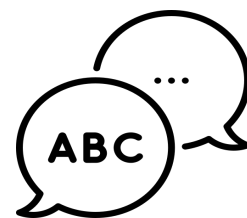


A-Level English Language Bridging Work



Name: _____

Form: _____

Instructions

Inside are four tasks to do. Each task should take around 30 minutes to complete. You will need some paper for task two and access to the internet for task three. Please ensure you bring this with you to your first lesson.

Further research

If you have completed these tasks and want to continue some further preparatory research, listen to the Lexis Podcast, especially episodes 1, 2, 3 and 27 to learn more about accents. Or, go on to the blog of linguist Deborah Cameron and begin to find out about issues surrounding language and gender that you will study later in the year.

TASK ONE: Becoming a student of English Language

What does an A Level in English Language involve and what does it mean to be a great student of English Language? These tasks will help you find out what's involved in the A Level and beyond: more importantly, how to enjoy and get the most out of the course.

1. Use the table below (and on the next page) to get a sense of what might be involved in the A Level English Language course. Tick the things that sound like you might find them interesting and any that you have already studied.
2. Read the article 'Becoming an A Level Language Student' written by one of our chief examiners, Marcello Giovanelli to gain further understanding of the course.
3. From what you have considered and read, pick one of the areas for language study that you want to study in greater depth. You will have to complete your own area of language investigation for your coursework, so you need to develop your own areas of interest early on. Summarise what you know, why you are interested and how you think you might investigate it.

What you might study	I know a bit about this but have never studied it	I've studied this	Would like to learn more about it
How children start to say their first words			
The ways in which women and men use language in similar and different ways			
Why everyone has an accent but why some accents are liked more than others			
How social media language has developed rapidly in the last couple of decades			
Where new words come from and why			
Why people in India, Nigeria, USA and New Zealand all have their own ways of speaking English			
How people in conversation interrupt and overlap with each other and how that works			
How slang develops and how it's been around for hundreds of years			
Why some words in the language are particularly offensive and make others feel angry or upset			

What you might study	I know a bit about this but have never studied it	I've studied this	Would like to learn more about it
How writers use language to persuade and influence their readers			
Why some jobs and occupations develop their own specialist vocabulary and expressions			
How people switch and shift the ways they use language in different situations and with different people			
How English has changed from something that only the common people spoke to being the language of all parts of society			

What area of language study are you most interested in? Why are interested in it? What would you like to find out? How might you investigate this?

BECOMING AN A LEVEL LANGUAGE STUDENT: A QUICK GUIDE



Examiner and university lecturer Dr Marcello Giovanelli tells students embarking on an A Level language course what to expect and how to make the most of the course.

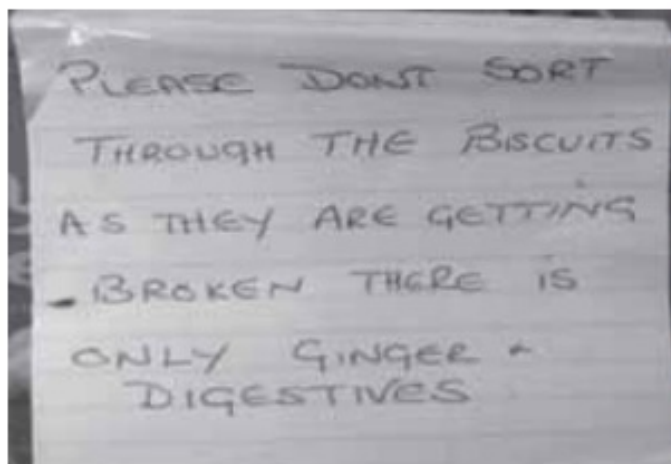
If you're reading this then you may well have just started your A Level studies in English Language. Congratulations on choosing an exciting, modern and engaging A Level course! However, the transition from GCSE or iGCSE to A Level can be a demanding one, and so in this article, I'll share some key principles of A Level language study with you that will help you to bridge the gap and get the most from your studies. Together, these form a 'quick guide' to becoming an A Level English Language student.

