

**SQA NATIONAL 5 ENGLISH**

# LANGUAGE SKILLS

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# Introduction

This book is aimed at supporting students who are working towards achieving a National 5 English qualification. This book will help you understand, analyse and use the **language** skills that form a key part of every section of the National 5 English assessment.

Students have been often heard to say that you cannot really study for English, particularly when it comes to Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAЕ). English teachers, though, are particularly keen on challenging this idea! There are many ways you can learn to use the key skills that are required to do well in National 5 English. Language skills are a vital part of this.

The National 5 English qualification is made up of four elements:

- Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAЕ)
- Critical Reading paper: Scottish Texts and Critical Essay
- Writing portfolio
- Spoken language

## ○ Get the most from this book

This book is divided into six main sections.

- **Section 1** outlines how language skills are used in the National 5 English course, how these skills can be useful in other curricular areas and how they relate to skills for life, work and learning.
- **Section 2** gives you advice on studying and revising language skills for the exam. You will learn about the command words used in the exam.
- **Section 3** focuses on strategies to approach reading for the Scottish Texts and the Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAЕ) papers. You will learn about different question types with worked examples and practice questions. Specific language skills will be dealt with in detail here too. You will learn how to answer the 8-mark question in the Scottish Texts paper. There are also practice passages for you to try.
- **Section 4** looks at the language used in fiction texts and the skills required to write good critical essays.
- **Section 5** focuses on the writing portfolio and gives advice on how to use language skills in the writing portfolio.
- **Section 6** looks at the spoken language performance.

Knowing and using **critical terminology** is an important part of the course so this is included throughout the book. The glossary on pages 142–143 gives definitions of all terms highlighted in red.

**Answers and mark schemes** for the activities and practice passage questions can be found at: [www.hoddergibson.co.uk/answers-N5-English-Language](http://www.hoddergibson.co.uk/answers-N5-English-Language)

## Dictionary

**Critical terminology:** the specific words we use to describe language techniques, e.g. simile, semi-colon, repetition. Further examples are available in the Glossary on page 142

In the National 5 English course, you will need to use a wide range of **language** skills. These will help you understand and analyse a whole range of texts, such as the non-fiction texts in the Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation paper, the Scottish Texts you will select, as well as your Critical Essay texts. They will also be important for you to use in the writing portfolio and spoken language performance.

Before you can do that, it is important to be clear about what is expected. Consider, then, what are language skills?



## For practice Activity 1

- 1 What do you think language skills are?
- 2 Where do you think you might use language skills in your study of English?
- 3 Where else do you think your language skills might be useful?
- 4 What jobs and types of work do you think might require good language skills?
- 5 Make a list of the skills you think would be considered language skills. You could do this on your own or with other people.

## ○ Language skills in English

The National 5 course covers a range of skills, including reading, writing, talking and listening. You have been developing these skills through your study of English for many years now and lots of the techniques a writer uses will be familiar to you already.

### Reading

In the National 5 course, you will do a great deal of reading. You will read:

- non-fiction for the RUAE paper, including newspaper/magazine articles
- fiction (and possibly non-fiction) for the Critical Reading paper
- examples of writing, preparing you for writing your own essays
- non-fiction as part of your research for writing pieces/talking
- different types of questions in the exam papers

### Writing

There is also a range of writing activities to be done in the National 5 course. You will produce:

- imaginative or **personal writing** for your broadly creative portfolio piece
- non-fiction writing for your broadly discursive portfolio piece
- critical essays
- detailed answers to questions
- notes and plans for essays and your spoken language performance

## Talking and listening

This is assessed in the spoken language performance, but you will also find yourself using these skills in a range of ways, such as:

- listening to your teacher and to contributions of others in class or in discussions
- group discussions about texts or topics in class



### For practice Activity 2

Go back to the list of language skills you identified in Activity 1. Create a table with three columns headed 'Reading', 'Writing' and 'Talking/listening' and place the language skills in the appropriate columns. Skills may appear in more than one column.

