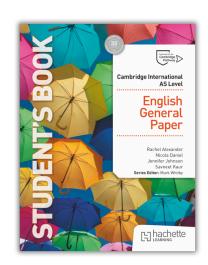


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6

# Context and meaning

# In this unit, you will:

- Demonstrate the ability to interpret meaning, language and information in context.
- Identify, select and use relevant information and examples for specific purposes.
- Apply information that exemplifies ideas and opinions.
- Demonstrate understanding of information (explicit and implicit) from a variety of material.

This unit will focus on the following skills:

 Understanding that there may be different points of view on a topic that might differ between groups of people in society, between traditional and

- contemporary perspectives, or between local, national and international contexts.
- Applying information to provide specific details that answer the question.
- Discussing different viewpoints and perspectives, such as different social or political groups or historical or ethical dimensions.
- Analysing the meaning of words and language features.
- Communicating information clearly and concisely.
- Identifying and understanding the key terms in the question and understanding the scope and any restrictions in the question.
- Selecting relevant information.

# Language focus

The following tasks introduce some of the main key terms you will meet in Unit 6. You can use a dictionary or the glossary at the end of this book to help you.

If English is not your first language, it can be useful to think about these in your first language to make sure you understand them and then translate into English.

A **verb** is a word in a sentence that indicates an action, a state of being or an occurrence. For example, *eat*, *love*, *happen*. In active sentences, the verb is 'done' by the subject of the sentence: *She* (subject) *runs* (verb) *daily*. In passive sentences, the verb is experienced by the subject: *The train is delayed* (verb) *by unexpected disruption on the track*.

A **noun** represents a specific person, object, thing or feeling in a sentence. In English, a noun can be singular (*one child*), plural (*two children*) or uncountable (*water*).

Which of the words in the key language box on this page are a noun and which are a verb? Can any be both?

# **KEY TERMS**

**Verb** A word used to describe an action.

**Noun** A word used to describe a thing.

# **KEY LANGUAGE**

- context
- perspective
- bias
- register
- tone
- close-read(deep-reading)
- deconstruct
- synonym
- antonym

# **EXERCISE 1**

Work with a partner. Look at the words in the key language box on the left. Discuss their meanings and then select the correct word to complete the definitions below.

- 1 When we examine a text in detail, we are \_\_\_\_\_\_ the text.
- We use a different \_\_\_\_\_ when we speak in different situations. For example, when we present at a conference we speak more formally than when we talk with friends at a party.
- When someone writes from only one point of view they demonstrate in their writing.

4	The circumstances and sit where the author was writ	tuation in which writing happens ting, is the	, such as when and
5	To really understand a que more understandable part	estion, you should ts.	it into smaller,
6	We describe the author's eauthor's of v	expression of attitude and emoti writing.	on in a text as the
7	The writer's	describes the position of the w	riter and this can

affect the way the reader experiences the text.

# **KEY TERMS**

**Synonym** A word with the same meaning as another.

**Antonym** A word with the opposite meaning to another.

# Synonyms and antonyms

**Synonyms** are words which have the same meaning as another word, while **antonyms** are words which have the opposite meaning. Knowing both synonyms and antonyms of a wide variety of words can help you to better understand passages and to write text yourself which conveys the desired meaning.

# **EXERCISE 2**

Look at the list of possible synonyms for each word that is shown below in **bold**. Underline the odd one out. Can you explain why the odd one out is not a synonym?

# **EXAMPLE**

From the **tone** of his letter, I could tell he had still not forgiven me.

mood colour feeling

Colour is the odd word out because it describes a shade (blue, red, etc.), whereas the mood and feeling mean emotion.

1 The government examined the new legislation in the context of recent changes in attitude to life expectancy.

book circumstances situation

2 His poetry provides us with an interesting **perspective** on the subject of ageing.

viewpoint angle

3 In an essay, it is important to be balanced and not display too much bias in favour of one position.

interest favouritism prejudice

4 It's best to adopt a formal **register** when writing an essay.

list tone style

**5** Let's **deconstruct** this question to really understand what we are being asked to do.

break down take apart destroy

Knowing how to express similar meanings in a variety of ways can increase your range of vocabulary and improve your writing skills.

# For example:

1	2	3	4	5
The author's	offers	a/an	interesting	perspective
analysis	provides		unique	on
	lends		novel	
			fresh	

### STUDY TIP

Try to get into the habit of making a note of synonyms and alternative phrasing you can use to help structure your sentences and improve your writing.

