

STUDENT'S BOOK



**Cambridge International
AS Level**

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English Language

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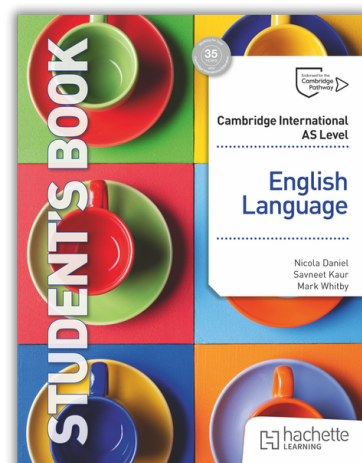
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Understanding textual conventions: narrative and descriptive texts

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KEY TERM

Word class The grammatical category a word fits in, dependent on its purpose in a sentence.

Word classes

Word classes are the categories we use to group words according to the job they do in a sentence. Understanding word classes helps readers analyse *how* a writer constructs meaning, shapes tone and guides the reader's response. Writers choose specific nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and other classes deliberately to create a particular effect. Writers use these classes to build imagery, create rhythm, shape viewpoint and influence how the reader interprets a scene.

EXERCISE 1

Match each **word class** to the correct **description** and **example**.

Word class	Description	Example
1 Nouns	A Describe nouns	i under, beside, during
2 Verbs	B Replace nouns	ii quickly, very, silently
3 Adjectives	C Join ideas	iii she, they, it
4 Adverbs	D Introduce nouns	iv the, some, my
5 Pronouns	E Name things (people, places, ideas)	v and, because, although
6 Prepositions	F Show actions or states	vi bright, careful, enormous
7 Conjunctions	G Describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs	vii run, think, is
8 Determiners	H Show relationships (place, time, direction)	viii cat, freedom, New York

Read the short non-fiction passage below, then complete the tasks that follow.

Many communities are now organising repair cafés, where volunteers help people fix broken household items instead of throwing them away. These events not only reduce waste but also encourage neighbours to share skills and support one another.

EXERCISE 2

- Find **one** example of each word class from the passage and write them in a list.
- Choose **two** of the examples you identified and explain how the writer's choice of word class helps shape meaning.
Sentence starters:
 - 'The noun ___ helps the writer focus the reader on...'
 - 'The verb ___ emphasises the action of...'

KEY TERMS

Dynamic verbs

Describe actions that can be seen, measured or physically carried out. They create movement, energy and sensory impact. For example: crashed, drifted, surged.

Stative verbs Describe states, thoughts, feelings or perceptions rather than physical actions. For example: believed, appeared, felt.

Analysing dynamic and stative verbs

Dynamic and **stative verbs** are an essential part of effective writing because they shape how active, vivid, reflective or emotional a text feels. Writers choose between these types of verbs deliberately to influence pace, tone and atmosphere.

Read the example below to see how dynamic and stative verbs can be used in a sentence to achieve certain effects.

