

**Lesson
Two**

Reading for Meaning and Understanding the Writer's Craft

Aims

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- read with insight and engagement
- make references to texts to support interpretation
- understand and collate specific meanings and express these in written prose
- understand and explain implicit meanings and attitudes (of writers or speakers) and express these in written prose
- understand how writers achieve effects and provide examples through discussion and quotations

Context

Each lesson in the first two modules will introduce both an unseen text and the set extracts from the Edexcel anthology, along with activities to develop active reading skills and exploration of writer's craft. At the end of each lesson, exam-style questions will be used to enable you to gain practice at responding to the non-fiction section of the anthology and unseen texts.



Oxford Open Learning

Reading for Meaning

Work in Modules 1 and 2 will provide opportunities for reading and responding to a range of different texts and genres. Texts encountered will address a variety of audiences for multiple purposes.

In your preparation for the unseen extract, you will consider the linguistic features of a range of non-fiction text types. You will look closely at the discourse structure underpinning each text. You will be able to identify the distinctive linguistic features of texts, and comment upon how these convey attitudes, values and ideas. You will be able to consider a range of contextual factors, where appropriate.

Before further consideration of the ways in which writers present attitudes, values and ideas in non-fiction texts, it is worth revising your prior knowledge of:

- The way a speaker's audience and purpose can affect the choice of genre
- Generic conventions of non-fiction texts

Genre, Audience and Purpose: Same Genre, Different Texts

When approaching an unseen text for the first time, the context which is most apparent is **genre** or text type.

Once the genre has been identified it is also possible to consider to what extent it *conforms* or *deviates* from typical features for that text type. You were introduced to some common non-fiction genres at the end of lesson 1. Genres can be subdivided further - for example, newspaper texts are a type of information text and can include feature articles, opinion columns and breaking news reports.

In some libraries, works of non-fiction are placed in this general category as if it was an over-arching genre. As you work through these lessons it should soon become clear that non-fiction can take a range of forms and styles.

Each genre or text type has conventions which the writer has either worked within or broken for a specific effect.

Purpose

Writers write with an intention in mind and the **purpose** is the reason the text has been written. When you read, you should

consider what the writer is trying to do. Non-fiction texts can be written to fulfil a number of purposes. These include:

- Writing to inform - the text aims to tell the reader about something in order to increase their understanding.
- Writing to argue or persuade - the text presents a viewpoint on a topic, while persuading the reader to adopt a particular belief or behaviour.
- Writing to entertain - the text appeals to the reader's emotions and enjoyment.
- Writing to advise or instruct - the text aims to provide the reader with help and support in relation to a particular issue or problem.

At times the purpose or function of the text can provide a key for evaluating language use.

Audience

While audience is used to describe all those who experience a text, it is important to note that different perspectives can be held in response to the same text.

Audience is the term used to refer to a particular set of people that the author has in mind when they wrote the text. You may see the term **primary audience** used to refer to the main audience or readership being addressed. There may be other audience attributes such as age, gender or assumed knowledge. The audience refers to the specific group of people the writer is aiming to engage with the text.

The content or subject matter can reveal the target audience, particularly when it is unusual or specialised. The form and layout may also provide evidence of target audience - use of images and larger fonts often indicate a younger reader.

Language choices such as lexical range (or vocabulary) also provide an indication of audience, with complex sentence structures and difficult vocabulary suggesting adult or specialist readers, while more simple constructions or colloquial slang can suggest an appeal to a younger or more general reader.

Specialist language does not simply relate to age, It can also reveal shared understanding of a topic. For example, a magazine aimed at gaming fans may use acronyms and abbreviations that make little sense to the general reader.

A text may have more than one audience - for example, recent advertising campaigns for *Disneyland Paris* appealed to parents through the voice over while stressing the child's perspective and experiences in the images used.

If you are presented with a text written in a different time period as your unseen, it can be worthwhile to compare the potential reactions of the original audience with a modern reader or listener. Other characteristics of audience which may illuminate interpretations can include age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and attitudes and values held.