# **EXERCISE 3: EXPANDING VOCABULARY**

Look at the table 1 and 2 below. Refer back to Exercise 2 to help you add alternative synonyms to columns 2 and 3.

Can you think of any more alternative ways of phrasing the same sentences?

1	1	2	3	4	5
	If we	break down (a)	the legislation, it reveals clear	prejudice (b)	in favour of

2	1	2	3	4	5
	From the writer's formal	style (a) (b)	we can	conclude (c) (d)	she was writing for a professional audience.

# **6.1** How context determines meaning

# **KEY TERM**

Context The circumstances, background or setting in which something exists or occurs.

When reading a complex text, a reader must ask themselves what is being discussed around this word or phrase that could affect its meaning. To work out the meaning of a word, phrase or idea, you need to **contextualise** it. This means you need to recognise the environmental, cultural and circumstantial factors that influence its meaning.

Contextualising skills are important because nuances in language can lead to multiple different interpretations. Sometimes, the historical or cultural context in which a text was written brings deeper insight into the political, economic and cultural state of the world at the time the writing was penned. This often shapes the themes and messages of the work.

Ways to do this are shown in Table 6.1.

Туре	Method	Examples	Explanation
Considering the cultural author's background, historical influences or significant events such as	author's background, historical influences or significant events such as	Anne Frank's non-fiction writing	Frank's diary, <i>The Diary of a Young Girl</i> , gives a firsthand account of life during the Holocaust, deeply influenced by the historical context of the Second World War.
	wars and major societal changes.	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's non-fiction work	In her non-fiction work <i>We Should All Be Feminists</i> , Adichie uses the cultural context of her background growing up in Nigeria to highlight gender inequality.
		James Baldwin's essays	These essays explore the social context of race, identity and social justice in America, influenced by the civil rights movement.

Туре	Method	Examples	Explanation
Assessing the situation/	The situation in which a word is used – e.g.	'Let's table that discussion', said the finance officer.	This means to postpone the discussion.
location	informal, professional, humorous – can change its interpretation.	'Let's put the data into the table', said the maths teacher.	This means an arrangement of data in rows and columns. The different situations give the word 'table' a different meaning.
	Likewise, English in different parts of the world can have different	They agreed to table the agenda item until a later meeting.	This means to postpone, and it is common usage of the word 'table' in American English (USA).
	meanings, so meaning can be determined by where the author and audience are located.	The government tabled the motion for a vote.	This means to add a motion/discussion to an agenda and is most typically used in British English (UK). The different geographical locations and types of English change the meaning.
Considering Different audiences can the audience perceive words differently		'Break a leg', said one actor to the other.	This is a wish of good luck.
	based on their cultural or social backgrounds.	'I hope you break a leg', said the football player to his rival.	In this example, the footballer is aggressively hoping someone gets injured. The different audiences for those phrases have different intentions.
Considering the purpose	Analyse the sentences or paragraphs around the word to determine its contextual meaning. A word can have a different meaning in different contexts.	'She loves to run in the park every morning.'	Context clues like 'park' and 'morning' suggest physical exercise.
		'The computer program will run once you click "start".'	Clues like 'program' and click 'start' make it clear this refers to an operation or execution.  These two uses of the word 'run' have different purposes.

#### ▲ Table 6.1 Applying contextualising skills

# **KEY TERMS**

**Society** People who live together in a community, sharing common conventions, customs and standards.

Culture The shared beliefs, customs, values, behaviours and artefacts that characterise a group, community or society. It shapes how people think, interact and make sense of the world around them.

**Environment** The surroundings or conditions in which someone or something exists, interacts or functions.

# Social, historical and cultural context

**Social**, historical and **cultural** context are some of the most influential factors affecting writing and literature. An author's writing tends to reflect their own **environment** and a reader's interpretation will be heavily affected by their own culture and social position. This means that when you read a piece of writing, in order to understand the meaning and to limit the effect that your own cultural or social perspective might have on the text, you must consider the writing in the context in which it was written.

Below is an extract from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, originally published in 1843. It describes the protagonist of the story, Ebenezer Scrooge, who is a wealthy man, visiting a poor area of London. At the time of writing, living conditions for many in London were appalling and there was a large divide between those who were wealthy and those who were poor.



