Higher ENGLISH for CfE

SQA Endorsed

Higher ENGLISH for CfE
READING FOR UNDERSTANDING, ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Ann Bridges and
Colin Eckford

SCOTTISH EXAMINATION MATERIALS

HODDER GIBSON

CONTENTS

SECTION 1 – IDENTIFICATION

Typical questions of this type start with an instruction to 'Identify the reasons/ideas/points the writer makes about …'

The purpose of these questions is usually to see that you have been able to isolate ideas and to understand them and their place within the passage. This helps to clarify your thoughts and allows you to see where a passage is going.

Quite often these questions are relatively straightforward. You are not expected to make long comments justifying your choice (unless you have specifically been asked to do so). Simple identification is what is required.

Sometimes you can be prompted to find points because there are helpful signposts in the passage: 'The first thing to notice is …', 'secondly', 'finally', and so on. If you have been asked to find three points, the chances are that you can find them in these little segments.

Sentence structure can also be helpful in separating one point from another. A sentence might begin with a statement about climate change, followed by evidence to back up the initial statement. The following is a simple example:

Climate change is fast approaching, faster than has been hitherto thought: the Antarctic glaciers are retreating at an accelerating pace; the warmer waters are undermining the coastal ice shelf, causing great icebergs to detach themselves more frequently; the consequent rise in sea levels (although at present very small) may reach one metre in this millennium.

Here the three points made – the three pieces of evidence – are quite obvious because the punctuation tells you where one point has ended and another has begun:

- Antarctic glaciers are diminishing fast.
- More icebergs are breaking off from the mainland than before.
- Water levels in the ocean are rising progressively.

One important aspect of this kind of task is that you are expected to recast the information in your own words – as has been done in the bullet points above.

You don't have to 'translate' every single word. You have to demonstrate that you have understood the point, but there is no sense in trying to translate 'Antarctic glaciers' into 'Southern Ocean ice rivers' – an Antarctic glacier is just an Antarctic glacier. You demonstrate your understanding by showing that you know what 'retreating at an accelerating pace' means.

If you had written the three points more briefly, as below, there would be something missing in your total understanding of the points:

- Antarctic glaciers are diminishing.
- Icebergs are breaking off from the mainland.
- Water levels in the ocean are rising.

There is no mention of the speed at which this is all happening, and its speed is one of the important points at the beginning of the sentence: 'Climate change is fast approaching, faster than has been hitherto thought'. This second set of bullet points is just too brief to demonstrate complete understanding.

The repetition of a key word in a paragraph can alert you to a second or third fact associated with the initial idea. Here is an example:

New technology has made it much easier for governments to oversee what people and institutions are up to. Government can now spy on us in all sorts of exciting new ways: read our emails, listen to our phone calls, track our text messages, access our bank accounts. But government being government, it often does this inefficiently and cackhandedly, which makes it even more frightening, given its potential for making wrongful accusations.

If you are asked to identify two aspects of what new technology has enabled governments to do, the repeated word 'government' will show you the beginnings of two statements:

- Governments can spy on their citizens using modern communications systems.
- Governments can get it wrong (because they are not very good at it).

There are two points to notice about these answers:

1. The different methods of communication are generalised under 'modern communications systems'. In this easy example you can see that it would not be sensible to quote this whole list and try to translate each one. The skill of generalisation is important, not only in this type of question, but in the whole business of summarising – going from the details to the main point.
2. The two points are recast 'in your own words'.

Further practice

Robot cars – made by Google

States can do plenty of things that business organisations can't. States fight wars; Google doesn't, and not just because the company motto is 'Don't be evil'. Google lacks the organisational capacity and the absolute authority for war. It couldn't fight one even if it wanted to. A state – the USA – put a man on the Moon, another massively costly enterprise that had all sorts of unexpected technological spin-offs. Google might like to do something as ambitious, but it wouldn't dare be so reckless with its cash. (The Apollo programme cost well over $100 billion in today's money; the space shuttle programme cost twice as much, or more than half the current net worth of Google.) States – thanks to their tax-raising powers – are able to pool resources to a degree that not even the biggest businesses can match.