## The importance of language skills

### Learning links

Look again at the list of language skills you made. Think about where you would use reading, writing, talking/listening and language skills other than in the English classroom. Make notes on when you would use these skills in other school subjects, real-life situations, the workplace or further education. You may do this activity on your own, with a partner or in a group.

For example: *I would need to work out what a writer is trying to imply when reading a newspaper, or I would need to use persuasive language when trying to get a pay rise.*



### Tools of the trade Activity 3

Look at the following examples. Identify why people employed in these jobs would need good language skills.

- Manager or coach of a sports team
- Nurse, doctor or healthcare assistant
- Vet, animal trainer, pet carer
- Supermarket assistant or sales assistant
- Lawyer or politician
- Trades person (painter and decorator, joiner, mechanic, etc.)
- Tourism assistant or travel agent
- Financial adviser
- Scientist
- Journalist



### Taking it further

Using what you have discovered and the connections you have made, write a short statement explaining why it is important to have good language skills.

## ○ How to study and revise language skills

Does the idea of studying for examinations fill you with dread? Does it leave you wondering where to start? The way to be successful in anything is to learn the skills and practise them regularly. You will be learning the key **language** skills you need for National 5 English by using this book, but have you learned the **skills** needed to study successfully?

This section will help you develop study skills and exam preparation techniques. Lots of this will not be new to you and some things might seem obvious, but the tips and strategies here will help you develop good study habits.

Remember, you cannot leave it until the last minute. You need to study often, regularly and with a clear focus.

Before you get started, consider the following:

- How do you feel about studying?
- What do you do to avoid studying? What distracts you from studying?
- How can you avoid distractions?
- When do you study?
- What do you study?
- What should you study more?
- Where do you study? Do you have a good study space? If not, how can you make one?
- How do you study?
- What do you use to study with?
- What resources do you need to help you study?



### *Study and revise*

- Make sure you study somewhere you will not be distracted by family, TV, your phone or social media.
- Create a well-lit space to study with a desk and chair if possible. If you don't have space at home, look at space available in your school/college library or in the classroom of a supportive teacher/tutor. Your local library will also be able to help you find a quiet space to study and you will find free access to the internet in both public and school/college libraries.
- Have clear goals: What do you want to achieve? What is your timescale for studying? How/when will you revise it again? How will you know you have been successful?
- Make use of stationery such as sticky notes and coloured pens to display key notes you need to memorise.
- Time management is important, so use a calendar (to record goals and achievements and to plan ahead), a clock or phone (to keep track of the time) and a phone or stopwatch (to perform timed tests). A noticeboard is helpful to display timetables, notes and things to remember.

## ○ Planning your study

No matter how early you start studying, make sure you have a study plan.

Find out when your key deadlines are: prelims, assessments, portfolio deadlines and the exam dates. If you know what texts you will be studying – and when you will be studying them – it will help you plan effectively. Gather all the information together and make a plan for studying.

### Focus on... Make a study plan

Activity	Personal deadline	Tick when complete
Put together a calendar of deadlines and display it somewhere obvious		
Put the dates and times of your exams on the calendar		
Make a list of the topics you need to revise		
Work out how much time you think you will need to spend on each topic		
Plan what topics you will revise and when. Create a weekly planner sheet for each week up to the exam		
Find out where your local library is, what the opening hours are and how to get there. Think about how you could use the library to help you study		

## Hints for effective studying

- Aim to spend more time on the topics you find harder than on the ones you think you are stronger in.
- Switch between topics to avoid becoming bored.
- Concentrate on making sure you *understand* the content – don't just memorise it.
- Use the internet – yes, really! Look for videos related to the topic you are studying; search the topic to find other sources of information. Take notes and add them to your revision notes.

### Tools of the trade Taking good notes

As you work through this book and the National 5 English course, create good notes and keep them well organised. Take notes about the texts you are studying, including the quotations you need. Note down the skills you need to answer questions and create writing of your own. Don't just write the notes down and file them away – make sure you review your notes regularly as part of your revision schedule.

