

MODERN LANGUAGES STUDY GUIDES

LITERATURE STUDY GUIDE FOR AS/A-LEVEL FRENCH

L'étranger

Albert Camus

- ▼ Build accurate and detailed knowledge of the work
- ▼ Master specialist vocabulary
- ▼ Develop your analytical response and critical skills

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Getting the most from this guide

This guide is designed to help you to develop your understanding and critical appreciation of the concepts and issues raised in *L'étranger* as well as your language skills, fully preparing you for your Paper 2 exam. It will help you when you are studying the novel for the first time and also during your revision.

A mix of French and English is used throughout the guide to ensure you learn key vocabulary and structures you'll need for your essay, while also allowing you to develop a deep understanding of the work.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help build your language skills and focus your understanding of the film:

Activity

A mix of activities are found throughout the book to test your knowledge of the work and develop your vocabulary and grammar. Longer writing tasks will help prepare you for your exam.

Build critical skills

These boxes offer an opportunity to consider some more challenging questions. They are designed to encourage deeper thinking and analysis to take you beyond what happens in the novel to explore why the author has used particular techniques, and the effects they have on you. These analytical and critical skills are essential for success in AO4 in the exam.

Answers

Answers to every activity, task, and critical skills question can be found online at www.hoddereducation.co.uk/mfl-study-guide-answers

Key vocabulary

For every paragraph in French, key vocabulary is highlighted and translated. Make sure you know these words so you can write an essay with accurate language and a wide range of vocabulary, which is essential to receive the top mark for AO3.

TASK

Short tasks are included throughout the book to test your knowledge of the novel. These require short written answers.

GRADE BOOSTER

These top tips will advise you on what to do, as well as what not to do, to maximise your chances of success in the examination.

Key quotation

Key quotations are highlighted as they may be useful supporting evidence in your essay.

Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas.

(Meursault)



5 Characters

Le personnage principal : Meursault

C'est un personnage bien mystérieux et pas du tout conventionnel que celui de Meursault. Tout d'abord, on apprend son **nom de famille** par le fait qu'il est le fils de Madame Meursault, puis d'autres personnages s'adressent à lui en disant « M. Meursault ». Mais on n'apprend jamais son **prénom**. Ceci permettant d'un côté de raconter une histoire avec un point de vue spécifique et dépeindre un caractère particulier, et d'un autre côté de **mettre l'accent sur** la signification du seul nom utilisé. Ce nom de famille, Meursault, est chargé de signification symbolique, d'autant plus qu'il est utilisé seul : la mer, la mort et le soleil sont réunies en lui. Au-delà du nom, le peu d'information que l'on apprend sur Meursault **se résume à** ceci : il n'a plus de famille, puisque sa mère vient de mourir, et personne d'autre n'est mentionné ; il vivait avec sa mère jusqu'à ce qu'il la mette dans un asile parce qu'il n'avait pas les moyens de payer une **garde** pour elle ; il travaille pour une entreprise en rapport avec les transports par bateau ; il a interrompu ses études ; physiquement parlant, il est jeune, il a le corps brun (et il n'aime pas les gens à la peau blanche). C'est donc peu d'information que nous avons sur le personnage principal, ce qui limite les points avec lesquels le lecteur peut s'identifier, et l'oblige à se concentrer sur ce qu'il a à dire plutôt que ce qu'il est.

Les principaux traits de caractère de Meursault, que nous allons voir en détails, sont qu'il ne ressent que peu d'émotions, et il intériorise ses perceptions sans jamais les **mettre en question** ou émettre un jugement à leur sujet ; inconsciemment puis consciemment, il ne se conforme pas aux attentes que la société a de lui, il est révolté, et, plutôt que de mentir pour sauver sa tête, il préfère maintenir la vérité et mourir à cause d'elle ; il paraît étrange au lecteur et à certain de ses interlocuteurs dans le roman, et, si sa culpabilité d'un crime est déclarée par la justice, **elle ne va pas de soi** pour lui.

le nom de famille

family name

le prénom first name

mettre l'accent to emphasise

se résumer à to boil down to

le/la garde carer

mettre en question to call into question

aller de soi to go without saying

What's in a name?