But businesses can do plenty of things that states can't. Google has just come up with a self-driving car that actually works. It has married its mapping technology to its super-smart computers to produce a machine that performs a complex task far more safely than any human being could manage. Google's self-driving cars don't crash (so far). It is hard to imagine a government programme resulting in a self-driving car that didn't crash. Governments tend to screw up complex, open-ended tasks like that. (The mission to put a man on the Moon was complex, but it wasn't open-ended: it had a straightforward, hard-to-miss target in the Moon itself.) Governments don't build good cars. The hopelessly inefficient and unreliable bangers turned out by the communist states of Eastern Europe – their puttering Ladas, their tin-box Trabants – are witness to that.

Most resources work best when they aren't pooled. Competition encourages diversification as well as innovation. There are limits to what markets can do, however. Champions of the free market have an unjustified faith in their ability to solve any problem. Yes, private enterprise has given us the self-driving car, which may one day have the power to change the way we live. (Sit in the back, read a book, sleep, work out, make out, and suddenly your daily commute becomes the best part of your day.)

But that car still needs roads to drive on and rules to govern what happens there. What about the people who don't want a self-driving car, or can't afford one, or simply enjoy being behind the wheel? Who is going to manage the transition from a driven to a driverless world? Google won't do it. Government will have to.

If the self-driving car is going to become normal, it will take time and it will be messy. The transport network will have to adapt, the insurance industry will have to adapt and the legal system will have to adapt (not least to decide what to do with all those people who still insist on their right to have crashes). The market may be able to take care of some of these things over time, but it won't be able to take care of all of them, certainly not all at the same time. Change on that scale is too difficult: people have an inbuilt tendency to collide. Government needs Google to build a car that really works. Google needs government if its car is ever really going to work.

David Runciman in *The Guardian*

Questions

1. Identify two things which states can do that business organisations can't (lines 1–10).
2. Identify two ingredients Google has used to make a driverless car possible (lines 11–20).
3. Identify three problems arising from the invention of the driverless car that government will have to sort out (lines 21–30).
4. Identify three aspects of motoring that will require change (lines 31–38).

In these questions you have been given line references – each of which, in this case, covers a complete paragraph. The actual points required can be found anywhere within these lines, and not all the material in those lines will be needed. Make sure that you read to the end of the reference so that you don't miss anything important. Equally, if you spot the 'answer' at the end of the paragraph, just check that there isn't anything you have missed at the beginning.

As you will see when you look at the answers, some of these questions are really easy and some require a little more thought, but they are generally questions that you can answer quickly and without any further explanation or comment.

Answers

Answers can be found at the end of Part One, on page 47.

Conclusion

This is the kind of question that you should be able to complete fairly quickly and briefly.

Look for signposts, repetition of key terms and clues in sentence structure.

List of terms used

Sentence structure, signposts, generalisation, recasting (in your own words), summarising.

Supplementary passage

How Harry Potter saved one small Highland town's economy

Mallaig's days as a bustling herring port are long gone, but the town is still full of people today. Few would have guessed that its commercial salvation would be owed to a modern fairytale.

The railway reached Mallaig from Fort William and the south in 1901; it was among the last big lines to be built in Britain, late enough to have its viaducts built of concrete by the contractor Robert McAlpine ('Concrete Bob'). It traversed one of Europe's most spectacular and empty landscapes – lochs, mountains, sea inlets, moorland – with hardly anything large enough to be called a village along its 40-mile length. Its construction needed a large – and controversial – government subsidy, and its traffic never grew much beyond the two or three trains a day that carried fish boxes and a few dozen travellers to and from the Hebrides. It made little economic sense. Only 60 years after the line opened, it began to be threatened with closure. Few people would have guessed then that its commercial salvation would eventually be owed to a novel and a film, and first of all, to a hobby.

