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AS & A Level

Learner Guide

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Literature in English
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How to use this guide

The Guide describes what you need to know about your AS and A Level Literature in English examinations, and offers some thoughts about how you might revise the work you have done during the past year (AS) or two years (A Level).

It will help you to plan your revision programme for the examination and will explain what the we are looking for in the answers you write.

Your teachers will of course be the best guide to what the examination consists of, and to what you should be working on as your preparation for the examination, but this Revision Guide will point you towards the most important areas that you should be considering.

The Guide contains the following sections:

Section 1: How will you be tested?

This section gives you some information about the different examination papers that you will be taking. You have no choice at AS Level, but at A Level you will be able to choose, though of course by now you or your teachers will already have made the choice; however, you should make sure that you are completely clear about which papers you will be sitting at the end of your course.

Section 2: What is in each examination paper?

This section describes the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills that the Examiners will test you on in each of the papers that you will take

Section 3: Examination tips

This section gives you advice to help you do as well as you can. Some of the tips are general advice and some are based on the common mistakes that learners make in exams.

Section 4: How should you revise for the examination?

This section suggests a number of ideas that you might find helpful when you have finished your course, and are preparing for the examination itself.

Section 5: Some words and phrases that examinations use

This section lists a number of words and phrases that can appear in examination questions, with some ideas about what they are asking you to do.

Section 6: Some terms that you might use, and should certainly understand

When you write answers in the examination, you might want to use some technical literary terms to help your argument; this section lists and discusses a few of the most common and most useful.

Section 7: The Assessment objectives

You may have heard of the five Assessment Objectives (AOs) and your teachers certainly will have done; this section explains what they are and why they are so important for you and for your examination.

Section 8: A final word or two

Some last thoughts.

Useful websites

These web pages can be used as useful resources to help you study for your AS/A Level in English Literature.

Section 1: How will you be tested?

1.1 About the examinations you will take

For **AS** Literature in English you will take **two** papers – Paper 3 and Paper 4; there is no choice.

For **A Level** Literature in English you will have to take **four** papers:

- Papers 3 and 4, unless you have already taken them
- Paper 5
- **one** of Papers 6, 7 and 8. Paper 8 is Coursework; you cannot really revise for this, but there are some notes and suggestions later in this Guide as to how you can present your work at its very best.

At both AS and A level you only write about each text ONCE.

You are given a choice of question for each text that you have studied in class. This always takes the form of either a general essay or an essay which asks you to write about a passage from the text in detail, whilst at the same time showing wider knowledge of the whole text. The passage will be printed on the paper.

1.2 About the Papers

1.2.1 The table below gives you information about the Papers you will take for AS Level:

Paper number	How long is this paper?	What will you have to do in each paper?	What is the % of the total marks?
Paper 3 Poetry and Prose	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on a prose text, and one on a poetry text. You will have a choice of either an essay question OR a passage based question on each text.	(50% of the AS total)
Paper 4 Drama	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on each of the two plays you have studied. You will have a choice of either an essay question OR a passage based question on each play.	(50% of the AS total)

You will find some more detail about each of these two papers in Section 2 below.

1.2.2 The table below gives you information about the Papers you will take for A Level:

Paper number	How long is this paper?	What will you have to do in each paper?	What is the % of the total marks?
Paper 3¹ Poetry and Prose	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on a prose text, and one on a poetry text. You will have a choice of questions on each text.	(25% of the A Level total)
Paper 4¹ Drama	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on each of two plays. You will have a choice of questions on each play.	(25% of the A Level total)
Paper 5¹ Shakespeare and other pre-20th Century texts	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on a play by Shakespeare, and one on another pre-20th Century text. You will have a choice of questions on each text.	(25% of the A Level total)
Paper 6² 20th Century writing	2 hours	You must answer two questions, one on each of two texts. You will have a choice of questions on each text.	(25% of the A Level total)
Paper 7² Comment and Appreciation	2 hours	Three passages will be set, and you must write on two of them. You will not have seen them before the examination.	(25% of the A Level total)
Paper 8² Coursework		You must submit two essays, each on a different text; you must cover two of the three genres (prose, poetry, drama). In total, you must write between 2000 and 3000 words.	(25% of the A Level total)

1 *these three Papers are compulsory for A Level*

2 *you must choose **one** of these three Papers*

You will find some more detail about each of these six papers in Section 2 below.

Section 2: What is in each examination paper?

This section gives further details about the contents of each Paper. No information is given about set texts, because these change regularly; your teacher will know which ones are on the syllabus relating to the year you will be taking the examination, so you do not need to worry that you are studying the wrong ones!

Personal Response to what you read is tremendously important in each Paper; you will of course need to show that you *know the story* of each of your texts, but much more than that you will be expected to show the Examiner that you understand *how* each writer has created this response in you – you will need to look at the language that he or she uses, at the imagery, at the form and structure of each piece that you are discussing, and how whichever angle you are taking (or the question makes you take) relates to the themes and ideas of the text as a whole. More will be said about this later, but it is crucially important!

Incidentally – but very importantly – you are **not** allowed to take any books or other materials into the examination room with you. This includes copies of the set texts and dictionaries – you **cannot** take any of these in. ‘B’ type questions demand that you look closely at a passage from the text, and these will be printed on the paper.

AS Level papers

Paper 3 (Poetry and Prose)

This paper has two sections, Section A (Poetry) and Section B (Prose), and you must answer **one** question from each section.

There will be two questions on each text – an essay question and a passage-based question on each text. You choose ONE question to answer for each text. You will be expected to show a good knowledge and understanding of the whole text, not just part of it.

Poetry does need some special care, and must be treated as the separate genre that it is; poets use rhyme, rhythm, stanza forms, line lengths, and of course stylistic devices such as alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, similes, metaphors, for very particular reasons, not just for their own enjoyment, and you must be sure that you explore *how and why* they do this in your answers. It is not enough simply to list any or all of the techniques that are used; you must make a real attempt to say what effects they are creating at each relevant moment in the poem, and their significance to the poem(s) as a whole. The same is true of prose; writers again use particular techniques, and again it is the purpose and effect of these that you must explore, and it is your understanding of these that Examiners will be looking for in your answers.

