



AQA Language GCSE Paper 1

Section A Question Two

Video Transcript

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[Paper 1 Question 2 AQA English Language exam](#)

Hello everybody it's Mrs Ware of Stream English here and today I'm going to help you with that last-minute revision for the AQA Language GCSE Paper 1 Section A Question Two, because you have been very naughty and left your revision to the last minute. So in this video, I'm going to be going through the basics of what

you need to know for this question, plus the more detailed things like how to plan, how to prepare, and we'll have a little look at a practice question as well. If you find this video helpful, don't forget to hit like and subscribe. Let's do this.

So the first thing we need to have a look at is the question itself. We've got an example question. I can't remember what past paper this is from, but it doesn't matter. The basic setup of the question is always the same in every paper.

First of all, you are given a specific line range that you have to talk about. Now unlike with Question One and Question Four, you don't have to seek out that chunk of text yourself. They copy it over for you so that you know exactly what chunk of text you're dealing with. Why they don't do that with the other questions as well I don't know, but they do for this one, so let's just appreciate that.

This phrasing of the start of the question is also always the same: "How does the writer use language here to describe..." and that "something" is going to vary depending on whatever the text is about. I've seen papers where it's something about the setting. I've seen papers where it's something about a character. And I've seen papers where it's something about like atmosphere or tension as well. But those tend to be the kind of three main groups: setting, character, or overall feeling — like tension, atmosphere, drama, excitement, whatever.

They then give you this bullet point list of the things you could potentially talk about: so "words and phrases" — that's looking at the writer's word choice; "language features and techniques" — that's looking at things like metaphors, semantic field; "sentence forms" — that's looking at your sentence moods, like for example imperatives, interrogatives, or also looking at things like short sentences being used for effect, longer sentences to build up pace, whatever it is.

The next thing you need to know is that this question is worth eight marks, so that's a sizable amount. If we consider that for the past few years, the grade boundary difference has been about four marks between each grade, but it's definitely not the most important question of this section. Question Four is much higher at 20 marks; Question Five even higher still at 40. That being said, this is not a question you want to ignore. You want to take this just as seriously as Three, Four and Five because it's eight marks. You're going to be spending around 10 — max 15 — minutes on it. How long exactly you spend will depend on the strategy you've chosen with how you're going to divide up the time in this paper. If you're looking for suggestions on those strategies again, have a look at my other videos.

The mark scheme for this question is split into four levels, and basically the level that you go into heavily hinges on the quality of your analysis. And we can see that based on the comments that AQA have put on the side here, with Level One: "simple, limited"; Level Two: "some understanding"; Level Three: "clear and relevant"; Level Four: "detailed, perceptive".

So I'm just going to start off by explaining what AQA mean by that so that we understand exactly how it is we're going to get marks in this question. For the three bullet points that you can see in the second column here, there are basically three main things that they're looking at in your answer. As I've already mentioned, the first is on the quality of your comment on the effect of language. The second is about your quotes, or as they call it, "textual details", and the third is about whether you've got subject terminology or not.

It's really important to note that the top bullet point — the quality of your comment on the effect of language — is the decider of your level. That will basically decide what level you get put into, and then the other two are kind of there for the

examiner to fine-tune and think about within that level what exactly what mark you should be getting.

It's worth noting though that for you, bullet point two is also really important. It doesn't matter if you are the greatest analyser of all time — if you don't choose a good quote, you're not going to be able to do good analysis. Because good analysis hinges on having something to analyse. So actually that second bullet point of choosing relevant, appropriate quotes is also going to be really important for you as well.

The third detail on subject terminology — I just want to stress here that you do not want to technique spot. Basically what that means is that you identify a technique in the quote, but you don't actually in any way talk about it or analyse it or anything like that. You just — you can spot it, you say that it's there, and that's about it. AQA hate it when students do that because this is not what this is about. This is not about identifying techniques. It doesn't matter if you can identify the fanciest techniques in the world — if you don't actually analyse that technique in that quote, you're not really going to be getting any credit for it.

So that's something important to keep in mind with subject terminology.

For the Level One: "simple, limited comment" — basically that suggests that you've only written one, maybe two sentences, and that's about it. Basically, you don't really have any quotes and you don't really have any comment on those quotes either. You just have a sentence answering the question and that's about it.

Level Two is much more of a common mark to get because four out of eight is where the pass starts to happen. So four, three and four out of eight is a very common kind of mark to get for this question. And as you can see, it's about you attempting to analyse, but you're not doing it very well. There can be several

reasons why you've not done it very well, and I'm going to try and go through some of those now.

