

YORK NOTES for GCSE

STUDY GUIDE

New for GCSE (9–1)

AQA UNSEEN POETRY STUDY AND EXAM PRACTICE

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YORK NOTES



AQA UNSEEN POETRY

STUDY AND EXAM PRACTICE

MARY GREEN

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PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED ON MY ANSWER TO THE 'UNSEEN' POEMS?

When you answer the questions in **Section C** of your GCSE English Literature Paper 2, usually referred to as the 'unseen' poems, you will be examined on the following two Assessment Objectives:

| Assessment Objectives | Wording | Worth thinking about ... |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| A01 | <p>Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintain a critical style and develop an informed response ● use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Am I clear about what happens in the poems? ● What do I think are the main ideas in the poems? ● How can I make my views clear and convincing? ● What are the key quotations and how can I use them to support my views? |
| A02 | <p>Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the poet concerned about in the poem? What choices has he/she made? (For example, what does this image mean? How does the rhythm suit the feelings and ideas?) ● What effects do the poet's choices create? Are they clear or ambiguous, optimistic or pessimistic? |

Important: You do not have to show an understanding of the relationship between the unseen poems and the context in which they were written (**A03**).

In other parts of your English Literature GCSE, **A04**, which is related to spelling, punctuation and grammar, is also assessed. While you will not gain any marks for A04 in your poetry examination, it is still important to ensure that you write accurately and clearly, in order to get your points across to the examiner in the best possible way.

PART ONE GETTING STARTED

Assessment Objectives 1 and 2 are about *what* poets do (the choices they make, and the effects these create), *what* your ideas are (your analysis and interpretation) and *how* you write about them (how well you explain your ideas).

Look out for the Assessment Objective labels throughout this book. These will help to focus your study and revision.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 1

A01

| What does it say? | What does it mean? | Dos and don'ts |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Read, understand and respond to texts.</p> <p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response ● Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. | <p>You must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use some of the literary terms you have learned (correctly!) ● Write in a professional way (not a chatty way) ● Show that you have thought for yourself ● Back up your ideas with examples, including quotations | <p>Don't write:</p> <p><i>The salamander is like a puppet.</i></p> <p>Do write:</p> <p><i>The image of the salamander as a 'shadow puppet/Darting' suggests an energetic, playful creature whose shape is glimpsed only now and again.</i></p> |

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 2

A02

| What does it say? | What does it mean? | Dos and don'ts |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Analyse the language, form and structure used by the poet to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.</p> | <p>'Analyse' – comment in detail on particular aspects of the poem or language</p> <p>'language' – what the poet writes and how they say it</p> <p>'form' – how the poem is told (e.g. how the poem is laid out using different shapes or verse forms such as sonnet, quatrains, tercets)</p> <p>'structure' – the order in which events are revealed, or in which characters appear, or descriptions are presented</p> <p>'create meanings' – what can we, as readers, infer from what the poet tells us? What is implied by particular descriptions, or events?</p> <p>'subject terminology' – words you should use when writing about poetry, such as imagery, metaphor, irony, symbol, setting, etc.</p> | <p>Don't write:</p> <p><i>The poem is written in couplets.</i></p> <p>Do write:</p> <p><i>By writing the poem in the form of couplets the poet emphasises a series of images set apart from each other, giving the strong impression of pictures hanging in a gallery.</i></p> |

INTRODUCTION TO PAPER 2, SECTION C: UNSEEN POETRY

After you have answered questions on the poems in the anthology cluster in Section B of Paper 2, you will be given two new poems in **Section C** that you have not seen before. These are referred to as the 'unseen' poems.

THE QUESTIONS

In Section C, there are two 'unseen' poems printed on the exam paper.

You will answer two essay-type questions.

QUESTION 1

This focuses on how the poet presents particular thoughts and ideas in the first poem. For example:

'How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about friendship?'

or

'How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about conflict?'

QUESTION 2

This asks you to compare an aspect of the two poems (find the similarities and differences). For example:

'In both poems the speakers describe feelings about seeing someone they love leave to fight in a war. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?'

TOP TIP

Allow yourself at **least 45 minutes** to answer questions on the 'unseen' poems. There are a couple more marks available for the 'unseen' poems (**32 marks**) than for the question on the anthology cluster in Section B (30 marks).

