

A level English Language: Getting Started.

What does this course require from me?

English language, most of all, requires you to be able to form opinions on a diverse range of issues that involve language: this encompasses a lot of issues as language is what we use to voice our opinions, shape our thoughts and communicate with others. Without language, there would be no world as we know it.

What is this booklet for?

This booklet will help you to start thinking like a student of English Language and, eventually, a linguist. The more you study English Language, the more you begin to inherit another sense, another power, to your personality that will always be able to see the nuances and ideas that hide behind language. You will be able to read conversations with a new level of analysis that you've never noticed before and form opinions using a far more informed, academic level of detail.

TASK 1: Terminology

Define the key terminology below by creating a 'Language Glossary' that you can then refer to during lessons. If there are any words or definitions you don't yet know, research the meaning of it.

Phoneme	Syllable	Dialect	Phonology
Accent	Lexis	Semantics	Pragmatics
Geographical	Register	Metaphor	Pejoration
Amelioration	Sociolect	Graphology	Grammar
Inflection	Clause	Structure	Exclamative sentence
Demonstrative sentence	Imperative sentence	Interrogative sentence	Sentence function
Tense	Discourse	Politeness	Ideology

TASK 2: Terminology

Recap the key terminology below (covered in your 'bridging' lesson about 'lexis' and the 'linguistic methods'). **Copy the table below** and **complete the 'function and example' column** using the **answers underneath**.

<u>Word Class</u>	<u>Function and Example</u>	
Nouns		
Adjectives		
Verbs		
Adverbs		
Pronouns		
Conjunctions		
Prepositions		
Determiners		
These are used to describe nouns and sometimes pronouns (e.g. <i>large, sunny, featureless</i>).	These describe verbs as well as sometimes adjectives and adverbs (e.g. <i>steadily, incredibly, sadly</i>)	These define relationships between words in terms of time, space and direction (e.g. <i>before, underneath, through</i>).
These can substitute and take the place of nouns (e.g. <i>you, they, him, me and it</i>).	These are doing words and can also describe a state (e.g. <i>jump, read, return, is, be, do</i>).	These provide specific kinds of information about a noun - i.e. quantity or possession (e.g. <i>a, the, two, his, few, those</i>).
These are naming words (e.g. <i>London, book, romance</i>).	These are known as connecting words (e.g. <i>and, or, but, because</i>)	

Now, how many different word classes can you identify in the extract below?

Something dead strange has happened to Christmas. It's just not the same as it used to be when I was a kid. In fact I've never actually got over the trauma of finding out that my parents has been lying to me annually about the existence of Santa Claus.

To me then, at the age of eleven, Santa Claus was a bit like God, all-seeing, all-knowing, but without the lousy things that God allows to happen: earthquakes, famines, motorway crashes. I would lie in bed under the blankets (how crude the word blankets sounds today when we are all conversant with the Tog rating of continental quilts), my heart pounding and palms sweaty in anticipation of the virgin Beano album.

TASK 3: Terminology

For each word class, there are a number of different 'types' of that word class, and you will eventually need to learn these!

For example, for **nouns**, there are: *common nouns, proper nouns, concrete nouns, abstract nouns, countable nouns, non-countable nouns, collective nouns and compound nouns*.

Start collecting key terms and their definitions now by researching the different 'types' of each word class and adding these to your Language Glossary.

- Noun
- Adjective
- Verb
- Adverb
- Pronoun
- Conjunction
- Preposition
- Determiner

TASK 4: Idiolect

Write a detailed paragraph considering the following:

Who was the last person you spoke to? What did you speak to them about? How did you talk to them? Why did you talk to them like this and not in the opposing manner? Did you need anything from them? If so, how did you change your language to express this need?

Now write another paragraph considering how your language might have been different if that person was a 5-month old baby? Or what if that person was the headteacher? Would your language change or stay the same? We can probably bet that it would change, but in what ways? And why do you think this is?

TASK 5: Language and Technology

David Crystal is a pioneering linguist who is, essentially, the God of English Language study.

Read of a short excerpt from his texts ‘2b or not 2b?’.

Last year, in a newspaper article headed "I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language", John Humphrys argued that texters are "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped." As a new variety of language, texting has been condemned as "textese", "slanguage", a "digital virus". According to John Sutherland of University College London, writing in this paper in 2002, it is "bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab shrinktalk ... Linguistically it's all pig's ear ... it masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates."

Some people dislike texting. Some are bemused by it. But it is merely the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. There is no disaster pending. We will not see a new generation of adults growing up unable to write proper English. The language as a whole will not decline. In texting what we are seeing, in a small way, is language in evolution.

- David Crystal

Use the following boxes to generate some ideas for discussion about David Crystal’s approach to texting and slang.