Key Term

CONTEXT Factors affecting or influencing the production of the text.

Texts in Context

With the anthology texts, you will be given the date of publication which may provide some guidance to the social and historical contexts. The question may also give some contextual details which will support your claims regarding purpose and audience.

With the unseen text, you will have to explore the context thoroughly. By considering the theme or themes, you can uncover some of the writer or speaker's views and attitudes.

Context can include the following:

- The historical period
- The political situation at time of production
- Social groupings and interactions
- Language use
- Changing cultural values

Social, economic and political contexts

At the time and place of production, it may be relevant to consider how the society was organised and which groups held the power and status.

Historical background

When responding to an extract, it can be examined for evidence of society's views on what was significant at the time, any real people alluded to within the text.

Cultural values

It may be significant to examine what the text reveals about the rituals, value systems and beliefs held by groups referred to in the extract.

Activity 1

Texts in Context

Read the extract from The Diary of Anne Frank below and write your responses to the following prompts:

- What are the writer's reasons for writing the particular text?
- Who is the text aimed at?
- Does the writer demonstrate any particular view or bias?
- How has the writer used different forms of language to make the writing more effective?
- Consider characters, places and contexts
- Consider language that evokes emotion, dramatic detail and description
- How does the writer make use of colloquial expressions or language?

Activity 1

MONDAY 26TH JULY 1943

Dearest Kitty,

Yesterday was a very tumultuous day, and we're still all wound up. Actually, you may wonder if there's ever a day that passes without some kind of excitement.

The first warning siren went off in the morning while we were at breakfast, but we paid no attention, because it only meant that the planes were crossing the coast. I had a terrible headache, so I lay down for an hour after breakfast and then went to the office at about two. At two-thirty Margot had finished her office work and was just gathering her things together when the sirens began wailing again. So she and I trooped back upstairs. None too soon, it seems, for less than five minutes later the guns were booming so loudly that we went and stood in the passage. The house shook and the bombs kept falling. I was clutching my 'escape bag', more because I wanted to have something to hold on to than because I wanted to run away. I know we can't leave here, but if we had to, being seen on the streets would be just as dangerous as getting caught in an air raid. After half an hour the drone of engines faded and the house began to hum with activity again. Peter emerged from his lookout post in the front attic, Dussel remained in the front office, Mrs van D. felt safest in the private office, Mr van Daan had been watching from the loft, and those of us on the landing spread out to watch the columns of smoke rising from the harbour. Before long the smell of fire was everywhere, and outside it looked as if the city were enveloped in a thick fog.

A big fire like that is not a pleasant sight, but fortunately for us it was all over, and we went back to our various jobs. Just as we were starting dinner: another air-raid alarm. The food was good, but I lost my appetite the moment I heard the siren. Nothing happened, however, and forty-five minutes later the all-clear was sounded. After the washing-up: another air-raid warning, gunfire and swarms of planes. 'Oh gosh, twice in one day,' we thought, 'that's twice too many.' Little good that did us, because once again the bombs rained down, this time on the other side of the city. According to British reports, Schiphol Airport was bombed. The planes dived and climbed, the air was abuzz with the drone of engines. It was very scary, and the whole time I kept thinking, 'Here it comes, this is it.'

I can assure you that when I went to bed at nine, my legs were still shaking. At the stroke of midnight I woke up again: more planes! Dussel was undressing, but I took no notice and leapt up, wide awake, at the sound of the first shot. I stayed in Father's bed until one, in my own bed until one-thirty, and was back in Father's bed at two. But the planes kept on coming.

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Relationship between writer and the reader

The sense that a reader makes of a text can be influenced by a range of contexts, such as gender, social class, level of education, ethnicity, customs and values.

Likewise, the writer's background has served to shape the choices they have made when expressing their ideas.

There may be additional influences such as prior knowledge of ways of approaching text or particular moral, religious or political beliefs which affect the aspects or themes of a text that the reader chooses to engage with.

Target Audience and Language

Writers are aware of their target audience and therefore select words very carefully in order to persuade readers to share viewpoints or accept things within the text.

