

Higher English

Critical Terminology

- This is a list of the key techniques, jargon and terminology you must know for your Higher close reading exam.
- You may find many of the techniques useful when writing your critical essays.
- Furthermore, you should be using many of these techniques in your own folio writing pieces.

3.9 Techniques are numbered in 'families'

For each technique you will find a definition.

➔ **Followed by an example.**

Some examples are followed by a brief commentary or explanation.



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SECTION 1: WORD TECHNIQUES

1.1 Word Choice - Denotation & Connotation:

Denotation: The basic meaning of a word, such as the dictionary definition.

Connotations: The ideas associated with a word, over and above its denotation.

Word choice can convey **attitude** and **tone**.

Writers choose words which have **connotations** that suit their overall purpose.

- ➔ The *denotation* of the word rose = flower, usually red, with a green stem and thorns.
The *connotation* of the word rose = gift of love, passion, devotion...
- ➔ The *denotation* of the word 'gaze' is 'to look'. Its *connotations* are 'dreaming, distraction, admiration'.
The *denotation* of the word 'stare' is 'to look'. Its *connotations* are 'anger, aggression, fixedly, intensity'.

1.2 Emotive Language:

Words with **connotations** which are designed to convey to, or stir up emotion in, the reader. These are usually words with strong positive or negative **connotations**.

- ➔ Consider the difference between:
 - 1) Government slashes support for impoverished single mums.
 - 2) Government reduces benefit payments to low-income, one-parent families.Although both are accurate and denote the same thing, the emotive language used in the first sentences is clearly designed to elicit sympathy from the reader.

1.3 Portmanteau words / Neologisms

Many words in the English language are made by combining two existing words.

(Breakfast+Lunch = Brunch; Web + Log = Blog)

These are called **portmanteau** words.

Writers may create their own new words (**neologisms**) which are examples of **portmanteau** words. The effect is often humorous.

- ➔ "It is rare to see the male half of Brangelina without his better half. When he was spotted alone at LAX airport he was looking mantastic with his designed stubble and a chic Armani suit."
Brad + Angelina = Brangelina
Man + Fantastic = Mantastic

1.4 Jargon:

Words and phrases which have specific meanings within a particular industry or field of study are called jargon and can be difficult for non-specialists to understand.

- ➔ "I got a 404 on my browser because I hadn't enabled cookies. I IM'd tech support, emptied my cache and rebooted."
- ➔ "Confrontation of visual fields reveal a peripheral scotoma occupying both the upper and lower quarters of the left visual field in the left eye. This is macula sparing. There is some question about there being a possible lesser scotoma in the left visual field of the right eye."

1.5 Dialect:

A form of language specific to a particular region or social group. Different words, grammar or pronunciation can indicate a **dialect**.

- "Didney take ye long, said Boab.
Naw it was just a wee footery job. Good saw by the way, good feel to it."
- "And I was like, well jell. Cause yous all ain't never done nuffin like that before wivout me."

1.6 Colloquial Language:

Every-day, natural or **informal** language. Sometimes called 'chatty' language. This can include **idioms** (well known phrases or sayings which are in common parlance), and **contractions** (words shortened by missing letters out).

- "D'you know what I mean? At the end of the day, it will set you back 20p - less than a can of coke."
- "Do you understand what I mean? When you consider the wider picture, it will cost you twenty pence, less than a can of Coca-Cola."

The first sentence uses colloquialisms. The second sentence is a translation into formal, standard English.

1.7 Incongruity:

Words are **incongruous** if it doesn't seem to match their context, or don't fit together well. Writers often deliberately use **colloquial** language or very **formal** language in a way which seems out of place. Often the effect is humorous.

- "Sociologists might argue that deep down we are all the same. I disagree. One finds it hard to believe the Queen gets home after a hard day's reining, shoves on a rom-com and slobs out on the sofa with Phil."

1.8 Juxtaposition / Oxymoron:

Juxtaposition is the placing of two words, phrases or ideas next to one another to highlight differences.

Juxtaposing two words which are **incongruous** by placing them next to one another, creates an **oxymoron**.

An **oxymoron** is a combination of words which are contradictory.

