

ENGLISH A: Language and Literature

Terminology and Vocabulary

Acquiring some of this vocabulary will do you great favours in your exam papers and your individual oral commentary. I suggest you keep this paper, and get it out whenever you have a piece of written work to do (especially commentaries). Consulting this paper on a regular basis is probably the best way you can pick up some of this vocabulary.

Literary terminology

theme	a universal idea explored in a work of literature
motif	recurring literary devices that help to inform the work's theme(s)
characterisation	the techniques an author uses to present a character's traits
flat character	a character that can be summed up with one or two traits
round character	a character whose traits are complex and many-sided
dynamic character	a character that undergoes significant development
stock character	a stereotyped flat character
foil character	a minor character who, by comparison, helps us better understand a major character
character development	a permanent change in a character's traits or outlook
epiphany	the moment when a character experiences a defining insight into their life
plot	the sequence of incidents or events in a literary work
conflict	a clash of action, desires, values or goals between the protagonist and the antagonist(s)
protagonist	the central character, the one who most clearly drives the plot development
antagonist	any person or external/internal force in conflict with the protagonist
exposition	first stage in traditional plot development: introduces setting/characters
complication	second stage: introduces central conflict
climax	the high point and moment of maximum tension in the plot
resolution	elucidates the events after the climax
narrator	the character, named or anonymous, that tells the story
point of view	the perspective from which a story is told
first person	when the narrator is the protagonist, and uses predominantly <i>I</i> or <i>we</i>
third person limited	when the narrator uses predominantly <i>he</i> , <i>she</i> or <i>they</i> , and the narrative is limited to the thoughts and feelings of one character
third person omniscient	similar to above, but here the narrator recounts the thoughts and feelings of many or all characters
dramatic point of view	when the narrator is not a character, but an objective voice
unreliable narrator	a narrator whose story cannot be entirely trusted
intrusive narrator	a narrator who interrupts the narrative to directly address the reader
free indirect discourse	when the thoughts of a character are blended into the narrative
stream of consciousness	a narrative style that mimics the flow of ideas in a character's mind
diction	choice of words
denotation	central or fundamental meaning of a word, the referential meaning
connotation	emotive associations of a word, its extra layers of meaning
tone	like <i>tone of voice</i> , the emotive manifestation of the narrator's attitude
mood	the emotive effect a text creates for the reader
imagery	words used to help the reader imagine a sensory experience
visual imagery	stimulates the sense of sight

auditory imagery	stimulates the sense of sound
tactile imagery	stimulates the sense of touch
olfactory imagery	stimulates the sense of smell
gustatory imagery	stimulates the sense of taste
synesthesia (synaesthesia)	when an image appeals to two senses at the same time
literal meaning	the straightforward denotation of a piece of language
figurative meaning	meaning that is more than the literal denotation of the individual words
figure of speech	when words are used to create effect, often figuratively
simile	an explicit comparison of two things, usually with <i>as</i> or <i>like</i>
metaphor	where one thing is described as if it were another (i.e. an implicit comparison)
symbol	something that has both literal and figurative meaning
personification	a figure of speech that gives human qualities to objects or ideas
allusion	a reference to shared cultural knowledge, e.g. a novel or a historical event
intertextuality	reference within one text to another, e.g. a biblical allusion in a novel
oxymoron	two words that seem to contradict each other
irony	a situation or use of language involving some kind of incongruity
verbal irony	saying one thing but meaning another
situational irony	when the situation or result contradicts our expectations
dramatic irony	when the audience knows more than at least one character does
alliteration	repetition of consonants, usually in initial position
assonance	repetition of vowels in medial position
euphony	the effect created by a concentration of soft, pleasant sounds
cacophony	the effect created by a concentration of harsh sounds
onomatopoeia	the effect achieved by a word whose sound reminds us of its meaning
persona / speaker	a character created by the poet to “narrate” the poem
stanza	a group of lines in a poem, the poetic equivalent of a “verse”
couplet	a two-line stanza
tercet	a three-line stanza
quatrain	a four-line stanza
rhyme scheme	a pattern of end rhyme in a stanza or the whole poem
meter	a regular rhythmical pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables
foot	a unit of the meter containing one stressed syllable
iambic	describes a foot that contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed
trochaic	describes a foot that contains a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed
tetrameter	a meter in which each line consists of four feet
pentameter	a meter in which each line consists of five feet
enjambement	when a phrase continues through the end of a line of verse
caesura	a pause in the middle of a line of verse, due to punctuation or syntactic structure