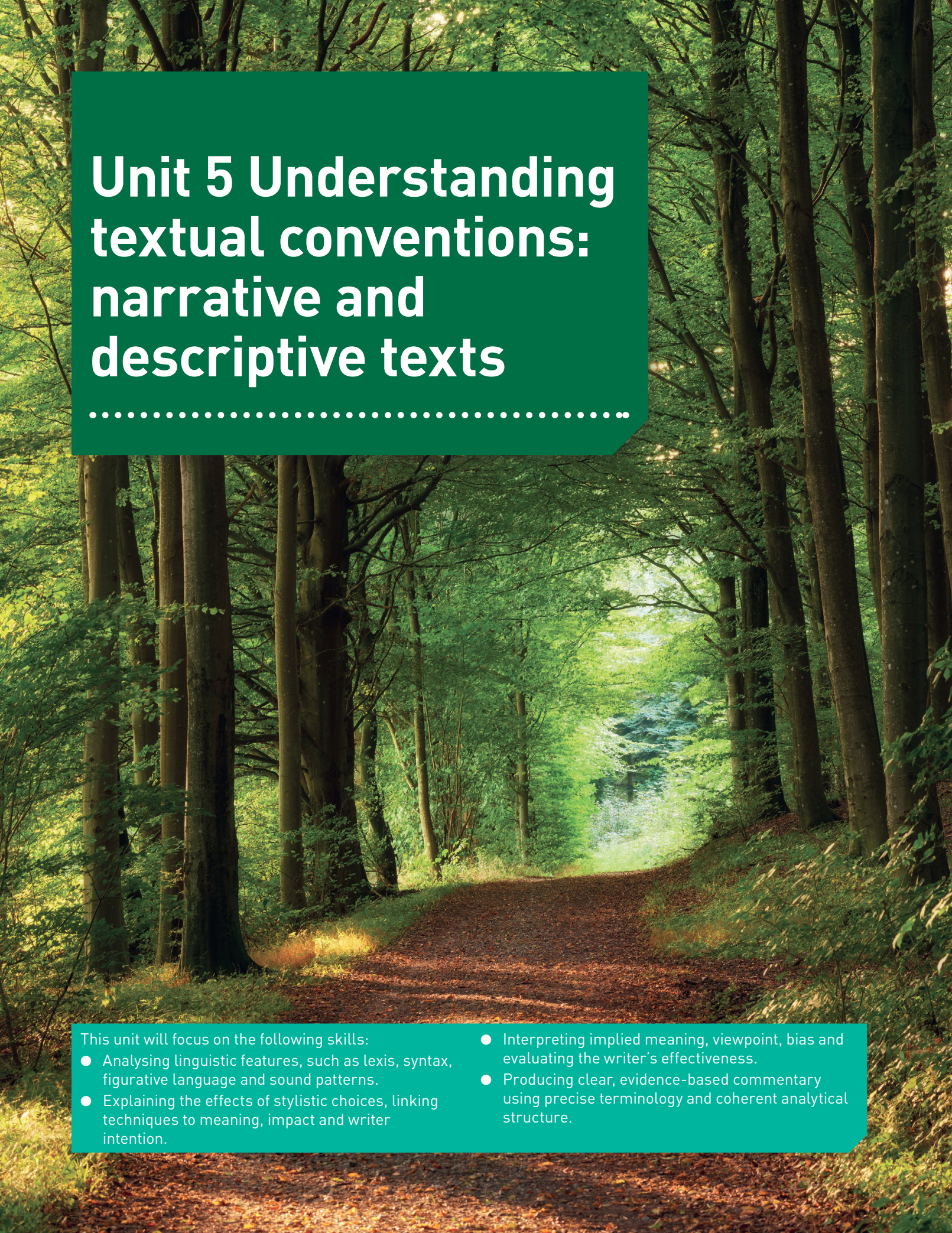
The morning rays spill over the rooftops, and the city seems to wake with me.

In this extract:

- 'Spill' is a dynamic verb, which creates movement and visual energy.
- 'Seems' is a stative verb showing perception and mood.
- Together, they create a gentle, waking atmosphere.

EXERCISE 3

- 1 Identify each verb as dynamic or stative.
 - a 'The waves pounded against the harbour wall.'
 - b 'The old pier seemed strangely deserted.'
 - c 'A cold wind whipped across the promenade.'
 - d 'She felt relieved to step inside the café.'
- 2 Choose **two** of the sentences above and explain how the verb type shapes tone or atmosphere.
Use the following sentence starters to help you answer:
 - 'The dynamic verb ___ creates a sense of...'
 - 'The stative verb ___ suggests...'

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in brown leaves and leads into a dense forest of tall, thin trees. Sunlight filters through the green leaves, creating a dappled light effect on the path and the surrounding foliage. The path curves slightly to the right in the distance.

Unit 5 Understanding textual conventions: narrative and descriptive texts

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This unit will focus on the following skills:

- Analysing linguistic features, such as lexis, syntax, figurative language and sound patterns.
- Explaining the effects of stylistic choices, linking techniques to meaning, impact and writer intention.
- Interpreting implied meaning, viewpoint, bias and evaluating the writer's effectiveness.
- Producing clear, evidence-based commentary using precise terminology and coherent analytical structure.

5.1 How the writer creates meaning: form, structure and linguistic features

Language is something we use every day (often without thinking about it) yet every text we encounter has been created through a series of deliberate choices by a writer. As you will have seen in the last unit, all texts, whether they are a speech, review, travel article or reflective blog, have conventions in the way they are written. Writers choose forms, organise ideas and craft sentences to influence how we think, feel and respond. Learning to notice and understand these choices is essential. Analysis is not just about hunting for techniques; it's about paying attention to how a text works and why it works that way.

This sub-unit gives you the tools to do that. You will explore how the form and genre of a text set up expectations for the reader, how the text's structure leads a reader through ideas, and how specific linguistic details (e.g. individual words, patterns of sound, tone and so on) create meaning and effect. These skills matter because they help you read with confidence and insight, uncovering layers that aren't immediately obvious. By the end of the chapter, you will have a clear, practical framework for analysing any text and writing commentary that is thoughtful, coherent and grounded in evidence.

Linguistic features

When analysing a text, there are a range of techniques that a reader needs to look at. It is important to use your skills of analysis in language to identify the **purpose** and **audience** for a text, the **genre** – and associated genre markers used – and the **form** and **context** of the text.

You will also develop skills in identifying and analysing structural elements in a text, and the writer's use of word choice, figurative language and imagery.