You will not be expected to have read other works by the same writers, or to have any detailed knowledge of the period in which they were written or of their biography. Indeed, material of this kind can prove detrimental if it takes you away from literary consideration of the book you have studied. You will however be expected to show clearly and confidently that you understand each text in real detail, so quotations and references will be essential in order to support what you say and to prove that you have a real and secure knowledge. Obviously you should try your best to ensure that everything you quote is as close as possible to exactly what the writer actually wrote, but because this examination is not a test of memory the Examiners will not mind a few misquotations – provided that there is never any doubt about what you mean, and about which part of the text you are quoting, a few incorrect words will not cost you any marks, though *seriously wrong misquotations* may do so!

Paper 4 (Drama)

There will be two questions on each text; an essay question and a passage-based question on each text. You choose ONE question to answer for each text. You will be expected to show a good knowledge and understanding of the whole text, not just part of it. This is a literature examination, not a theatre studies one. You will not be expected to show any knowledge of how your plays might be produced; however, it is *essential* that you show an understanding that they are drama, and meant to be seen rather than just read. You should not write about drama as if it is simply prose printed in a curious way, and you must make reference in your answers to the dramatic or theatrical effects that the writer is creating, and the impact that these have upon you as a reader or as a member of an audience. If you have been lucky enough to see a live theatre production, or a film/video/DVD version, you may want to refer briefly to this, but you must spend most of your time writing about the text itself and the dramatic effects within it.

As in all the other Papers you will be expected to show clearly and confidently that you understand each text in real detail, so quotations and references will be essential in order to support what you say and to prove that you have a first hand, real and secure knowledge. Obviously you should try your best to ensure that everything you quote is as close as possible to exactly what the writer actually wrote, but because this examination is not a test of memory the Examiners will not mind a few misquotation: provided that there is never any doubt about what you mean, and about which part of the text you are quoting, a few incorrect words will not cost you any marks, though *seriously wrong misquotations* may do so!

A Level papers

Paper 5 (Shakespeare and other pre-20th Century Texts)

This paper has two sections, Section A (Shakespeare) and Section B (other pre-20th Century texts), and you must answer **one** question from each section.

There will be two questions on each text; an essay question and a passage-based question on each text. You choose ONE question to answer for each text. You will be expected to show a good knowledge and understanding of the whole text, not just part of it. You should note what is said about drama in this guide as Shakespeare's plays should be treated as drama. Your answers must look for exactly the same kinds of things as you do in other plays. Bear in mind, too, that a great deal of Shakespeare's drama is also written in verse, so many of the techniques mentioned in regard to poetry are also crucial here.

You will not be expected to have read other works by the same writer, or to have any detailed knowledge of the period in which they were written. As in all the other Papers you will be expected to show clearly and confidently that you understand each text in real detail, so quotations and references will be essential in order to support what you say and to prove that you have a real and secure knowledge; obviously you should try your best to ensure that everything you quote is as close to as possible to what the writer actually wrote, but because this examination is not a test of memory the Examiners will not mind a few misquotations – provided that there is never any doubt about what you mean, and about which part of the text you are quoting, a few incorrect words will not cost you any marks, though *seriously wrong misquotations* may do so!

Paper 6 (20th Century Writing)

There will be two questions on each text; an essay question and a passage-based question on each text. You choose ONE question to answer for each text. You will be expected to show a good knowledge and understanding of the whole text, not just part of it.

As in all the other papers, you will be expected to show clearly and confidently that you understand each text in real detail, so quotations and references will be essential in order to support what you say and to prove that you have a real and secure knowledge; obviously you should try your best to ensure that everything you quote is as close as possible to exactly what the writer actually wrote, but because this examination is not a test of memory the Examiners will not mind a few misquotations – provided that there is never any doubt about what you mean, and about which part of the text you are quoting, a few incorrect words will not cost you any marks, though *seriously wrong misquotations* may do so! Everything that has been said earlier about the way you should approach each of the three genres must also apply in this Paper; you may find some unusual and occasionally difficult styles and techniques, but the Examiners will expect you to be well aware of these, and to be making the same kind of closely critical comments that you have in other Papers.

Paper 7 (Comment and Appreciation)

Three unseen, and therefore unprepared, passages will be set, of which you must write answers on **two**. There will always be at least two of the three genres (prose, poetry, drama), but if the Paper has two passages from one genre you are quite free to do both if you wish. One of the three questions may ask you to write a comparison of two shorter passages. All the passages will come from works originally written in English, and at least one will have been written after 1900.

You will be expected to show more than just an understanding of what your chosen passages are about. You will need to show that you understand *how* each writer has created his/her effects, and how the language, form and structure of the passage has helped in doing this. Personal response, supported by close and detailed discussion, is what is required. Just listing literary devices will gain very few marks.

If you are given a complete poem to discuss, you will not be expected to show any knowledge of other works by the same poet, or to know anything about the time when the poem was written. The same is true of prose and drama passages, and if these are extracts from longer texts you will not be expected to have any knowledge at all of where they come from, or of what is written outside what you are given. You will not gain marks by referring to the outside text or time in which it was written.

Paper 8 (Coursework)

If you decide to take this Paper, your teacher will have to obtain permission from Cambridge International Examinations before you start any work. This permission is needed just to make sure that the texts you plan to use are suitable, and Cambridge will also provide guidance in terms of whether the essay titles that you are going to write on are not too easy, or indeed too difficult. If you want to use your own title, or to change what the teacher has given you, do make sure that he or she knows what you are doing.

You must write on two texts, one from each of two genres (prose, poetry, or drama), and they must be texts that are not set anywhere else in the Syllabus (another reason for making sure that your teacher knows what you are doing). You should aim to write about 1000–1500 words on each text, so that the two essays together come to between 2000 words (the minimum expected) and 3000 words (the maximum allowed). If you write more than 3000 words altogether, you must try to reduce the length, as you will probably find that you have wasted words or repeated yourself too much, or introduced irrelevant material.