Meursault. *Mort* — *Mer* — *Soleil*. *Meur* — pour mort et mer, *sault* — pour sol, le soleil. Meursault carries in his name all the elements that make and break him. We have seen in the chapter on 'Themes' that Meursault has a close bond with the sea, and even through his job he is linked with the sea (his job involves recording the loading and unloading of ships). Death is in him, as the only thing he can be sure of: sooner or later, he will die, and by a chance of fate, a death

Build critical skills

Des critiques récents de *L'étranger* ont lu dans le nom de Meursault « un saut vers la mort ». Êtes-vous d'accord avec cette interprétation ?

Key quotation

J'ai senti alors quelque chose qui soulevait toute la salle, et pour la première fois j'ai compris que j'étais coupable.

(Meursault, 2^e, Chapitre 3)

he caused will be the reason for his premature death, while his reaction to the death of his mother will contribute to it. And the sun, although it allows him to indulge his love for swimming in the sea, is the 'great brute' (which is what Camus called it once in his *Carnets*) that will lead to his demise.

Perception, consciousness, analysis

The first thing a reader is able to identify about Meursault is his rather curious perception of the world around him. However, on closer examination, we realise that his perception and sensations are perfectly normal — what is strange is that what we are reading on the page is only part of what his senses perceive, and also that there is no reaction to these sensations. Meursault 'writes' his account as a report of what his consciousness registers, rather than everything his senses perceive.

Second, that same consciousness does not allow itself any conjecture — guesswork — in the first part of the book. It is only in the second part, when Meursault has to occupy time and when his farcical trial is taking place around him, his mind allows itself to reflect, deduce and make conjectures. For example, he realises, on the first afternoon of his trial: 'j'ai senti combien j'étais détesté par tous ces gens-là'. He would not have realised this in the first part of the book, as exemplified by his lack of concern when he realises that Marie is slightly shocked to find out that his mother has just died. While it is difficult to identify with this particular kind of perception or consciousness of the world that surrounds Meursault, it enables the narrator to expose the absurd comedy that life is. Since the narrator seems to have a simple and straightforward perception and understanding of life, we are as unprepared as he is when we see his trial moving further and further away from the crime and focussing, on the contrary, on guessing and judging his character — what he is profoundly like. We know that he did not mean to be insensitive and appear callous in various situations and that it is therefore unfair to judge him based on a few instances of antisocial behaviour. Read about the story being told through Meursault's eyes and consciousness in the chapter on 'Writer's techniques' on pages 67–68.

Wisdom?

Meursault's lack of interpretation of his perceptions or sensations can also be seen as a form of wisdom: ultimately, he lives in the present moment. He does not try to link events to the past to draw conclusions, nor does he project himself into the future. This is why, for example, he is personally uninterested in the idea of marriage, and would agree to it only to please Marie. Marriage in essence involves the future, a concept Meursault is not in any way interested in and does not think about. The present keeps him too busy. In the same way, he is mildly surprised by Raymond's offer of friendship, but would not even think of refusing it, since he has no reason to. This wisdom can be linked to a high level of harmony between himself and the world around him and also to a kind of innocence. This wisdom does not need questioning, and much less

answers. In the first part of the book, nothing that Meursault hears, says or does seems to him incongruous, until the killing of the Arab man. We will see the consequences of this form of innocence on Meursault when he is faced with interrogation and judgement.

Innocence and the truth

Meursault's innocence in his relationship with the world, together with his determination not to lie about what he feels, turns him (in the context of his trial) into a veritable martyr for the truth.