- "The mothers at the school gate carry out an affectionate battle daily for the best place to park their monster 4x4 cars. Heaven forbid little Jonnie would have to walk 100m from the school gates. At times things get vicious. In their Juicy Couture trackies these guerilla mums jostle angrily into parking spaces, leap-frogging along the road, desperate for the best parking spot. This Laura Ashley army wage their maternal warfare daily at 3pm. It is an indication of what can happen to sane women when they become too obsessed with their children: they develop a unique kind of hateful-love."

*In this example, the underlined phrases **juxtapose** words with positive and negative **connotations**. This is to emphasise the contradiction in the mothers' actions: they are showing love for their children by being aggressive.*

*"Hateful-love" is an example of an **oxymoron**. Love is not hateful by definition. However, the phrase emphasises the **irony** of the mothers' actions.*

SECTION 2: IMAGERY TECHNIQUES

2.1 Simile

A comparison between two things (one literal and one figurative).

Uses 'like' or 'as'

Designed to make the image of the thing being described more vivid. Can also create humour or another tone.

- "The very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric." (from *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad)
- "A hot wind was blowing around my head, the strands of my hair lifting and swirling in it, like ink spilled in water." (from *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood)

2.2 Metaphor

A comparison between two things where one is said to be another.

Designed to make the description of the subject more vivid by transferring across an idea from the literal root of the image. Can also create tone/humour or emphasise a particular quality in the thing being described.

- "I got the drunk up [the stairs] somehow. He was eager to help but his legs were rubber."
- "His hair was bone white." (both from *The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler)

2.3 Personification

A specific form of **metaphor**, where an inanimate (non-living) thing is given human or animal qualities.

- "My car grumbled into life, coughed and spluttered its way up the hill before making one final gasp and dying."
- "Snow cradled the earth, the wind sang a gentle lullaby and the trees danced in time."

2.4 Extended Metaphor

When a writer uses a **simile** or **metaphor** to make an initial comparison and then continues the same idea through several lines or paragraphs with similar metaphors.

- All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages...

(from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The opening line sets up the metaphor of the world/life being a performance. The speech then goes on to list the seven 'parts' played by the 'actor' which metaphorically represent the seven stages of a man's life.)

SECTION 3: SENTENCE STRUCTURE

TECHNIQUES

3.1 Repetition

Using a word or phrases more than once for emphasis or some other effect.

3.2 List

A series of words or phrases.

Can be separated by commas, or semi-colons.

Often emphasising the quantity/variety/extent of something.

3.3 Tricolon (aka a 'climactic power of three')

A series of three words or phrases which build in increasing power.

→ "I came, I saw, I conquered." (attributed to Julius Caesar)

→ "The first, the last, my everything" (by the soul legend and 'walrus of love', Barry White)

3.4 Climax

The highest degree of tension, humour, drama, quantity, size, etc. is called the **climax**.

When a sentence builds up towards this highest point, it is called a **climactic sentence**.

Paragraphs and whole passages can also be **climactic**.

3.5 Anti-Climax

A sentence which builds in intensity, power or quantity towards a **climax** but which is ended with an unexpected disappointment or humorous twist.

3.6 Parallel Structure

Phrases/sentences which follow the same grammatical construction and shape.

Often beginning or ending in the same way, or using punctuation in the same way.

This can create a feeling of balance between sentences, or emphasise similarities or differences.

→ "Buy a bucket of chicken, have a barrel of fun!" (*KFC slogan*)

→ "He's quite a man with the girls. They say he's closed the eyes of many a man and opened the eyes of many a woman." (*from the Western film 'Angel and the Badman'*)

→ "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." (*J.F.K*)

3.7 Antithesis

The **juxtaposition** of contrasting or opposite terms in a balanced way.

→ "Many are called, but few are chosen" (*Matthew 22:14*)

→ "When there is need of silence, you speak, and when there is need of speech, you are dumb; when you are present, you wish to be absent, and when absent, you desire to be present; in peace you are for war, and in war you long for peace; in council you descant on bravery, and in the battle you tremble."

3.8 Inversion

When the normal [subject, verb, object] order of a sentence ['The cat sat on the mat'] is turned around.

