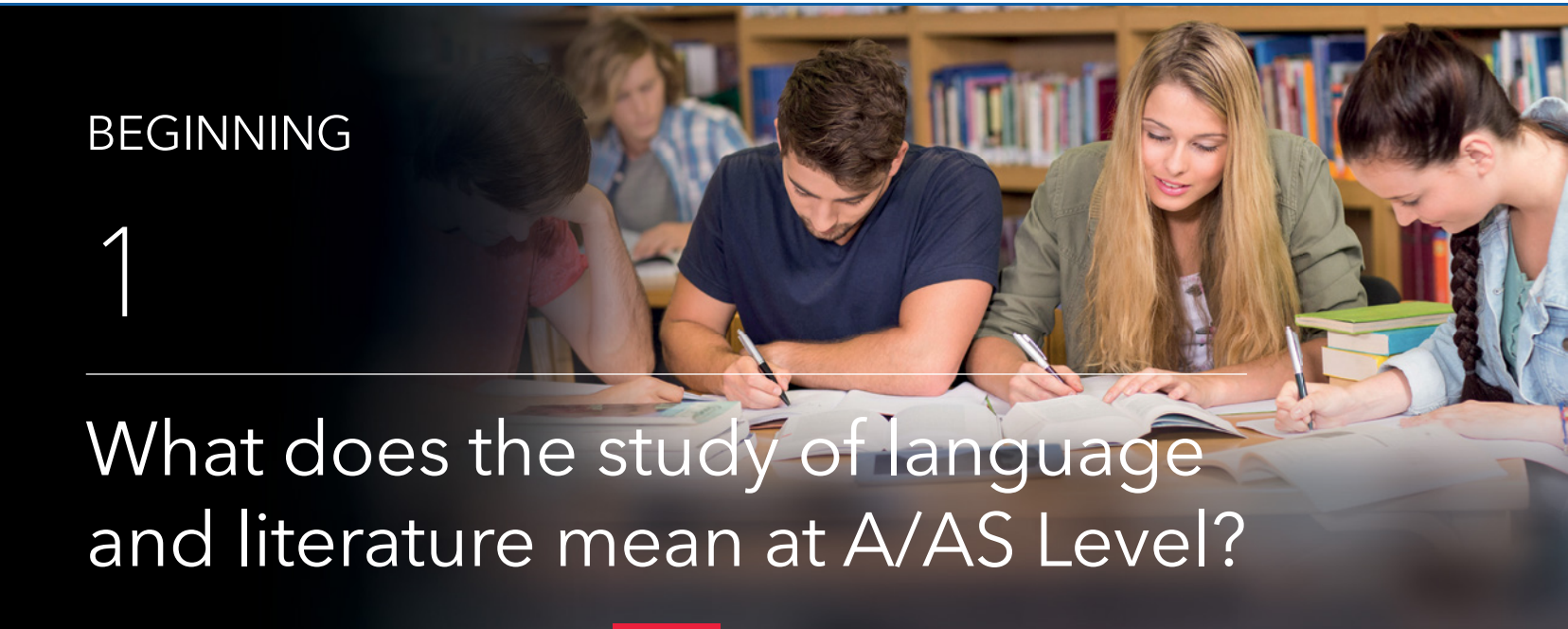


## BEGINNING

## 1



# What does the study of language and literature mean at A/AS Level?

In this unit, you will:

- consider what it means to be studying an A Level in language and literature
- understand the assessment objectives against which your learning will be measured.

## 1.1 Moving from GCSE to A/AS Level

In your previous studies, you may have completed 'language' work and 'literature' work separately, and would have taken individual qualifications in them. You may have preferred one kind of 'English' over another: perhaps you really enjoy reading non-fiction or developing your own writing; on the other hand, you may be an avid reader of literary fiction and enjoy exploring and discussing ideas, themes and characters in the books that you read. At A/AS Level, you will build on all of this work but do so in a way that attempts to find connections between these different types of study, and in doing so present a more holistic and exciting kind of 'English'.

## 1.2 'Language study' and 'literary study'

A/AS Level English Language and Literature bridges the gap between language study and literary study; indeed, underpinning the course is the idea that this kind of separating of the subject into distinctive areas is potentially unhelpful.

So what is different about this course? To answer this question, it's worth looking at what is studied

in the separate A/AS Level qualifications in English Language and in English Literature.

A/AS Level English Language is concerned with discourses (different types of text, context and debate) and explores how these vary according to personal and social factors. It explores the concept of representation (how language is used to present a way of looking at the world), and examines attitudes around language use, and key topics such as how children's language develops and how language changes over time.

On the other hand, A/AS Level English Literature is concerned with the study of literary authors, periods and genres, using historical (how literature has changed over time) or theoretical (ideas about how texts can be understood) perspectives. It tends to privilege certain kinds of texts (the **literary canon**) and dismisses others as not worthy of study. That is, it suggests literature is an exclusive category. However, the notion of what counts as literature and the concept of *literariness* itself are essentially problematic.



See Unit 13 for more on literariness

Traditionally, A/AS Level Language and Literature has been known as a *combined subject* where students have studied a few language topics and a few literature topics. It's now viewed as more of an *integrated subject* where the two strands 'language' and 'literature' are pulled together, and where the analysis of all kinds of text is informed by a secure understanding of how language is constructed and

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works. Although this concept of the subject is still a little problematic (drawing two things together could be interpreted as still seeing them as separate in some way), the fact that the rigorous study of language is at the heart of the subject gives it a real identity and, as you will discover throughout the course, is very enabling.