1. Learning a Metalanguage and Avoiding Impressionism

Given that you may not have had to do much explicit language work at KS4, you will find that you need to acquire a new terminology to deal with the kinds of analyses that you will undertake at A Level. We call this type of language about language a **metalanguage**. For English Language, most of this revolves around what we term **levels of language** (discourse, grammar, semantics, lexis, phonology), or what are currently known as **linguistic methods** or **frameworks** in examination board specifications. As a beginning linguist, it's important to start using these terms confidently and accurately to ensure that all **descriptive linguistic work** (any analysis that identifies and explores language features) that you do is as precise and clear as is possible, and avoids merely making impressionistic and speculative claims that are not rooted in language analysis.

As an example, look at the text (above right). This was written by a mid-day supervisor and

attached to a biscuit tin in a school staffroom. It was motivated by her anger towards a member of the teaching staff persistently going through the tin trying to find chocolate biscuits.



A non-linguist might comment on this text in quite an intuitive way by identifying the angry 'tone', perhaps making some comment on the order that's being given, and even arguing that the use of the word 'please' makes the order seem more polite. However, because there's very little language analysis going on here beyond simply identifying words, the comments feel impressionistic and idiosyncratic; they are not grounded in a recognised and accepted way of talking about the content and structure of language.

On the other hand, knowing even a little bit about how language works can be incredibly enabling, helping with the analysis and

making you sound more competent and professional in your work. For example, using the knowledge that events can be grammatically presented using either the **active** or **passive voice** not only enables

an analysis to take place using a shared and accepted metalanguage, but can also lead to a more intricate analysis. In this example, the mid-day supervisor has chosen to write in the passive 'they are getting broken' rather than the active 'someone/name of person is breaking them'. Since the

use of the passive voice downplays the **agent** (person responsible) for the action of the verb, we can argue that using this form is generally significant. In this instance, we might deduce that the supervisor wants to avoid attaching a sense of blame to the breaking of the biscuits. Being able to discuss the grammar (or any other aspect) in this way is likely to lead to a much better analysis.

2. The Importance of Context

At A Level, engaging with context means moving beyond simple GCSE notions of audience and purpose. Now what's really important to remember is that by context we are referring to a range of factors both within and outside of the text, paying close attention to situations where a text is both written or spoken (**the context of production**), and where it is read or listened to (**the context of reception**). Returning to our 'biscuit tin' text, we could identify a whole range of contextual factors that would be important to comment on.

In terms of the context of production, the fact that the text producer is a mid-day supervisor and not a member of teaching staff is significant since it is likely that she will have a less powerful role in the school, and consequently will need to be careful about not offending someone of a higher status. This goes some way to explaining her motivation for using the passive voice that was discussed earlier.

In terms of the context of reception, we can imagine that this note would be seen by whoever was in the staffroom and happened to come across the biscuit tin, and that this could take place at many different times. It's relatively easy therefore to see that there are as many possible contexts of reception as there are potential readers, and that each reading will be motivated by who the reader is, the conditions in which they read (carefully, in a rush, whether they have had a good day or are fed up), whether they are actually guilty of breaking the biscuits and so on. Equally, context needs to be understood as a **dynamic entity** rather than a static one; the situation and circumstances in which a text is understood can change quite considerably. For example, the person responsible for breaking the biscuits might suddenly react in a very different way when he realises the message is aimed at him. In this instance the context that surrounds the reading, and therefore influences it, can develop and evolve as the reading itself takes place.

There are two important points worth emphasising here. First, the relationship between context and language features is both a complex and incredibly important one. Writers and speakers make language choices that are influenced by contextual factors, and readers and listeners interpret what they read and hear within the specific situations in which they find themselves. Second, the richness of contextual detail

and its importance in the process of making meaning means that it's often better to think of any data you engage with in your studies not as a 'text' but as part of a larger communicative act called a **discourse event** that has real participants with intentions, beliefs and emotions engaging in an act of communication. All of these influence what gets written or said, and how that gets interpreted.