Often to emphasise a word or phrase at the beginning or end.

Can create drama or suspense by delaying the subject of the sentence.

→ "On the mat sat... the cat!"

3.9 Linking Phrase/Sentence

A phrase or sentence which links back to the previous point, then introduces and leads the passage into a new direction or point.

- “Of course, all of these reasons are well and good, until you consider one of the biggest and most overlooked counter-arguments.....”

Here, the words “all of these reasons” links back to reasons that have presumably been given in a previous paragraph. “the biggest and most overlooked counter-argument” leads into a discussion of the other side of the issue.

3.10 Minor Sentence

A sentence without a verb.

Sounds informal.

Can sound like notes, stage directions or internal thoughts.

- “Forward. Then the pirouette. Tap, shuffle ball-change. Hands to the floor. Upright and bow...and done! Phew!”

3.11 Simple Sentence

A sentence made up of only one main clause.

A clause is a grammatical 'chunk' smaller than a sentence. A main clause will have one subject and one 'predicate'.

The predicate is the section of the clause which tells us something about the subject. The predicate is usually a verb followed by an object.

- “The cat sat on the mat.”

In this sentence the subject is “the cat”. The verb is “sat”. The object “(on the) mat” tells us where the subject was sitting. Taken together, the words “sat on the mat” is the predicate because it tells us about the subject.

- “Lucy enjoyed the Harry Potter books.”

In this sentence, the subject is “Lucy”. The predicate is made up of the verb “enjoyed” and the object “the Harry Potter books”.

3.12 Complex Sentence

A sentence containing subordinate (extra) clauses.

Subordinate clauses are related to the main clause and give more information about it.

Subordinate clauses don't make sense on their own.

- “The cat sat on the mat that I had bought in India.”

Here, the main clause (“The cat sat on the mat”) has had an extra subordinate clause added (“that I had bought in India”). The subordinate clause gives more information about the main clause – by telling us where the mat came from – but wouldn't make sense on its own.

- “Whenever I left the house, the cat sat on the mat.”

Here the subordinate clause (“Whenever I left the house,”) comes first. But it still wouldn't make sense without the main clause.

3.13 Statement

A simple sentence which puts forward information as fact.

- “I am feeling happy.”

3.14 Question / Rhetorical Question

A **question** is a sentence worded so as to invite an answer.

→ “How are you feeling?”

A rhetorical question is a **statement** disguised as a question. The answer is implied or obvious.

→ “You've forgotten your homework. Am I surprised?” (= 'I'm not surprised')

3.15 Exclamation

A sentence or phrase expressing emotion (often surprise, shock or excitement).

Usually marked with an exclamation mark.

→ “Oh my! How terrible!”

3.16 Imperative

A sentence which tells or commands.

→ “Stop worrying. Be happy!”

3.17 Inverted commas ' ' or “ ”

When used around words spoken they are called “speech marks”. Around words quoted they are called “quotation marks” and are usually double.

→ Buddha said “Awake. Be the witness to your thoughts.”

Can also be used to indicate the title or name of a book/play/film etc. and are usually single.

→ My favourite book is 'Wuthering Heights' by Emily Bronte.

Can also be used to indicate that a word is being used in a different way to its usual literal meaning. This may show that the writer doesn't agree with the word; that the word's accuracy or appropriateness is being contested; that the writer is using the word **ironically** or **sarcastically**.

→ The people who believe in so-called “Global Warming” are idiots.

3.18 Parenthesis , , or - - or ()

A pair of commas, **dashes** or brackets used to insert an explanation (such as a definition or example) or comment (also known as an ‘aside’) into a sentence.

→ The people (if you can call them that) who deny Global Warming are misguided and dangerous.

→ The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) was established in 1927.

3.19 Ellipsis ...

Three full stops used to indicate either words missed out, a pause or gap, or that a sentence is incomplete.

→ The dangers of the roads are endless: potholes, cyclists, undertaking motorists, blind corners...

→ Jesus said “Don't worry about tomorrow [...] Today's trouble is enough for today.”

3.20 Colon :

Two dots, one above the other.

Used to introduce a quote, a list, an explanation, illustration or example.

→ There is one thing above all else that has sentimental value: my wedding ring.