You should plan the work. You can also discuss it with your friends and your teacher, and draft it carefully before preparing a final version. However, once you show the finished version to your teacher, or once s/he makes any detailed or written comments on it, then *you must not re-write it*. It must be entirely your own work. You can of course refer to other material, from books or from Internet websites, but every time you do so you *must* indicate that you have done so, and you *must* say exactly where it has come from, in footnotes or a bibliography (ideally both).

Section 2: What is in each examination paper?

Many candidates now use word-processors for Coursework, and doing so can certainly make things easier for you in terms of drafting and re-ordering your thoughts. But don't worry if you can't word process your work: the marks are given for your appreciation of the texts and your ability to argue a case, not for your typing skills.

Your teacher will mark your essays, and then send them to Cambridge International Examinations. A Coursework Moderator will then read it (or a sample if your Centre has lots of learners taking this paper), to make sure that your teacher's marking is correct and the same as the marking done by every other teacher throughout the world. If necessary, your marks *may* be changed slightly so that every candidate is treated fairly and to the same standard.

Section 3: Examination tips

How to use these tips

These tips highlight some common mistakes made by learners, together with some ideas to help you prepare for your examination more confidently, and to answer the set questions more successfully. They are collected under various subheadings to help you when you revise for a particular topic.

General advice

- Use plenty of quotation and/or reference to exactly what is written. Start to deal with particular examples or moments as soon as you possibly can. Don't write vague introductory paragraphs. Get straight in.
- Answer exactly what the question asks you and not what you think it asks, or worse still what you wish it had asked!
- Try to show that you have enjoyed what you have read – the best answers show 'thorough knowledge of the texts, often accompanied by engagement and enjoyment.'
- Try to write about what the writer says, and how s/he says it. No matter how much research you have done and how much you think a writer's life is relevant to the question, try not to write at length on matters which are outside the text.
- Don't just 'tell the story' of your set texts.
- Write in good, clear and accurate English – use technical language when it is helpful to do so, but do not try to show off your knowledge of lots of 'difficult' words.
- Time yourself carefully so that you give roughly the same amount of time to each of your answers, and allow about five or ten minutes at the end to check and correct what you have written.
- Don't answer more – or fewer – questions than you should!
- Don't write too much: brief, clear, substantiated argument is more highly rewarded than work where the examiner has to seek out the line of discussion. Selection of relevant examples is a key skill.
- Read around the subject by all means – particularly at A level it's good to explore what others think about your texts. But don't forget that it is your own response (not even your teacher's) that counts most highly. Feel free to tell the examiner what YOU think in order to score highly with the marks for Personal Response.
- There is no need to say everything. Selection of relevant examples is better than trying to put down everything you can think of.
- Show that you know each of your set texts thoroughly and in great detail; this is obvious, but very important.

Top tip

If you have access to the internet, you can go onto the Cambridge examinations website and have a look at past papers and the mark schemes for yourself:

Try taking one of your essays that you have written in class and either mark it for yourself or ask a friend in the same class group to do it for you. Once you know what is being looked for, you will tighten up your writing a lot!

Written English

This is an examination about literature, but spelling, punctuation and the use of conventional English do count. You need to remember that one of the things you are being assessed on is your ability to communicate what you understand of the texts. This means that a clear sense of argument, of points being arranged in a logical order, with ideas moving forward sensibly is much more important than worrying too much about individual spellings.

General tips for pre-examination preparation

Whenever you write an essay:

- Read the questions fully and carefully.
- Think about the key words in each question you choose, and what the examiners want you to do. Questions often have a significant word in them (in drama it's often 'presented') and this usually pushes you towards needing to think about how an author is shaping the material in order to get a reader/ audience to respond.
- Answer the question – do not wander away from it, however much you want to.
- Make a plan: keep it brief and keep to it. You get NO MARKS for a plan, no matter how good it is or how ambitious. Practise this so that your plan is an appropriate length for you. Perhaps each word or phrase in your plan should represent a paragraph that you intend to write.
- Check what you have written at the end, and correct any mistakes you find.
- Use quotations – short, not long – to support and illustrate what you say. Don't just put them in and move on. If they are there, say something about why they are relevant: pick on a word, or the tone, for example

Poetry and Prose questions

As with every paper, the most important tip here is to know your texts thoroughly.

Learn something – it need not be much – about each writer, so that you can at least use the term "he" or "she" correctly (Stevie Smith was a woman!). However, you need to remember that even though it may be tempting to do so, the mark scheme makes no mention of the links between the set texts and a writer's life. So avoid comments about this. Focus instead on the text and its effects.

Make sure that you answer what the question asks you. According to the Principal Examiner, "successful candidates selected carefully from their knowledge to answer the questions set, specifically and directly".

Use background information only if it is directly helpful to what you say, and if the need for it emerges from the text and the case that you are making. It is very easy to think that filling in context is what the exam is all about. It isn't.

Never, ever, tell the story of a novel or a play. The examiner already knows the book and it's very easy to spend time filling in background information without actually analyzing a text in literary terms. This is a mistake.

Don't mistake paraphrase for analysis. So don't put a poet's ideas 'in other words' or announce that 'what he is trying to say is....' He or she is saying it like that for a reason, and that's what you have been asked to talk about.

Drama questions

Re-read the general tips about poetry and prose and – they all apply to this paper as well.

Remember that you are writing about *drama* in this paper.

Drama is intended for performance, not just private reading, so do think about how the play will be *seen and experienced by an audience* (this may be a TV or video audience, not just one in a theatre, of course).

However, don't rely upon a TV or video version you have seen – keep your eye firmly on the text.

Read the questions carefully and pick out some of the phrases used – 'dramatic significance' or 'dramatic presentation', for example. Try to 'see' the action in your mind's eye. How would you yourself present the drama?