First, faced with the possible consequences of being found guilty of a murder, most criminals would try to deny or diminish their responsibility in their action. Meursault does not do that, or even, it seems, *think* about doing that. When given the opportunity to defend himself in reaction to the witnesses' statements, instead of trying to justify or minimise some aspects which, even to him, must look bad for his case, he only confirms the strictest truth, without any other comment. He does this on many other occasions throughout the trial. All these examples point to the fact that, even though it will have terrible consequences for him, Meursault refuses to do what society expects him to. He lives by the truth and nothing else, and nobody will make him say anything other than the truth purely to behave in a way society approves. When asked whether he feels any regret for his act, he says that it would be more accurate to say that he feels *ennui*: mild annoyance, wishing it had not happened. Meursault does not realise that he should, at the very least, seem compliant and that he could, if he wanted to, try to get the lightest sentence possible by faking all sorts of things: his lack of responsibility in the murder, being coerced by Raymond, or even tricked by him, the fact that the heat and sun had seriously impaired his judgement.

TASK

Donnez cinq exemples pouvant démontrer la naïveté de Meursault.



▲ Meursault en prison (photogramme du film de 1967)

Key quotation

J'ai réfléchi et j'ai dit que, plutôt que du regret véritable, j'éprouvais un certain ennui.

(Meursault au juge d'instruction)

Moreover, it is obvious that Meursault will absolutely not say that his lack of sensitivity is due to grief suppressing any normal reaction in him. His mother's death and his behaviour at the funeral have, for him, nothing to do with the crime. So either Meursault does not even know that this game has to be played or he refuses to play it. Either way, he is going to die because he refuses to lie and pretend, which can be equated to dying as a martyr for the truth.

Note the difference between the first and the second parts of the book when considering Meursault's brutal honesty and strict adherence to the truth. When he says that he does not love Marie, the worst that happens is that she is taken aback, but she still wishes to marry him. In the second part, this honesty and insistence on telling the truth makes him a hardened, unfeeling, criminal.

Rebellion

The refusal to take part in the game of pretence imposed by society makes a definite rebel of Meursault, a person who will not conform to society's conventions. Apart from his crime (which is eventually almost wholly ignored to focus on his apparent lack of emotions, construed as monstrosity), this non-conformity, which Meursault pushes to its limits, has to be crushed, for fear it might catch on and bring the established order down. With this in mind, it is easier to understand the harshness of the sentence demanded by the prosecutor and dutifully delivered by the jury.

Both before and after the trial, religion is presented to Meursault as the source of relief he needs to alleviate the guilt of his mind, his thoughts, of his being. But both times, Meursault refuses the easy way out and stands firm in his non-belief in a God. For him there is an earthly way to find peace, even on the eve of death and, as time is pressing, he prefers to concentrate on finding this earthly peace than spending time discussing a religion. In addition, to accept finding comfort in the forgiveness of a God and in life after death is pointless to him, as this is all in a possible future. He, on the other hand, needs to make his peace with the world now. The last line of the book suggests that, as a rebel, Meursault has made his peace with the world: he is a rebel and he is completely at peace with that. This is why he calls the crowds to welcome him with shouts of hatred: he marks the irreconcilable difference between him and other people — the crowds

Key quotation

[...]il me restait à souhaiter qu'il y ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de mon exécution et qu'ils m'accueillent avec des cris de haine.

(Meursault)

Key quotation

En quelque sorte, on avait l'air de traiter cette affaire en dehors de moi.

Moi je crois que j'étais déjà très loin de cette salle d'audience.

(Meursault)

Strange, or a stranger?

All the above points, and many more besides, make Meursault appear as a *strange* person, to say the least. But it is this strangeness that makes him feel like a *stranger*, or an outsider, at his trial for murder. He has nothing in common with the society that would like him to lie to please them and would like to force him into some specific patterns of behaviour, whereas he senses that these kinds of behaviour are not genuine.