# **GLOSSARY**

**Slipshod** A lack of care or thought.

**Sepulchre** A small monument or room where a dead person is buried.

**Frousy** A description for someone with an unkempt or dirty appearance.

# Sustainability focus

In this extract, people are described as disposing of their waste directly onto the street. Waste disposal is still a significant issue today. Are you aware of the recycling and general waste facilities in your area? Do you think these facilities are sufficient and sustainable?

Read the extract and then answer the practice questions that follow.

# Extract from A Christmas Carol

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and **sepulchres** of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, was a greyhaired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a **frousy** curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

# **EXERCISE 4**

- 1 Highlight three quotations in the extract which describe living conditions in London.
- **2** What do you think Dickens's attitude towards the poor living conditions was? Justify your answer.
- 3 A Christmas Carol was written when the Industrial Revolution in Britain had resulted in poor living conditions for many people in London. How might this have affected how the audience at the time interpreted this passage? Write about 150 words.

# **PRACTICE QUESTION**

- 1 Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the following:
  - to be regarded in a particular way (1)
     Look at the paragraph which starts 'They left the busy scene', (paragraph 1) [1].
  - ii to closely examine or inspect (1)Look at the paragraph which starts 'Far in this den' (paragraph 2) [1].

# **KEY TERMS**

Homonym A word that has the same spelling or pronunciation as another word, but which has a different meaning. Homonyms can be further divided into two categories, homophones and homographs.

Homophone A word that has the same pronunciation as another word but a different meaning.

Homograph A word that is spelled the same as another word but has different meanings and sometimes different pronunciations.

# Situational context

Words and text can also have different meanings depending on the situation they are used in. The English language has a variety of features which means that different words might be confused for one another, such as the existence of **homonyms**, **homophones** and **homographs**. If you search the dictionary for words, you will often be presented with multiple different meanings for the same word.

This is where situational context is useful. By using clues in the surrounding text (such as the topic and tone), you can often decipher which meaning of the word is intended.

# **EXERCISE 5**

1 Look up some simple words. Suggestions you might consider are shown below, but you can pick any word from the dictionary you like.

Spring	Bank	Break	Key	Charge	Point
Play	Fair	Bat	Right	Set	Can
Book	Face	Arm	Bear	Cold	Strike

- 2 Find out how many different meanings your word has.
- **3** Write a sentence using each different meaning of the word.
- **4** Below are three sentences that use the word 'light'. Think about what 'light' means in each sentence and how the context helps you to figure it out.

Sentence	Explain the meaning of 'light' in this context	Identify the words which acted as clues to the meaning
His hair was a light, sandy brown.	Pale in colour	Hair, sandy
The room was filled with soft, warm light from the fireplace.		
She packed a light bag for her weekend trip to the countryside.		
The comedian's jokes added a light mood to the serious discussion.		

5 The phrases in the table below can have different meanings depending on the context. Explain what each meaning is. Identify the clues that helped you come to that understanding.

Context	Meaning of the word/ phrase	Clues
In a business meeting, the manager started with a funny story to <b>break</b> the ice.		
During a winter trip, we used a sharp tool to <b>break the ice</b> on the frozen lake.		
When a class is answering questions, the teacher tells a student who is getting the answers right, 'you have hit the nail on the head'.		
When a carpenter is training an apprentice in correctly using a hammer, and is giving praise, he says, 'you have hit the nail on the head'.		
During a ballroom dancing competition, a dancer is criticised for being clumsy and 'stepping on someone's toes'.		
When at work, an employee does a colleague's important task and is accused of 'stepping on someone's toes'.		

- i Think of a word or phrase that has multiple meanings depending on the context (e.g. 'run', 'head', 'wave').
- **ii** Write two sentences using the word or phrase in completely different ways.
- iii Swap sentences with a classmate and try to explain the meaning in each context.

# Considering the audience

Different audiences can perceive words differently based on their cultural or social backgrounds. This is often true when we have different homographs of words. Remember that these are words that are spelled the same but have different meanings, and sometimes different pronunciations. Audiences might interpret words differently because of different cultural backgrounds, occupations or interests or because of their own personal experiences.

# **Examples**

### Bass

Context 1: A musician seeing this word might interpret 'bass' as the low-frequency sounds in music or a type of guitar.

Context 2: A fisherman might see this word and think of 'bass' as a type of fish.