Explore *how* the play is written, not just tell its story.

Discuss the characters as dramatic creations; they are not real people, so how has the writer made them convincing, attractive or perhaps unattractive to you?

When you are in the exam room

Essay questions, (a) type answers

Focus quickly but thoughtfully on what the question asks you to do.

Plan some thoughts before you start to write.

Make sure that your answer is organised, and really answers what the question asks.

Make sure that every sentence adds something to your argument. Don't waste time saying things that do not directly answer the question.

Don't repeat yourself.

Use short quotations and/or references to your text to support what you say, but do not waste time 'translating' or explaining each quotation.

Keep looking back at the question, to make you sure that your answer stays focused on what it asks.

Passage-based questions, (b) type answers

Top Tip: If you are going to do a passage based question, you must be confident that you know the passage concerned in great detail. Many candidates assume that because it's printed on the paper, this is an easy option. It isn't. It's demanding because you HAVE TO look at aspects of structure, form and language. You are not being asked to remember vaguely what was said in class, you are being asked to consider in detail and you have no excuse because the material is there and waiting for you.

Read the question carefully, and make sure you know what it is asking you to do. Think hard about the 'trigger' words like 'presentation': these are there to point you towards discussing the writer's techniques and away from general unsupported points

Read the poem/passage very carefully before you start to write. Make sure that it is one you recognise and understand – do not attempt to do it 'unseen'.

Section 3: Examination tips

Focus all the time on the passage/poem that is set. Work outwards from the detail of the passage, not in from some grand, big idea that you have had.

Discuss *how* the writer is creating effects in the poem/passage.

Don't waste time simply identifying and listing literary devices: it is how they work, and the effects they create, that matter.

If the question asks for this, look for how the poem/passage seems characteristic of other things in the whole text.

Keep a sensible balance – your answer must be mostly based on the poem/passage; don't just tell the whole story or try to write about all the poems in your selection.

Good answers 'concentrate in detail on the language of the poem/passage', and 'show a good sense of its context'.

Specific A level demands

At A Level remember that there is one very specific step upwards in the mark scheme. You have to be prepared to talk about texts as being open to a variety of different interpretations.

You can do this by:

- Discussing the work of a critic in relation to your text
- Writing, perhaps about a director's interpretation of a drama text that you have read
- Setting up possibilities in your own mind: 'character X might represent the past in the novel, but he could also be a symbol for regret ...'

However: this requirement does not replace the need for you to express a personal response, so you should be very careful not to simply present a collection of other people's views, without making it clear what you yourself think.

Paper 7 tips: Comment and Appreciation

This is a rather different paper as you cannot prepare for it by revising your set books, but you *can* prepare in different ways.

A lot of what you do in the (b) questions in your other papers, and a lot of what is said above about them, is important in Paper 7.

Paper 7 looks for *skills*, not knowledge.

There is no value in showing how many technical terms you know, except when you are discussing and evaluating *how the writers are using them*.

Read all of the printed poems/passages before you decide which ones to write about, then read your chosen ones again, several times.

Look at the exact wording of the question – it will always ask for a critical commentary or critical appreciation, but sometimes ask you to focus on some particular aspect as well.

A critical commentary/appreciation means that you must look at what is said, but more importantly at the language and the techniques used, and at their effects on you as a reader.

Begin your answer with a *short* outline of what the poem/passage says – no more than a few lines – to establish your understanding and your confidence. Then explore *how* the writer creates his or her effects, but do *not* just write a list of technical terms.

Your personal response, and your understanding of how the writer has created this, matters much more than your knowledge of any terms. Technical terms are just a useful shorthand way of explaining some of your reactions.

Don't waste time writing about background information, biographical material, other works by the writers or indeed about other writers (even if you know this) – it will not be rewarded.

Personal response is essential, but it must be to the poem/passage, not to its ideas – don't be led astray into writing more generally about what is being said.

Focus 100% upon what is printed on the question paper!

Discuss things that are related to genre. If you are writing about a piece of drama, remember that it is written for the theatre, and for public viewing and hearing, not just reading.

Don't work through the poem/passage line by line – this approach does not always work – but look at more general themes and methods that are used. It might be useful to start a paragraph with a technical word for example: 'Imagery is important in this poem because....'

If asked to compare two or more pieces, try to move between them as you write; do not write about one, then another, then another . . . Look for similarities of theme and of style, and take each similarity/difference in turn.

Support everything you say with quotations from the printed passages – and remember, several short ones are better than a few long ones.

Paper 8 tips: Coursework

Coursework is in many respects very different from the examination-based papers, but most of the general tips still apply.

Know your texts well and in detail – the fact that you can have them in front of you as you write is helpful, but does not mean that you need not have studied them at least as thoroughly as for any other paper.

Your knowledge of the two books used must be more exact, and supported by more accurate quotation, than for a timed examination.

Make sure that you understand the task that is set for you, and what you are expected to do in response to it.

You have a very limited number of words – between 2000 and 3000 words for two essays on two texts – so do focus very tightly on the task.

Don't waste time on unhelpful background or biographical material.

Don't waste time simply 'telling the story'.

Section 3: Examination tips

Show that you can understand and explain at least some of the ways in which your writers create characters and create particular moods and effects, and explore in some detail how the words they use do this.

Technical terms are important in Coursework, so do use them correctly, but do not simply show that you know them – it is how they are used, and the effects that they are creating, that matter.

Show that you understand some of the effects of genre – drama, for example, is intended to be seen and heard, as part of a shared audience experience; poetry has its own characteristics – rhyme, rhythm, stanza for and so on – all of which may need discussing.

Coursework should be as good as it can be in presentation. Check carefully for spelling and grammatical errors. Remember that a word processor can check your spelling, but it doesn't know whether you mean 'check', 'cheque' or 'Czech'. So don't rely on it to do the work for you.

Coursework should be drafted, and perhaps re-drafted; what the external moderator sees will be the result of several attempts to say things in the very best possible way.