THE POEMS

The poems in Section C can be of any type so you need to make sure you are familiar with a range of poetry of different styles. When you read the poems, you should look for what seems to be special or **distinctive** about them and how the poet expresses this. It is rather like looking at a painting and thinking about what special quality it has and the materials the painter has chosen to accomplish it.

ASSESSMENT

There are 32 marks available for your answers on the 'unseen' poems:

| Question | AO | Marks |
|----------|-----|-------|
| 1 | AO1 | 12 |
| | AO2 | 12 |
| 2 | AO2 | 8 |



PART TWO: READING 'UNSEEN' POEMS

QUESTION 1 – THE FIRST UNSEEN POEM

READING THE POEM

When you read a poem for the first time allow yourself to respond to it simply, so that you have a rough idea of what the poem is about, rather than struggle to find specific or complicated meanings. Think about the **feelings** and **thoughts** the poem evokes in you.

On the second reading you can explore the **key techniques** the poet uses and the **effects** they create. Make sure you:

- are ready with an approach you can put into action
- remain optimistic and engage with the poem so that you are open to its feelings and ideas
- remember that there are time limits, so don't spend too long on note-making. Leave enough time to write your answer.

READING THE QUESTION

Decide what the key words are in the question and highlight these. For example:

'How does the **poet present** the **speaker's feelings** about **friendship**?'

So, write about:

- how the poet presents feelings and ideas about friendship (e.g. what vocabulary choices and techniques are chosen and their effects)
- how the speaker's voice portrays these feelings and ideas about friendship.

Keep the key words in mind as you write, or refer back to them so you stay on track.

For help writing annotations, see page 17.

For help using quotations, see page 19.

For how to approach Question 2, see page 29.

TOP TIP



Question 1, the question on the first poem, will gain you the most marks (24) so spend **about 30–35 minutes** on this. Use the remaining time to answer Question 2, the question on both poems (8 marks).

HOW TO APPROACH QUESTION 1

You might find it useful to memorise the following stages so that when you answer the question you have a coherent approach to help you.

Stage 1

- Read the poem through and respond to it simply.
- Read the exam question and highlight the key words.

Stage 2

- Read the poem again, keeping the exam question in mind.
- Highlight important images and techniques that help you answer the question.

Stage 3

- Add some annotations to the poem.
- Reread any lines or images that you are unsure of, thinking about the broad meaning of the poem.

Stage 4

- Use your annotations to help you write your response.

GUIDE TO POETIC TECHNIQUES

In this section you are going to learn about the various poetic techniques that you will be identifying in the 'unseen' poems. You will then learn how to annotate a poem (page 17) and then read a variety of poems, each with a different focus (pages 18–27).

In order to answer the exam questions on the unseen poems, you will need to be able to recognise the **poetic techniques** described on the following pages. It is important, however, always to describe the **effect** a technique creates rather than just identifying it. Also remember that many techniques, such as rhythm and rhyme, or **assonance** and **alliteration**, work together to create or reinforce effects, usually of particular images and **themes** in a poem. Examples are given from the poems in this book and also from the AQA Anthology.

VOICE AND PERSPECTIVE

A02

Voice/speaker

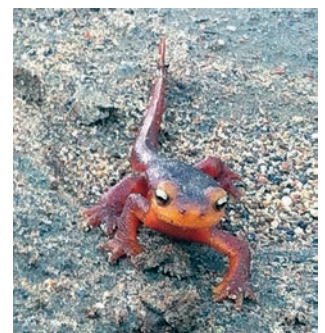
The **voice**, or speaker, is the person behind the words of the poem. The distinctive tone and style of the voice enables the reader to get to know the speaker. The speaker is not the same as the poet.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | The speaker in the poem 'Salamander' (page 20) asks ' Does he think I am a salamander too? ', making the assumption that the salamander thinks like a human, and might also view a human as a salamander. |
| Effect | The assumption in the question suggests a childlike innocence. In addition, the question underlines the need that the speaker has to make a friend of the salamander, reinforcing the speaker not only as a child, but a lonely one. |