#### Lead

Context 1: A teacher might read 'lead' and think of it as a word describing the guiding of others.

Context 2: A scientist might see this word and interpret it as a heavy metal element.

#### Tear

Context 1: A child reading a sad story might interpret 'tear' as drops of liquid falling from the eyes.

Context 2: A tailor working with fabric might read the word 'tear' and think of ripping material.

# **EXERCISE 6**

- 1 Look at the sentences below. Explain how the different audiences identified might interpret these sentences:
  - i 'The pitch was perfect.'
    - A sports fan.
    - A musician.
  - ii 'The stream was beautiful today.'
    - A nature enthusiast.
    - A gamer.

# Read the following extract and answer the questions below.

The new feature launched on the app is lit! Everyone is talking about how it's changed the way we connect. It has a sleek design and intuitive interface, appealing to both tech-savvy teens and professionals.

# **EXERCISE 7**

- 1 How might a teenager interpret this text differently compared to a professional?
- 2 Identify one word or phrase in the text that might carry different connotations depending on the reader's familiarity with technology.

# Unfamiliar vocabulary

Being unfamiliar with the language can mean that you find it difficult to understand the text you are studying. This limits how you might relate to the text or analyse its meaning. When you are studying at home, you can use a dictionary to work out the meaning of a word. However, you will not always be able to do this. It is important, therefore, to develop skills that allow you to work out the meaning of an unknown word based on its context.

# Remember

Learning new vocabulary is also a great way to help you improve your writing. The more words you know, the better you will become at communicating in speech or writing.

Read the passage below and then complete the exercise that follows.

# Healthy eating

Eating healthily is an essential part of looking after yourself, and it has many incredible benefits. Choosing nutritious foods can **circumvent** many preventable health problems like heart disease, diabetes or obesity. A balanced diet contributes to your body's natural defence system – it supports your body staying strong and healthy. However, healthy eating isn't just about what you pile onto your plate – it's the **embodiment** of a way of living. It's when you focus on self-care and make choices that help you feel your best physically and mentally. It's about feeding your body and mind with the things that make you thrive.

It's not easy, though. Trying to keep eating healthily can feel **futile** when it comes to staying well in the long run. Unhealthy foods surround us at all times: in shops, in adverts, on TV, on buses, in sporting venues, online... You don't need to restrict all unhealthy foods. Indulging occasionally is part of enjoying life and cutting them out entirely will only make you want them more, but if processed or unhealthy foods make up most of what you eat, it will take a negative toll on your body. It's worth trying to build habits that let you enjoy food and still take care of yourself.

The benefits of eating healthily are **pervasive**. They touch every part of your life and are inescapable. You'll feel energetic, focused and better able to handle challenges. Also, when you take the time to enjoy good, wholesome food, it can inspire a genuine **reverence** for nature's goodness. Whether it's a fresh vegetable's snap or seasonal fruit's sweetness, nourishing food makes meals enjoyable. Eating well doesn't mean aiming for perfection. It's more about discovering an attitude to food that lays a foundation for a lasting sense of wellbeing.

# **EXERCISE 8**

1 Look at the following words from the extract. Look them up in a dictionary and write down their definition (even if you already know what they mean). Then, explain in your own words what they mean.

Word	Dictionary definition	Explain in your own words
avoid	keep away from or stop oneself from doing (something)	to stay away from or stop yourself from doing something
circumvent		
embodiment		
futile		
pervasive		
reverence		

Read the passage below and then complete the exercise that follows.

# Social media: hellscape or lifeline?

Social media has genuinely reshaped how we stay in touch and share our lives. At its best, it creates space for genuine connection, where people can be themselves and find others who see the world similarly. Instagram, Facebook, BlueSky and X have given people a platform to speak up, especially those whose voices might've been overlooked. They've helped build communities, spark conversations, and shine a light on a range of perspectives we might not have seen otherwise. They've also played a powerful role in raising awareness around social issues – movements like Black Lives Matter gained momentum because people came together online, showed their support and started a global movement. Social media has also **facilitated** social and political action by making it easier for people to organise fundraising efforts, petitions and protests, including uprisings for social change in Tunisia and Egypt.