Writers, of course, use their skill to create an image or idea in the head of the reader. This could be a strong opinion they want to share, a vivid picture of a place or a sense of a mood they want to convey. In the following example, the writer is describing a trip to the city of Lisbon in Portugal that they found to be peaceful and inspiring. The annotations show how language has been used to create the style the writer intended to use and how they shaped their writing to fulfil their brief: to make the reader want to travel to Lisbon.

Remember!

Purpose What the text is trying to do: inform, describe, persuade, entertain, reflect or shape the reader's feelings or understanding in a particular way.

Audience Who the text is written for: the specific group the writer wants to reach, influence or connect with, which shapes tone, style and level of detail.

Genre The type of text it is (e.g. travel writing, review, speech), which carries conventions that shape structure, language choices and reader expectations.

Form The format or mode the text takes (e.g. article, blog post, diary entry, letter), which affects layout, voice and how ideas are organised.

Context The circumstances surrounding the text: when, where and why it was produced, and any cultural, social or situational factors that influence meaning.

EXEMPLIFICATION

Read the following annotated passage. In this, a writer is describing their personal experience of exploring Lisbon. As you read, think about how this piece of travel writing might differ from a professional, informative travel guide.

▼ A tram travelling on a Lisbon street



Visit Lisbon – a maze of steep, sun-washed lanes with a calm, lived-in rhythm.

Lisbon feels instantly welcoming. Sun-drenched, relaxed and full of character, it has a depth that invites slow exploration: it is a place where old Europe and the modern world rest side by side.

Lisbon has a gentle, unhurried rhythm. Even in the busier areas, the city retains a softness. Each district has its own personality: Alfama, with its narrow, winding lanes, laundry hanging from balconies and traditional Fado drifting from doorways, contrasts with Bairro Alto – lively, creative, full of bars, street art and nightlife. Belém features grand riverside monuments, museums and the famous Pastéis de Belém bakery. Chiado has a different pace again, with its elegant cafés, bookshops and a slightly Parisian feel.

The text is **structured chronologically** and mirrors the writer's experience of arriving in a new city. It moves from general overview to district contrasts to personal exploration to a specific moment to reflective conclusion, creating a well-organised narrative.

First-person narration is typical of this type of personal travel writing, showing idealised personal experience and sensory detail. Its purpose is to create a warm sense of place, emphasising the tranquil atmosphere and the writer's positive bias.

I take great delight in rambling through the maze of sunlit alleyways, which seem to breathe with a subtle rhythm. Lisbon is a city of textures and contrasts, from the mosaic pavements underfoot to the calming blue-and-white tiles on buildings, and the late-afternoon light glowing on the river. It's visually rich yet never overwhelming. Even in the busier areas, there's a softness to the city: the scent of warm custard tarts, still fresh from the oven; the rattling of trams; and viewpoints that burst out over the River Tagus.

Imagery, sensory detail, figurative language, positive word choice and dynamic verbs. Visual imagery creates a vivid sense of place. Auditory detail creates multi-sensory immersion.

Personification is used to animate Lisbon and create intimacy. Calm verbs and positive word choice give movement to the setting and reinforce the narrator's positive experience. Gentle tone, which is contemplative and appreciative, focuses on small details to create a slow-build effect.

GLOSSARY

Fado Portugal's most iconic traditional music genre, typically performed by a solo singer accompanied by the Portuguese *guitarra* (a 12-string guitar) and a classical guitar.

Lisbon The capital city of Portugal.

Meander To move slowly and indirectly, following a winding or wandering path rather than a straight or purposeful route.

Mosaic A decorative artwork or pattern made by arranging small pieces of coloured stone, tile, glass or ceramic.

Pastéis de Belém bakery A historic pastry shop in Lisbon, famous for producing custard tarts using a secret recipe created by monks in the nineteenth century. It is one of Lisbon's most iconic food destinations, attracting visitors from around the world.

On my first day, the morning rays spill over the rooftops, turning the city a soft, honey-coloured gold. I wander along the narrow lanes, the city waking with me: shutters creak open, a radio hums from an unseen window, and the scent of freshly baked bread drifts from a tiny bakery hidden between two ancient houses. The alleys snake and dip without warning, yet there is something pleasant in their unpredictability, as if the neighbourhood is my guide, leading me to its heart rather than leading me astray. I reach a small terrace overlooking the river: the Tagus glitters like a sheet of hammered silver, and, for a just moment, the whole city seems to stop, breathing in the beauty of the day before it fully begins.

People linger over their coffee; we meander through the markets and sit simply to watch the city breathe. It's a peaceful place where we can fill our days with museums and historic sites, or simply drift with the city's slow pace and still feel we've experienced something meaningful.

The use of **pronouns** such as 'we' towards the end brings the reader into the setting, creating intimacy. The writer's language suggests a harmonious relationship between the visitor and the city. The language connotes trust and comfort, countering stereotypes of maze-like old towns as confusing or overwhelming.