Perspective

The **perspective** is the point of view from which the poem is written and is usually third person or first person, past or present. Less often it is second person; this is when the speaker addresses another voice or the reader as 'you'.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In 'Salamander' (page 20) the speaker recounts what is happening from the first person present perspective: ' I watch him '. |
| Effect | The first person present tense creates a sense of closeness as if the speaker is nearby. |



Persona

If the **voice** in the poem is a specific person or character, rather like an actor playing a role, we refer to it as a **persona**.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | Dramatic monologues have personas. The speaker in Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' (AQA Anthology) is the Duke of Ferrara. |
| Effect | The effect is to create a dramatic voice, as though the character is centre stage, addressing an audience. |

Mood

Mood is the tone or atmosphere created by the poet. Voice, vocabulary, rhythm and other techniques all combine to create the mood of the poem. Mood affects the reader's feelings.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Charlotte Mew's 'The Call' (page 40), the speaker asks 'Was it a bright or a dark angel? Who can know? / It left no mark upon the snow'. |
| Effect | A sense of mystery has been building from line 7 in the poem and reaches a height in these lines. The 'bright' or 'dark angel' creates a supernatural mood, but the use of questions makes the meaning ambiguous . |



Colloquialism

Everyday language, which may include regional expressions or slang, is described as **colloquial**.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In John Pownall's 'Moving' (page 60) the speaker refers to a woman's 'kids' instead of 'children'. |
| Effect | The effect is to help create a sense of the commonplace, so that the reader feels that the events and feelings in the poem, however important, are also part of an ordinary life. |

FORM AND STRUCTURE

A02

Form

Form is the way the poem is laid out on the page. It can refer to a specific verse form in which the number of lines in a verse or **stanza** is repeated. It can also refer to a specific type of poem that follows a set of rules such as those for a **sonnet**. If a poem has no regular form it is usually called **free verse**. A poem's form often enhances its meaning.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | 'Drummer Hodge' (page 36) has three sestets . It has repeated stanza lengths, line lengths and a regular metre . |
| Effect | The effect of the repetition creates formality, showing respect for Hodge. The stanzas create a simple funeral song (dirge). |

Structure

Structure is the pattern, order or organisation of language and ideas and how they develop and change throughout the poem.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Lord Byron's 'When We Two Parted' (AQA Anthology), the speaker returns to the beginning of the poem at the end, so the poem is circular in structure. The key words ' In silence and tears ' are repeated. |
| Effect | The effect of the circular structure is to convince the reader not only of the depth of the speaker's feelings about lost love, but also that the speaker is not free from the emotions expressed at the beginning of the poem, even ' After long years '. |

Enjambment

Enjambment occurs when a line runs on into the next line without pause, carrying the thought, image, pace and sometimes the sound with it.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Paul Deaton's 'Sea Bream Dinner' (page 24) enjambment is used in the lines ' over the long broken / path '. |
| Effect | The first line flows into the second, taking the image of the ' path ' with it. Since it also lengthens the line, it emphasises that the path is a ' long ' one. |



Caesura

Caesura is a pause in a line of poetry that affects the pace and rhythm.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | Caesura is used in Paul Deaton's 'Sea Bream Dinner' (page 24), in the lines ' be wholesome, silver sea thing, / treasured, let the white meat do its best. ' |
| Effect | The pauses after ' wholesome ' and ' treasured ' help to create a slow, gentle pace. They emphasise the careful ritual involved in cooking the meal, while simultaneously showing respect for the fish that provides the nourishment. |

Stanza

A **stanza** is a specific group of lines forming a unit, such as a **quatrain**. (A verse can be any number of lines that are grouped together and does not necessarily follow any specific pattern.)

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Mike Gould's 'Installations' (page 22), for example, each stanza is made up of two lines – a couplet . |
| Effect | Individual couplets have been chosen to create the effect of separate images, reinforcing the idea that they are like pictures in a gallery. |

Metre

Metre is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of verse. The most common metre in English is **iambic pentameter**.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Thomas Hardy's 'Drummer Hodge' (page 36) the line, 'They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest ' is iambic tetrameter followed by the line 'Uncoffined – just as found ', which is iambic trimeter . Line 1 begins with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable for four feet, and line 2 for three feet. (A foot is the different stress pattern in a unit of rhythm). The metre is kept up throughout the poem. |
| Effect | The heavy sound of the stressed syllables echo the heavy sound of soldiers marching or perhaps the powerful, repetitive movement of earth being shovelled into Hodges' grave. |



