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Part 1

Advanced Subsidiary English Language

Introduction

Before taking any test or examination, it is a good idea to find out what you are being tested on. You wouldn't try for your driving test or a certificate in, say, a sport or hobby you have without in the first place asking what was expected of you, and finding out what skills you were expected to have. The same is true of any examination you take in school. At the moment you are preparing for Advanced Subsidiary English Language. So what skills and knowledge will you be tested on?

Examiners call the answers to this question the Assessment Objectives. Here are the Assessment Objectives for Advanced Subsidiary English Language:

- i** Ability to read with understanding written material in a variety of forms, and to comment on its effectiveness.
- ii** Knowledge and understanding of features of English language.
- iii** Ability to write clearly, accurately and effectively for a particular purpose or audience.

All of the above taken together seems like a daunting task and yet you already have some foundation in the knowledge and skills referred to in the Assessment Objectives. The aim of this part of the book is to help you to clarify in your mind what you already know from your previous study of English Language, to build on this and to further enhance your knowledge and equip you well for the examination.

The examination

You will have to sit *two* papers. Each of these carries the same number of marks (50) which obviously means that they are of equal importance.

Paper 1

In this paper you will be given three passages for comment from which you are to choose two. For each of the passages you choose you will be asked to write a commentary on the writer's use of language. The passages will be drawn from a variety of sources, for example fiction, or non-fiction such as advertisements, magazine articles, biography or even from spoken language such as a speech. You will then be given a directed writing task based on the passage. You will be expected to write around 120 words. Alternatively you may be asked to produce

a piece of writing of around 120 words related to the passage for comment and then asked to write a commentary comparing your piece of writing with the original. You will be given two hours for the paper, and the breakdown of marks is 15 for each commentary and 10 for each piece of directed writing.

Paper 2

In this paper you will be asked to write two compositions. Each composition should be between 600 and 900 words. One must be Narrative, Descriptive or Imaginative, and the other must be either Discursive or Argumentative. You will be offered a choice of compositions in each of the two sections. Each composition carries 25 marks, and you will be given two hours to complete the paper.

You will be tested on all three Assessment Objectives in Paper 1 and on the second and third Assessment Objectives in Paper 2. The units which follow will take you through the examination step by step. At various points there will be tasks for you to work through. Depending on whether you are using this book on your own or in school and depending, where appropriate, on your teacher's advice, you can tackle the tasks on your own, with a partner or in a group.

1

Written material in a variety of forms: genre, writer's purpose and tone

The first Assessment Objective in this examination is to show 'ability to read with understanding written material in a variety of forms, and to comment on its effectiveness'. It seems sensible at this point, then, to explore the idea of variety of forms, and ask ourselves why a variety of forms exists in the first place.

Genre

Even if you are not aware of it, you read a variety of forms of language every day, and not just in the classroom.



Task

Think about and write down the types of written English to be found in your home.

The most obvious types you found would probably be books, which can be divided into two types: fiction and non-fiction. But these can be further divided. There are many types of fiction texts, and the name we give to a type is **genre**.



Task

Make a list of genres of fiction books you know.

Sample response

Mystery, historical, supernatural, romance, science fiction, war, human interest, adventure, crime.



Task

Now do the same for non-fiction texts.

Sample response

Biography; autobiography; travel; information on, say, sports or hobbies; history; geography.

Don't forget that ordinary non-fiction texts in most people's homes include cookery books, telephone directories, holiday brochures, magazines, mail order catalogues, instruction manuals for the video recorder, computer, toaster etc. You will almost certainly have newspapers in your home, giving details of recent events and people's opinions of them, or comments or speeches by politicians. You might be surprised by how much we rely on 'written material in a variety of forms' for day-to-day survival in the modern world!

Even if you are not conscious of it, you are already able to recognise forms of written English, not just in an obvious way by looking at a title, but by responding to key features of English language and style. You are now going to be given six short extracts, each from a different genre, with some accompanying tasks. You will be returning to these extracts in unit 2.

Sample responses follow the tasks in a separate section, but don't look at them until you've tried the tasks on your own. This pattern has been adopted in other units in this book. These samples are given as examples of good, rather than bad or average, responses. Rather than suggesting marks for these responses according to examination criteria we offer you samples of good practice, something to aim for. Think big!



Task

Six short extracts follow. For each, identify the genre. You might want to jot down which features of the extract helped you to identify its genre. Don't worry at this stage if you are unsure about the exact words to use for language features; we'll be looking at that later. The six genres used are autobiography, history, women's magazines, travel, speech and crime.

1

Some of the little beaches I have loved are so obscure they have no name. I think of a quiet cove on the coast of Scotland where otters play in the tidal pools. And a tiny bay on the Galápagos island of Santiago where a very sociable sea lion prodded the sole of my foot with his wet muzzle, beckoning me to come in for a swim. And of course there are the windswept wintry walks along the endless seaboard of the Netherlands, guaranteed to clear your head and get your life into perspective.