Les personnages secondaires

The unifying thread that links all the secondary characters of the novel is the fact that the reader gets to know them through only the eyes of the narrator Meursault, since the novel is written in the first person *je*. Therefore, this reduces, together with the brief and factual style, what we can learn and imagine about the characters.

Marie

Marie est une présence du passé qui **ressurgit** dans le présent de Meursault. Elle a travaillé autrefois pour le même employeur que Meursault, et il a le souvenir qu'ils avaient déjà été **attirés** l'un par l'autre, à l'époque. Mais son départ de l'entreprise l'avait emmenée loin des yeux de Meursault, et donc, ce n'est pas une surprise quand on connaît le caractère de celui-ci, loin de ses **pensées**. Quand elle réapparaît dans sa vie, ils commencent immédiatement une **liaison**, qui mène assez rapidement Marie à questionner Meursault sur l'amour qu'il a pour elle et à le demander en mariage. Mais lorsque l'équilibre de son monde est **rompu** par l'assassinat qu'il commet, Meursault est séparé à jamais de Marie, qui lui écrit et vient le voir une fois, puis disparaît presque entièrement de la vie et des pensées de Meursault, sans qu'on sache pourquoi.

ressurgir to reappear,
to re-emerge

attirer to attract

la pensée thought

la liaison affair

rompre to break

In Marie, Camus expresses his sensual attraction for the women of Algeria (not just Algerian women, but the women who live there). Whenever she appears in the novel, at least when Meursault is still a free man, they are involved in activities that have some degree of sensuality: their bodies are, as often as possible, close to one another. Whenever Meursault spends time with Marie, we hear him say: 'J'ai eu encore envie d'elle', or something similar, which shows his physical drive and, in a way, something much more certain than any kind of love he might feel for her:

J'ai répondu comme je l'avais déjà fait une fois que cela ne signifiait rien mais que sans doute je ne l'aimais pas.

It is Marie who thinks about love and marriage, and if she had not mentioned them, they would not even have occurred to Meursault, since love and marriage involve the future, whereas we have seen that Meursault lives solely in the present moment. Marie is slightly unnerved by his reply, and expresses this clearly:

[...]elle a murmuré que j'étais bizarre, qu'elle m'aimait sans doute à cause de cela mais que peut-être un jour je la dégoûterais pour les mêmes raisons.

She is also taken aback, on their first day together, when she realises that Meursault has just buried his mother: she clearly expects a different kind of behaviour. However, either she has the sense not to make it her problem or her attraction to him is stronger than her slight repulsion, and they go ahead with spending the evening and night together.

When Meursault finds himself in prison following the murder of the Arab man, Marie visits him once and writes to him once. We know why she cannot visit him more than once (she is not a family member), but we never find out why she stops writing, although Meursault does wonder, just in passing: is she with a new Meursault? Is she ill or dead? During her visit, she is artificially positive and Meursault sees that. Apart from the fact that he finds her beautiful, Meursault feels indisposed by the light and the high level of noise in the room, so the visit feels, if not downright unpleasant, at least fraught. During the trial, Marie is aware that she is having a negative effect on Meursault's case, so she tries to explain why her answers to the questions she is asked sound so bad, although she knows that Meursault is not a bad character. She is, however, not allowed to finish her explanation and is very upset, we presume, at the thought of having damaged his case. That is nearly the last time Marie appears in Meursault's consciousness, apart from a few times when he reflects on his life almost certainly coming to an end.

