A Analysing unprepared prose

Section A of the Student Book covers the skills and knowledge needed to make a critical analysis of unprepared prose. It combines linguistic and literary approaches.

Part 1 shows students how to identify a writer’s/speaker’s attitudes, values and ideas and relate these to uses of structure, form and language. The emphasis is on building suitable frameworks to analyse the particular text in question rather than using an ‘all-purpose’ toolkit. Part 1 could be introduced after AS examinations and the skills regularly revisited during the Advanced study period.

Part 2 covers in a systematic way the range of written non-fiction prescribed for Section A.

Part 3 covers the range of spoken non-fiction texts prescribed for Section A.

Part 4 gives students specific guidance on how to meet the requirements of the Section A exam.

1 A foundation for Section A

Key teaching points
Encourage students to:
- see the unprepared question as an analytical task focused on language rather than as a comprehension exercise
- think of texts from the past as being accessible, not written in a different language
- combine linguistic analysis with comment on literary techniques
- have the confidence to build and use their own frameworks for analysis
- draw on the skills of analysing unprepared texts they developed in Unit 1.

The range of non-fiction

This sub-section gives an overview of the main written and spoken genres included in the specification. Teachers should refer to page 29 of the specification for a full list of wider reading on which to base the work for Section A.

Activity 1 (SB p8) asks students to review their prior reading of non-fiction and explore their preferences. The majority enjoy non-fiction and know more about it than they realise: this task gets the course off to a positive start and highlights the importance of personal response. They use Handout 3.1 to record their reading.

Handout 3.1 reproduces the reading grid for Activity 1.

Genre, audience and purpose

Activity 2 (SB p9) Question 1 reminds students of the importance of audience in shaping a non-fiction text. Refer them back to their work on this in Units 1 and 2. Question 2 shows that different genres typically have different levels of formality (register) but that this will vary depending on a writer’s audience and purpose. For example, letter writing ranges from the highly informal (a note to a close friend) to the highly formal (details of a business plan to a bank manager).

Activity 3 (SB p9)

Commentary

The genres and main linguistic features of the five extracts are:

Extract A – Biography (Peter Ackroyd’s biography of Dickens, 1990)
- foregrounding of facts, focus on time and place;
- discursive style and register; use of simple past and past historic tenses to create a broad chronological perspective;
- positioning of the reader to accept and share the writer’s judgements: ‘so great was his father’s hold upon his life …’

Extract B – Formal speech (Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863)
- First person plural address to audience; formal register;
- deictic references to create a shared context between speaker and listeners: ‘this field’, ‘those who here gave their lives’;
- abstract lexis assuming shared values: ‘liberty’, ‘all men are created equal’.

Extract C – Diary entry (Benjamin Haydon, 1825)
- personal register; mixing of narration and reflection – shift between past and present tense typical of informal texts;
- use of a single simile (how like ants! I thought) developed in a whimsical way;
- syntax characteristic of an informal text, a string of short phrases linked by the co-ordinating conjunction ‘and’.

Extract D – Impromptu speech (V.I. Lenin to revolutionary workers in Petrograd, 1917)
- First and second person address to audience;
- reiteration and syntactic parallelism to emphasise a key point: ‘The people need … The people need …’;
- juxtaposition of contrasting phrases: ‘The people need bread and land. And they give you war, hunger, no food’;
- use of vocatives and an imperative mood to unite and rally the audience: ‘Sailors, comrades, you must fight for the revolution, fight to the end’.