EXERCISE 1

Look back at what you learned in the last chapter. Copy this table, and answer the questions based on this passage.

Term	Question to answer	Your response
Purpose	What is the text trying to do? How do you know?	
Audience	Who is the text written for? How do you know?	
Genre	What type of text is it? How do you know?	
Form	What format or mode does the text take?	
Context	What are the circumstances surrounding the text?	

MEDIA INSPECTOR

Find a travel blog or social media travel post online. Read it carefully and then answer the following questions.

- 1 What image is being constructed?
- 2 How do captions, images or visuals influence the viewer's interpretation?
- 3 What is not shown or said? How do these things influence the purpose of the text?
- 4 How does this create an ideal view of the location?
- 5 How does it appeal to its audience?

KEY TERMS

Connotation The implied meaning of a word, not its literal meaning.

Figurative Words or expressions that go beyond their literal meaning to create imagery, comparisons or symbolic effects, such as metaphors, similes or personification.

Lexis The words a writer chooses and the vocabulary patterns they use to create meaning, tone and style.

Lexical cohesion When vocabulary choices, such as using repeated words, synonyms and related terms, are used to create a clear, connected meaning for the reader.

Patterns of meaning Repeated or connected ideas in a text shown through groups of related words, images or concepts.

Register The level of formality or informality in a text, shown through the writer's purpose, audience and context.

Semantic field A group of words that are linked by meaning because they all relate to the same topic, idea or area of experience. For example, storm, thunder, downpour and gale belong to the semantic field of weather.

Diction The level of formality, tone, register and style created by a writer's word choices.

Lexical choice The specific words a writer selects and the effects those individual words create.

Lexis, word choice and connotations

Lexis

When analysing a text, it is always important to study the **lexis** used by the writer, which means looking closely at how specific word choices contribute to the writer's purpose, influence the reader and construct a particular voice or viewpoint. This is more than just noticing 'interesting words'; it is helpful to be able to comment on how a writer uses:

- **connotation** and the emotional or cultural associations of words
- evaluative adjectives
- **figurative** lexis, such as metaphors and personification
- **lexical cohesion** (repetition, synonyms and related terms that bind a text together)
- **register**
- **semantic fields** and **patterns of meaning**
- word classes – the writer's choice of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and the impact these have
- word choice/lexical choice – how precision and nuance in vocabulary choices suggest an attitude or create a mood or value judgement.

During analysis, it's useful to be able to explain why the writer has chosen particular lexis and how it shapes the reader's understanding. For example, you should be able to comment on how evaluative adjectives could create bias, how dynamic verbs energise a description, or how technical lexis establishes authority.

Have a look at the following examples to see how lexis impacts meaning.

The reckless, irresponsible driver swerved across the road.

'Reckless' and 'irresponsible' are evaluative adjectives, expressing a judgement and creating bias. The writer isn't trying to be neutral here – the vocabulary they use establishes that they believe the driver was at fault. Their lexical choice pushes the reader towards feeling a negative way towards the driver and towards sharing the writer's critical opinion.

Waves crashed, surged and pounded against the rocks.

'Crashed', 'surged' and 'pounded' are dynamic verbs that add movement, force and intensity to the description, which therefore feels vivid and active rather than static. The dynamic verbs inject pace and energy, making the scene feel alive.

The coach explained how the players' aerobic capacity, reaction time and muscle recovery rate had improved during training.

Specialised terms like 'aerobic capacity', 'reaction time' and 'muscle recovery rate' signal expertise and sports science knowledge. By using technical lexis like this, the writer appears credible and authoritative about fitness. Therefore, the use of technical lexis positions the writer as knowledgeable and trustworthy in a specific field.

Lexical choice and diction

The **lexical choice** of the writer can provide a lot of information to the reader. Every word carries its own shade of meaning, its own tone, its own little clue to the reader. Some writers go for clear, simple vocabulary, but others choose words that feel more expressive. Those choices shape how the writing sounds, how it feels, and how we interpret what's being said. Understanding lexical choice and **diction** involves noticing those decisions and recognising the effects they create.

Diction is the general style of vocabulary (formal, informal, technical, poetic, blunt, emotive). It is the overall quality of a writer's vocabulary – the level of formality, tone, register and style created by their word choices.

Lexical choice is the specific words a writer selects and the effects those individual words create. It refers to the precise words chosen within that style – such as ‘youths’ compared to ‘teenagers’ or ‘kids’; ‘protesters’ compared to ‘activists’ or ‘rioters’. For example:

- ‘youths’ feels slightly negative or unruly
- ‘kids’ feels informal and innocent
- ‘teenagers’ feels neutral and factual.