In 1899, the Railway Club, the world's first society for railway enthusiasts, was founded in London. It was from these elite beginnings that the twentieth century's great cult of trainspotting spread to even the roughest school playground, reinforcing a general fondness for steam locomotives that many people had without knowing quite why, so that a sense of loss ran through Britain (more so than any other country) when, in the 1960s, it became clear that their day was nearly done.

Hundreds of steam locomotives were saved from the scrapyard and restored to working order; dozens of branch lines were repaired and reopened so that in the holidays Britain could be charmed by how it once was. It's hard to think that anywhere in the world has seen a more popular or successful preservation movement, or at least not one run and funded largely by volunteers and not governments. Among the successes was the West Coast Railway Company, which hires out engines, coaches and crew for steam excursions, and which since 1995 has run the Jacobite Express, with its two return trains a day in the high season between Fort William and Mallaig.

A film producer looking to shoot a fantastical train in a dramatic location would naturally turn to such a company, and so in three Harry Potter films, beginning with the first, the train to Hogwarts is seen crossing Concrete Bob's most famous creation, Glenfinnan's curved viaduct. The implication that if Hogwarts ever existed it would exist in Mallaig is a small implausibility set inside a far grander one. Nonetheless, the Jacobite Express still fills with Potter fans from all parts of the globe and always stops for a photo opportunity at Glenfinnan, which is where the real Bonnie Prince Charlie really raised his standard at the beginning of the '45 and which is marked as such by a real 60ft-high memorial; all of which reality is cast into shadow by the film of a modern fairytale.

What economic plan for this part of Scotland could have conceived 50 years ago that a good part of its future prosperity would come from steam engines and film locations?

Ian Jack in *The Guardian*

Questions

1. Identify nine facts from the first paragraph (lines 1–11) about the railway to Mallaig.
2. Of these, choose the four or five most important.
3. Re-read paragraph 3 (lines 18–25). What two activities enabled organisations such as the West Coast Railway Company to come into being?
4. From paragraph 4 (lines 26–34), identify three facts that are ignored in the face of the fictional Harry Potter.

Answers

Answers can be found at the end of Part One, on page 48.

SECTION 2 – EXPLANATION

Typical questions of this type begin:

Explain how the writer … or Explain what the writer …

This type of question is a step up in difficulty from simple identification. It requires you to show your understanding of complex ideas, to follow the writer's line of thought, or to understand her point of view.

- Context will help you with complex ideas.
- 'Signposts' will help with the line of thought.
- There are also little intensifying or modifying words that can affect your understanding of the writer's point of view.
- Anecdotes and examples will help with your overall understanding of a paragraph or passage.

Context

In the following sentences from the article 'Beyond a joke', **context** is key to your understanding.

Trying to explain a joke has long been considered an example of pedantic futility. That hasn't stopped academics and teachers through the ages from erecting vast and subtle theories of comedy that are ultimately useless.

Steven Poole in *The Guardian*

Task

Explain what, in the writer's view, is the outcome of 'trying to explain a joke'.

Answer

In order to answer this question you have to understand what 'pedantic futility' means. The context – in this case the sentence that follows the phrase – allows you to make a good guess, even if you didn't know the meaning of 'pedantic' or 'futility'.

Understanding 'futility' is easier, because you probably have some idea of what it means, and you can get the words 'ultimately useless' from the next sentence. The meaning of 'pedantic' therefore must come from something earlier in that sentence, that is from 'academics and teachers' – people who make claims to know the answers ('vast and subtle theories'). So the result of trying to explain a joke is a useless academic exercise leading nowhere.

Signposts

Signposts – such as 'but', 'although', 'because of', 'however' – can be useful in showing cause and effect, contradiction or contrast, among other things.

Here is another little extract from 'Beyond a joke':

What the author of the book does not offer, though, is any kind of reason why an 'Aha!' response to a problem is different from a 'Haha!' response to a joke. He tries to convince us using technical terminology, but the same technical terminology can be used to explain problem solving. So the effect of jokes is really not explained. We are obviously no closer to understanding why is it satisfying to solve a puzzle, but amusing to get a joke.

Explain what criticisms the writer makes of the book.