The first one is that you've been generic. What I mean by that is that you've said something that's true of any text ever — it's not specific to the text that you're dealing with in this exam. Some classic generic phrases are things like "it makes the reader want to read on", "it gives the reader more information", "it builds a vivid picture in the reader's head". Oh, I hate them. I hate them, hate them, hate them, hate them. And so do AQA, because they don't actually show that you understand anything at all. They're just kind of cliché phrases that don't really mean anything.

The second way that you can go wrong is if you've misunderstood the text. Now you might have heard a teacher say before that there's no right or wrong answer in English — that doesn't mean that you can say whatever you want. It means that there isn't an objective answer; it's very subjective. Instead of having a concept of right or wrong, we have what we call a valid or invalid interpretation.

So you want to make sure that you have a valid interpretation. That means that the idea that you've got about the text can be proven by things in the text.

Students can often misunderstand a text — they might say that a character is nervous when actually they're not at all. Or they might say that a setting seems to be quite ominous when it just isn't at all, and therefore they've said something that's just invalid, and therefore they're not going to be able to show the clear understanding needed for the Level Three.

Another way that you can go wrong with the analysis is with circular analysis. For example, you might in your point say something like "the character is presented as unfriendly" — that's fine. You then provide a quotation. You then say "this quote shows that the character is unfriendly." You've just gone round in a circle. Your comment on the quotation hasn't added anything new to your answer —

you've just basically repeated yourself. That's circular analysis there, and that's a very common thing that students do.

So if you're attempting to comment on the text, if you're attempting to show that you understand it, but you're perhaps not managing to quite so successfully, then you're going to be in the Level Two: "some understanding".

To get into the Level Three you have to show a clear understanding. Now one thing that's important to note here, and something that I learned while I was an examiner for this paper, is that you only have to demonstrate the level once in order to get into the bottom of that level.

What I mean by that is: you can have a student where 98% of their answer is Level Two, and then suddenly they have two sentences that are Level Three. Because they've got two sentences at Level Three that have shown a clear understanding, I have to give them five out of eight.

This means that if you're given by a teacher a score at the bottom of the level, that should be an indicator to you that your answer more often was a standard of the level below the one that you've been placed in. So if you get a five out of eight, it means that some of your answer was at least at a Level Two standard. If all of your answer was at Level Three standard, they would have given you six out of eight rather than five. So that's really important to keep in mind for when you're looking back over your work and you're reflecting on how you can improve: look at the criteria of the level below the score you got, because that is a standard that would have been common in your answer as well and that's why you only got the bottom of the level.

But going back to Level Three and showing a clear understanding and what that means. So basically it kind of is obvious from the phrasing — you're not wrong. You have clearly understood the text, but it's not just that you've clearly

understood it, but also that you're able to defend it. You are able to prove that your interpretation is valid. You clearly know what it is you're supposed to be doing for this question. You have your idea to answer the question. You have your quotation. You begin to break down your quote to try and explain how it shows your idea. You might know this in your school as like a P paragraph or a PEEL paragraph. I've seen it as like PEESL, whatever. I personally call it a TEA paragraph because then I can make lots of analogies with cups of tea and use pictures of cups of tea. And if you want to know more about my TEA paragraph structure, then you'll need to have a look at the other videos / my course where I go into that in a lot more detail.

But the basic idea here is that you've just shown clearly in both your idea to answer the question, the quote that you've chosen to back it up, and your explanation of that quote — all across the board you clearly understand the ideas of this text.

This Level Three — five or six out of eight — is where you start to be getting into quite a wide range of different grades actually depending on how you did in the different questions. But theoretically, at a six out of eight, the grade nine is possible. And of course this will vary year on year depending on grade boundaries, but there have been previous years where if a student got full marks in question number one, and then the top of Level Three in questions two, three, four and five, then they were able to achieve a kind of low grade nine.

So in theory, if you got six out of eight on this question, a grade nine is in your reach depending on how you do on the other questions as well. To make yourself a kind of more secure grade seven, eight or nine though, you want to be aiming for that Level Four — seven or eight out of eight. To get that seven or eight out of eight, you need to have detailed perceptive analysis.

So the word “detailed” is pretty self-explanatory there. What they mean is — well, I'll use this analogy. I come from a family where if you're eating chicken and it is chicken on the bone, you must eat all of the chicken on the bone. We're not one of those "snap the bone in half and suck out the marrow" families. We're not that bad. But we are a "chew the cartilage on the end" kind of family. If you come from one of these families, you know what I'm talking about right now.

But the basic premise if you don't come from one of those families is that you need to eat all of the chicken that is on the bone. Leave no meat behind. If you're leaving meat behind, it means you're wasting chicken and that is unacceptable.