In short, lexis and lexical choice are about how writers use vocabulary as a deliberate tool. The analysis readers make involves connecting specific word choices to their effects on meaning, tone and audience. Look at the example below and practise these skills.

Visit to Blueharbour Bay

I had imagined Blueharbour Bay as a quiet, rustic coastal town where I could switch off and relax for a weekend, but the reality felt far less inviting. The narrow, run-down streets were choked with traffic from early morning, and the constant rumble of delivery vans made it difficult to hear anything else. Even the sea, which I’d hoped would offer some calm, was dull and churned-up, its usual blue-grey replaced by a murky brown after days of rain.

Walking along the promenade didn’t help much. The paint on the railings had peeled away in long strips, and the unappealing smell of fried food from the row of takeaway huts clung to the air. A cold wind whipped in from the water, carrying scraps of litter that skittered across the pavement. I tried to explore the old pier, but half of it had been fenced off for repairs, leaving only a short stretch where a handful of bored-looking tourists stood staring out at the fog.

By late afternoon, the drizzle had settled into a steady, soaking rain. I ducked into a café for shelter, but even there the atmosphere felt flat. The lights flickered, the tables were sticky, and the staff looked as though they were counting the minutes until closing time. I finished my coffee quickly and headed back to the train station, feeling more relieved to leave than disappointed to go.

EXERCISE 2

Look at the passage above. It contains a range of lexical choices to create impact. Copy and complete the table below by identifying examples of lexical choices from the text. For each lexical choice, you should:

- give an example: what is the word or phrase?
- explain the effect: what effect does it create? How does it support the writer’s purpose?

Lexical choice	Example	Explain the effect
Evaluative adjectives		
Dynamic verbs		
Semantic field		
Connotations		
Figurative language		
Lexical cohesion		

KEY TERM

Denotation The literal meaning of a word.

Lexical choice and word connotations

Writers choose words to create a particular impression – they are chosen specifically to create the tone, idea or impact the writer is trying to convey. Word choice from a writer is rarely accidental!

The words a writer chooses have a **denotation** – a literal meaning – but they can also have a connotation, which means you can read something into that word. Consider the following words:

calm quiet silent

These words all relate to a low level of noise, but each carries a different connotation. The word 'quiet' is fairly neutral, simply describing a lack of sound. The word 'calm' has a more positive connotation, suggesting peacefulness or relaxation. In contrast, 'silent' can feel more intense or even unsettling, as it implies a complete absence of sound and can hint at tension or anticipation. The writer's lexical choice shapes how the reader interprets the atmosphere.

Look at the two examples below. These show how a writer's word choice changes the tone and feel of the writing.

Passage 1

The path wove through the silent trees as dusk fell over the hillside. An icy breeze drifted across the ground, carrying the faint smell of decay. In the distance, a single light flickered in the window of the old cottage.

Passage 2

The path wound through the peaceful trees as sunset settled over the hillside. A gentle breeze drifted across the ground, carrying the faint smell of pine. In the distance, a single light glowed in the window of the old cottage.

In the first version of the passage, the word 'silent' suggests an unnatural lack of sound and 'icy breeze' suggests the environment is uncomfortable. 'Decay' has connotations of death and the light that 'flickered' sounds more menacing than comforting.

However, when comparing this to the second version, the lexical choice of 'peaceful' and 'settled' creates a calm atmosphere, continued by the wind being described as being 'gentle'. The smell in this forest is of 'pine', with natural and clean connotations. 'Sunset' creates a sense of warmth and beauty, coupled with the light in the cottage that 'glowed', adding to this pleasant atmosphere.

EXERCISE 3

- 1 For each of the examples below, identify how lexical choice is used effectively by the author to create a tone, mood or atmosphere. You should aim to identify at least one example. One has been done for you.
 - a 'It's appalling that big business continues to devastate our environment, spewing filth into the rivers, the seas and the oceans.'

'Spewing' has connotations of large quantities of toxic or unhealthy liquid being forcefully released.

 - b 'The festival buzzed with activity; vibrant costumes glittered in the crowds; music boomed from speakers all around and the energy of youth was almost tangible.'
 - c 'The gentle wash of the waves soothed the soul; the warm sand supported my frame as I rested, listening to the gentle rustle of the tall grass on the dunes.'
- 2 Pick **one** of the examples above. Try to continue this using the style of the writer.

Read the passage below and complete the exercise that follows.

She walked through the streets, checking her map occasionally. Her final destination appeared ahead of her. She could hear her footsteps as she walked along the street, looking around her. The houses were old and traditional, with lace curtains and picket fences. Number 20 was now straight ahead, and, through the window, Helena could see figures moving. Her task lay ahead of her, and she knew it would be an important day.

EXERCISE 4

Using the paragraph above, change the lexical choice to change the tone to a style of your choice. For example, it could be cheerful, supernatural or tense.