Answer

The writer can't show any difference between the two responses to jokes and problems, so he has not helped us to understand what makes a joke funny.

In this case, useful signposts are 'but', 'So', 'Why … but …' These words tend to show the movement through the writer's line of thought.

Modifying or intensifying

There are also little words that have a **modifying or intensifying** function, and that can change a statement subtly to show what the writer is thinking. Words such as 'just', 'even' and 'clearly' are examples of these.

- 'He was **just** trying to be helpful' suggests that he was not, in fact, being much use.
- '**Even** the policeman believed his story' is stronger than 'The policeman believed his story'.

In the example above from 'Beyond a joke', 'though' and 'obviously' are clues to the writer's bias. Later on in the article there are other examples of words that signal his bias. These include:

1. 'We are invited to agree that …'
2. 'Another aspect of humour supposedly revealed by science …'
3. '[The scientist] claims that humour tends to target …'
4. 'Such moral questions about comedy are, of course, simply not answerable by neuroscientific explanations …'

Explain how, in each of the four examples above, the writer shows his scepticism about a scientific explanation of humour.

Answers

1. 'We are invited to agree' suggests that the writer feels he is being lured (unjustifiably) into going along with what the scientist says.
2. 'supposedly' suggests that this aspect is not actually revealed – it is in the mind of only the scientist.
3. 'claims' suggests that the scientist is making a statement that he can't prove.
4. 'of course' shows the writer's view that only a fool would think that scientific explanations are true.

Examples and anecdotes

Examples and anecdotes don't usually form part of an explanation but they do reinforce your understanding of the points the writer is making. They illustrate the writer's argument in the same way that context can help you understand the meaning of individual words and phrases.

Further practice

The following exercise will illustrate several of the ideas above.

Sometimes it is right to wipe out a species

The World Health Organization's annual assembly, in the face of contrary advice from independent experts, decided recently not to set a date to destroy the last two remaining samples of smallpox virus kept in secure laboratories in Atlanta and Novosibirsk. Smallpox, being a virus, does not really count as a living species. But the prospect of the deliberate extinction of some harmful species is getting closer. Be in no doubt – it would be an unambiguously good thing.

Unfortunately, the imminent eradication of the guinea worm in Africa has suffered a setback this year. Last month there were just three new cases, down from 25 last year and 80 the year before that, but one of them was in Chad in an area previously thought to be free of the problem. Despite this, the parasite seems to be on the way to eradication.

Is such deliberate extinction of creatures that cause suffering a good idea? As long as the effect on the ecosystems is small, then the answer is clearly yes. Take mosquitoes, for example. There are 2500 species of mosquito in the world and only one of them – *Aedes aegyti* – is responsible for carrying dengue fever, a disease that currently afflicts nearly 400 million people, a figure that is rising. If you were to wave a magic wand and get rid of *A aegyti*, then there would be plenty of other mosquitoes to take its place in ponds and puddles.

And waving such a magic wand is no longer completely implausible. Last month the Brazilian Government gave an Oxford-based company a licence to release into the wild genetically engineered male *A aegyti* mosquitoes. They carry two extra genes that render their offspring incapable of breeding. Release enough of these mosquitoes into an area and the species all but dies out locally. The beauty of this scheme is that the rarer the species gets, the better are the chances that the genetically engineered males you release will mate with any available females, so the technique becomes more effective, not less, as local extinction approaches.

Global eradication of even this one species of mosquito is likely to remain practically impossible, but local extinction might well be feasible. And although it's not the insect's fault that it carries the dengue virus, this is good riddance. The ecological impact of reducing the diversity of the mosquito by just one species will be undetectable.

As the prospect of eradicating species we dislike gets closer, so the prospect of resurrecting extinct species we do like gets closer, too. Exactly a century ago this September the last living specimen of the passenger pigeon, a female called Martha, died in a Cincinnati zoo. The DNA sequence of the passenger pigeon has now been read, and there is a plan to edit the chromosomes of a closely related species, the ban-tailed pigeon, until they match the passenger pigeon's. After that, a cell could be turned into an embryo and grown into an egg.