Half-rhyme

A rhyme is a **half-rhyme** if it has the same consonants but not the same vowel sound. Half-rhyme is sometimes called 'slant-rhyme' or 'near-rhyme'.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | Half-rhyme occurs in Thomas Hardy's 'Neutral Tones' (AQA Anthology) as ' rove ' and ' love '. |
| Effect | Half-rhyme is often used if the poet wishes to introduce a discordant note. Here, Hardy is writing about a broken relationship. The reader is therefore reminded of the theme through the choice of half-rhyme 'rove'/'love' (an imperfect rhyme, like the relationship). |

LANGUAGE

A02

Imagery

An **image** is a picture in words that makes objects, living things or actions feel more vivid in the reader's mind. It often appeals to the sense of sight, but may appeal to the other senses too.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Mike Gould's 'Installations' (page 22) there is an image of a dead fox's ribcage: ' a crimson diagram on tarmac plinth '. |
| Effect | The image has a dual effect. It reminds the reader of the gruesome and bloody nature of the fox's death. It also reminds us of a bright red painting or work of art set on a ' plinth ', which is less immediate than the first effect. |

Metaphor

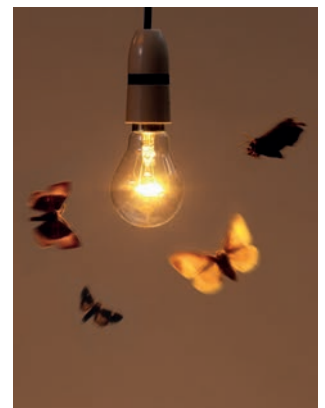
A **metaphor** is a particular kind of image. It occurs when one thing is used to describe another, creating a striking impression.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' (page 37) the speaker-soldier says that whatever foreign field he might be buried in will become ' a richer dust '. |
| Effect | The speaker is saying that if the foreign field contains his body (an English body), it will be forever enriched. ' A richer dust ' is a metaphor for English soil and therefore a patriotic metaphor for England. |

Extended metaphor

An **extended metaphor** continues some aspect of the image. It may continue into the next line or throughout the poem.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In, Carole Satyamurti's 'Piccadilly Line' (page 45) a comparison is made, throughout the whole poem, between a group of young girls and a moth (which dies). For example, the girls ' flutter ', ' are excited by a vision / of glitter ' and drawn ' to the lure of the light '. |
| Effect | The extended metaphor of the moth, its attraction to light and its brief life, gives the comparison greater weight, suggesting that youth is a very brief, if intense period of life. |



Simile

A **simile** occurs when one thing is compared to another using 'like' or 'as'.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | Thomas Hardy's 'Neutral Tones' (AQA Anthology) includes the simile, 'And a grin of bitterness swept thereby / Like an ominous bird a-wing ...'. |
| Effect | The speaker compares his companion's bitter smile to a sinister bird. The poet, therefore, drives home to the reader the complete failure of the relationship. |

Connotation

Connotations are ideas that spring to mind or are suggested by a word or phrase.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Carole Satyamurti's 'Piccadilly Line' (page 45) the excited young girls who board the train on the underground line 'flutter' in their excitement at being out for the evening, then 'settle' down. |
| Effect | The verb 'flutter' has connotations of something light and insubstantial, such as a winged creature. However, when accompanied by the word 'settle', it suggests a moth in the specific circumstances of the poem. |



Personification

Personification occurs when ideas or things are given human feelings and characteristics.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Love's Philosophy' (AQA Anthology) 'the waves clasp one another'. |
| Effect | The reader sees in their mind's eye the natural movement of the waves holding each other in the way that a human might hug another human being. |