Discuss your idea and rough drafts with your teacher, though he/she will not be able to correct your writing for you.

Do not submit untidy work.

Each essay should be roughly the same length: about 1000–1500 words. Do not write more than 3000 words; count carefully, and reduce it if you have to. This is a guideline. Often very good course work is shorter because every word counts and there is no feeling that arguments are simply being padded. In other words, EDIT your work and ask yourself whether every word counts. If it doesn't, get rid of it.

Each essay must be on a different text, and of a different genre.

Section 4: How should you revise for the examination?

Examiners are not out to trick you in any way. They are all human beings, and they all have many years of experience as AS and A Level teachers; they know very well what difficulties you have when studying and revising, and they do not want to make things even more difficult for you. However, they know how very important these examinations are, and must be absolutely fair to every candidate, including you, so the questions that they set will always be designed to help you to show yourself at your very best. They will mark and reward what you say, and will not automatically penalise you for what you do *not* say (unless of course you simply fail to answer the question that they set, in which case you will of course gain few marks, or in an extreme case none at all!)

We will always set questions about what is really important and central in each of the texts you are studying. It is obviously essential that you look again at all the *main* ideas, themes and characters in your texts when you revise. It is possible that one of the two questions on each text may ask about something that you have not studied in so much depth, or which you thought was less important. If this does happen you can be sure that the Examiners will believe that what they are asking *is* important, and that it can and should be easily related to the main topics that you have studied. Whatever you do, don't panic – if you know the texts well and thoroughly, you will certainly be able to answer either of the two questions well and confidently. The worst thing you can do (apart from writing nothing at all, which is a sure-fire guarantee that you will get no marks at all) is to write on a subject that you *wish* we had set, or one that you have prepared and are determined to write about whatever is actually asked. This is very likely indeed to get you very few marks.

So – how can you revise properly, and make sure that you *do* know each of your texts really well? The answers are really much the same for each of Papers 3, 4, 5 and 6, so this Guide will deal with all four together. No references will be made to specific set texts or poems – the revision suggestions can apply to any text at all that you are studying. Papers 7 and 8 are different, and for obvious reasons no clear revision strategies can be offered for them, except to say that whatever you are doing in your work for the other papers will have huge and rewarding benefits if you are taking either of these two.

First of all, it is worth bearing firmly in mind that if you have attended all your English Literature lessons, if you have completed all the work that has been set, and if you have kept some organised and careful notes, then you will already have done a great deal of the work that revision entails. The word 'revision' means that you are looking at the work again (the prefix *re* means 'again'), so that what you are doing is simply making sure that you really have understood and absorbed everything that you have been taught and that you have learnt before. If, of course, you have *not* been quite so efficient as this, then you may not altogether be *re*-vising ...

To begin the serious task of revision, sort out all the lesson notes that you have made and kept, and if you find that you have missed some out because of illness or other absence then ask your teacher if he or she can give you a little bit of extra help, or perhaps ask one of your friends if you can borrow their notes for a day or two.

Make yourself a revision timetable; this will be very valuable, and provided that you stick to it then you will complete everything that you need to do in plenty of time. Start this a number of weeks – perhaps five or even six – before the date of your first examination, and list every day between now and then, including weekends. Work out what you will need to do, break it down into small and sensibly managed parts, and write what you plan to do every day – six days each week. Obviously you will have other AS or A Level subjects to revise, but you should try to spend at least a couple of hours each day on your English Literature. If you can, leave one day free each week so that you can have a regular 'day off' to relax and do other

Section 4: How should you revise for the examination?

things, and also so that if for any reason you fall behind your planned schedule then you will have some time to catch up.

What should you put into this revision plan? This Guide must assume that you have in fact done all the work that you should have done during the course, so what you do now really is *re*-vising. Divide each of your texts into smaller parts – if it is a play, then take one Act, or a few scenes, at a time; if it is a novel, then two or three chapters; if a collection of poetry, then 4–5 poems. Each of these small bites is what you should look at during each revision day. Allow enough time at the end of your plan for further revision of larger parts – maybe half of each text, and finally one last session for a whole-text revision. You can then be quite sure that you have missed nothing out.

What should you look at each day? Well, to some extent this will depend upon what the text is, how long it is, and what work you have already done on it. But the essential thing first is to make absolutely sure that you know – really know – what is in each part of each text, so that if you decide to tackle a passage-based question in the examination you can remember very quickly where it comes, what happens before and after it, and what is important in it. If you do a more general essay question, you can sift very quickly through your memory for material to use in answering it, because you will know the text so thoroughly. What you are trying to do here is to make links, to see how things connect together in a text to create meaning.

So – re-read your section(s) fully and carefully, and make some more notes as you go to help you retain the information and ideas that you will have. What do you learn in each section about the characters, about the themes, about the writer's style and methods? What features are particularly striking or important? How does each section relate to the rest of the text? Are there any lines or short sentences that you feel might be useful to remember as quotations? To answer many of these points, go back to your earlier work and notes, to see what your teacher said about this section – what he/she said will certainly have been worth noting and remembering.

When you move on to the next section of each text, think about how (or perhaps if) it helps you understand what you looked at the day before. Does any earlier section help you to appreciate what you are now studying? Or does what you are now studying add to what you read earlier, and possibly make that a little bit clearer? Can you find examples of the writer's use of language, of images, of similes or metaphors that have been used elsewhere in the text? Are there any common ideas or themes in these images (this is particularly likely in some poetry and drama) – if so, does this help you to see what the writer is saying, and how he or she is saying it here?

In prose and drama look at how you learn more about the main character(s) in each section. Does the section you are looking at now add anything to what you already know, or does it perhaps simply reinforce what you know? Does it possibly complicate what you thought about the character(s) earlier, and if so why has the writer done this? Is there any speech or description in this section that seems to you especially helpful in understanding the character(s)? Try to think, too, about how a writer is trying to influence you towards a character, perhaps by commenting on them or making them speak/act in particular ways.