Figures of speech

	Explanation	Example
metaphor	an implicit comparison between two things, metaphors involve the reader in the interpretive act of searching for the points of similarity; they are also powerful in creating imagery, as they invite us to see one thing as another	The streets <i>were a furnace</i> , the sun an <i>executioner</i> .
simile	an explicit comparison between two things, usually with <i>as</i> or <i>like</i> ; similes, unlike metaphors, maintain a certain distance between the points of comparison	you fit into me <i>like a hook into an eye</i>
oxymoron	words that seem to contradict each other, thus startling the reader with a fresh and exciting use of language	his <i>aggressive delicacy</i>
syn(a)esthesia	describing a sensory image with words that are normally associated with another sense; another figure of speech offering the chance for original uses of language	<i>twinkle-bells of sunshine</i>
euphemism	replacing a taboo or unwelcome term with an inoffensive one in an attempt to avoid offence	<i>convenience fee, pass away, powder my nose</i> , etc
hyperbole	exaggeration for rhetorical effect	<i>She was about 60 years older than Mr Antolini.</i>
litotes	the assertion of something by contradicting its opposite; may serve to reveal something of a character's expectations	...but Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that <i>it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine</i> .
synecdoche	a form of metonymy in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole	<i>All hands</i> on deck!
metonymy	substituting a word or phrase for one with which it is closely associated	<i>Whitehall</i> prepares for a hung parliament.
irony	when the intended meaning differs from the apparent, literal meaning; a risky figure of speech that often creates a comic effect	<i>What is it your doing with grouse, Valentine, I'd love to know?</i> (Bernard means quite the opposite)
paradox	an apparent contradiction which on closer inspection may reveal a certain truth; draws the reader into a consideration of real meaning	<i>My son, my executioner</i> , I hold you in my arms
parallelism	when two or more parts of the sentence(s) have a syntactically similar form, giving an overall pattern	<i>The great insight of liberalism is..., and the great insight of conservatism is...</i>
antithesis	a type of parallelism in which contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in balanced (syntactically similar) phrases	We must learn to <i>live together as brothers or perish together as fools</i> .
chiasmus	a type of antithesis in which two phrases are balanced and their parts reversed	<i>I flee who chases me, and chase who flees me.</i>
understatement	making a situation seem less important or serious than it is	<i>I mean I'm not going to be a goddam surgeon or a violinist or anything anyway</i>
anaphora	repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences or stanzas	<i>I needed</i> a drink, <i>I needed</i> a lot of life insurance, <i>I needed</i> a vacation, <i>I needed</i> a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun.
personification	giving an inanimate object, or abstraction, human qualities	<i>The wind stood up and gave a shout.</i>

Linguistic terminology

Words marked with a * are words that you should learn, as they can be useful in commentaries. The other words are for reference, or for learning on a particular module.

phonology	the rules of a language's sound system	
syntax *	the rules governing how words combine into sentences	
semantics	the rules relating words to meaning	
phoneme	smallest meaningful unit of sound	/s/; /ə/
morpheme	smallest meaningful unit of grammar	-est; -s; un-
lexeme	minimal unit of language, including all of its forms	go (includes going, goes, gone etc.)
prefix *	a morpheme added to the beginning of the word	dis-; in-
suffix *	a morpheme added to the end of a word	-ment; -ly; -ed
acronym *	a word derived from the initials of other words	NATO
eponym	a word derived from a name	sandwich (the Earl of Sandwich)
semantic field *	a semantic property (element of meaning) shared by a group of words	the team <u>surrendered</u> before the <u>massacre</u> was complete (s.f.=war)
synonym *	different words, similar meaning	happy/glad; flashlight/torch
antonym *	different words, opposite meaning	up/down; alive/dead
homonym	same pronunciation, different meaning	boar/bore; too/two; right/write
heteronym	same spelling, different meaning and pronunciation	bow/bow; read/read
ellipsis	omission of words that context renders unnecessary	Bob had five dollars, <u>Jo three</u> .
contraction	shortening a word (or word group) by internal omission	can't; let's
noun phrase	a noun, together with determiner(s) and modification	the big green monster
determiner	a word that clarifies a noun's referent	a; the; both; two; either; those
modifier	information about the head noun, either before (pre-modification) or after (post-modification) the noun	green... (pre-); ...that I bought yesterday (post-)
nominalisation	forming a noun phrase by transforming a verb/adj/adv into the head noun	his refusal to participate (from the verb refuse)
finite verb form	a verb that shows agreement for number and/or tense	he <u>goes</u> ; we <u>went</u>
non-finite verb form	a verb that doesn't inflect for number or tense	I went there <u>to relax</u> ; No <u>fishing</u>
clause *	a unit of language consisting of subject and predicate	the paper came on time today
subject	the "thing" in a clause that "does" the verb (!)	<u>the paper</u> came on time today
predicate	information in a clause about what the subject is/does	the paper <u>came on time today</u>
sentence *	a unit of language consisting of one or several clauses	The paper came on time today.
declarative *	a type of sentence in the form of a statement	I'm reading the news.
interrogative *	a type of sentence in the form of a question	Are you reading the news?
imperative *	a type of sentence in the form of a command	Read the news.
exclamative *	a type of sentence emphatically expressing emotion	What magnificent news!
variety	one of the many different "appearances" of a language	Black American English
register	a variety of language used in a particular social context	formal English

dialect	a geographical variety of language	<i>Jamaican English</i>
standard	the variety of language most typically considered correct	
non-standard	any variety of language that is not the standard	
vernacular	the relaxed and informal register of language	
colloquial	a style of language associated with everyday speech	
lingua franca	a major language used by speakers of different languages	
slang *	non-standard colloquial language	<i>Give us a butcher's! (look)</i>
jargon *	specialist vocabulary of a certain field	<i>claudication (medical term)</i>
taboo	a word usually avoided due to offensive connotations	<i>bollocks</i>
euphemism *	a word/phrase used in place of a taboo term	<i>to pass water</i>