Alliteration

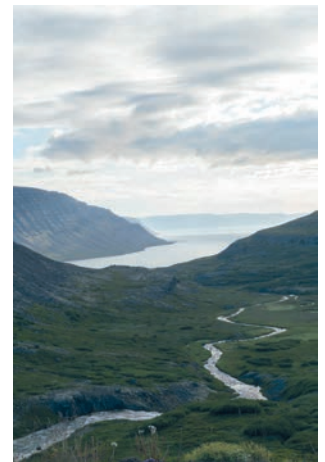
Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound (not necessarily the same letter) in a stretch of language, often at the beginning of words.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Mike Gould's 'Installations' (page 22), 'digger's door' is alliterative. |
| Effect | The sound of double 'd' in 'digger's and door' creates a heavy thudding sound that emphasises the bulk and weight of the bulldozer's cabin door. |

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of the same vowel sound in a stretch of language.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Love's Philosophy' (AQA Anthology) opens with the lines: 'The fountains mingle with the river / And the rivers with the Ocean / The winds of Heaven mix for ever / With a sweet emotion;'. <i>(Note: 'mingle', 'river', 'rivers', 'winds', 'mix', 'with' all contain the 'i' vowel sound.)</i> |
| Effect | The repetition of the 'i' sound (in 'mingle', 'river', 'rivers', 'winds', 'mix', 'with') combines with the images of nature to reinforce the flowing movement of the river and wind. |



Consonance

Consonance is the repetition of the same consonant sound in a stretch of language. (It is different from alliteration because, unlike alliteration, it concerns consonant sounds only.)

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Example | In Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet 29 – I think of thee!' (AQA Anthology), 'straggling green', which is describing wild vines, is an example of consonance. <i>(Note: 'straggling' and 'green' both contain the 'g' consonant sound.)</i> |
| Effect | The repetition of 'g' in 'straggling' and 'green' helps to emphasise the image of the wayward, invasive vines. |

Ambiguity

Ambiguity occurs when writers, perhaps deliberately, use words or images with more than one meaning or interpretation.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Example | In Charlotte Mew's 'The Call' (page 40) there is a visitor to the speaker's home: 'Something swift and tall / Swept in and out and that was all.' |
| Effect | The visitor that calls may be some kind of supernatural presence or a figment of the speaker's mind. The poet chooses to give the reader little certainty about what the presence is, in order to create a sense of mystery or a spiritual element to the narrator's experience. |

Sibilant

The **sibilant** is a hissing sound made by using 's', 'ss' 'sh' or 'z'.

| | |
|---------|--|
| Example | In Charlotte Mew's 'The Farmer's Bride' (AQA Anthology), the young wife is described as, ' Shy as a leveret, swift as he / Straight and slight as a young larch tree '. |
| Effect | The soft sounding sibilant 's' in the repeated ' as ', ' Shy ', ' swift ', ' Straight ' and ' slight ' and its association with the ' Shy ... leveret ' and the ' young ... tree ' helps reinforce in the reader's mind the darting but timid youthfulness and vulnerability of the young wife. |



Rhetorical question

A **rhetorical question** is asked for effect; to persuade or further an argument rather than elicit an answer.

| | |
|---------|---|
| Example | The speaker in Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Love's Philosophy' (AQA Anthology) asks at the end of the poem: ' And the sunlight clasps the earth, / And the moonbeams kiss the sea – / What are all these kissings worth, / If thou kiss not me? ' |
| Effect | The question is used to further the argument that the lover should unite with the speaker, as the moon and sea unite. |



HOW TO ANNOTATE A POEM

When you annotate a poem you scribble quick comments, questions and ideas around it, and sometimes on it, using circles, underlining or highlighting to help you focus.

ELEMENTS YOU MIGHT ANNOTATE

The poem's 'story'

Does the poem seem to be about something specific, such as a relationship or an incident? Sometimes a poem may seem to concentrate on feelings and thoughts rather than describe particular events. But a poem will always have a focus, and be about the speaker's experience.

Theme

What is the main idea or ideas running through the poem? If key lines reveal this, you could highlight them. Are there other related ideas you could also select? Remember, the **theme** or message is revealed through the 'story'.



Voice and perspective

Can you note down the **mood** the **voice** creates? Is it sad, thoughtful, distant? What person is the poem told in and what tense? Who is the speaker addressing?

Form

Is the poem written in a specific **form**, such as a **sonnet**? Is it **free verse**? Can you highlight any patterns? Although the line lengths vary in free verse, there may be **repetition** or rhymes that are not immediately obvious, which appear in the middle of sentences, for example. Rhythm, regular or irregular, and rhyme, such as in a **rhyming couplet**, give form to a poem.