3. Ideas about Language

Another key skill that you will develop as you progress through your studies will be your ability to read and engage with ideas about language study. This will move you beyond seeing yourself as someone who analyses language to someone who actively explores ideas and concepts that researchers and academics have grappled with. Whichever specification you are following for your own studies, being able to understand the various debates surrounding language topics, and integrating these into your own analyses of data is an important skill that you will need to master. In your analysis of the 'biscuit tin' text, you could draw on a number of theories related to how people communicate with each other (**interaction and politeness theories**), how status at work affects the ways in which language is used (**language and occupation, the discourse of the workplace**), and how technology might be influencing the ways in which we communicate in non-electronic forms (**language change, attitudes to language**). The best way to become competent at working with ideas like these is to try to explore them in the light of any data you are looking at in class. To what extent do you find that your data supports or challenges established research ideas that you have read?

4. Read Around the Subject

Of course, one of the best ways to explore issues and ideas in language is to read as widely as you can around the subject. *emag* is a great place to start for language articles that have been written specifically for A Level students, and your teacher will be able to guide you towards suitable ones. Beyond *emag* there is a wealth of material. As a start, you might try David Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press) for a good reference book and overall guide to language topics, Louise Mullany and Peter Stockwell's *Introducing English Language* (Routledge) for an excellent, albeit quite advanced, guide to the study of language and linguistics. *Language: A Student Handbook on Key Topics and Theories*

(ed. Dan Clayton, English and Media Centre) offers an excellent collection of essays by leading academics on A Level language topics.

It's also a good idea to use the internet to keep up to date with news stories and the latest debates involving language. Whether it's schools banning students from using non-standard English, how the latest innovations in technology are affecting the ways that we use language, or what the latest research in child language learning is, there's always something to interest the language student. Regularly visiting the online pages of tabloid newspapers will lead to no end of stories to read and discuss in class. To make things easier for yourself, you could subscribe to a blog which collects the latest news for you such as Dan Clayton's peerless EngLangBlog <http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk>

5. Become a Data Collector

Another important part of becoming a student of language is learning how to become a researcher of language. In fact your career as a collector of language data begins the moment you start your course. The wonderful thing about language data, of course, is that it's everywhere: in the conversations we have with friends, the TV we watch, the books, magazines, social media pages, and tweets we read, the websites we browse, the computer games we play and so on. Make a point of collecting interesting examples of language you see, either in hard copy form or using the camera facility or a scanning app on your smartphone. Record conversations of both real (do ask for permission!) and represented (on the TV and radio) speech, practise transcriptions, start a scrapbook, and share ideas with your fellow students via a blog or your school or college's VLE. Get used to working with data and start applying learning in class to your own examples that you collect. You've got an exciting two years of study ahead of you!

Dr Marcello Giovanelli is a Lecturer in English in Education at the University of Nottingham.

@ emag web archive

- Language Discourses 1 and 2
- Beneath The Surface of Language
- Categorising Texts – Sorted!
- Small Packet Big Eat
- Real World Pragmatics

TASK Two: Examining your own language

One of the most interesting aspects of studying A Level English Language is that you learn more about your own language use, especially the way you talk and write.

Create a **language profile** of yourself. You might want to do this as a mind map, thinking specifically about these four categories:

- The way you speak with friends
- The way you speak to family or teachers
- The way you communicate through mobile phone messaging
- The way you write within your school work

You might also want to consider the following:

- What's your earliest language memory? Can you remember a nursery rhyme, song or picture book from when you were very little?
- Have your family or extended family kept any records – video, audio, family memories – of any of your earliest words?
- Have you kept any old school books from when you were learning to read and write?
- Where were you born and where in the UK, or the wider world, are your family from? Go back a few generations if you like and think about any other languages that your family members might speak, or other places your family members might have lived.
- Are there any words or expressions only you or your family use, which others don't really understand?
- Do you or your friends at school use language in any ways that you notice as being different from other people around you? These could be other people in your year, your teachers, your family, whoever.
- Do you listen to or watch anyone on TV, online or in films or music videos who uses language in a way that interests or annoys you?
- Do you ever look at or hear someone else using language in a way that you find is totally new or strange to you?
- Have your teachers or family ever talked to you about the way you speak?

One of the most useful resources for language on this course is **you**. Language is made up of so much more than the words we see printed on a page, so when you are thinking about language, come back to these ideas here to keep the range wide. We are often told there is a right way and a wrong way to use language, but the more you study about language, the more you'll realise that it's more complicated and interesting than that.