### 1.3 Stylistics

Studying texts by paying close attention to their language is known as **stylistics**. A stylistic analysis uses the best and most recent knowledge about how language operates to present ideas that are:

- **focused and systematic:** the best analyses always focus on language itself, and use methods and models from language study. This means that they don't stray into unnecessary comments about biographies of writers or generalise about what people might have thought, said or done in particular historical periods. As they draw on established ways of working in linguistics, they naturally avoid being simply vague impressionistic claims.
- **transparent:** the best analyses avoid over-the-top 'showing off'. Instead, they concentrate on what's in the text and describe this as transparently as possible so that other readers can understand how that reading was arrived at. The idea of a stylistic analysis is not to show how clever you are but to demonstrate how closely and accurately you can explore features and patterns in the text.
- **interpretative:** the best analyses don't just list language features but also find a motivation for their use. This means that an analysis is always looking for a way to explain features and build these into a wider sense of meaning.



#### Key terms

**literary canon:** a collection of authors and texts that is considered 'high status' and especially worthy of study

**stylistics:** the study of texts focusing carefully on language and providing a rich interpretation of key concerns, themes and possible effects

As an example of what a good analysis might look like, look at Text 1A from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In Text 1A, a character called Jonathan Harker is describing his journey by horse and carriage at night to Dracula's castle.

#### Text 1A

Soon we were hemmed in with trees, which in places arched right over the roadway till we passed as through a tunnel; and again great frowning rocks guarded us boldly on either side.

Source: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

- A *language approach* might describe the use of prepositions (words that present relationships in space, such as 'in', 'over', 'through'). Although this might be presented as a significant pattern, no real interpretative significance would be attached to it.
- A *literary approach* might comment on a theme such as the fear that Harker experiences as he is travelling, and how he is characterised as being contained. Although some quotation might be used to support these points, they would largely be impressionistic and intuitive, and not make any reference to established ways of talking about language.

A/AS Level English Language and Literature bridges the gap between language study and literary study...

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- A *language-literature/stylistics approach* would bring the two together to present an analysis that is rooted in the language of the text but has a strong interpretative focus as well. It could draw on the pattern of prepositions to suggest that the narrative demands that the reader shares Harker's point of view. The use of the pronoun 'we' encourages us to adopt the vantage point from which he experiences the events, and the prepositions both mirror the movements the carriage makes and evoke a type of claustrophobic fear, since they all represent the carriage as being contained. In turn, the verbs of containment 'hemmed in' and 'guarded', the latter as part of a metaphor of the rocks being presented as humans, foreground this way of interpreting Text 1A.



See 6.2.3 for more on metaphor

## ACTIVITY 1

**Stylistics**

The stylisticians Peter Stockwell and Sara Whiteley have written that 'Stylistics is the proper study of literature' (*Cambridge Handbook of Stylistics*, 2014: 1). Based on what you have read in this unit, what do you think they mean by this? Would you agree with them or should studying literature also be about other things? Do you think their comment is valid for other kinds of texts as well?

## 1.4 Assessment objectives and what they mean

Five assessment objectives (AOs) underpin A/AS Level English Language and Literature. These are:

- AO1: apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression
- AO2: analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts
- AO3: demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of contexts in which texts are produced and received

- AO4: explore connections between texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods
- AO5: demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

Your ability to explain and explore texts using a critical vocabulary in a systematic way is crucial for AO1. This means being able to use appropriate terms at each of the language levels, as well as a wider range of critical ideas and frameworks that you will learn about throughout this book. AO1 also assesses your ability to write clearly and accurately.



See 1.3 for more on appropriate terms at each of the language levels

AO2 is about ensuring a strong interpretative side to your writing when exploring texts. This means that it is not enough simply to use a model of analysis or a set of analytical terms but you should also explain in detail how these contribute to a sense of meaning. Avoiding simply treating texts as data and instead exploring them as inherently rich and meaningful is crucial for this AO.

AO3 assesses your ability to understand how highly influential external factors are in shaping the writing of, speaking about, reading of, and listening to texts. As you will see through the remainder of this book, the study of context can include considering aspects of history, biography, typical features of texts that we can place into groups due to similarities, and the relationships between people involved in creating and consuming them.

AO4 assesses your ability to find connections between different kinds of text. This might be exploring how two extracts are similar and different or thinking about the whole notion of what counts as 'literature' and what kinds of difference exist between so-called 'literary' and 'non-literary texts'.

Finally, AO5 assesses your own creative work. A/AS Level English Language and Literature offers you the opportunity to explore how what you've learnt about how language operates can be put to good use in your own writing. You'll be expected to be able to exploit this in imaginative and interesting ways.

Table 1A shows how each assessment objective is mapped across the different parts of the specification.

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Table 1A

	AO1	AO2	AO3	AO4	AO5
<b>AS Level</b>					
Imagined worlds	✓	✓			
Poetic voices	✓	✓		✓	
Remembered places	✓		✓	✓	
Re-creative writing		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>A Level</b>					
Remembered places	✓		✓	✓	
Imagined worlds	✓	✓	✓		
Poetic voices	✓	✓			
Writing about society		✓		✓	✓
Dramatic encounters	✓	✓	✓		
Making connections	✓	✓	✓	✓	



### Summary

- A/AS Level English Language and Literature is an exciting way of looking at all kinds of texts with a strong focus on the language they use.
- A/AS Level English Language and Literature is informed by the discipline of stylistics.
- Assessment objectives are mapped across individual units to allow you to see what is being tested in each part of the specification.