2

In 1914 Europe blundered into the First World War. From 1870 to 1914 the Germans had built up a military machine of alarming efficiency.

E. L. Black (ed.) *1914-1918 in Poetry*

3

I have been asked to speak on the subject 'The Artist and Politics'. I'll try to do so ... I am an artist by vocation and profession. I am a citizen by obligation and responsibility. And as an actress I am happiest when I work in a play or a film that makes both artistic and social contribution.

Melina Mercouri

4

Most of the Thames Valley Police personnel were ever wont to pounce quickly upon any newspaper clipping concerning their competence, or alleged lack of competence.

Colin Dexter *The Remorseful Day*

were ever wont they had a tendency to

5

Belle – the new moisturiser which is taking over beauty salons all over the country – has now been released on to the sales counters of good department stores. For discerning women who are prepared to spend a little bit extra.

6

I was born on the eighteenth of July, 1918, at Mvezo, a tiny village ... in the district of Umtata, the capital of the Transkei ... My father was a tall, dark-skinned man with a straight and stately posture, which I like to think I inherited. He had a tuft of white hair just above his forehead, and, as a boy, I would take white ash and rub it into my hair in imitation of him. My father had a stern manner and did not spare the rod when disciplining his children.

Nelson Mandela *Long Walk to Freedom*

Sample response

1 is travel, 2 is history, 3 is a speech, 4 is crime, 5 is a women's magazine and 6 is autobiography.

Writer's purpose

It is reasonable to assume that any writer has a purpose in the writing which he/she produces. By his/her writing at all, and by your reading what is written, a relationship is set up between you and the writer.



Task

Make a list of different purposes which writers might have in producing a piece of writing. Use the list of genres at the start of this unit to help you.

Sample response

To persuade, to dissuade, to ridicule, to advertise, to give information, to make you laugh, to puzzle, to scare, to offer a point of view and to offer contrasting points of view.

Being aware of the writer's purpose – that is, knowing *why* he/she wrote what he/she did – will help you to analyse the writing – that is, examine *what* was written and *how*. It will also help you to focus on your own writing skills, which are an important part of this examination.



Task

Go back to the six extracts we have just examined to work out their genre. This time, for each extract, write down what you think the writer's purpose was in writing.

Sample response

- In **1** the writer's purpose is to persuade the reader of the attraction of quiet, deserted beaches.
- In **2** the writer's purpose is to criticise the behaviour of governments which allow a war to begin.
- In **3** the writer's purpose (really the speaker's purpose) is to give information about the link between her work and her politics.
- In **4** the writer's purpose is to entertain and puzzle with a crime story.
- In **5** the writer's purpose is to advertise a particular product and persuade the reader to buy it.
- In **6** the writer's purpose is to give information about his own life and to create sympathy both for the writer as a boy and for his father.

Tone

Before we think about tone when it refers to writing, let us think about what we mean by tone when we refer to speech. It's easy to see that when we speak to other people we might be serious, joking, angry, sarcastic, loving, accusing or persuasive. For example, the tone you would use if you were telling your sister off for borrowing your CD without asking would not be the same tone you would use if you were trying to persuade your parents to let you stay out later than usual.



Task

List four or five recent situations where you have spoken to different people. What tone did you use in each one and why?

Sample response

When I was speaking to a close friend the tone used was informal and/or confidential whereas when I was speaking to the headteacher the tone used was formal and polite. When I was asking for a favour from a parent the tone used was affectionate and possibly ingratiating, but when I was speaking to the ticket collector at the station I used a polite tone. When I was speaking to my next-door neighbour I used a conversational tone.

Written language uses a variety of tones in the same way that speech does. Now we will go back to the six extracts we have already used to establish genre and writer's purpose, and this time we will examine them to think about the tone used in them.



Task

For each of the extracts used earlier (1–6) think about and write down the tone used by each writer.

Sample response

- In 1 the writer's tone is persuasive.
- In 2 the writer's tone is critical and sarcastic.
- In 3 the writer's tone is serious, formal and informative.
- In 4 the writer's tone is humorous.
- In 5 the writer's tone is persuasive.
- In 6 the writer's tone is informative and confidential.

You will have noticed that the tone adopted by each writer is closely linked to the purpose he/she had in writing, and this should hardly be surprising. But what you have done in examining genre, writer's purpose and tone separately is that you have begun to dismantle and deconstruct language in order to understand it better. In the next unit we will be returning yet again to the extracts used in this unit when we come to think about vocabulary.

Exam tip

Before you start to write your commentary on a passage take time to think and possibly jot down its genre, the writer's purpose and the tone the writer is using to make the writing purpose clear.