Part 1
AS Level

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Section 1
Introduction to AS Level English Language

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Unit 1.1
Understanding context, audience and purpose

Learning objectives

In this unit, you will:

- learn how the context, audience and purpose are linked to a text (AO3)
- learn how these factors influence the way a text is constructed (AO3).

Before you start

1   Have you heard or used the word 'context' before? If so, when? For example, what does it mean if you are told to look at the 'context' of an unfamiliar word to work out its meaning?

2   You will know the word 'audience' – what is its usual meaning? For example, when you go to films or music shows with friends – who is the audience? Are audiences always the same people for every film or show? Why not?

3   'Purpose' will also be a word you probably know, but can you think of any **synonyms** for it? How might 'purpose' and 'audience' be linked?

Each of these elements is important, both in understanding whether a text is effective and in shaping your own work.

> **KEY TERM**
>
> **synonym:** generally, a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language (for example: 'happy' and 'joyful')

As you progress through this course, you will need to understand clearly what **context**, **audience** and **purpose** mean.

Why is it important to understand these key ideas?

When you write any text, identifying audience, context and purpose is vital. For example, look at this typical exam-style writing question:

[1] context – time (left school), situation (working for a charity)

[2] audience – members of the school

[3] purpose – to explain why it was a rewarding experience

> After leaving school, a student decides to work for a year as a volunteer for a local charity. At the end of the year, the student returns to their previous school to give a speech about their experience to other students. Write the speech. In your writing, create a sense of a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards the experience.

> **KEY TERMS**
>
> **context:** the situation or background to a text or its writer. On a general level, this might be 'the writer's childhood' or 'Canada, 1920s', but it might also be more specific, for example, 'a party which takes place at the height of the Mexican Revolution'.
>
> **audience:** the reader(s) of, or listener(s) to, a text. This can apply both to an individual ('Uncle Joe'), or to a group (middle-aged women who like sporty cars).

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purpose: the reason why a text has been written, and what the writer is seeking to achieve. This might be a general intention (to entertain with a humorous account) or more specific (to persuade an employer to give you an interview).

ACTIVITY 1

Why is it important to identify these core elements? What might be the outcome if you ignore such things?

It is also important to realise that many texts you read and write have more than one purpose and, sometimes, different types of reader.

ACTIVITY 2

What might be a secondary purpose for the speech in the task at the bottom of page 3?

Now, look at this extract from a student's letter to an editor of a newspaper on a different topic:

[2] context – a newspaper has criticised local people for damaging the environment

STUDENT RESPONSE

[1] purpose – to express anger at the newspaper's stance; to persuade readers that it is not the islanders' fault

It is completely unfair of your paper to accuse our local island communities of contributing to the pollution of the seas, and the destruction of the coral. We have no control over climate change and one of the few ways we can survive on our tiny strips of land is to extend the landmass by taking rocks and other materials from the sea-bed. Rather than blame us, why don't you attack local government for abandoning indigenous people, and demand that they invest in our communities?

ACTIVITY 3

What do you learn about the audience and purposes here?

a   What – or who – is the audience for this text? Look at the personal and possessive pronouns: 'your paper', 'our local island', 'we have no control'.

b   A key feature of persuasive texts is often a 'call to action' (a request for the reader/audience to do something or change their behaviour). What is the call to action here?

Why does knowing about these things matter?

If you understand the context, audience and purpose of a text you need to **write**, it will help you to:

- include the relevant content (for example, the speech for Activity 2 wouldn't be much use if the student wrote about his favourite music!)
- write in the correct style (for example, writing for people your own age will have a different tone than when you write for people much older or younger than you)
- use techniques that will help you achieve the required purpose (explanations tend to require factual information, and some detail about processes; persuasive texts might address the audience directly, have a 'call to action' and so on).

If you understand the context, audience and purpose of a text you are **reading**, it will help you to:

- understand the **mood** or **tone** created
- identify the ways the writer has achieved their purpose
- engage emotionally with or understand the views expressed.

> **KEY TERMS**
>
> **mood:** the atmosphere or feeling created by a text or elements of a text
>
> **tone:** the voice or level of feeling, closely linked to the mood created

ACTIVITY 4

How would you describe the mood or tone of the writer of the letter to the editor of the newspaper?