<p>What did John Humphrys say about texters?</p> <p>Give your opinion on this with detailed reasoning.</p>	<p>Why do you think texting makes some people believe that it is a ‘digital virus’? Is this a step too far?</p>	<p>Do you text?</p> <p>Do you use slang?</p> <p>Are you illiterate, in that case?</p>
<p>David Crystal regards texting as ‘linguistically creative’. What do you think he means by this and do you agree?</p>	<p>Can language evolve? Are there any words you used to use that you no longer use? Are there any words you now use that you didn’t in Year 7?</p>	<p>Finally, if you were to describe what texting was to a person foreign to it, how would you describe it?</p>

TASK 6: Language and Technology

Yes, you are studying English Language which means we concern ourselves with lexis. However, we are also very interested in how we communicate meanings: somehow this can be done with the raise of an eyebrow, a singular 'tut' or even an emoji. Read the literature below about how emojis affect our communication.

On Twitter, new-fangled uses of punctuation open doors to more nuanced casual expression

On Twitter, emojis and new-fangled uses of punctuation, for instance, open doors to more nuanced casual expression. For example, the ~quirky tilde pair~ or full. stops. in. between. words. for. emphasis. While you are unlikely to find a breezy caption written in all lowercase and without punctuation in the New York Times, you may well find one in a humorous post published on BuzzFeed.

As the author of the BuzzFeed Style Guide, I crafted a set of guidelines that were flexible and applicable to hard news stories as well as the more lighthearted posts our platform publishes, such as comical lists and takes on celebrity goings-on, as well as to our social media posts. For instance, I decided, along with my team of copy editors, to include a rule that we should put emojis outside end punctuation not inside, because the consensus was that it simply looks cleaner to end a sentence as you normally would and then use an emoji.

Think about the top 5 emojis you would use. Next, think about **why** you use them. Do you use the smiling face because you're smiling? Or are you expressing a hidden, more ironic sense of a smiling face? **Fill in the table below to record your ideas.**

Emoji (draw/describe)	Why do you use it? (the real reason!)

I bet you never thought you'd be studying the use of emojis at A Level study; yet here you are. Now, remember that we don't just look at what emojis we use – we look at how language and graphology has evolved over time to a) adapt to the ever-changing needs of humans and society and b) to express levels of emotion over a smart-phone.

TASK 7: Sociolects

Think about the following 'groups'. How would you **stereotypically** define them in terms of their characteristics? What do you have to be like to fit into that group? More importantly, how do you think they might **use language**?

Group	Characteristics
Goth/Emo	
Chav	
'Popular student'	
Nerd	
Mother	
Teenager	
'Man'	
'Lady'	
Performer	

Now, do you fit into any of these groups? Is this by choice? **Write a summary of the type of group you think you belong to and how you fit into that group.** *This does not have to be one from the list.* Think of it as a short autobiography of yourself, but you're including ideas about the language you use, too!

TASK 8: Accents and Dialects

Read this extract from David and Ben Crystal's book about accents 'You Say Potato'.

The heart of the answer is the notion that accents express our identity – who we are, which part of the country we come from, or where we belong socially or professionally. And identity is a very emotional issue.

We need to be clear what we're talking about, when we refer to someone's 'accent'. Accents have to be distinguished from dialects. An accent is a person's distinctive pronunciation. A dialect is a much broader notion: it refers to the distinctive vocabulary and grammar of someone's use of language. If you say eether and I say iyther, that's accent. We use the same word but pronounce it differently. But if you say I've got a new dustbin and I say I've gotten a new garbage can, that's dialect. We're using different words and sentence patterns to talk about the same thing. This book is just about accents. Usually, when people talk about accents, they're thinking geographically.

It tells you about a person's social background – the social class they belong to, or their educational history, or their ethnic or religious affiliation. If we were to explore the personal histories of Ben and someone else, that girl, his ex-girlfriend, we'd find social factors in the way they were brought up that account for their different preferences. Most people remember having some feature of their pronunciation corrected by their parents, or by a teacher in school. As adults, some go out of their way to change their accent, because they want to sound like people from a social class they aspire to. There's a third function of accent: it can tell you what job a person does.

Complete the tasks below. Use the information above to help you form detailed answers and discussions.

<p>What do accents express?</p> <p>Why can accents be an 'emotional issue'?</p>	<p>Is an accent different from a dialect? If so, how?</p>	<p>Think about your own accent. Is it purely from one area or is it a mix of different influences?</p>
<p>How can an accent tell you about a person's job?</p>	<p>What does social class have to do with an accent?</p> <p>(Think back to your judgements of accents before!)</p>	<p>Would we regard the Queen differently if she had a scouse accent? If so, why?</p>

Thank you and well done for working your way through these activities! Finally, **summarise** which aspects of the course you were **most interested in**, perhaps what **shocked you the most** and also **what you'd like to learn more about**.

Hopefully this short booklet has helped gear your brain into the linguistic way of thinking and approaching issues. Be prepared to discuss and express far more ideas than you did at GCSE. A level is all about discussion, debate and criticism. The more you read and discuss, the better!