Just as we use a particular **tone and register** when we speak, writers use the same principles when writing; not only by the choice of vocabulary but also sentence construction, choice of **similes** and **metaphors** and other literary devices such as **rhetoric, irony, questions and alliteration**.

Learning Checkpoint: Technical Glossary

Tone: the quality or character of the language used

Register: the level or pitch of the language e.g. informal register to suggest a close relationship

Similes: a figure of speech where two distinct things are explicitly compared using 'like' or 'as'

Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is used to suggest a quality; not literal e.g. hard-hearted

Rhetoric: the art of using persuasive language devices

Irony: the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning

Alliteration: sound pattern created by stressing the same consonant sound or sound group e.g. cold, calculating and cruel

When analysing texts, you first need to look at how the writer is using language and then decide on the **purpose** of the piece and the **target audience**.

Words have different meanings according to the **context** in which they are used. Writers are aware of this and use word associations to elicit specific responses from readers and influence the way they think and feel about a piece of text. This is called emotive language.

Language and the Writer's Craft: Unseen Texts

In the examination one of the texts you will be responding to will be unseen. It will be a new extract presented for the first time of the exam paper which you will be unprepared for. This section of the lesson is designed to help you prepare for these texts, by outlining the reading process and ways of identifying basic language features.

In the examination, you will use the reading time indicated on the paper (15 minutes) to read the text thoroughly using the active reading strategies that you studied in lesson 1.

First of all and before you read any of the text, look carefully at the title of it and think about what it suggests to you.

If there is a brief introduction this may provide important information and may help you to understand the passage and attribute meaning. Remember that an introduction is scene setting and should outline the background of a piece of text.

You will use skimming and scanning to gain some sense of the passage as a whole and also try and understand the content. When you are reading texts as part of your IGCSE study, highlight words and key phrases by underlining or circling those that seem significant or of interest to readers.

After your first reading, identify some key elements of audience, purpose and the writer's technique (this should be at word level, sentence level and text level). You can use the glossary overleaf to help you identify some language features. Don't be put off by the amount of technical terms - as you study the notes on the anthology texts, you will come across these terms again and again and you will see how language choices work in real texts. You do not need to learn these off by heart - refer to them as you read and you will become more familiar with them as you progress through the course.

Language Glossary

Word level

Analyse lexical choice (vocabulary) and the type of language used (emotive, technical, informal, simple, figurative, formal)

Sentence level

Features of sentence variety and construction (simple vs. complex sentences, variety, punctuation, tense, person)

Text level

Sequence and presentation of material (this can include illustrations, layout, and 'signposting' by use of headings).

Nouns names of things, places or people

Concrete or common nouns

These are physical things, in other words things that you can see and touch e.g. *apple, umbrella*

Proper nouns

This always begins with a capital letter to indicate the name of a person or place: Adichie, Bhutan, Paris.

Capital letters

In addition to using capital letters for the first letter of proper and abstract nouns, they are also used for titles of people, books, films, plays and magazines, for example: *A Tale of Two Cities*

Collective nouns

Refers to a group of objects, animals or people: team, flock.

Abstract nouns

The refer to things that cannot be seen or touched so normally relates to a feeling, concept or occasion e.g. Christmas, Diwali, Peace.

Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns take the place of a noun and can be 1st, 2nd or 3rd person address. They can be used as the subject or object of a sentence, as follows:

1st person singular: I (subject); me (object)

1st person plural: we (subject); us (object)

2nd person singular: you (subject); you (object)

2nd person plural: you (subject), you (object)

3rd person singular: he/she/it (subject); him/her/it (object)

3rd person plural: they (subject); them (object)

Verb a 'doing' or 'being' word

Verb 'to be'

1st person: I am/we are (present tense);

I was/we were (past tense)

2nd person: you are (present tense);

you were (past tense)

3rd person: he/she/it is/they are (present tense);

he/she/it was/they were (past tense).

Conjunctions Words that link two parts of a sentence or two or more sentences together.

And, but and or

These are types of conjunctions that traditionally writers were told should not be used to start a sentence – they are usually used between clauses:

I waited for an hour but he didn't arrive.