It's the same with analysis. A lot of times students will have a quote and they will perhaps talk about one word in that quote and then they'll move on, even though actually there were other things they could have talked about as well that would have added to their idea and really developed their analysis. But they didn't talk about those things — they just moved on to something else. That means they left meat on the bone.

You want to make sure you don't leave any meat on the bone. You talk about absolutely everything that is relevant to your idea and to the question. If you do that, then you're dealing with detailed analysis — because you're breaking down your quotes in a lot of detail. You're looking at multiple things going on.

“Detailed” can also mean that you're looking at more than one quotation for the same idea. Okay? So if you have an idea of something like, you know, the character is presented as violent — you don't just try and prove that with one quote. You've also got a second quote to back it up as well. And again, on both of those two quotes, you've done detailed analysis — you've gotten the chicken off the bone in both of them.

For the extra special, you would then also look at what is the link between those two different pieces of analysis that you did — between those two quotes you just analysed. How do they kind of connect to one another in meaning as well?

For the “perceptive” part — being perceptive is an incredibly difficult thing for a teacher to try to teach their students. It's one of the hardest things that an English teacher has to try and teach their really able students. Because essentially what being perceptive means is that you are understanding a text on a really deep level and you're understanding it on a level that most students just don't — they just miss and don't see.

So some students misinterpret this and they think that this means that everything you write has to be like utter genius from the word go. That is not true at all. Basically what it means is that you have shown a clear understanding of the text, but more than that, you've shown a really insightful understanding of how that idea, how that meaning was conveyed by the writer.

So part of that will come from you being really detailed in your analysis, like I said before. But another part of that is you being able to spot the links between things. So if you've analysed a metaphor and, I don't know, assonance within one quote — you're also able to say how the two connect together.

Or if you analysed a metaphor in one quote and then you analysed sensory language in another quote — you can also explore how the meaning created in each one kind of combined to create an overall effect. How they build on one another. How they perhaps contrast with one another. Whatever it is. So you're really good at spotting — you don't just look at one thing. You're really good at spotting the links between multiple things.

You can spot patterns in meaning. You can spot patterns in like effect as well. So you might just have a Level Three idea. You might have something like "the

storm is presented as being threatening and violent". But what makes a Level Four answer different to a Level Three answer that has the exact same idea is how they prove that that idea is valid — the detail that they go into, what it is that they're looking at, how they look at how things combine together.

So Level Four is not an easy thing — obviously that's why it's what you have to do to get the very highest grades. But it is definitely possible.

Practice Question & Model Answer

So the text that we're going to be having a look at today is from *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. And I love this novel. I mean books are always — and I stress **always** — better than the films. But if you have seen the film, then you probably know how great this book is too.

To give you a rough idea, it's basically set in the 1920s, and one of its key themes is sort of criticising the extravagance, the wasteful spending, the over-the-topness of people in the 1920s — and how they were so focused on this kind of superficiality and focused on that above deep, real human connection. Wonder if that sounds at all familiar in any way...

Anyway, let's have a look at the text.

When we're looking at this question, the first thing we need to do is look at the question. So the question here is:

“How has the writer used language to describe the party?”

And if I was in an exam, the first thing I'd want to do is highlight that question key phrase — *the party*.

There are two reasons I want to do that. Number one: because before I start reading the text, I need to make sure I know what is it I'm looking for — what is it that I need to think about. And so now that I've highlighted that, I know I need to think about *the party*.

The second reason is that when it comes to writing my answer, I want to keep using that question keyword. I want to keep using the phrase “the party”, “of the party”, “the party” — so that the examiner can clearly see that I am answering the question, and that everything I'm saying is relevant to the question.

Once I've done that, the next thing I need to do is just read the text.

Now as I'm reading the text, I remember I want to have in the back of my mind — what is my answer to the question? I'm basically trying to come up with an adjective or a phrase that can answer the question.

So I'm going to read the text, and then I'll tell you what adjectives I came up with:

“The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher; laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and colour under the constantly changing light.”

Man, I love F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Ah, so — what adjectives can I come up with?

Well, the adjectives that I came up with — first of all, this party seems **lively**. It seems **fast-paced**. And it seems **convivial**.

If you're not sure what convivial means, it basically means that it's very like sociable and fun — and the sociableness is *why* it is fun. Fun fact: I learned that word from Sims — so hey, go video games for teaching vocabulary.

Now that I've come up with my adjectives, I need to think about how I would prove those ideas. So I've got my interpretations: lively, fast-paced, convivial. How can I prove that those interpretations are valid?

I'm going to have to do that by picking quotations and analysing how those quotations prove — this is a lively party, this is a fast-paced party, etc.