So, we can refine our definitions of context, audience and purpose now:

Context	Audience	Purpose
This can be the situation in which the text was constructed (e.g. criticism of island communities), or the particular conditions which influenced the writer (e.g. growing up on an island), or wider political, cultural or social movements (e.g. climate change and how governments respond).	Audience can be a general group or category of people who might read an article or hear a speech, or a specific single individual at whom the text is directed (or, indeed, both!).	Purpose can be expressed in simple terms such as 'to persuade' or 'to describe', but writing intentions are often much more specific (e.g. to persuade readers that islanders are not to blame). Importantly, texts can be **hybrids** that have several purposes.

> **KEY TERM**
>
> **hybrid:** something made by combining two different elements

Understanding these factors is vitally important when understanding and responding to texts. For example, read this opening explanation which accompanies a typical text you might read in the exam:

> The following text is taken from the writer's diary. It describes a midsummer's night and her memories of her dead husband.

ACTIVITY 5

Based on this alone, which words relate to 'context', 'audience' and 'purpose' (you may have to think a bit about 'audience')?

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Responding to audience, context and purpose when reading texts

Now let us look at the passage in question. It is taken from the diary of Mary Shelley (the author of 'Frankenstein') and was written in 1824. The first paragraph has been annotated to show all three elements.

[1] context – time and setting: now – the beautiful summer's evening linked to God's creation

[2] audience – direct address to her late husband

[3] context – time and setting: the past – memories of the churchyard, where they met

[4] purpose – to explain the continuing strength of her love

[5] context – the influence of the natural world and its beauty in contrast to city life

What a divine night it is! I have just returned from **Kentish Town**; a calm twilight pervades the clear sky; the lamp-like moon is hung out in heaven, and the bright west retains the dye of sunset. If such weather would continue, I should write again; the lamp of thought is again illumined in my heart, and the fire descends from heaven that kindles it. Such, my loved **Shelley**, now ten years ago, at this season, did we first meet, and these were the very scenes – that churchyard, with its sacred tomb, was the spot where first love shone in your dear eyes. The stars of heaven are now your country, and your spirit drinks beauty and wisdom in those spheres, and I, beloved, shall one day join you. Nature speaks to me of you. In towns and society I do not feel your presence: but there you are with me, my own, my unalienable!

I feel my powers again, and this is, of itself, happiness; the eclipse of winter is passing from my mind. I shall again feel the enthusiastic glow of composition, again, as I pour forth my soul upon paper, feel the winged ideas arise, and enjoy the delight of expressing them. Study and occupation will be a pleasure, and not a task, and this I shall owe to sight and companionship of trees and meadows, flowers and sunshine.

From *The Journals of Mary Shelley.*

Kentish Town: then, a village on the edge of London

Shelley: Mary Shelley's late husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who died in 1822

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ACTIVITY 6

How do context, audience and purpose work in Shelley's text? Write brief notes in response to these questions:

1   What other examples of each of the three elements (context, audience, purpose) can you find in the first paragraph?

2   In the second paragraph her purpose and audience seem to change.

   a   What new feelings or ideas does she want to express?

   b   To whom does she seem to be speaking now?

3   The use of context re-appears in the second paragraph. How does Shelley link the natural world and the changing seasons to her mood and work?

Reflection: What have you learned about how to approach reading tasks? Consider:

- the reading skills you used in this last task
- how you used the task wording to identify or select answers
- how you read the text – did you read it all in one go, and then line-by-line? Did you read every word or **skim** read it? Or did you **scan** for the information you wanted?

KEY TERMS

skim: to cast your eyes quickly over a text to get the general 'gist' or overall sense of what it is about

scan: to run your eyes over a text looking for a specific word or piece of information

ACTIVITY 7

Now, write up your ideas in about 75–100 words, explaining what the context, audience and purpose of Mary Shelley's diary extract reveal about her, and what mood they create.

Self-assessment checklist

Reflect on what you've learnt in this unit and indicate your confidence level between 1 and 5. If you score below 3, revisit that section. Come back to this list later in your course. Has your confidence grown?

	Confidence level	Revisited?
I understand what the terms 'context', 'audience' and 'purpose' mean		
I can identify how they are used in writing tasks		
I can identify how they are used in reading passages		

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Unit 1.2
Understanding form and structure

Learning objectives

In this unit, you will:

- understand the forms and structures of different texts (AO1)
- learn what the terms form and structure mean (AO3).