Some nattering nabobs of negativism are worried that this is a bad idea. It might risk upsetting today's ecology or make us complacent about extinction. Worse, argues one critic, it is 'a refusal to accept our moral and technological limits in nature.' Yup. That refusal is something I am eternally grateful for as a person who was vaccinated against smallpox.

Imagine, 50 years from now, that we have resurrected five species – the passenger pigeon, mammoth, dodo, thylacine and great auk – but eradicated five others: the guinea worm, dengue mosquito, leprosy bacillus, malaria parasite and river-blindness worm. Would that be a better world? Yes.

Matt Ridley in *The Times*

Questions

1. Explain how the writer views 'deliberate extinction of harmful species' (lines 1–6).
2. Explain how the writer's use of mosquitoes as an example backs his idea that deliberate extinction is allowable (lines 11–17).
3. Explain how such an extinction is becoming possible (lines 18–25).
4. Explain why the critics of resurrecting extinct species think it is a bad idea (lines 37–41).

Answers

Answers can be found at the end of Part One, on page 49.

Conclusion

Your understanding of the complex ideas of a passage can be deepened by looking at the context of unfamiliar words and phrases, by following the line of thought using signposts, repetition and climax, and by detecting bias on the part of the writer.

List of terms used

Context, signposts, modifiers or intensifiers, bias, point of view.

Hint

Some pointers to the bias of the writer can be found in his use of phrases such as 'Be in no doubt' (line 5), 'clearly' (line 12), 'even this one species' (line 26), and his repetition of 'yes' and 'yup' throughout – ending on a 'Yes'.

Supplementary passage

Heard the one about women on TV?

Not getting on the box means female comics don't earn the money to tour and hone their skills.

Women are under-represented in TV comedy for a variety of reasons, the hackneyed 'fear that women aren't funny' being one of them. Therefore, the fees available for being funny on television do not, broadly, go to women. So, aspirant female stand-ups do not have the money to support the tours they should do to sharpen their material and become better known.

It's hard enough to pay travel expenses for low-paid live club gigs, never mind touring a solo show or going to the Edinburgh Fringe, which is the very best place to hone, to practise and to garner attention. Edinburgh is the breeding ground for most of the celebrated comedians we know today.

Anyone who is currently packing for this year's Fringe will know the huge costs attached: flat rental for the month; venue hire (which falls to the performers, who often discover they have made a loss even after a series of sell-out shows); advertising space in the programme; poster and flyer printing …

If women aren't getting TV fees, they either can't afford to tour or they must subsidise themselves with other jobs, which can prevent them from travelling

anyway. Nor will they get a live audience easily if they haven't been on TV. It is, in a stroke of good news for fans of cliché, both a Catch-22 and a vicious circle. If they can't afford to practise their material and find a fan base beyond their home town, they won't get on to TV, so they won't be able to … well, you get the idea.

You might say that the problem of not getting TV fees to support a new career would apply to any aspiring comedian, but producers and bookers are much quicker to offer space to unknown men than to women. They do want to 'break new talent', and if an obscure male comic has a bad show then they will assume the problem either lies with him or an off night, not with his gender. A woman who gets no laughs, however, will appear to confirm a broader sweep of secret fears – 'that women can't be funny'.

I'm not unsympathetic; a television series is not a charity enterprise, and of course producers' first priority must be to make it funny. But how do they test what's funny? Gauging audience laughter is not reliable because audiences react best to what they know. It's not just producers who are sexist; crowds are too. With the best will in the world, they can feel nervous for female performers – and, with less goodwill, irritated when they see women appearing to boss men around.

This is a problem that will disappear as soon as female comics are a more common sight, but I'm afraid that the new policy of insisting on 'at least one per show' might not help. Too often, producers translate 'at least one per show' into 'one per show'. I'm not a comedian but I have been told straight by TV bookers, when giving my availability to appear on something: 'We already have a woman for the 19th … Could you do the 26th?' All it would take is for one generation of broadcasters to take the plunge and aim for a 50/50 mix, using the dozens of female performers who are out there waiting for a break.