Social media has become a lifeline for people who feel unheard or overlooked. It's given marginalised groups a place where they can find each other, share experiences, and build communities grounded in support and understanding. Social media platforms have provided a way to connect, exchange resources, and have created spaces where acceptance is not just an aspiration, it's real. Using social media with a compassionate mindset can drive important changes, support minorities and create unity. In these cases, the true power of social media shines through.

But it's not all positive. It's hard to see perfection in posts every day. Social media platforms can encourage people to make unrealistic comparisons to their own looks, lives and situations. Relying too heavily on likes and shares can also **diminish** a person's self-esteem, making them question their worth based on digital approval. Misinformation and online bullying also cause significant harm, and an online space can be difficult to escape – the hate follows you on every device connected to the internet. For this reason, it's **mandatory** for both users and apps to promote respectful interactions and for providers to put safeguards in place to protect user wellbeing.

Navigating social media's ups and downs requires good judgement and strength. A **resilient** attitude is the only way to face the challenges of an online world while still staying true to yourself. We can unlock its potential without falling into its pitfalls only by using social media with good intentions and balance, and by knowing when to close the app and engage with the face-to-face world. In the end, social media's impact depends on how we choose to engage with it. Thoughtful and positive participation can lead to a supportive and inspiring online community where everyone can thrive or to a toxic hellscape where trolls and bullies rule. It is what we make it.



# **PRACTICE QUESTION**

2 'Social media should be banned for all children under the age of 16.' To what extent do you agree with this opinion? (40 marks)

Write an essay of 600–700 words, using examples to support your arguments.

# **EXERCISE 9**

1 Look at the following words from the extract above. In pairs, come up with some synonyms and antonyms for each word. You may use a thesaurus to help.

Word	Synonym	Antonym
ascend	rise	descend
authentic		
compassionate		
diminish		
facilitate		
mandatory		
resilient		

# **6.2** Understanding questions

We have covered strategies for interpreting the meaning of words and phrases based on their context. We will now build on these skills, helping you to show understanding of a passage as a whole and to interpret and evaluate texts you are reading.

It is an important skill to be able to read and understand a wide range of texts and discuss your thoughts and opinions about them. During your life, you will encounter texts from print media, such as newspapers, magazines, books, journals or advertisements, and online sources, such as websites, online reports, reviews, essays, blogs, adverts, or reports of speeches. The texts you read may also have visuals for you to interpret, such as graphs, diagrams, tables, notes or other sources of data. Being able to explain what the information shows, analyse its meaning, and discuss these points are important skills.

# **STUDY TIP**

Creating a short plan before you begin writing your response can be helpful to remind yourself what you want to include.

# Tackling a passage

- **Step 1** Start the process by reading the passage carefully. This is vital for understanding the overall message, tone and structure.
- **Step 2** Read the questions and then highlight:
  - the command words
  - what the question is asking for.
- **Step 3** Scan the text and highlight the evidence that answers the question.
- **Step 4** Answer the question using your own words as far as possible. Not all of the information will be explicit. You will have to make some inferences or read between the lines.
- **Step 5** Re-read your answer when you have finished to ensure it answers the question and that it makes sense.

# **EXERCISE 10**

Read the passage below and then answer the questions that follow. Using these steps will help you formulate your response:

- Identify the command words in the questions and revise what they are asking you to do.
- Scan the text to identify where you are going to find the answers. If you are able, highlight the text or make notes.
- Go on to answer the questions and then re-read to check your responses.

# Sportswashing: the corruption of pure competition

Sport is supposed to celebrate talent, dedication and the excitement of fair competition, but that purity has been compromised lately. The growing trend of 'sportswashing' - where governments or big corporations use sport to polish their image - has turned beloved games into tools for political and financial gain and a PR spin for unsavoury groups of people. For me, sport should centre around the players, the fans, and the sheer love of the game, rather than being hijacked by regimes using it to cover up human rights abuses or brands trying to sanitise their reputations. The worrying truth is that we risk becoming part of the problem when we support these events. We become complicit. Every time we clap and cheer for these teams, we could be helping bad actors hide behind the scoreboard. Whether we realise it or not, when we inadvertently get involved in these propaganda machines, we share some of that responsibility.



# The hijacking of sport

At its heart, sportswashing is dishonest. It's rarely about growing sport or championing athletes – it's about managing public perceptions. Some governments spend eyewatering sums on World Cups, the Olympic Games and Formula 1 races, hoping the spectacle will distract us from what's happening behind closed doors: censorship, repression and corruption. There are defenders and critics of all of these events.