Figurative language and imagery

KEY TERMS

Figurative language

When a writer uses words in a way that goes beyond their literal meaning to create a vivid picture, a strong feeling or a particular effect.

Metaphor A type of figurative language where a writer says that one thing is another, even though it isn't literally true, in order to create a strong image or idea.

Simile A type of figurative language that compares one thing to another using the words 'like' or 'as'.

Personification A type of figurative language where a writer gives human qualities to something that isn't human – an object, an idea or a natural force.

Figurative language is used to create strong sensory impressions in the reader. This is commonly seen through the use of **similes**, **metaphors** and **personification**. Writers use figurative language because it lets them say more than the literal meaning of the words on the page. Instead of simply describing something as it is, figurative language helps the reader feel it, picture it or understand it in a more memorable way. It gives their writing colour, texture and emotional depth.

A metaphor, simile or example of personification can do several things at once:

- Create a vivid image that sticks in the reader's mind.
- Suggest an emotion or atmosphere without spelling it out.
- Make an idea clearer by linking it to something familiar.
- Add personality to the writer's voice.
- Create a tone – such as dramatic, humorous, reflective or tense.

A well-chosen comparison can convey what would take several literal sentences to explain. It's a way of guiding the reader's imagination so they experience the moment, not just understand it.

Similes

When a writer uses a simile, they compare two things using the words 'like' or 'as'. The two things being compared will be very different, except for the thing the writer believes they have in common. For example:

The crowd wove through the city like an angry snake. As unstoppable as the tide, they surged towards the entrance.

The crowd is being compared to an angry snake. An angry snake would be dangerous and would weave when it moves; the simile suggests both the movement of the crowd through the city and the danger it could pose.

Metaphors

A metaphor differs from a simile because the writer doesn't compare two things – they directly say one thing is, does or has something it cannot literally be, do or have. For example:

The carnival was an excited heartbeat which flowed through the veins of the city.

'An excited heartbeat' suggests the crowd is full of energy and positivity. It also hints at something alive, powerful and invigorating.

'Flowed through the veins of the city' extends the metaphor by comparing the city to a body. The streets become veins, and the carnival becomes the blood flowing through them. It suggests movement, energy and a sense that the carnival is animating the city itself.

KEY TERM**Pathetic fallacy**

When the weather or the natural world is personified in order to reflect the emotions, mood or atmosphere of a scene or character.

Personification and pathetic fallacy

Personification is a type of metaphor that describes something that is not human as if it is human or behaves like a human. For example:

The city paused, holding its breath, waiting for whatever would break the tension.

'Paused' and 'holding its breath' make the city feel alive and aware, giving it human characteristics.

Pathetic fallacy is a type of personification and involves the personification of nature or the weather. For example:

The rain wept from the mournful sky.

Weeping and being mournful are both human actions and characteristics, and have been used to describe how the weather is reflecting the tone of the writing. They create a sad, oppressive mood.

EXERCISE 5

- 1 Look at the examples below. Identify the type of figurative language used in each.

Example	Simile	Metaphor	Personification
The warning spread through the office like a ripple across still water.			
Her confidence was a shield, deflecting every criticism thrown her way.			
The old building groaned as the storm pressed against its windows.			
He clung to the plan like a lifeline.			
The deadline was a shadow hanging over the entire team.			
The wind teased the edges of the banner, tugging it back and forth.			
The argument fizzled out like a match in the rain.			
Hope was a thin thread holding the community together.			
The city lights blinked awake as dusk settled over the streets.			
Her ideas darted through the meeting like sparks from a fire.			

- 2 Now look at the following examples. Identify:
- the type of figurative language
 - the literal item in the description and the figurative one.

Explain how the two are similar. An example has been done for you:

- a 'Her confidence was a shield, deflecting every criticism thrown her way.'
- The writer uses a metaphor.
 - Her confidence is compared to a shield.
 - A shield is a protection against harm, showing how her confidence is also a way to keep her safe from the criticisms made against her.
- b 'The rumour moved through the school like smoke slipping under a door.'
- c 'She stood at the podium like a runner waiting for the starting gun.'
- d 'The meeting was a battlefield, each comment another strike.'
- e 'His patience was a thin thread, ready to snap.'
- f 'The wind prowled around the building, searching for a way in.'
- g 'The streetlights blinked awake as evening settled over the town.'

Now read the following passage and complete the exercise that follows.

New Zealand

I have yet to hear of anyone who has visited New Zealand and been disappointed. This place just seems to get **rave** reviews: it's always up there in travellers' best destination polls and images of the landscapes never fail to look stunning.