In poetry, try now to see each poem as part of the whole collection, rather just as isolated and individual poems, and see what connections or links you can find between them. It might be useful to draw a chart or a mind map showing clusters of poems, or clusters of themes/images/verse forms. Can you 'pair off' or 'group' each poem with others? If so, what do they have in common, and what similarities can you find in their ideas and styles?

What differences are there? What effects do these similarities and differences create?

As you work through each section that you have chosen, you will find yourself gaining an increasingly strong and confident understanding of each text, and of how each writer has created them and the effects and responses that you have noticed. You will be putting together a growing understanding of the writer's

methods and concerns, and of how each small part – each word, each phrase, each image, each scene, each chapter – contributes to the whole piece of writing. You may in fact be developing your skills of literary criticism, and you will certainly be becoming a more confident examination candidate.

As you reach the end of this part of your revision plan, you should move on to look at larger parts of each text, and work in exactly the same way as has been outlined. You will almost certainly find parts of this boring and repetitive, but it will without any doubt at all pay major dividends, in that your knowledge and memory will keep growing, and you will find that increasingly you can talk with real confidence about all aspects of each text, and find that you can face the examination with growing security.

The very last phase of revision, perhaps during the final week before the examination, should be to undertake a speed-reading of each text. It is often useful with prose or drama to select a small number of episodes or scenes that you feel you really understand: look at them again in these last few days and remind yourself that as you know them very well, they will probably be the scenes that you will wish to concentrate on in an answer. If you choose well and have genuine insight, virtually any moment can offer something to an answer (though of course you would not be sensible simply to concentrate on the various appearances of only one character, for example. This sounds alarming, but all it amounts to really is a skimming through of each novel, reminding yourself of what happens in each chapter, and looking in more detail at those pages you found of especial importance, or perhaps ones that you found difficult. You may be able to read the whole of each play, but if not you should do exactly the same as with the novels. You should certainly re-read some of the poetry, choosing those poems – probably 8 or 10 – which you and your teacher feel are of greatest importance (though you must bear in mind that the Examiners may choose one or two outside your personally chosen group).

If you can, have a look at some old examination questions – your teacher will probably have some examples of these. Do not panic or worry if they seem difficult, but equally do not relax if they all look very easy. What you should be doing is just to try to become familiar with the kind of questions that have been asked in the past, and to think about how you might have addressed them if you had been taking this exam earlier. Do *not* try to work out from them what the questions in your own examination might be. Have a look, though, at the next section in this Guide – terms that Examiners may use – and see where they appear in past papers; what do you think the Examiners were expecting you to do in response to each question? Discuss this with friends or your teacher, so that you can feel as certain as possible about what each kind of question really means and requires.

Remember – as this Guide says several times – the Examiners are not trying to trick you. They do not want to make things difficult for you, or to catch you out about what you do *not* know or do *not* remember, but to help you produce answers which show fully and clearly what you *do* know and understand. If you have worked hard and thoroughly, and then revised hard and thoroughly, this is exactly what you will do.

Section 5: Some words and phrases that examinations use

There is of course no way of forecasting what any examination question will be about, nor how it will be worded. People who believe that they can 'question-spot' by looking through past papers may sometimes be lucky, but it is very unwise indeed to rely upon such guesswork. What you can be reasonably certain about, however, is that many questions will contain some of the following expressions; they are very commonly used by Examiners, and it is worth doing two things:

- ensure that you know what these terms mean, and how you should write in response to them if they appear in your exam paper;
- look for them when you see the paper itself, and feel confident that you know how you should react to them. When you open your examination question paper, you may find it helpful to underline these terms, so that they are firmly in your mind as you write your answers.

The list is not exhaustive, and you may find that not all these terms (or possibly even none of them at all) will in fact appear in your examination, but the chances are high that at least some of them will.

5.1 Some words and phrases that might open a question

Comment on ...

Compare ...

Consider ...

Discuss ...

Discuss the importance of ...

Discuss the effects of ...

Discuss the writer's treatment of ...

Discuss your response to ...

How does ...?

How effective is ...?

How far do you agree that ...?

Show how ...

What does this extract contribute to ...?

What is the significance of ...?

What might be the thoughts of an audience ...?

What uses does the writer make of ...?

Write about ...

Write a comparison of ...

Write a critical appreciation of ...

Write an essay on ...

You should not be frightened by any of the above words or phrases; nor should you worry if your examination questions introduce some other words or phrases. In a very simple sense, most of them are really just pointing you towards the same direction – they are inviting you to look closely at what the rest of the question says, and then to apply that idea or instruction to what you know about the text. You are not being asked simply to write everything you know about it – that would be far too difficult in just one hour – but to think hard and quickly about a particular aspect, and then to write with focus and detail about just this. Note, too, that there are sometimes words that are designed to push you into thinking about the literary characteristics of your text: 'presentation' is a good example. In this case, examiners are trying to nudge you into moving up the mark scale. For example, if a question simply asks you about the character X in a novel,

you could simply respond as though the character was almost a real person. If you are asked about the presentation of X in the novel, then you might want to talk about the author's voice, the way the character is made to speak, the opinions that other characters express about X during the course of the novel. In other words, some of these 'nudge' words are important because they are signalling a way to higher performance from you.

5.1.1 Comment on ...; Discuss ...; Consider ...

These really mean very much the same thing and are just ways of asking you to think about a particular view or angle, and to write about your own thoughts, but with careful and detailed supporting illustration from the text itself.

5.1.2 Discuss the importance of ...; Discuss the effects of ...; Discuss the writer's treatment of ...; Discuss your response to ...; How does ...? How effective is ...?

Each of these instructions appears to be more exact and specific, but again the thrust is similar – the Examiner is asking you to look at one particular aspect of the text, and to write about it, and about how you react to it. If it asks about 'the importance', it is really much the same as if it said 'what you think is important'.

5.1.3 What does this extract contribute to ...? What is the significance of ...? What might be the thoughts of an audience ...?