3.21 Semi-Colon :

A dot above a comma.

Can separate items in a list, when each item is a phrase or sentence of its own:

- ➔ I collected many things on my travels: beautiful furs from the Russian tundra; glittering jewels from the mines of Africa; a tiny, but perfectly formed carving of a swan on a single grain of rice from China, and most importantly, unforgettable memories that I shall treasure forever.

Can also join two sentences together when they are interconnected or relate to one another:

- ➔ Dave opened a window; a gust of wind caught the vase of flowers on his desk and blew it over.

3.22 Dash -

In pairs dashes mark off a **parenthetical** comment or explanation:

- ➔ All my valuables – iPhone, laptop, PS3, jewellery - were stolen in a burglary last week.

Single dashes can be used like a **colon** to introduce a further explanation or development of an idea:

- ➔ “Of course I'll sign a prenuptial agreement – as long as it's in my favour,” she smirked.

Can be used to indicate an interruption:

- ➔ I turned to get his change from the till. “Hang on,” I said. “Just wait there a secon -”
But with a slam of the door, he was gone.

3.23 Typography: (Bold, Italic, Underline, Capital Letters)

Typography means the way print has been arranged or formatted.

Writers may make use of **bold**, *italic*, underlining or CAPITALS to emphasise a particular word, suggest tone or stress, or (in the case of capitals) indicate shouting.

- ➔ “THEN WHY DID YOU MARRY HER!?” he screamed, exasperated.

Consider how the use of italics in these two sentences changes the meaning completely:

- ➔ I didn't marry her for her *money*.
- ➔ I didn't marry her for *her* money.

In the first example, the emphasis created by the italics suggests the speaker married her for something other than her money.

By changing the emphasis, the second example implies a totally different meaning: I married her to get at someone else's money!

In fact, if you can say this same sentence in seven different ways by putting the stress on a different word, thereby creating seven different meanings – amazing, eh?!

SECTION 4: TONE

4.1 Tone

Tone is not a technique in itself – tone is created by other techniques such as **structure**, **word choice**, sound, point of view, **juxtaposition**, **imagery**, **hyperbole** etc...Once you have identified the **tone**, you should focus on those other techniques which create it.

This is a list of just some words which could be used to describe tone:

- *acerbic* (harsh, sour, severe)
- *ambivalent* (laid back, uninterested, unconcerned)
- *approving* (positive, showing satisfaction)
- *biting* (sharp, cutting, stinging)
- *candid* (open, frank, outspoken, revealing)
- *clinical* (extremely objective and realistic, emotionless, forensic)
- *contemptuous* (showing contempt, disdain or scorn)
- *conversational* (chatty, intimate, informal)
- *cynical* (distrustful, bitter, sneering, pessimistic)
- *doubtful* (uncertain, unconvinced, questioning)
- *effusive* (a pouring out of extreme praise or concern; hyperbolic; over the top)
- *elegiac* (expressing sorrow or lamentation, usually for something lost)
- *emotional* (angry, depressed, elated, moody, indignant...)
- *hectoring* (pushy, bullying, nagging)
- *humorous* (jokey, light-hearted, amusing)
- *impartial* (deliberately fair, just and unbiased)
- *intimate* (chatty, revelatory, friendly, confiding)
- *introspective* (looking inward; examining own thoughts or actions)
- *ironic* (saying the opposite of what is meant, usually humorously)
- *menacing* (threatening, dangerous, aggressive) • *mocking* (teasing, laughing, showing contempt)
- *nostalgic* (a bitter-sweet longing for things past; looking back on a 'golden' time)
- *pedantic* (having a narrow, unyielding focus on small details, rules and accuracy)
- *reflective* (meditative, thoughtful, contemplative)
- *scathing* (attacking with severe criticism and vitriol)
- *self-deprecating* (being modest or critical of ones self, often humorously)
- *tongue-in-cheek* (not really meaning what is said; often humorous)

4.2 Register

Register describes the level of language. It is a measure of formality.

Writers can write in a **formal register** or an **informal register**:

A formal register may be created by the use of **jargon**, sophisticated **word choice**, an objective 3rd person stance, **complex sentence structures** and a lack of contractions or **colloquial language**.