I think it's something to do with the fact that, for Europeans at least, New Zealand feels very familiar, a strong echo of the home continent – but one that is better in so many ways: the landscape is grander, wilder, more beautiful in its variety and scale, and the population is sparse. From North Island orchards to South Island wheat fields, the farmed areas are wonderfully **bucolic**. Roadside shacks sell all kinds of produce and somehow it often feels like a 1950s **time warp**. In a good way.

The South Island scenery is a major draw – it's not hard to see why this place was chosen to represent Tolkien's Middle Earth in the filming of *The Lord of the Rings trilogy*. It is like a fantasy – the pointy snow-capped mountains, glittering lakes and **verdant** green valleys are straight out of a fairytale. The coast is no less magnificent, an endless procession of wild beaches and impossibly picturesque **vistas** across misted **fjords** and towering cliffs.

The other thing people love about New Zealand is the food and drink, which are up there with the best in the world. All that natural bounty does make a difference. Add a polished tourist infrastructure, no end of wild and wacky adventure sports, and a pleasantly laidback take on life – it's no wonder people love it so much.

(Source: Tom Le Bas, former travel editor and writer for National Geographic, Lonely Planet Traveller magazine, Insight Guides and others)

GLOSSARY

Rave To speak with great enthusiasm.

Bucolic Idyllic and charming countryside or rural areas.

Time warp A situation that feels detached from the present or current events.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy A famous series of books about fantastical lands and creatures, later turned into a movie trilogy.

Verdant An area with lush and green vegetation.

Vistas Expansive views of a landscape.

Fjord A narrow and deep inlet of the sea surrounded by steep cliffs.

EXERCISE 6

Identify **three** examples of figurative language and imagery used in this text and explain the impact they have on the reader.

KEY TERMS

Alliteration The repetition of the same initial consonant sound in two or more nearby words.

Assonance The repetition of the same vowel sound in nearby words.

Sibilance The repetition of soft 's', 'sh', or 'z' sounds in nearby words.

Rhythm The pattern of beats, stresses and pauses created by the arrangement of words and sentences in writing.

Onomatopoeia A technique where a word imitates the sound of what it describes.

Phonological devices Specific sounds within words that writers use to create rhythm or mood.

Phonological devices in writing

Writers use sound just as deliberately as they use imagery or vocabulary. The choice of certain patterns or repeated sounds helps create the atmosphere of a passage, highlights particular ideas and makes descriptions stronger in the reader's mind. These effects often work quietly in the background, adding rhythm and flow to the writing and are known as **phonological devices**.

Alliteration

Alliteration is when several nearby words begin with the same consonant sound. It can sharpen a phrase, give it more impact or create a sense of energy or urgency. Depending on the sound, it might feel harsh, lively or even playful. For example:

The cold, creeping current curled around her ankles.

The repeated 'c' sound gives the line a sinister, chilling feel. It creates the sensation of something slow and unsettling moving across the skin.

Bright banners billowed above the bustling crowd.

The repeated 'b' sound creates a lively, energetic rhythm that reflects the movement and excitement of the scene.

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. It is often used to soften the tone or create a gentle, flowing quality in writing. Sometimes it stretches out a moment, giving the line a more musical or reflective feel. For example:

The low moan of the road rose beneath the tyres.

The long 'o' sound stretches the line, creating a drawn-out, echoing quality that matches the steady hum of travel.

He waited in the fading daylight, patient and pale.

The repeated 'a' sound softens the tone and slows the pace, giving the moment a quiet, reflective mood.

Sibilance

Sibilance uses repeated 's' or 'sh' sounds. These can make a line feel hushed, tense or atmospheric. In some contexts it's soothing; in others it adds a faintly unsettling edge. It's a subtle but effective way of shaping mood. For example:

She slipped silently through the shadowed hallway.

The repeated 's' sound produces a hushed, secretive atmosphere, reinforcing the sense of stealth.

The sea sighed as the waves washed across the sand.

The soft sibilance creates a soothing, rhythmic sound that mirrors the gentle movement of the tide.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia uses words that echo real sounds, helping a description feel vivid and immediate. These sound-based words can make a scene more energetic, tense or immersive, depending on the noise being imitated. It's an effective way of pulling the reader directly into the moment. For example:

Branches snapped as the storm tore through the forest.

The word 'snapped' mimics the sharp, sudden sound of breaking wood, heightening the sense of danger and force.

The bacon sizzled softly in the pan.

‘Sizzled’ recreates the gentle frying sound, creating a warm, sensory image that appeals to the reader’s hearing.

Rhythm

Rhythm comes from the pattern created by sentence length, pauses and stresses. Short, abrupt sentences can tighten the pace and build pressure. Longer, more fluid lines slow things down and encourage reflection. Rhythm guides how the writing moves – and how the reader experiences that movement. For example:

He ran. He stumbled. He kept going.

Short, clipped sentences create a fast, breathless rhythm that mirrors the character’s urgency and physical effort.