These expressions tend to be used in passage-based questions, where you are expected to show how well you can explore the passage in very close detail, but also how far you can then relate it and its methods and concerns to the text as a whole. In other words, what can you see in the passage which you can find elsewhere in the text? Are there things in the passage which do, or do not, appear anywhere else? Do you find the writer's style or technique in the passage to be similar to the writing elsewhere in the text, and if so where?

The last one ('**What might be the thoughts of an audience ...?**') is a little different, but again it expects you to look closely at the given passage, always of a piece of drama. This time, however, you are asked to imagine that you are part of an audience actually watching the play, and to think about how you might react to what is happening, and to the words and actions of the characters involved. Do remember at all times that a play is intended to be seen and heard, not just read. You must concentrate particularly upon the given passage, of course, but never forget that the way you are reacting now is influenced by what has happened earlier in the play – unless of course the passage is the very beginning of the play.

5.1.4 Write a comparison of ...; Write a critical appreciation of ...

These will almost certainly appear in passage-based questions, and in Paper 7 (Comment and Appreciation). They are asking you to explore in real and careful detail, and to show that you have the ability to understand what is written, and how effectively the writer has shaped the text in order to create a particular impression on the reader or spectator.. You will probably want in such questions to introduce your knowledge of some critical terms, but as will be said later, do not do so just to show off this knowledge – use them sensibly, appropriately, and sparingly.

5.1.5 Write about ...; Write an essay on ...

These are rather abrupt instructions, but they do appear from time to time. As always, do not be alarmed, and certainly do not fear that they mean something special, or something different from anything

else. What the Examiner is requiring as always is that you look carefully at whatever aspect of the text is mentioned, and that you write a thoughtfully argued response to it, bringing in your own response, and supporting it with sensibly chosen references and quotations. Provided that you concentrate upon the topic selected by the Examiner, you will almost certainly be on the right track, and hopefully will be awarded a good mark.

5.2 Here are a few phrases which might appear inside a question:

Characteristic of the text as a whole
Concerns and methods
Dramatic effects/effectiveness
Style and concerns
With close reference to

These should be fairly self-explanatory, particularly in the light of what has just been said. **'Concerns'** may be an unfamiliar word, but it simply means whatever it is that the writer is writing about in the text – his/her ideas, topics, themes, problems, interests, characters and so on. **'Methods'** and **'style'** mean much the same – they refer to *how* the work is written, and expect you to look at the language, images, structure and so on. **'Characteristic of the text as a whole'** has really been explained above in Section 5.1.3; you will need to discuss how far you consider the given passage to be similar to (or possibly different from) what is written in the text generally, both in terms of its ideas and in the way it is written – obviously you will be expected to give some quite detailed illustrations here, to show how well you know the text. Which leads neatly into the last phrase – 'With close reference to ...' – which very clearly reminds you to use as much reference and quotation as you can from the passage or wider text.

Section 6: Some words that you might use, and should certainly understand

The terms that are listed below are ones that you might want to use from time to time in your examination answers. The Examiners will be looking for personal response, for real and detailed understanding, and for you to show that you can explore and explain how in your view the writers create their particular effects. The Examiners will emphatically *not* be impressed if you simply use these terms, or any others, just to show that you know them – no marks will be awarded just because you know the words! They can often, though, be a useful shorthand way of explaining something that can otherwise take a long time. Use them if they are helpful and point your argument towards a valuable focus, but do not use them just to show that you know them.

Above all, do not just list examples of where and how they occur; you will again be given no credit for simply saying 'There is alliteration in line 25', or 'The writer uses much onomatopoeia in stanza 4'; if you can show *why* some type of image or technique is used, and *what effect* it has, then you will be given credit.

You should by now be familiar with most of the following words, but if you are not sure about any of them, ask your teacher to help explain and illustrate them. Best of all, try to find some examples of where and how they are used in your own set texts, so that you can if necessary make sensible use of them in the examination.

6.1 Some general critical terms

Alliteration
Assonance
Atmosphere
Imagery/images
Language
Metaphor
Onomatopoeia
Setting
Simile
Tone

6.2 Some terms that are used mostly about poetry

Rhyme
Half-rhyme
Eye-rhyme
Rhythm
Blank verse
Free verse
Stanza

6.3 Some terms that are used mostly about prose

Dialogue
Paragraph
Section
Sentence
Phrase
Clause

6.4 Some terms that are used mostly about plays

Act
Audience
Dialogue
Monologue
Scene
Set
Stage directions

Section 7: The Assessment objectives

These may sound terribly alarming and forbidding, but they are not intended to be so at all; the five Assessment Objectives (usually just called the AOs) are simply a means by which the Examiners make sure that you have covered everything that the syllabus requires of you, and that you have shown all the skills that are demanded of you. Your teachers will have had the AOs in mind while teaching you, and the Examiners will measure what you write against each of them when marking your answers. It is important that you know a little about each of them, but there is no need whatsoever to learn them, or to try to remember them when you are revising or writing your examination. If you have studied your texts thoroughly, and know how to write about them thoughtfully, you will almost certainly be fulfilling all the AO requirements automatically, without even being aware that you are doing so. Anyway, here they are:

Assessment objective	What the full AO actually says that you must show	What you need to be able to do
1: Responding to different texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an ability to respond to texts in the three main forms (Prose, Poetry and Drama) of different types and from different cultures. 	Study of the syllabus and the question papers will ensure that you are enabled to respond to the three main forms (genres), and works from different periods and backgrounds.
2: Understanding of a writer's methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings. 	Provided that you answer the questions properly, and do what is asked of you, you will fulfill this AO; it requires you to show that you can discuss in detail in what way and how effectively the writers have created their effects.
3: Informed opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an ability to produce informed, independent opinions and judgements on literary texts. 	Again, you will do this by answering the questions set; these will always want you to show that you have an opinion about the texts you have studied; provided that you support your argument sensibly and fully, you will do what this AO requires.
4: Understanding and insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an ability to communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary study. 	Once more, you will fulfil this Objective, if you answer each question thoughtfully and with close reference to the texts and to the ways in which they are written, and provided too that you write in a thoughtfully and carefully argued way.
5: Different opinions (NB This AO applies to A-Level only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an ability to appreciate and discuss varying opinions of literary works. (NB This AO applies to A- Level only) 	In Papers 5, 6, 7, and 8 you are expected make reference to some other possible view(s) or interpretation(s) of your texts, so that you can show the Examiners that you have reached your own response and view only after careful thought and discussion. You can of course do this in your AS papers too, but it is not essential in these.