Structure

How does the poem open and close? Does it change direction? Regular rhythm and rhyme can also be part of the **structure** and bring a sense of closure or finality, for example. You could make notes alongside the start and end of the poem.

Language

How does the poet use language? How does it link to the theme? What particular vocabulary choices and **images** can you highlight which the poet has used to create effects?

Poetic techniques

Can you identify any specific techniques? What effects are created? Remember that poetic techniques work together. For example, the vowels in **assonance** create sound effects that may, for example, highlight the mood.

PART TWO READING 'UNSEEN' POEMS

The annotations below highlight some examples of the poem's elements. There are other examples too, so read the annotations and see what else you can find.

Use this process with all the poems you study.

Story: speaker is trying to reach a lover by text message, but there is a breakdown in the relationship and/or communication – main theme of the poem?

Technique: simile, 'injured' suggests something's wrong.
Effect: the speaker's hurt feelings? Lack of communication or misunderstanding? Ambiguous.

Technique: alliteration 'k' sound. **Effect:** stresses damaged relationship?

Technique: image. **Effect:** draws attention to how texting is not the human voice. So misunderstandings can easily happen as well as breakdown in relationship?

Text

I tend the mobile now
like an injured bird.

We text, text, text
our significant words.

5 I re-read your first,
your second, your third,

look for the small xx,
feeling absurd.

The codes we send
10 arrive with a broken chord.

I try to picture your hands,
their image is blurred.

Nothing my thumbs press
will ever be heard.

Technique: repetition of words.
Effect: emphasises poem's fast pace and how poem mimics texting.

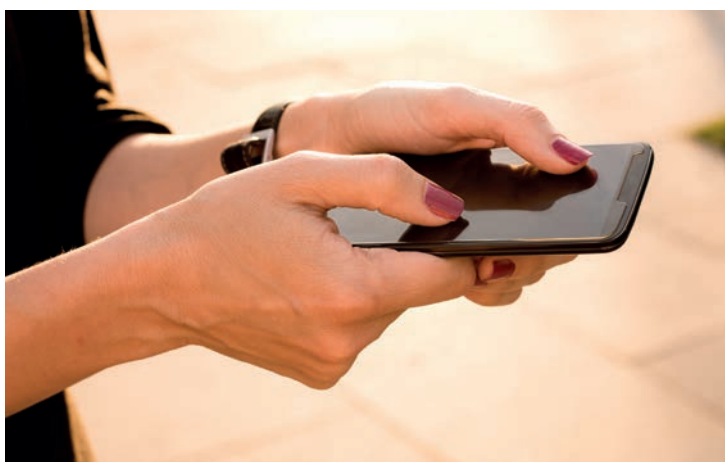
Voice: anxious, wants reassurance.
Effect: adds to impression that relationship is broken/breaking up. But reader doesn't know what lover thinks.

Technique: rhyme: mostly full? 'chord' half-rhyme. **Effect:** short and sharp like lines and texting?

Carol Ann Duffy

Structure: first three couplets express anxiety, fourth also includes feelings of foolishness. Last three – speaker thinks relationship is broken. Last one very final.

Form: couplets, 14 lines, a loose sonnet about love. Spaces between couplets suggest distance between lovers.



HOW TO USE QUOTATIONS

One of the secrets of success in writing exam essays is to use quotations *effectively*. There are five basic principles:

- 1 Only quote what is most useful.
- 2 Do not use a quotation that repeats what you have just written.
- 3 Put quotation marks around the quotation.
- 4 Write the quotation exactly as it appears in the original.
- 5 Use the quotation so that it fits neatly (is embedded) into your sentence.

Quotations should be used to develop the line of thought in your essay, and to 'zoom in' on key details, such as language choices. Compare the Good Level and High Level responses to 'The Letter' (page 53) below and the ways in which the quotations are used.

Good Level use of quotation: **clear and logical**

A01

Useful quotation

In Gillian Clarke's poem, the images, 'the laughter of girls./skelter of skirts' vividly describe the girls as they run down the track and into the farmhouse kitchen. The word 'skelter' tells us that the girls are running fast and their skirts are flying so they are probably out of breath.