The street stretched ahead of her, long and quiet, lined with shuttered shops and dim windows.

The longer, flowing structure slows the pace, encouraging the reader to take in the details and feel the stillness of the setting.

In essence, these sound patterns allow writers to influence the reader’s emotional response without spelling everything out. They give language a sense of life, colour and intention.

Read the passage below and complete the exercise that follows.

Journey to the Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

The sun slipped slowly over the horizon as our jeep rolled toward the Maasai Mara, its soft, sweeping grasslands stirring in the early breeze. I felt the steady **thrum** of the engine beneath my feet, a heartbeat guiding us deeper into a landscape shaped by survival, silence and space.

Ahead, acacia trees arched like watchful **sentinels**, their branches tracing wide, wavering patterns against the sky. Herds of zebra drifted across the plains in gentle, rhythmic lines, their hooves tapping a pattern that echoed through the open, **ochre** earth.

As we crossed a shallow stream, the water murmured in mellow tones, repeating its slow, lilting song around the stones. The air was warm, wide with wonder, and every sound – every shift of grass, every wingbeat – seemed to stitch itself into the slow, steady rhythm of the reserve.

This place was built to preserve what persists: the fragile balance between creature and climate, movement and memory. And as the morning brightened, I felt the land’s ancient pulse guiding us onward.

▼ Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya (also known as the Masai Mara)



GLOSSARY

Thrum A continuous, low, vibrating sound, like an engine, machinery, or something humming in the background.

Sentinels A sentry or guard, person or thing who watches over a place or protects it.

Ochre A natural red- or yellow-toned earth pigment.

EXERCISE 7

In this extract, the writer uses sound techniques to create a calm and positive mood. As you read through the examples below, try to identify which of the sound techniques has been used.

Quotation	Analysis	Technique
sun slipped slowly	Repetition of the 's' sound creates a gentle, unhurried opening that mirrors dawn.	
soft, sweeping grasslands	Reinforces the smooth, flowing movement of the landscape.	
thrum of the engine	Echoes the low, vibrating sound of the vehicle, helping the reader feel the steady movement of the journey.	
wide, wavering patterns	Highlights the shifting shapes of the acacia branches.	
survival, silence and space	The repeated 's' sound produces a hushed, atmospheric tone, evoking the vast quiet of the reserve.	
slow, steady rhythm	Soft sibilance mimics the calm, measured pace of the environment.	
murmured in mellow tones	Repetition of 'm' sounds creates a musical, soothing effect.	
	'Murmured' imitates a soft, gentle noise, giving the stream a calm, almost conversational presence.	
open, ochre earth	Long 'o' sounds stretch the phrase, mirroring the wide plains.	
Herds of zebra drifted across the plains in gentle, rhythmic lines, their hooves tapping a pattern...	The sentence uses a flowing, multi-clause structure with alternating stressed syllables to echo the movement of the herd.	
a heartbeat guiding us deeper into a landscape	The phrase uses a strong stress pattern to mimic the thrum of the engine and the pulse of the journey.	

Sustainability focus



Having read the article about the Maasai Mara National Reserve, do some research into ways that endangered animals are being preserved in another location. Produce a short text inspired by your research.

Create **one** of:

- a mini-article promoting a local nature reserve
- a social media post encouraging sustainable behaviour
- a poster highlighting threats to biodiversity
- a short persuasive paragraph on why nature reserves matter.

EXERCISE 8

- 1 Look at the examples below. For each one, identify the technique used and go on to explain what effect the writer is trying to convey.
 - a 'One breath in, two breaths out, the climb went on.'
 - b 'Wind worried the wild water at the ocean's edge.'
 - c 'Bright berries burst beneath my boots.'
 - d 'Step, drag, step – he made his way up the muddy track.'
 - e 'She shuffled across the stones, the soft scrape echoing.'
 - f 'A low, rolling moan drifted over the hollow.'
 - g 'Tiny twigs trembled when the truck trundled past.'
 - h 'He heard the distant cry rise high above the pines.'
 - i 'Sea mist hissed against the harbour wall.'
 - j 'The pale haze made the day feel strangely weightless.'
 - k 'The grass whispered its thin, secret song.'
 - l 'The gulls dipped, lifted, dipped again as the tide turned.'
- 2 Re-read the extract 'Journey to the Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya'. Write a further paragraph to add to this, using sound techniques to mirror the original writer's style.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Choose **one** of the tasks below and write about 700 words as a response.

- 1 Write a story that begins with the following sentence:
 'The sun slipped slowly over the horizon as the jeep rolled toward the reserve.'
 In your writing, create a vivid sense of place and build tension as the journey continues. [25]
- 2 Write a story that begins with the following sentence:
 'Lydia turned around the corner, freezing in surprise as her eyes fixed on the scene ahead.'
 In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. [25]

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