Section 8: A final word or two

If you have covered everything that this Guide contains, and if you have spent the past year or two years working really hard, you will know your texts well and thoroughly, and should be able to face the examination with confidence that you will do your very best.

Examiners will be looking to give you as many marks as they possibly can, and will reward every good and thoughtful point that you make, provided of course that it is relevant to what the question asks. They will *not* take marks off simply because they do not agree with what you say – provided that you say it well and carefully, and support it with material from the texts themselves, they will reward what you write. If you say things which are manifestly and unarguably *wrong*, then marks will not be awarded, but your careful and sustained opinion will certainly be welcomed and valued.

Make yourself a revision timetable, preferably starting a number of weeks before the day of your first examination; write this timetable out, perhaps pinning it up somewhere in your room at home; make sure that it covers every text and every aspect of this text that you know you must cover; write out a few important quotations, and try to remember them (but don't spend more time learning them than reading the texts!); make sure that you do some revision every day; keep up to your own schedule, and don't let yourself get behind; but do allow some time off to relax as well – this is essential; try *not* to over-revise the night before any examination.

Get to the examination room on time, so that you are fully prepared and – hopefully – quite relaxed; read the questions carefully; do not panic if they seem difficult at first – look out for the words that are listed in Section 4, and think about what they are asking you to do; make a few notes before you start, to remind yourself of what you need to say; then write *and enjoy what you are writing* – if you enjoy it, the Examiner will too.

Finally, once a Paper is finished, forget it as quickly as you can! Do not let yourself worry about what you could have said, or what you think you may have left out. It is too late now, and you need to begin thinking about your next examination ...

A truly final note now – Good luck, and enjoy your studying of Literature in English as well as your revision!

Useful websites

These web pages can be used as useful resources to help you study for your AS/A Level in English Literature.

www.universalteacher.org.uk

This website contains comprehensive and interesting guidance about how best to read and discuss a wide range of texts, both individual and paired. A brief but helpful history of English literature, from Middle English to the late 20th Century, is also included.

www.sparknotes.com

This site has basic, but very useful notes on a huge range of commonly studied texts, with chapter synopses, character analyses, themes and motifs, essay ideas, and suggestions for further reading. It is a very useful site indeed.

www.bibliomania.com

Study notes on a very wide range of texts, with notes, suggested essay titles, and guidance on further reading (you need to register to access the material, but at the time of access there appeared to be no charge).

www.novelguide.com

The site contains detailed discussion of a wide range of novels old and new, with relevant background material.

aspirations.english.cam.ac.uk

This is a fascinating site, with some good and challenging interactive material to help with the study of poetry in particular. Well worth a visit.

www.s-cool.co.uk/topic_index.asp?subject_id=4&d=0

Some quite basic, but very helpful and reassuring advice on how best to approach the study of literature, notes on how to study poetry, and on a few individual texts.

www.shakespearehelp.com

A very detailed listing of resource material on Shakespeare, his life, times and plays, particularly useful for advanced learners.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/16/sosteacher/english/browse.shtml

This site details a large number of questions that learners have submitted on a range of literature topics, including particular texts, with some useful responses and advice.

www.englishbiz.co.uk

A site geared towards pre-A-Level learners, but it does contain good and practical advice on planning, organising and writing critical and other sorts of essays.

The following sites are designed for more advanced study, but are well worth a look, as their material is full, detailed, and invariably interesting.

www.palgrave.com/skills4study/html/index.asp

This site is designed for university learners, but also helpful at A Level. Discusses a range of study skills, including how to structure and write good literature essays.

www.literaryhistory.com

The material here is advanced, but useful and thought-provoking. A wealth of resource material is offered on a huge range of writers, old and modern.

www.victorianweb.org

This site contains very detailed and advanced material – mostly resource-based – on writers from the 19th and very early 20th Centuries. Well worth a visit if you are studying a text from this period.

Many universities across the world now have podcast courses that are distributed through the I-tunes university. Both the Open University and Oxford University, for example have podcasts on Shakespeare and his times. If you go searching you may also find that there are a variety of sites that will provide you with free audio versions of classic texts: these can be very useful if you find that you absorb text better by hearing than reading. With play texts they often give you a vivid sense of what's going on. Remember, too, that many films of your texts exist that can be downloaded (usually for a fee), though you need to remember that what you have been asked to study is a book – directors often play round with text, add or omit certain scenes – so you would not wish to rely too heavily on films/audiobooks etc without checking back to the text.

Some words of caution

Cambridge is not responsible for the quality of the information or the validity of critical views expressed. You need to use your own discretion and the wisdom of your teachers. The best thing to remember is that we want to know how YOU have responded to the texts set and whether you can support the ideas you express by exploring the text in detail. No amount of background work, no matter how worthy, can replace your own focused study of the text set. So if you don't have access to the web, this should not be a cause of worry.

If you are doing the coursework option you should be particularly careful. It is easy to cut and paste simply because someone has said what you think rather better than you would say it yourself. But this counts as trying to pass on someone else's opinions as your own, and is very much against the rules. It's called plagiarism. These days there are very sophisticated searching tools for finding phrases on the Internet, and this means that examiners may type in a phrase you have used (usually there is a sudden change in the sort of vocabulary that a candidate is using that triggers a suspicion) and discover your source. You must acknowledge quotations, whether from books or from the Internet. You do this by placing inverted commas round the words ('...') and then providing a note at the end. Being caught out for plagiarism is taken very seriously and will jeopardise your result.

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