Most football fans around the world are aware that wealthy individuals and regimes can raise the stakes by buying football clubs, collecting the world's most famous players, hosting big-name sporting events, and reshaping global sport to reflect their desired image. Some fans see progress; others see a smokescreen hiding injustices. But hey – it makes great football, right?

# Are we complicit?

This is where it gets uncomfortable. As fans, we crave the joy of a last-minute winner or the rush of a packed stadium. Most of us don't want to mix our love of sport with political debate or to think about the harm that might be happening behind the glamour of the beautiful game, but when sports are used to cover human-rights abuses, our support

has consequences. Streaming the match, buying the kit, showing up at the stadium – these are all ways we can end up helping those trying to sweep deeper issues under the rug. Some argue that sport and politics should stay separate, but that's simply not good enough. History is full of moments where sport has been a powerful tool for social change, from Olympic protests to international boycotts. The problem with sportswashing is that it flips the script: instead of sport being a vehicle for challenging injustice, sportswashing hides such injustice behind goals and glory.

Even though sportswashing feels massive, fans aren't powerless. In recent years, supporters have started speaking out, saying they don't want their passion for sport to be twisted into propaganda. Football supporters have formed organisations against sportswashing and raised banners criticising some club owners. And an increasing number of athletes are refusing to stay silent, choosing to skip competitions or demand answers. These acts might seem small, but they matter. They show that sport doesn't have to be a tool for spin and that fans can hold the line. Asking questions – about who owns clubs, where tournaments take place, and who's funding what – is the first step in pushing for better.

# What is the responsibility of sporting bodies?

The organisations that run global sport should be more than just its lawmakers; they should also be its protectors. Far too often, though, sporting bodies have looked the other way when it comes to uncomfortable truths. FIFA, the IOC, Formula 1 - they've all come under fire for ignoring serious human rights concerns when the issue of money is involved. Formula 1 still races in authoritarian states, where human rights are under threat because - let's be honest the money is too attractive. Sportswashing is a lucrative business. And while some bodies now have 'human rights policies', breaches often lack meaningful consequences. It's not enough just to issue statements; decisive action is needed. These organisations need to stop putting profits first. That means refusing to host events where sport is used to distract, and demanding better from team owners. Athletes deserve to compete without being caught in ethical controversies.

# Final thoughts: the fight for pure sport

Sportswashing is undermining the very soul of sport. It's taking something pure, beautiful and empowering and turning it into a sordid, manipulated branding exercise. It forces us to weigh our morals against our love of the game. I still believe sport should be about the joy of play, the magic of competition, and the pride of cheering for something real. If we let sportswashing carry on unchecked, we risk losing all that. In its place, we'll be left with a glossy, heartless performance designed to serve the powerful. So here's the big question: are we willing to keep looking the other way, or are we ready to stand up for the sport we love?

# PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- **3** Look at paragraph 1. State the meaning of the following words as they are used:
  - sportswashing (1)
  - complicit (1)
- Use the text to identify **two** pieces of evidence that explain why sportswashing is an important social issue. (2)
- 5 Identify **two** ways individuals can push back on the issue of sportswashing. (2)

# **6.4** Evaluating the appropriacy of information (media literacy)

Sometimes, a piece of writing is not entirely what it seems. A writer might produce a text which is unreliable, biased or simply untrue. They can use their many skills to manipulate what a reader thinks, feels and believes. Understanding a writer's words and the information they present is not the only important part of reading comprehension. It is also vital that you understand when someone is trying to manipulate your thinking or is providing information which is untrue. It is important to develop your critical reading skills by evaluating the reliability of texts based on their purpose, tone, the evidence provided, and the bias of the author.

# Fact and opinion

Good writers, particularly journalists, are skilled at manipulating opinion. Be careful that you know the difference between fact and opinion – it isn't always that obvious. Many news agencies, for example, have a political bias, which may mean that some of their content will favour one political party or personality more than their opponent.

# Fact, or opinion in disquise?

Using a combination of both facts and opinions can be very persuasive.

Read this short extract and look out for factual content and opinion-based language.

Climate change is the biggest threat humanity has ever faced. Ice sheets are melting faster than ever before, and global temperatures have increased by over 1.1°C in the past

century. If governments don't act now, the consequences will be catastrophic.