### Good notes should:

- be to the point – easily revisable, understandable and short, but with all relevant detail
- use abbreviations you will understand
- refresh your knowledge
- help you learn how to present your answers
- contain information on each topic from textbooks, guide books and lessons

- be written in your **own handwriting** – students remember information better when they take notes by hand
- be in your **own words** – make sure you are not just copying; you should understand what you are writing down

## When taking notes:

- Leave plenty of **space** around notes and only write on one side of the paper. This leaves room for additions and changes.
- Use **colour** to highlight and/or **underline** main points – this will help you to remember them.
- Make sure the notes are **neat and visually attractive** to make them easier to use.
- Use **headings** and sub-headings and a **numbering or bullet point** system.
- When you find something you do not understand, don't just write it down – ask your teacher to **explain** anything important if you don't feel you got it first time. It will be twice as tough trying to understand it later.
- Store notes in a **tidy, safe and organised** system.
- **Revisit topics** (after a break, a day later, a week later and a month later) to make sure you have remembered what you have learned.

## Activity 1

Copy this checklist into your study notes and tick off when you have completed each task.

Review your notes	Yes
Are they in folders?	
Are they organised by topic?	
Have you made a contents page?	
Are they in the right order? Are they tidy and neat?	
Have you re-written them since you first made them?	
Have you used colour/diagrams, etc. to make them look nice?	
Are they short and memorable?	
Are they in your own words?	
Have you used headings/bullet points?	
Do you have a safe place to store your notes?	
Have you planned when to revisit your notes in your study plan?	
Action points – things to do:	



## ○ Command words

For each exam you sit, there will be a set of what is called 'command words' that appear in the questions. Each subject has slightly different command words, and sometimes, even if they have the same words, they might mean something different in each subject.

The main command words for English are shown in the table below.

Command word	Where it appears	Use	Example in use
Identify	Mainly found in the Reading for UAE paper  Can be found in Scottish Texts paper	This is used to assess your ability to describe the main ideas or the main points in a text. You are usually instructed to use your own words when answering this type of question	Look at lines 4–16. Identify, in your own words as far as possible, six positive points the writer makes about ...
Summarise	Mainly found in the Reading for UAE paper  Can be found in Scottish Texts paper	This type of question asks you to show that you understand the writer's ideas by selecting the most important points or key ideas and explaining them using your own words	Using your own words as far as possible, summarise the four main events in this extract
Explain (what/why)	Found in the Reading for UAE paper and Scottish Texts paper	These types of questions ask you to answer in your own words. They ask you to show your understanding of the writer's ideas, opinions or points of view	Look at lines 7–13. In your own words, explain three points the writer makes ...
Explain (how)	Found in the Reading for UAE paper, Scottish Texts paper and Critical Essay paper	This is the second type of 'explain' question – the analysis type. This will ask you about how a writer uses language or a specific language feature. It will always tell you how many examples you should discuss in your answer	Look at lines 41–46. By referring to two examples of language, explain how the writer makes it clear that the characters are upset
Show	Scottish Texts paper	You should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain how the writer develops a <b>theme</b> or topic</li> <li>• explain how the writer uses a technique in more than one short text, or throughout a longer text</li> </ul>	Show how one example of the writer's use of <b>imagery</b> makes it clear how the character feels



Command word	Where it appears	Use	Example in use
Describe	Critical Essay paper	You should show understanding by summarising, in your own words, aspects of the text, such as <b>plot</b> , theme, <b>character</b> development, <b>setting</b> , etc.	Choose a novel in which a character is in conflict with another character. Describe the conflict and then go on to explain why the conflict is important to the novel as a whole
Evaluate	Critical Essay paper	This asks for your evaluation of the impact, effect or importance of the writer's techniques	Consider the language of two texts written in different varieties of Scots. Referring to appropriate techniques, explain and evaluate the differences in language use

When you move to Higher, the word 'analyse' will be added to the command words.

## For practice Activity 2

For each of the 'explain' questions below, explain if they are understanding (why) questions or analysis (how) questions. Some of these come with 'clues' and others do not!