She sat on the bench and drew a sketch of the lake below her.

You will see some texts in the anthology that do use these words at the start of sentences. This is unusual and you should try to comment on why you think the writer has done this and what the effects are.

Adverbs: These modify verbs and tell us how something is or was done:

- He *quickly* wrote the e-mail.
- She moves *elegantly*.

Adjectives: are words used to describe nouns e.g. *He bit into the juicy apple*

Adjectives can be changed into adverbs by adding 'ly' to the word, for example: *happy* becomes *happily*.

Evaluating the Writer's Craft: Pulling it All Together

Non-fiction texts can be personal, social, environmental or moral in theme. There are a range of techniques used to gain an emotional response from readers. Some writers use scare tactics to play on the reader's fears or insecurities, some use shock tactics to create sensation or outrage. Some appeal to more positive aspects, such as hopes, dreams and ambitions. They may appeal to vanity or a sense of idealism. Many appeal to the reader's self-image or how they wish the world to see them.

Some writers will persuade through positive arguments while others will use a negative approach to undermine or contradict opposing views. Writers often use personal or first-hand experiences to add weight to their argument. Interviews and quotations can also be used to provide 'expert' support.

You are expected to understand meaning and to be able to explain aspects of content and form. You should also be able to recognise purpose and target audience, and evaluate how aims are achieved. Readings should be supported by a range of detailed references.

You may be asked to explore how the writer presents a theme, person or event, or how that moment is made significant or moving for the reader. Responses should include a discussion of how language and form are used to convey ideas.

You should be able to locate facts and opinions, consider how they have been used and to what effect. You should consider the purpose of texts and how they affect readers in different ways. Evaluations should present opinions on how successfully linguistic features have been used.

Responding to Texts

As well as identifying examples of literary techniques, you need to evaluate the purpose and effect of particular language features.

You will need to look in detail at the passage, examining how the narrative is structured, as well as the variety of descriptive and figurative techniques employed.

When studying for the examination, highlighting and annotating texts can prove helpful. Use a range of colours to identify the work various word choices are doing:

1. You can start with **adjectives**, as descriptions of people and places can influence the reader's response.
2. Looking at **verbs** and **adverbs** to consider the precise meaning that they convey can help in discussion of writer's attitude.

3. Structural variations such as **sentence variety**, **sentence length** and **paragraph length** can also be used for effect.
4. Any **contrasts** between images or sensory description may highlight themes.
5. Other **thematic or abstract** words can reveal focus of the text e.g. love, time, etc.
6. Use of **dialogue**.
7. Use of **punctuation** for effect.

Activity 2

Evaluating the Writer's Craft

(Extract from Bill Bryson's, *Notes from a Small Island*)

*There's something surreal about plunging into the bowels of the earth to catch a train. It's a little world of its own down there, with its own strange winds and weather systems, its own eerie noises and oily smells. Even when you're descended so far into the earth that you're lost your bearings utterly and wouldn't be in the least surprised to pass a troop of blackened miners coming off shift, there's always the rumble of a train passing somewhere on an unknown line even further below. And it all happens in such orderly quiet: all these thousands of people passing on stairs and escalators, stepping on and off crowded trains, sliding into the darkness with wobbling heads, and never speaking, like characters from *Night of the Living Dead*...*

The best part of Underground travel is that you never actually see the places above you. You have to imagine them...In London the names sound sylvan and beckoning: Stamford Brook, Turnham Green, Bromley-by-Bow, Maida Vale, Drayton Park. That isn't a city up there, it's a Jane Austen novel. It's easy to imagine that you are shuttling about under a semi-mythic city from some golden pre-industrial age. Swiss Cottage ceases to be a busy road junction and instead becomes instead a gingerbread dwelling in the midst of the great oak forest known as St. John's Wood.



1. In the first paragraph Bryson appeals to the senses. What words and phrases does he use to do this?
2. How does he describe the people who use the underground?
3. Sometimes we imagine what a place will be like just from the name. What does Bryson imagine Swiss Cottage will be like? Do you think this is a reality?