# **EXERCISE 11**

- 1 Which parts are facts?
- 2 Which parts are opinions?
- 3 Why might the author include both?
- 4 Choose one of the following topics:
  - social media
  - school uniforms
  - eating meat or animal products.

Write one paragraph where you blend facts and opinions to persuade a particular viewpoint to the reader. Underline your opinions and highlight your facts.



**KEY TERM** 

Bias When a

person favours

often unfairly or

inaccurately.

one perspective or

viewpoint over another,

# **KEY TERMS**

**Subjective** A subjective opinion relies upon an individual's knowledge of a subject and what they believe to be right or wrong.

**Objective** An objective opinion looks at a subject from several different points of view, without bias.

# Subjective and objective opinions

There are two types of opinion. **Objective** opinions are undeniably true, such as proven facts or statistics. **Subjective** opinions are those based around personal experiences and beliefs and are not necessarily supported by testable evidence. You will come across both in a range of text types, and it's important to be able to distinguish the two.

# Read this short paragraph and then answer the questions that follow.

Tourism has ruined the charm of the small town. Once peaceful and quiet, it's now filled with noisy crowds and overpriced cafés. Residents complain about rising rent prices and the constant sound of suitcase wheels on cobblestones. Cheap rental accommodation is filling up the housing stock, meaning that young people from the town can no longer afford to buy a decent home. There has been a shocking 65% increase in home purchases made by short-term letting agents, meaning hard-working locals are being priced out of the market. It is time to put restrictions in place to stop these changes happening to our small towns and villages.

# **EXERCISE 12**

- 1 Which phrases express subjective opinions?
- 2 Identify any objective opinions, if present.
- 3 Why might the writer choose to use a subjective tone here?

A subjective opinion is not the best kind of evidence to use when you are trying to make a strong argument. It is best presented as an opinion and used to show an awareness of a different viewpoint. It is always important to look to see who is making the comment and think about where their loyalties might lie.

# Subjectivity in persuasion

Sometimes, though, a subjective tone can be used to be persuasive as it may gloss over inconvenient facts and instead use emotive language to create an emotional reaction in the reader, which manipulates them into believing what the author is trying to convey.

Read the extract below, from an advert for a holiday destination, and complete the exercise which follows.

Escape the chaos of modern life and breathe in the pure, untouched air of the Highlands. No traffic, no stress – just peace, beauty and bliss. With no people around for miles, your neighbours are the bold native sheep. With no sound but the wash of the ocean and the call of the golden eagle, you will experience calm like no other place. Safely nestled in your cottage, no WiFi signal will reach you, so leave those work emails behind and focus on being cosy in front of the log fire, enjoying a good book and a warm drink.

# **EXERCISE 13**

- 1 Identify and highlight three subjective phrases.
- 2 What persuasive effect does the subjectivity have on the reader?
- 3 Who might not be persuaded by this language, and why?

# **MEDIA INSPECTOR**

# Subjectivity in the spotlight

Subjective opinions are used in media texts to influence public perception and emotional response. Sometimes, they can even be presented as objective opinions.

Look at these two headlines:

'Government's budget cuts leave schools in crisis'.

'Education spending adjusted to reflect economic realities'.

- 1 Identify the subjective language in each.
- 2 What emotional response is each headline trying to provoke?
- 3 Which headline seems more persuasive and to whom?

# Media literacy: the trust test

We are surrounded by media. It fills our screens, appears in newspapers and magazines, and exists online in social media apps. These sources provide information from many different places, making it tough to tell what is real and what is not. **Fake news** has been a political tool since Ancient Roman times, used to discredit opponents and their ideas. Today, fake news spreads rapidly through social media algorithms and platforms. It's used to influence opinions, sell products and create distrust. This makes media literacy more important than ever.

When sourcing information, you should consider:

- 1 What is the source of the information?
  - >> Who wrote or published the text?
  - >> Is it from a reputable outlet (e.g. academic journal, government website)?
  - >> Can you verify the author's credentials or expertise?
- 2 What evidence and references does it provide?
  - >> Does the text provide facts, data or statistics?
  - » Are sources cited or linked?
  - >> Can you trace the information back to a trustworthy origin?
- 3 How does it use language and tone?
  - >> Is the tone objective and balanced or emotional and exaggerated?
  - >> Look for signs of bias, sensationalism, or persuasive language disguised as fact.
- 4 What is the intended purpose and who is the target audience
  - >> What is the author trying to achieve inform, persuade, entertain or sell?
  - >> Is the text opinion-heavy or presenting all sides of a topic?
- 5 What was the date of publication and is it still relevant?
  - >> When was it written or published?
  - >> Is the information still accurate and up to date?
- **6** Is it verifiable?
  - >> Can you find the same information in other trusted sources?
  - >> If it sounds extreme or surprising, double-check it elsewhere.