Words for describing tone

Tone is the emotional attitude expressed by the writer/narrator towards the subject. You can think of it as being like tone of voice – the emotional attitude we reveal in the way we speak. Tone is correctly described with adjectives that could equally be applied to descriptions of a speaker's tone of voice. Here is a fairly comprehensive list of adjectives that can be used.

admiring	cynical	hopeful	playful
aggressive	defiant	humorous	pleading
agitated	derogatory	iconoclastic	pompous
aloof	despairing	impassioned	positive
ambivalent	detached	impatient	proud
amused	determined	incensed	provocative
angry	dignified	incredulous	reassuring
animated	disapproving	indifferent	reflective
anxious	disdainful	indignant	reminiscent
apathetic	disgusted	inflammatory	remorseful
apologetic	disillusioned	informative	remote
apprehensive	disparaging	inquisitive	resentful
approving	disrespectful	insistent	resigned
arrogant	dissatisfied	insolent	respectful
assertive	distant	insulting	restive
authoritative	eager	inviting	restrained
bashful	earnest	irate	reverent
belligerent	elevated	ironic	romantic
bitter	embarrassed	jaded	sarcastic
bold	enthusiastic	joyous	satiric
brash	exaggerated	judgemental	scornful
brazen	excited	lamenting	self-deprecatory
cajoling	expectant	languid	sentimental
callous	facetious	light-hearted	serious
calm	factual	lively	sincere
candid	fanciful	matter-of-fact	sceptical
carefree	fearful	melancholic	solemn
careful	fearless	mocking	sombre
cautionary	fierce	monotonous	sorrowful
cautious	firm	morbid	spiteful
cheerful	forceful	mournful	strident
combative	formal	musical	sympathetic
compassionate	forthright	neutral	thoughtful
concerned	frank	nostalgic	unapologetic
conciliatory	frantic	ominous	upbeat
condemning	friendly	optimistic	urgent
condescending	frustrated	outraged	whimsical
confident	gentle	patient	wistful
conservative	happy	patronising	worried
contemplative	harried	pejorative	wry
contemptuous	harsh	penitent	zealous
contrite	hateful	pensive	
critical	haughty	persuasive	
curious	hesitant	pessimistic	

Words for describing mood

Mood is the emotional effect created by the text in the reader. It is similar to what you might call 'atmosphere'. Below you'll find a few examples.

dreamy	haunting
eerie	mysterious
exciting	passionate
gloomy	tense

Words for describing style

'Style' refers to the kind of language used, and it is one of the factors that contributes to a text's tone. Style is often prescribed by considerations of appropriacy and context. These words qualify how a text is written, not the attitude that the text expresses.

abstruse	esoteric	obscure
academic	euphemistic	pedantic
artificial	exact	plain
bombastic	figurative	poetic
business-like	formal	precise
colloquial	fulsome	pretentious
concrete	grotesque	scholarly
connotative	idiomatic	sensuous
cultured	informal	simple
detached	intellectual	symbolic
descriptive	learned	trite
effusive	literal	unctuous
emotional	moralistic	vulgar

Words for describing what the writer/narrator does

These words are also very useful for commentaries.

accentuates	depicts	mocks
addresses	deplores	notes
alleges	derides	observes
alludes	describes	paints
appeals to	discusses	perpetuates
applies sth to	dramatises	points out
articulates	echoes	portrays
asserts	elucidates	posits
assesses	emphasises	predicts
attributes sth to	employs	presents
belittles	enables	proposes
bemoans	exploits	qualifies
characterises	explores	questions
classifies	expresses	recalls
compares	forges	reflects
concedes	grants	rejects
concurr	highlights	remembers
condemns	illuminates	reveals
confronts	illustrates	satirizes
conjures sth up	imbues the text with	speculates
connects sth to	implies	states
construes sth as	insists	stresses
contrasts	introduces	suggests
conveys	juxtaposes	underlines
contends	laments	urges
critiques	maintains	warns

Words for describing purpose

A text cannot be effectively analysed without recognising and describing its purpose. The list below considers the typical purposes of three different types of texts.

POETIC:	stimulate, inspire, move, shock, entertain, capture the imagination
MASS:	inform, persuade, entertain, shock
PROFESSIONAL:	present, analyse, convey factual information