Before you start

Think about the variety and range of texts you write, use or study in your work at school or college:

1   Do these texts all look the same? What is different about their appearance or presentation?

2   Are they all organised in the same way? (In other words, are the texts divided up in the same way, or is each text different?)

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> **KEY CONCEPT**
>
> **Meaning and style**
> The writer's choice of form and structure help as much as their lexical choice to create the meaning and style of a text. For example, how does the form and structure of a cookery book contribute to its effectiveness? How would the book work without a separate list of ingredients, weights and measures for each recipe?

The importance of form and structure

The presentation and organisation of texts are key factors in the way writers shape their content. Such factors can tell readers where to look, the order in which to read material and what information or ideas have particular priority or importance, but they can also create effects, causing us to read something more quickly, or to make us stop and reflect. These elements are generally referred to as **form** and **structure**.

> **KEY TERMS**
>
> **form:** really another word for *type*, but more useful because it relates to the shape and overall presentation of a text
>
> **structure:** a familiar word which refers to the way a text is organised and ordered. It can relate both to the whole text (a story with a middle, beginning and end) or to features of a text (the way the sentences in a paragraph are ordered, repeating patterns and so on)

How can you recognise form and structure in a text?
Look at the annotated leaflet on the opposite page.

Island Paradise Holidays

title of experience in large font

striking image

Your own private paradise

sub-headings

Come to Yawela Island and be our guest! Our unique package enables you and your partner to stay in luxurious lodges perched on top of the pure, white sand of your own private beach. With room service at your fingertips any time of day, you'll want for nothing.

Rest and relaxation

We offer yoga, meditation, massage and other therapies as part of your experience. Just let us know what you want and when, and we'll do the rest. Join our team at the Therapy Centre or we'll come to you. It's your choice!

Trips and treats

Like the idea of exploring our wonderful coast? We can arrange tours of the island by boat or bicycle with our own, trained guide. You will experience the rich variety of wildlife, and can cool down at one of the many bars or restaurants dotted along the coast. Fancy something more energetic? We can offer diving or sailing trips with our qualified trainers, or you can take part in some of the beach games on offer such as volleyball.

How to book

It's easy. Find us online at www.yawelaparadise.com where you can read all about our prices and availability. But don't wait too long – there's a paradise island that's waiting just for you!

introduction to experience

Experience your own private paradise with our bespoke holidays

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KEY TERM

chronological: sequenced according to time (e.g. starting in the past, ending in the present day)

ACTIVITY 1

Work with a partner to discuss the following questions about form and structure in the leaflet:

1 Are there any other elements of form that could be added to the annotations? Think about any visual features in the leaflet that do not have arrows pointing to them.

2 Is the text structured in a **chronological** way, as a story might be, or is it organised in a different way (for example, according to the importance of the information)?

KEY TERM

prose: continuous text as you would find in a novel, rather than in a poem

Form and structure in non-visual texts

Form and structure are easy to see and comment on in highly visual texts, such as advertisements and brochures, but are more difficult to identify in texts that are predominantly **prose**.

Read the following passage taken from *The Flowers*, by Alice Walker. It is not the opening of the story, but comes shortly after the girl described has left her house.

> She had explored the woods behind the house many times. Often, in late autumn, her mother took her to gather nuts among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, vaguely keeping an eye out for snakes. She found, in addition to various common but pretty ferns and leaves, an armful of strange blue flowers with velvety ridges and a sweet suds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds.
>
> By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs of her findings, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strangeness of the land made it not as pleasant as her usual haunts. It seemed gloomy in the little cove in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep.
>
> From *The Flowers,* by Alice Walker.

KEY TERMS

direct speech: spoken language shown by speech marks or inverted commas

complex sentences: sentences with a main clause (a clause which can stand on its own and has a subject and a verb, like a sentence) plus at least one subordinate or dependent clause (a clause which cannot stand alone and may have no subject or verb)

ACTIVITY 2

Working with a partner, copy and complete this table. Use it to:

• check off the features of form you can identify

• provide more detail about the features you have selected, including a brief note of any examples. The first has been done for you.

Feature of form (or its absence)	Comment and example
Paragraphs	Yes – two of approximately equal length. The first starts 'She had explored…'. The second begins, 'By twelve o clock…'.
Direct speech	
Prose description of setting or action	
Short simple sentences	
Longer, **complex sentences**	