you can probably find a cheap second hand one.



Very useful series of books (with each one covering a different aspect) though the price soon adds up! Cambridge University Press



Language Blogs/ Podcasts/ Websites:

- www.lingthusiasm.com Each podcast covers a different topic, and provides insight into the issues and attitudes of that language topic.
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qtnz/episodes/guide> Word of Mouth podcasts, most hosted by Michael Rosen with guest speakers. Cover attitudes and key aspects of a wide range of language topics.
- <http://talkthetalkpodcast.com/> Australian radio show with three hosts (one linguist, two non) and occasional interviews.
- <https://www.languageonthemove.com/> Language blog, covering lots of topics, especially helpful for Paper 2.
- <https://player.fm/series/a-way-with-words> Solo podcast with a mixture of language/linguistics content and writing advice
- <https://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com/> This blog is specifically about the differences between American Standard English and British Standard English.
- <https://debuk.wordpress.com/> A feminist blog about language
- <https://historyofenglishpodcast.com/> It says it in the name really, a podcast about the history of the English language (so great for our topic of language change).
- <https://www.theallusionist.org/> Solo hosted podcast with frequent interviews, about general language and especially etymology, produced in a radio show style.
- <https://thelanguagerevolution.co.uk/> About changing UK attitudes to language.
- <https://player.fm/series/the-vocal-fries-1518536> Informal podcast with two linguists, about various aspects of linguistic discrimination