Does it matter? Should they bother? It's only comedy, after all, not the House of Commons or the Supreme Committee for Educational Policy in Saudi Arabia. And yet I do think it has importance.

Television is where our national conversation is held. It's where opinions are aired and formed, jokes made and voices heard. Whether comedy, news debate, drama or documentary, if any gender, race, class or age group dominates out of all proportion to our true national mix, that conversation is weakened and our opinions misshapen as a result. It is worth trying harder.

Victoria Coren Mitchell in *The Observer*

Questions

1. Explain why female comedians are disadvantaged by today's TV set-up (lines 1–4).
2. Explain the 'Catch-22' and/or the 'vicious circle' referred to in lines 13–18.
3. Re-read lines 19–30. Explain how, even if a woman does get a chance, she still has to overcome problems that a male comic does not face.
4. Explain the disadvantage of the 'new policy' mentioned in line 32.
5. Explain why the writer thinks that, even though 'It's only comedy, after all' (line 38), it is very important for our society as a whole.

Answers

Answers can be found at the end of Part One, on pages 49–50.

SECTION 3 – ANALYSIS

This type of question usually asks for an analysis of some aspect of language. Typical questions begin:

Analyse how …

Four of the most important aspects of analysis are dealt with in this chapter:

- Word choice
- Imagery
- Sentence structure
- Tone

There are, of course, lots of other devices writers use to enliven their writing, and make it effective: typography, anecdote, rhyme, cadence, quotation, and so on.

All of the aspects above come under the heading of 'the writer's use of language' – any of which you might be asked to analyse.

Word choice

What is special about word choice in the way that it is identified for questioning in Higher English passages? It is surely obvious that all professional writers choose their words with care, so all words can be described as 'chosen'. By focusing on the use of particular words in particular contexts, however, you can see how you are being manipulated or entertained, or attracted or emotionally affected, by the writer's choice.

In **descriptive** passages, word choice might be a main method whereby the mood or atmosphere of a particular scene is conveyed. In **persuasive** passages, word choice might be one of the methods used to influence your ideas or predispose you to look favourably on the argument. In a piece of **comic writing**, the word choice will alert you to the tone and set up expectations for entertainment.

Given the nature of the kind of passages normally examined in Higher English papers, it is more than likely that the main focus will be on words that attempt to influence you by conveying ideas from the writer's point of view. There will also be occasions where a descriptive passage or a humorous tone is marked by interesting and emotive word choice.

Denotation and connotation

The effect of words on you, their ability to move you or persuade you, depends on their connotations. All words have a **denotation** – a direct definition or basic 'meaning':

- An infant, for example, is 'the young of the human species'.
- A baby is also 'the young of the human species'.
- So is a 'neonate' – except that this is a medical term.

Questions

Passage 1 Questions

1. Re-read lines 1–14.
   a) Identify in your own words the key criticisms the writer makes of the way we live today. 4
   b) Analyse how the writer's word choice in lines 1–3 emphasises his low opinion of 'consumer society'. 2
   c) Analyse how the writer creates a critical tone in lines 9–14 about those who say they are 'above fashion'. 2
2. Re-read lines 15–20.
   a) According to the writer, what **two** key aspects of our lives do we attempt to satisfy by 'running on the consumer treadmill'? 2
   b) Analyse how the writer's sentence structure in these lines emphasises the points he is making. 4
3. Analyse how the writer's imagery in lines 21–25 conveys his view of how 'The whole show' is organised. 4
4. According to the writer in lines 37–41, what are the problems with our dependence on 'retail therapy' and what solutions does he suggest? 4
5. By referring to lines 42–52, identify in your own words the **three** measures the writer suggests the Government should take to 'help us rebalance our lives'. 3

Passage 2 Question

6. Both writers express their views about consumerism. Identify key areas on which they agree **and** on which they disagree. In your answer, you should refer in detail to both passages.

   You may answer this question in continuous prose or in a series of developed bullet points. 5