Suggested Answers to Activities

Activity 1: Texts in Context - Extract from *The Diary of Anne Frank*

- **Who is the text aimed at?**

When Anne Frank initially wrote her diary, it was for a private audience (herself). When the diary was discovered and returned in 1947 to her father Otto – the only family member to survive the concentration camp – it was published to try to help readers understand the struggle for survival of the Jewish population in Europe, as they attempted to escape persecution by the Nazis during the Second World War.

Given that Anne was a teenager when writing, the text is often shared with young people to help them empathise with the harsh realities faced by others in time of conflict.

- **Does the writer demonstrate any particular view or bias?**

At first the writer seems to demonstrate the typical carefree attitude of a teenager, summing up the drama of being close to an air raid as *'excitement'*.

- **How has the writer used different forms of language to make the writing more effective?**

As the passage continues, Anne's use of language reflects her age - she uses quite simple vocabulary and does seem to be concerned with herself. She mentions her

'headache' and the potential bombings seem an inconvenience as she recalls how she 'trooped' back upstairs to hide. As a Jew, she had to avoid exposing herself in public as the threat of being sent to a concentration camp was very real (and in fact the tragic outcome).

The style of writing in the final paragraph mimics her fear during the raid ('more planes!').

- **Consider characters, places and contexts**

Anne is writing to 'Kitty'. To this day, there is debate about whether the diary was really intended for her best friend Kitty, who survived the concentration camps, or whether Anne was writing to keep herself occupied and chose Kitty as an imagined audience (this is supported in the larger text as she addresses some of her entries to her father 'Pop').

If we consider that she was writing to give herself hope and comfort, we can see her moving from being brave and flippant in the opening paragraph, to the honest admission of fear which is present at the end of the extract.

- **Consider language that evokes emotion, dramatic detail and description**

Worked example: 'Before long the smell of fire was everywhere, and outside it looked as if the city were enveloped in a thick fog.'

In the sentence above, Anne describes the city after the bombing. The harbour has been hit. She uses sensory description. She does not elaborate on 'the smell of fire' but does use a simile to explain how the smoke from the detonation of the bombs spread through a large area, 'as if the city were enveloped in a thick fog'. This reveals the impact of the bombs and relates it to something she has encountered, foggy weather.

- **How does the writer make use of colloquial expressions or language?**

'Oh gosh' - Here Anne uses a polite expression of surprise (used in place of an expletive or swearing) popular at the time of writing.

'Little good that did us' - The word inversion here is a common colloquialism, relating to how pointless a particular action is.

'the bombs rained down' - This **idiom** (colloquial metaphor) presents a powerful image of the sheer number of bombs dropped and the constant bombardment, comparing the bombs to raindrops.

Activity 2: Evaluating Writer's Craft - Bill Bryson extract

1. In the first paragraph Bryson appeals to the senses.

What words and phrases does he use to do this?

There is a concentration of sensory description. Touch is evoked by the reference to 'strange winds' (the back draft you feel as a train enters a station). He also notes there are 'eerie noises' and 'oily smells'. If you are familiar with the Tube in London or the underground networks in another large city, you will be able to recall these things, while if it is unfamiliar to you as a reader you will try to imagine the strangeness of the train. There is something sinister about the experience, as he hears the 'rumble' of a train moving far below his feet.

2. How does he describe the people who use the underground?

Bryson is disturbed by how quiet everyone seems to be as they make their way to and from the train. He uses a **simile** to compare the thousands of commuters to zombies, 'stepping on and off crowded trains, sliding into the darkness with wobbling heads, and never speaking, like characters from *Night of the Living Dead*...'

3. Sometimes we imagine what a place will be like just from the name. What does Bryson imagine Swiss Cottage will be like? Do you think this is a reality?

Bryson fantasises about what the various places in London might look like based on the names of the underground stations. The names sound attractive to him and he imagines a beautiful rural setting, like a 'gingerbread dwelling' from a fairytale. In reality he reveals it is simply 'a busy road junction'.