- 1 Using your own words as far as possible, explain what the writer believes was the real reason for witch trials.
- 2 Referring to **two** examples of language, explain how Rory is shown to be a hard-working member of his team.
- 3 Explain what the writer has to say about the environmental impact of microbeads.
- 4 Explain how the writer's attitude towards Gail is demonstrated through his use of at least **one** example of language.
- 5 Look at lines 15–27. Explain what the writer believes is key to success in the entertainment industry.

## Taking it further

Look at the questions in the practice papers in Section 3 (pages 85–91).

For each 'explain' question, work out which are understanding questions ('what'/'why' questions) and which are analysis questions ('how' questions).

## Past papers and practice papers

Using past papers and practice papers is a good way of studying and has many benefits. You might think using past papers and practice papers during your exam preparation is a bit pointless because you will never get that passage, extract or set of questions again. However, closer to the exam, they provide good practice for working in timed conditions. They also help you spot patterns – types of questions that often appear in papers. They will show you topics that regularly come up, how you can apply skills you have learned and what information you will need to remember. The table below explains how you can use a past exam paper to get the most from your studying.

Table 1.1 Using a past paper to improve your studying

Section of the paper	How you could use it
The passage itself	<p>Time yourself reading the passage fully</p> <p>Work out how much time that leaves you for answering questions</p> <p>Try reducing the time you use for reading by reading more often and trying to beat your time</p> <p>Practise doing questions in the time you have left</p>
Questions	<p>Identify the command words in questions</p> <p>Use the questions to mark off the lines where you need to find the answers</p> <p>Work out what each question is asking you to do</p> <p>Make a note of commonly used words and phrases and make sure you know what these mean and what they are asking for</p> <p>Make a note of the most common types of question that come up in papers</p> <p>Make sure you know the strategies needed to answer each type of question</p> <p>Try answering the questions in the time limit you have worked out for yourself</p>

## Taking it further

Using your note-taking skills, read Table 1.1 and take a set of effective notes on how to use past papers and practice papers to help you study. Use your own words as far as possible.

Now copy and complete the table below to review your progress.

Progress review	Yes	Evidence
I can explain what 'command words' are		
I can tell the difference between the two kinds of 'explain' questions		
I know how to use practice papers and past papers in my study		



## Section 3

# Reading: understanding, analysing and evaluating language

When analysing any passage, whether it is fiction or non-fiction, you must develop good reading habits. Many students only skim read a passage, giving it a quick read to get the overall idea of what the passage is about. Others will look at the questions and then scan the passage for the specific answers. While these strategies have their strengths and uses, when you are being assessed on your reading, it is important to do a deep read – where you take your time, focus on the words, the ideas and the **structure**, and develop your own opinions about the content and **language** used in the text.



Reading skills are required in all areas of the National 5 English course:

- in the Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (RUAE) paper
- reading a fiction or non-fiction text in order to write a critical essay in the Critical Reading paper
- reading a Scottish Text
- researching for your writing portfolio
- proofreading your own essays

## ○ Reading strategies

When you are analysing a text, it is really important that you have read it thoroughly. While the exam has a time element, the RUAE and Scottish Texts sections test your ability to read, understand, analyse and evaluate. If you do not read the text thoroughly, you cannot do these well. If you are worried about the time it takes to read the passages in the exam, there are things you can do to help.



## Study and revise

- Read as often as you can! Read for 20 minutes per day to help you read faster and broaden your vocabulary and understanding.
- Read non-fiction texts – try to read articles from good quality journalism (print or online) each weekend.
- Re-read your literature texts. The more you read them, the more familiar you will be with the content, ideas, plot, etc.
- The text in the RUAE paper usually has 60–70 lines. The extract in the Scottish Texts paper is usually between 30 and 40 lines, except for poetry. Practise deep reading articles and extracts of those lengths. Time yourself. Try to beat your time (without skim reading).

## Skimming, scanning and deep reading

It is important when first reading an article or extract that you pay close attention to it. Take your time and 'deep read' it. If you skim read or just scan for an answer, you can miss important content, **tone**, **linkage** and the overall meaning of a text.