Explains the effect of the quotation

High Level use of quotation: **precise focus** with comment on **connotations** and effects

A01

Precise quotation

In Gillian Clarke's poem, the speaker depicts the girls running down the track through the vivid image 'skelter of skirts' and its association with the expression 'helter-skelter' (meaning speed and confusion). We can imagine the girls' skirts flapping back and forth, suggesting energy and high spirits.

Makes an association to illustrate the effect

Describes the effect on the reader

VOICE AND PERSPECTIVE

Start by reading the following poem, which explores ideas about loneliness and friendship. The student's annotations in this case relate to **voice** and **perspective** and how these contribute to the poem's effects.

Salamander

An unexpected guest
Comes to my grandmother's greenhouse,
A golden salamander,
Searching for slugs,
And company, perhaps.

Speaker is looking for friendship

5

Present tense rather than past tense. Effect?

On lonely days I watch him.

He is a clown tumbling between chrysanthemums

A word a child might use

And red geraniums,

Or a shadow puppet

10 Darting between shady leaves

And the roots of miniature trees.

Or sometimes he lolls

In the luxury of the African marigold,

As though sunning himself in its glow.

First person speaker. Effect?

15

I am as still as a waxwork.

He spots my presence

And sits,

His eyes mapping my face

Pressed to the windowpane.

20 Searching.

Does he see me?

Does he know we both wear the colour of friendship?

This sounds like the sort of thing a child would say.

Does he think I am a salamander too?

Could be a child speaking?

Voice is sad/resigned

Quite difficult word for a child

Is speaker addressing him/herself or reader – or who?

Mary Green

WORKING FROM THE ANNOTATIONS

Through exploring the **voice** you can find out about the speaker of the poem, where they are, what they are thinking and feeling, and sometimes who they are. The annotations on **perspective** tell us what person and tense the poem is written in. Both can add to our understanding of the poem and its **mood**.

- 1 What have you discovered about the poem from the annotations? What could you add? Write further comments alongside the poem. For example:
 - Find any other lines or words that suggest whether the speaker is an adult or a child (e.g. in lines 7–14).
 - Try to answer any questions asked in the annotations.
- 2 What do the annotations tell you about the speaker's voice and perspective and the effects these create? Think about:
 - how the speaker's voice shifts in tone in the last lines of the poem and the effect this has on the reader.

TOP TIP



Remember, the speaker is not the poet. The speaker of the poem is the voice that you imagine when you read a poem. While a poet may draw on their experience, the poem is not an autobiography. Even very personal poems are always works of imagination.

EXAM FOCUS

A01

A02



A student has begun to write about the voice in the poem and the nature of the speaker and how it reflects loneliness and a search for friendship.

Reference to voice

Considers more than one possibility about who the speaker could be

The speaker of the poem seems to be a 'lonely' child. The poem employs complex words, such as 'chrysanthemum' in line 7, which a child might not use, but the last line sounds very like a child who is imagining how the salamander thinks. It is as if the speaker feels the salamander and he or she might have a connection and be real friends.

Identifies how the speaker feels and embeds quotation in sentence

Shows the effect on the reader

YOUR TASK

- 3 Write at least two paragraphs, similar in style to the one above, discussing other features of the voice and perspective. Remember to include evidence and refer back to your answers to Questions 1 and 2. You could write about the following:
 - The perspective (person and tense) of the poem and the effects created.
 - How the voice changes in mood and its effects. (Refer here to your answer in Question 2.)
 - How the speaker's mood is reflected in particular words. For example, consider the importance of the word 'Searching' in the last verse. Is it only the salamander that is 'searching'?
 - Anything else you can think of.

FORM AND STRUCTURE

You are now going to look at a student's annotations on the uses of **form** and **structure**, in a poem which explores ideas about art and the way we see reality. As you read the poem, consider how structural elements contribute to its effects.

Title – is each of the stanzas an 'installation'?

Effects? Couplets are separate pictures. Makes them sharper?

Nine couplets

Installations¹

A dead fox lies stretched out on the kerb
His ribcage a crimson diagram on tarmac plinth;

As if each couplet is a picture

On the prom,² a trolley is upturned
Its wheels whirling in the tunnel of air.