So if I have highlighters in the exam with me — which I recommend you have — I would go through and highlight the potential quotes that I can analyse. If you've got multiple highlighters, then you could colour-code your different ideas. So I could have a yellow for lively, a blue for fast-paced, and a red for convivial. And then I know I've got lots of different quotes for the different ideas and it makes it easier for me to spot what it is that I'm going to talk about.

For the moment, I'm going to imagine you've just got the one highlighter, and so you're just highlighting the same. I'm also doing that because my ideas of lively, fast-paced, convivial are going to be provable from very similar quotations. They're not completely separate from one another — and nothing ever is in a text. These ideas intertwine with one another, and so they intertwine in the quotes.

So I'm just going to have quotes that have the ability to prove potentially all three, or two of the three, or whatever.

When it comes to choosing what quotes to highlight, there are some important things that you want to remember.

The first thing is that we want the quote to be **relevant** — it needs to clearly be a quote that shows the idea that you've got. So in my case, clearly shows that the party is lively or fast-paced or convivial, and is clearly about *the party*. It needs to be relevant to both the question and to your idea.

The second thing is that you need it to be **rich**. What I mean by that is you need there to be **lots** of things you can analyse.

The worst thing is to pick a quote with **explicit meaning**. Explicit meaning is when the writer just says exactly what they mean. So they will say something like “I am sad.” You do not want to choose that quotation to prove that a character feels sad — that is a terrible quote choice.

Instead, you want to choose a quote where there is a lot of **implicit** meaning. So instead of the writer explicitly saying “I am sad”, the writer describes tears rolling down her face, her heart snapping into whatever else it is that they say.

The second thing is — as well as it being implicit — ideally there's multiple things you could say about it. This is like the **dream** quotation.

Now, the first thing you want to be looking for is if it's **metaphorical**. If there's a metaphor in the extract that is relevant — talk about it. Absolutely pick the metaphors.

But also, if as well as the metaphor you're able to talk about sentence length, repetition, semantic field, individual word choice and the connotations of the word — if there's more than one thing going on in that quote — then that is good.

I do have personally my own little hierarchy of techniques where, as I've just mentioned, metaphorical language is absolutely at the top of the hierarchy — along with any symbolic language as well.

Your middle would be patterns — so if something is repeated, if you've got semantic fields, lexical fields.

And then the third is like your kind of word choice. Word choice isn't a bad thing to go for — the fact that it's in third doesn't mean that you should avoid talking about that — but often a writer will have a lot more going on than just word choice.

So if you've been taught by your teacher to like zoom in on a particular word, that is absolutely a good thing to do. But just keep in mind that don't do that at the expense of a metaphor. If there's a metaphor that could be talked about, don't talk about word choice. Don't be the guy that ignores three metaphors to really talk for a paragraph about the use of a noun. Don't be that guy.

The third thing you're looking for is that the quote is not going to be too long or too short. So if I'm trying to show that the party is lively, I need my quotes that do that to be the exact right length. I don't want to include anything that isn't relevant to the party being lively. Not too long, not too short — just right. Kind of like with Goldilocks.

So going back to this text then — I can see that there is a lot of potential quotations that I could go for:

“Lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun” — so that interesting kind of juxtaposition between the things getting darker but light's growing brighter, and how that's symbolic of perhaps like the energy and excitement of the party and how lively it is.

The synaesthesia in “the orchestra playing yellow cocktail music.”

The metaphor in “the opera of voices.”

The repetition of “laughter is easier minute by minute.”

The metaphor of laughter being “spilled with prodigality” and “tipped out at a cheerful word.”

“The groups change more swiftly” — that word choice of “swiftly.”

The metaphor “swell with new arrivals.”

The metaphor “dissolve and form in the same breath.”

The metaphor of girls “weaving here and there.”

The metaphor of gliding through the “sea-change of faces.”

The triadic structure of “faces and voices and colour.”

The word choice of “constantly changing light” — but also perhaps the symbolism within light itself.

Now, I’ve just run through those very quickly. But basically that’s the kind of thing you want to do — is you want to go on a little **technique spotting hunt**.

Now remember I said one of the worst things to do in your answer is **technique spot** — but when you’re trying to find what to talk about, that is what you want to do. Just quickly hunt for the various different techniques that show the lively, fast-paced, and convivial.

Once you’ve got them highlighted, the next step is actually thinking about what effect they create.

I’m not going to do that in this video, because if I went through every single one of these quotes and analysed them, we’d be here for several hours. But if you do feel like you need a lot of help with that — if you feel like you need a lot of practice and work and guidance on how to analyse — then just make sure you have a look at the other videos of the course because they will go through those things in a lot more detail.

Mrs Wear

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