### **GLOSSARY**

Fake news False or misleading information, often presented as fact.

# Spotting unreliable sources

It is important to develop critical awareness of common indicators that a source may not be trustworthy.

# **EXERCISE 14**

1 Match each of the following descriptions to the correct red flag of unreliability.

Red flag	Description
Conspiracy language	Uses lots of emotional language to create fear or anger.
Emotional manipulation	Cites anonymous experts with no links or credentials.
Vague or unnamed sources	Shares only one side of the story, ignoring the counterargument.
Bias or lack of balance	Uses dramatic fonts, all caps, and clickbait headlines.
Sensationalism	Claims to reveal 'the truth they don't want you to know'.

### Read this short passage:

Doctors won't tell you this, but eating seven almonds a day cures anxiety better than any medicine. Big Pharma doesn't want you to know!

- 2 Think about:
  - What signs suggest this source might be unreliable?
  - Is there any verifiable evidence or source mentioned?
  - How might you fact-check this claim?
- **3** Below are two article headlines. Make an initial judgment on their reliability based on what you see.

'Scientists discover new coral species in the Pacific' – marinebiologynews.org

'The ocean is dying and no one cares – we're all doomed!' – truth-smasher.net

For each headline, answer:

- i What clues in the headline or source name suggest reliability or unreliability?
- ii Which one would you trust more, and why?

Read the two short extracts below. Then answer the questions that follow.

### Text A

Vaccines contain microchips used to track citizens, according to some reports circulating online. I have also seen evidence that Bill Gates believes that the Covid vaccine will use experimental technology and permanently alter your DNA. These chips will allow 5G networks to enter your system, and through this, the world elite will send various signals to the chips, thereby controlling all of humanity. We don't need them any more as people no longer die from things like smallpox or measles. Fresh air and healthy living are all we need.

The Unjabbed Truth blog

# Text B

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), vaccines have significantly reduced global disease rates, particularly in child deaths. The positive impact of vaccines on health is massive, only surpassed by access to clean water, according to the WHO. The UK NHS also states that vaccines not only prevent illness in a single person, but also contribute to 'herd immunity' or 'population protection' by ensuring that one infected person can't transmit to others. The US CDC also does extensive testing to ensure that a vaccine is safe before it is released and afterwards.

Immunity: The Science of Saving Lives, by Dr J. L. Smith

# **EXERCISE 15**

- 1 i What is the source or type of each opinion? (news article, social media post, scientific report, etc.)
  - ii What clues help you decide how trustworthy each text is?
  - iii Which one do you find more reliable, and why?
  - iv What questions would you ask to verify the information?
- 2 Invent a short, unreliable article headline and a text paragraph using at least two red flags. Then swap with a partner and try to deconstruct each other's fake news.

# **CHALLENGE**

Choose a topic, such as climate change, fast fashion or artificial intelligence. Find two articles that arque different viewpoints. Working in pairs or groups:

- Identify signs of bias in each article.
- Check for facts versus opinions.
- Decide which article is more reliable and justify your answer.

# **UNIT CHECKLIST**

In this unit, you have reviewed the following assessment objectives and skills:

- ✓ Demonstrate the ability to interpret meaning, language and information in their context.
- ✓ Identify, select and use relevant information and examples for specific purposes.
- ✔ Apply information that exemplifies ideas and opinions.
- ✓ Demonstrate understanding of information (explicit and implicit) from a variety of material.
- Understand that there may be different points of view on a topic that may differ between groups of people in society, between traditional and contemporary perspectives, or between local, national and international contexts.
- ✓ Apply information to provide specific details that answer the question.
- ✓ Discuss different viewpoints and perspectives, such as different social or political groups or historical or ethical dimensions.
- ✓ Analyse the meaning of words and language features used in their context.
- ✓ Communicate information clearly and concisely.
- ✓ Identify and understand the key terms in the question and understand the scope and any restrictions in the question.
- ✓ Select relevant information.

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