- 5 By the corner, a footway's blocked by signage,
A digger's door hangs open, framing empty seats.

An electric gate, trapped by Autumn mulch,
Buzzes and hums in suspended motion.

- A leaf escapes, is caught and pressed
10 Under a wiper blade, jammed behind glass.

Now, a crumpled tank's in flames, a face in a
Creeping line of figures turns towards the lens.

As if we're looking at a war photo in a gallery now?

A mural offers bodies in a Basque city,³
Horses' heads angled, crying to the sky.

- 15 In the galleries of our days, we stare or walk alone,
Feel untouched, but no one's ever safe from life.

Another change here? Reference to 'our'

The pictures are silent in the dark of the night,
But in a distant town a child wakes to the thunder.

Mike Gould

Glossary

¹ 'Installations' are modern works of art, often with several different parts to them, and are usually exhibited in a gallery space.

'Installation' can also refer to something installed or put into a space or room.

² promenade; a path, usually along a seafront

³ Reference to Picasso's painting 'Guernica' about a city bombed during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9)



WORKING FROM THE ANNOTATIONS

Form and **structure** are both important because they help signal changes in direction, or direct the reader towards particular ideas, sounds or patterns. The way a poem is divided up can also isolate particular ideas or **images**, so that they create impact and meaning.

- 1 What have you discovered about the poem from the annotations? Is there anything else you could add about the structure? Write further comments alongside the poem. You might think about whether any words or sounds are repeated or echoed, even if rhyme is not used.
- 2 What have you learned from the annotations about the structure and how it contributes to the poem's effect? Think about how it affects the:
 - meaning of the poem and how it helps the poet express himself
 - way the reader feels or thinks about the poem.

TOP TIP



Remember, as a rough guide, the **form** is the way the poem is laid out and sometimes has a name, such as 'free verse'. The **structure** is the underlying pattern and direction the poem takes.

EXAM FOCUS

A01

A02



A student has begun a response, referring to the way the poem reflects the idea of art through its structure.

Reference to form used

Explains effect

Further explanation and analysis

The writer has divided the poem into nine separate couplets. In each one of these, except the seventh, it is as if the poet has hung up an image for us to look at, like the 'dead fox' in the first and the trolley in the second. Because these images are separated like this, they are very clear - as though they are framed in a gallery. This initially creates a sense of distance, even coldness.

Close reading of stanza

Chooses appropriate quotations

YOUR TASK

- 3 Write at least two paragraphs, similar in style to the one above, on other aspects of the form or structure of the poem. You could choose to write about some or all of the following:
 - How each of the first five **couplets** reflect everyday life – and the tone/**mood** created.
 - The change in focus in the sixth **stanza**.
 - Why the eighth stanza refers to 'our' and 'we' and the change in mood this creates.
 - Anything else you can think of.

LANGUAGE

When you explore a poem's language, think about how it reveals the ideas and **themes** in the poem. Read 'Sea Bream Dinner', which explores ideas about nourishment, mealtime rituals and respect for food.

The student's annotations highlight features of the language and how these contribute to the poem's effects.

Sea Bream Dinner

Speaker seems to need some comfort?

And sometimes it is enough to only
think about what to have for dinner,
and to go out to the shops in advance
through the square beneath the lurching
5 horse chestnuts, and over the long broken
path slabs at midday, to buy fish, fresh
from the fishmonger's magician
hands and to get home in the evening,
to cook with stained spoon and heavy pan
10 what has been found first by a Cornish fisherman.

Alliteration: 'f'.
Effect: stresses the fish's freshness and fishy quality

Image of the fishmonger's mysterious skill

And not to be in a devil's rush, not to high
hurdle against the odds a sprinter's dinner,
but to gas light the stove, to put
the whole sea bream in the clay tagine
15 carefully, as if it were your parents
you were laying to rest, with sprig

Metaphor for fast food

Simile showing respect for the dead, as though the fish is lying in its clay coffin

Alliteration: 'd'.
Makes a downward sound. Like a funeral hymn?

Almost like grace/a prayer said before a meal?

of bay, splash of wine, slide this day's death
into the oven with a softly worded message,
be wholesome, silver sea thing,

Image of a beautiful fish, said with love

20 treasured, let the white meat do its best.

Paul Deaton