Skimming and scanning are also important skills to have. Once you have fully read the passage and start to tackle the questions, you will be able to skim and scan to find the answers. Because you have 'deep read' the passage already, your brain will have a better idea of where to find that information and that will speed up your retrieval skills.

**Skimming** – this is a technique where you quickly read a text in order to get an overview of its content.

**Scanning** – this is when you quickly read through a text to find specific information or a particular answer.

**Deep reading** – this is when you take the time to read every word of the passage. If you imagine you are reading it aloud, like a storyteller, you will pick up more of the pace, the tone and the impact of the punctuation, etc.

## How to analyse a text

- When reading, keep a highlighter pen handy. Use it to identify any key words, ideas or language techniques used. You can do this in any type of text – for the RUAE paper, Scottish Texts or when you are studying texts for your Critical Essay.
- It may also be helpful to annotate the text as you go through it:
  - Identify a technique, make a note about why you think it was important to highlight it and note down how it links to other parts of the text.
  - Write notes in the margins or you could use sticky notes if you prefer to keep your text clean.
- Create 'generic' notes while you are being taught about the text:
  - Write everything you need as you are taught it.
  - Go back after each note-taking session. Make sure you can understand your notes – and ask questions if you cannot!
  - Use your generic notes to create specific notes.
  - Create a section for each chapter/scene/poem/story.
  - Create a page for 'connected ideas' for the 8-mark question for poems and short stories.
  - Create a page for each **character**, one for **setting**, one for the **themes**, the **plot**, etc.
  - These will provide important study notes for you.





## Study and revise

- If you have not already done so, look at your notes for your literature texts.
- If you do not have your notes organised as suggested above, start creating note pages for each area of study. This will ensure you have clear notes. Continue to use these as you study your literature texts.

## Types of examination questions

In both the RUAE paper and in the Scottish Texts section of the Critical Reading paper, you are asked to show understanding of the writer's ideas, to analyse the writer's techniques and to evaluate how effectively the writer uses these techniques.

**Understand:** to be able to explain the intended *meaning* of the text.

**Analyse:** to identify the writer's techniques and explain *how* they are used.

**Evaluate:** to explain the *effect* of the writer's use of language techniques or the *effect* of the writer's ideas, arguments or use of structure.

### Understanding questions:

- Ask you to *explain* why or what ...
- Ask you to answer in your own words.

### Analysis and evaluation questions:

- Ask about language or a specific language technique.
- Ask for examples or evidence in the form of a quotation (or reference) from the passage. This would gain you 1 mark.
- Ask you for a comment explaining *how* language is used in this context.

In the RUAE paper and the Scottish Texts section of the Critical Reading paper, you will be asked about the writer's use of language. Some questions may focus on specific features such as **word choice**, **sentence structure** or **imagery**, but some will simply ask you about how the writer uses language. You will need to use these same language skills in your own writing and speaking.

Through your study of literature, you will have covered most of these language features before, such as word choice, **figurative language**, sentence structure, text structure, punctuation, tone, **onomatopoeia** and **alliteration**, for example.

## Dictionary

**Figurative language:** when a word or description does not use its literal (actual) meaning but instead is used to convey another idea



# LANGUAGE SKILLS

SQA NATIONAL 5 ENGLISH

**Successfully develop the key language skills you need for the National 5 English assessments.**

Covering reading, writing, talking and listening – vital skills for learning, life and work – this course companion will help you to fulfil your potential at N5 and beyond.

- ▶ **Gain in-depth understanding** of the language skills required for National 5 English
- ▶ **Focus on strategies for approaching the exam**, with explanations of command words and different question types, worked examples and practice questions
- ▶ **Be guided step by step through analysing an extract/ passage**, looking at word choice, imagery, structure and many other linguistic techniques
- ▶ **Improve your language skills**, with dozens of ready-made activities, including independent work, group discussion points and extension tasks

Answers and marking guidelines are available online at [www.hoddergibson.co.uk/answers-N5-English-Language](http://www.hoddergibson.co.uk/answers-N5-English-Language)

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