Raymond Sintès

voisin de palier
someone who lives on
the same floor (landing)

denué(e) devoid

exemplaire model,
perfect
bagarreur
(**bagarreuse**)
aggressive, ready for a
fight

Raymond, le **voisin de palier** devenu ami dans des circonstances légèrement douteuses mais en même temps touchantes, permet principalement d'accentuer la façon terre-à-terre et **dénuée** de questionnement dont Meursault accueille les informations qui lui arrivent. Sa relation avec Raymond tourne souvent autour du plaisir parfaitement innocent de la relation sociale, en particulier dans la première partie du livre où, par exemple, Meursault « [s'applique] à contenter Raymond parce qu'il n'avait pas de raison de ne pas le contenter », ou bien, après avoir passé un bon après-midi avec Raymond, il commente : « Je le trouvais très gentil avec moi et j'ai pensé que c'était un bon moment. » Raymond n'est pourtant pas un personnage **exemplaire** : il ne se cache pas (peut-être devant l'absence de condamnation de Meursault ?) d'être **bagarreur** et de battre une femme. Lors du procès, Raymond veut sincèrement que son témoignage aide Meursault, qui est son ami, mais son manque d'éloquence et sa réputation sont retournés contre Meursault.

Raymond is Meursault's neighbour and is first introduced to the reader when the latter meets him by chance on his way home after work. From the information we are given from then on (information filtered by Meursault's consciousness), it is still difficult to know for sure what Raymond is truly like: is he a *magasinier*

(stock-controller), or is he a pimp as he is reputed to be, or is he both? Why does he want Meursault to write the letter to his mistress for him? Is it because he genuinely thinks that Meursault's knowledge and use of language will make a more eloquent letter, or does he want to make sure he does not leave any trace of his involvement with the woman, if the authorities were to investigate him? Although the letter is used against Meursault as proof of his bad character, it is clear that Raymond is keen to help him when he is cross-examined during the trial. However, the negative reputation of Raymond makes his testimony completely useless and the prosecutor uses it to make things worse for Meursault.

It is clear that Raymond sometimes behaves like a thug, but because (when he is a free man at least) Meursault makes no judgement on anything, much less moral ones, he continues to interact with Raymond despite his reputation and knowing that he beats a woman and fights with men. This lack of judgement and Meursault's helpfulness to Raymond are the reasons why they end up being friends. To Meursault, friendship means nothing, but he is keen to please. By contrast, Raymond feels Meursault understands him so he offers him his friendship and clearly puts a lot of value on their friendship. Raymond's behaviour denotes a certain code of honour, which we find again in the fights he is involved in. He only fights one-to-one, even though, on the beach for example, Meursault is around to help him if needed. Raymond also appears to fight to defend his honour: 'Il m'a dit que je n'étais pas un homme. Alors je suis descendu[...].'

Although Meursault never thinks of Raymond in this way, it is because of Raymond that Meursault arrives at the event that will seal his fate: to stop Raymond from doing something irreparable, Meursault takes his revolver from him, but because of the circumstances and despite himself, he ends up committing the irreparable act against the Arab man, which is construed during the trial as a premeditated, complicit act. Raymond is not a clear-cut, black-and-white character, which helps Camus's aim of showing the absurdity of life.

Activités



Connaissances

- 1 Résumez la signification du nom de Meursault.
- 2 Résumez l'évolution des pensées de Meursault de la perception à l'analyse.
- 3 Dans quelle mesure Meursault est-il sage ?
- 4 Dans quelle mesure est-il innocent ?
- 5 Décrivez la forme que prend la rébellion chez Meursault.

Vocabulaire

- 6 Cherchez dans le vocabulaire à la fin du chapitre le contraire des mots en italique ci-dessous, et écrivez-les dans la phrase commençant par « au contraire » :
 - 1 Meursault n'est pas peu scrupuleux, malhonnête, impudique, indécis, pénible, querelleur, expansif, lâche, traître ou incrédule.
Au contraire, il est
 - 2 Marie n'est pas dure, froide, sérieuse, laide, ou peu convenable.
Au contraire, Marie est
 - 3 Raymond n'est pas mesuré, timide, léthargique, modéré, ou scrupuleux.
Au contraire, Raymond est