And you'll also start to build up a bigger picture of the different influences on your own language identity as this course goes on – all the factors that influence who you are linguistically and how you can choose to behave with language in different situations.

TASK Three: Accents and Dialects

One of the first units we will study is that of accents and dialects. Use your own knowledge and the internet to complete the following tasks.

1. Define the two terms **accent** and **dialect**. How are they different?
2. List as many **different accents** within the UK that you can think of. Then, identify the three accents you like the most, and the three you dislike the most.
3. Explain what makes you **like or dislike some accents over others**. Is this to do with the sounds of accents, what you associate with the place it originates, or some other factors?
4. Look up the **YouGov 2014 accent poll**. Which accents came out top, and which came out bottom? Are the rankings in this poll similar or different to yours?
5. Many people argue that **we should all speak the same Standard English**, no matter where we are from in the country. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your reasons.

TASK four: MLE

One of the most interesting accents and dialects that has developed in Britain is MLE. Read the following Guardian article that 'profiles' MLE and consider the questions as you go.

Wagwan? Why are more and more Britons speaking Multicultural London English?

Hench, peng, shook ... if you don't know what any of these mean, you're nothing more than a wasteman. MLE is sweeping the country!



🔊 Listen ... MLE speakers never drop their aitches. Composite: None

Name: Multicultural London English.

Age: About 40.

Appearance: The UK's future dominant dialect.

Wagwan blud? OK, let's get this out of the way immediately. Multicultural London English is a real dialect spoken by an increasingly large number of people. The last thing anyone wants to read now is a broadsheet newspaper journalist using it as an excuse to act like Richard Madeley doing a bad Ali G impersonation.

I am sorry and ting. I swear to God, this is your last warning.

Fine. What's Multicultural London English again? MLE is a dialect spoken by young, working-class Londoners who grow up in areas marked by high levels of immigration. It has its roots in patois spoken by Caribbean migrants who arrived in London after the second world war, but has since become more widespread.

Questions to consider:

Have you heard any of these words before? Where?

Would you/do you use them yourself? Does this depend on the situation?

Where does it tell us MLE originates?

Is this why my nephew keeps calling me “mandem”? Probably. But get used to it. Linguistics experts have argued that MLE is spreading so fast that most people in the UK will probably speak a version of it within 100 years.

This sounds like a disgrace. It isn't, though, is it? The beauty of language is its ability to adapt and change over time. It is perfectly natural to assume that people a century from now will have entirely different speech patterns, just as nobody today uses the sort of dialect that was common a century ago.

It doesn't sound very British, though. Yes, it does. MLE is a dialect that has developed organically in the UK. It's as British as red-faced cockneys, or bowler-hatted bankers, or whatever other cartoon nostalgia you are imagining. It's different, but different doesn't always mean worse.

Well, if we're all going to be speaking this soon, I'd better have a crash course. You want some slang lessons?

Yes please. I'm doing this reluctantly, and very briefly: “hench” is “muscular”, “peng” is “good”, “wasteman” is “a useless person”, and “shook” is “scared”.

I have written all these down. You're wasting your time. Slang dies quickly, and the MLE speakers of 2122 won't use any of these. What you should be listening for is grammar and phonology. Although people who speak Estuary English regularly drop their aitches, for instance, MLE speakers will always pronounce theirs.

What else? Well, MLE is characterised by long vowels made in the centre of the mouth; for example, “go” will rhyme more closely with “more” than “mow”. Also “th” words like “thing” and “thank” often become shortened to a hard T (“ting” and “tank”) in addition to the historical estuary F (“fing” and “fank”).

That sounds fine. See? Nothing to be afraid of.

In fact, it sounds rather peng. Get out.

Do say: “MLE will be our dominant dialect within a century.”

Don't say: “MLE is bare swag, rudeboy.”

Questions to consider:

Some people are really quite angry at this spread of MLE. Why do you think that might be?

Why does it suggest we shouldn't 'write these words down'? What does this imply about language?

Do you think you will speak MLE in the future? Explain your ideas.