An **informal register** may be created by **contractions**, **colloquial** or **dialect** language, 2nd person address direct to the reader through **questions**, or the use of 3rd person pronouns ('We/Our/Us').

SECTION 5: RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

5.1 Hyperbole

Exaggeration for emphasis / comic or dramatic effect.

- “I will love you for eternity and travel to the ends of the earth for you. I will wrap a lasso around the moon and give it to you in a box as a token of my undying adoration, my love.”

5.2 Litotes

Ironic understatement when an idea is expressed by denying its opposite.

- She's not the prettiest of girls. She's no oil painting = *she is ugly*.
- We were trailing 16-0 with just minutes left on the clock, and we had lost our three best players to injuries or red cards. Let's just say the match wasn't going brilliantly.... = *it was going disastrously*

5.3 Euphemism

Expressing an idea using mild or indirect words so as to make something rude, crude or unpleasant more palatable.

- Spend a penny (*urinate*)
- Pass away (*die*)
- Make love (*have sexual intercourse*)
- Downsize the business (*fire staff*)
- Military intervention (*invasion / war*)
- A technicolour yawn (*vomitting*)

Can be used to create humour:

- Vertically challenged (*short*)
- Transparent Wall Maintenance Officer (*window cleaner*)

5.4 Cliche

A phrase or expression which has become so common it has lost its originality and become mundane.

- At the end of the day
- What goes around comes around
- The best of both worlds
- Raining cats and dogs
- Give it 110%

5.5 Anecdote

A short, real-life story used to illustrate a larger point or idea.

Anecdotes are often humorous and/or personal.

5.6 Irony

Saying the opposite of what is meant for comic or dramatic effect.

- She looked at the mess of scribbles, equations and diagrams that Joe had drawn in his attempt to explain how gravity works. “Oh yes.” she said with a raised eyebrow. “How silly of me not to have understood, when it is obviously so very simple.”

Sarcasm is a specific type of **irony**. It is using irony to mock, criticise or convey contempt.

- “Do you want to whisper that again, a little louder? I'm not sure everyone in the room heard you.”

5.7 Pun

A joke based on a deliberate confusion between two words or phrases which sound alike but have different meanings.

- ➔ Seven days without laughter makes one weak.
- ➔ The musician had pinned a note to his door: "Gone Chopin. Back in a Minuet."
- ➔ I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger and bigger. Then it hit me.
- ➔ Your Facebook page is a site for sore eyes.

SECTION 6: POETIC TECHNIQUES

6.1 Rhyme

Correspondence of sound between words or the endings of words.

- ➔ There was a young man from Dealing
Who caught the bus for Ealing.
It said on the door
Don't spit on the floor
So he jumped up and spat on the ceiling

In a limerick like this, the words at the end of lines 1,2 and 5 rhyme. So do the words at the end of lines 3 & 4.

6.2 Rhythm

The measured flow of words and phrases based on the stressed syllables in the words.

- ➔ There was an old man from Milan,
Whose limericks never would scan.
When told this was so,
He said, 'yes, I know.

'But I always try to get as many syllables into the last line as I possibly can.'

A limerick like this follows a strict pattern of rhythm. Lines 1, 2 and 5 usually have 3 strong beats in them ('was' 'man' '-lan')

Lines 3 & 4 usually have 2 strong beats. ('lim-' 'nev- 'scan')

The humour of this limerick is that it deliberately adds extra beats to the final line, breaking the typical rhythmic pattern.

6.3 Alliteration

The repetition of the same letter sound at the beginning of several words.

Usually imitates the sound of what is being described, or creates atmosphere.

- ➔ The snake slithered slowly, hissing and spitting at the same time.

6.4 Assonance

The repetition of a vowel sound in several words.

- ➔ August is always awfully hot and monotonous, dragging on and on...

Here the 'aww' sound created by various letters ('au', 'a', 'aw', 'o') imitates the long drawn out feeling being described.

6.5 Onomatopoeia

Words which are derived from (or imitate) the sound they describe.

- ➔ sizzle
- ➔ squelch
- ➔ whisper
- ➔ cuckoo
- ➔ snap