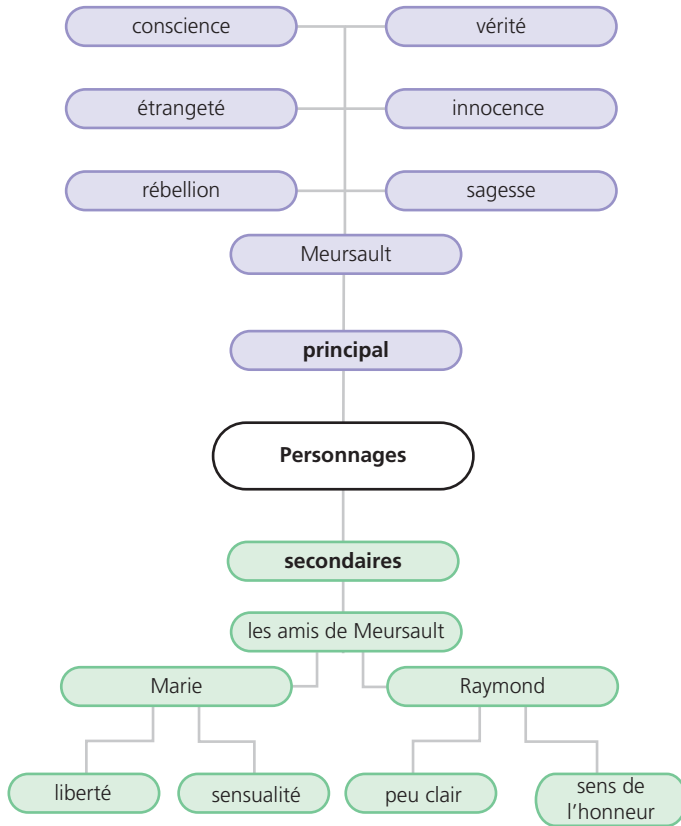
GRADE BOOSTER

'To be given' and 'to be asked' do not exist as passive expressions in French when referring to a person. With these verbs, revert to a sentence in the active voice. For example, *on m'a donné* beaucoup de travail aujourd'hui ; *on m'a demandé* de vérifier tous les reçus.

Grammaire

- 7 **La voix passive.** Écrivez les phrases suivantes à la voix passive.
 - 1 On ne connaît Meursault que par son nom de famille.
 - 2 Personne n'utilise son prénom dans le roman.
 - 3 Camus met l'accent sur la signification du nom de famille.
 - 4 On a peu d'information sur le personnage principal.
 - 5 Le juge interroge plusieurs fois Meursault pour savoir s'il veut ajouter quelque chose.
 - 6 La justice déclare la culpabilité de Meursault.
 - 7 Meursault ressent soudain à quel point tous les gens du procès le détestent.
 - 8 Le travail aussi lie Meursault à la mer.
- 8 Traduisez les phrases suivantes.
 - 1 **Meursault is given** a few days respite before his execution.
 - 2 **He is given** the possibility to appeal.
 - 3 Meursault **is asked** whether he'd like to make any comment.

Les personnages



Vocabulaire

l'affection (f) affection

l'attirance (f) attraction

avoir la conscience tranquille to have a clear conscience

convenable suitable, appropriate, proper

les convenances (f) conventions, proprieties

crédule gullible, credulous

débauché(e) debauched

le défaut de caractère character defect

déterminé(e) determined

dissolu(e) dissolute

entêté(e) stubborn

l'entêtement (m) stubbornness

la force morale moral strength

incorruptible incorruptible

l'insistance (f) insistence

intègre honest

l'intégrité (f) integrity

la liaison affair, liaison

malhonnête dishonest

médiocre mediocre

la modestie modesty

naïf (naïve) naive

la passion passion

persistant(e) persistent

peu scrupuleux (-euse) unscrupulous

la pureté purity

la qualité quality

la réserve reserve

résolu(e) decisive

la retenue restraint

le scrupule scruple

scrupuleux (-euse) scrupulous

simple homely, direct