PiXL 6

A Level English Language

PiXL A-Level Language

Welcome to A Level English Language!

Now that you've decided to study English Language at A level, you'll need to do a bit of preparation. This pack contains a programme of information sheets, activities and resources to prepare you to start your A level in September. It is aimed to be used after you complete your GCSE throughout the rest of the summer term and over the summer holidays to ensure you are ready to start your course in September.

The resources include:

- Key pre-knowledge topics that are required for you to be successful in your course with activities associated with the topics, which test your key knowledge and understanding of the building blocks required to be successful in this subject.
- Suggested reading and associated websites where you can research the topics you will be exploring in your A level course.
- Suggested visits and activities over the summer holidays including places of interest that will generate enthusiasm and engagement.
- How to make the most of the technology you use every day.

1. Introducing the key ideas and skills

There are some important areas that will be the basis of your study of the language of texts taken from everyday sources. You will have to become confident in using them. There are a number of linguistic frameworks and related concepts to come to grips with.

Linguistic Frameworks

Lexis

Semantics

Grammar

Phonetics / Phonology

Pragmatics

Discourse

Graphology

Related Concepts

Register

Mode

Idiolect

Sociolect

Dialect

Accent

Representation

Linguistic Frameworks

Lexis - *The words used in text or spoken data; the words, phrases and idioms of language.*

Key Features may include:

- Choice of lexis, e.g. jargon (specialist terms), dialect, slang, colloquialisms, swearing, taboo terms, clichés, euphemisms, dysphemisms, archaisms (deliberate use of old-fashioned terms).
- Choices indicating factors such as levels of formality and education, e.g. elevated, literate, sophisticated, Latinate, unusual and polysyllabic terms (largely a reading or writing vocabulary) as opposed to simple, every-day, vernacular and monosyllabic (largely a speaking vocabulary).
- The concept of the lexeme.
- Types of word, e.g. compound, shortening, abbreviation, acronym, neologism, blend, loan word**.**
- Use of recurring lexis from particular lexical (semantic) fields.
- Collocations, whether common (predictable) or uncommon (deviant).
- Use of figurative language, e.g. metaphor, simile, pun, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, oxymoron.

Phew! Don't panic, just look up some of these words, begin to compile a glossary and learn a few for now. You might start with jargon and see if it applies to the list of words you have been given so far! Then go to the last bullet point and see how many you recognise from your GCSE studies.

ACTIVITY 1

List as many words for 'drunk' as you can, trying to cover as many different registers (levels of formality and informality). Try to think about what your parents and grandparents would say, and also think about different contexts, e.g. what would you say to a police officer / teacher and what would you say to your friends.

Next you need to get your words in rank order, from most formal to least. Once that's done, try applying some lexical labels to them. Do you have examples for each of the following terms? If not, can you add some for the categories you don't yet have?

Formal	Technical	Informal
Colloquial	Impolite	Slang
Taboo	Dialect / Regional	'Posh' Slang
Old Fashioned	Older People's Slang	'Youth' Slang

ACTIVITY 2

EITHER

Find a short written text and have a go at analysing the lexis u
criteria from the frameworks and concepts on page 3.

OR

Write your own text or record a short conversation and analyse the lexis.

Semantics - *The meaning of language. The semantics of a word is the meaning of it as given in a dictionary. The semantic meaning of a text is not always straightforward, though, because we can add layers of meaning, for example through euphemisms or dysphemisms and through imagery.*

Key Features may include:

- Denotation - factual and objective meanings
- Connotation - personal and subjective meanings
- Types of meaning - positive / negative, specific / vague, literal / figurative
- Contrasts in meaning - synonym, antonym, hypernym, hyponym, homonym, homophone, homograph
- Changes in meaning - amelioration, pejoration, broadening, narrowing

ACTIVITY

Look up any of these key words that you do not know and add them to your glossary.

Euphemisms and Dysphemisms

*A **euphemism** is the substitution of a polite expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt (e.g. "spending a penny").*

*A **dysphemism** is when we use a harsh expression instead of a more neutral one (e.g. animal names when they are applied to people, such as: coot, old bat, pig, chicken, snake, and bitch). We might call someone a pig when we actually mean that his table manners are not very delicate!*

ACTIVITY 1

Pick an area where euphemisms are often used (sex, death and bodily functions are the most common). Try to list five euphemisms and five dysphemisms.

ACTIVITY 2

Write a school report in which you, the teacher, wish to communicate a true picture without giving offence.

Grammar - *The way individual words are structured and arranged together in sentences.*

Key Features may include:

- Word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and determiners
- Features of the verb: main and auxiliary, tense, modal auxiliaries, active and passive voice
- Sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory
- Sentence complexity: minor, simple, compound, complex, relative length
- Unusual word order
- Standard or non-standard forms
- Other aspects: ellipsis, pre - and post - modification, subject / object, pronoun use, person, agreement, content and function words, noun phrase complexity
- Word structure: prefix, suffix

Some of the key features are explored below.

Word Classes

You need to know the different word classes so that you can analyse how they are used. They are the basic types of words that English has. There are eight of them:

Nouns
A noun is a naming word. It names a person, place, thing, idea, living creature, quality, or action. There are two main types of noun: proper and common. Most nouns are common nouns and they can be divided up into three categories: concrete, abstract and collective.

Adjectives
An adjective is a word that describes a noun. It tells you something about the noun. Examples: *big, yellow, thin, amazing, beautiful, quick, important*

Verbs
A verb is a word which describes an action (doing something) or a state (being something). You will need to find out about main verbs, auxiliary verbs, primary verbs, modal auxiliaries, active and passive verbs. Some information is provided on pages 8-10.

Adverbs
An adverb is a word which usually describes a verb. It tells you how something is done. It may also tell you when or where something happened. Many adverbs end in –ly.
Examples: *slowly, intelligently, well, yesterday, tomorrow, here, everywhere.*

Pronouns A pronoun is used instead of a noun, to avoid repeating the noun. Examples: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they.*

Prepositions
A preposition usually comes before a noun, pronoun or noun phrase. Prepositions can relate to position. They join the noun to some other part of the sentence.
Examples: *on, in, by, with, under, through, at.*

Conjunctions (connectives)
A conjunction joins two words, phrases or sentences together. Examples: *but, so, and, because, or.*

Determiners
These words come before nouns and refer to them directly. The most common determiner, *the*, is called the definite article. The indefinite article is *a/an.*

ACTIVITY: NOUNS

Sort these nouns into two categories (this is more easily done as a cut and sort activity). Note that the two groups are not necessarily even in number:

Peter	Boy	Cheese	England
Country	Dumbo	The Lion King	Rover
Table	Elephant	Yorkshire	Film
Pencil	Doctor	Fire Engine	Brick

Once you have reached an agreement over what goes where, define the difference between the two groups as clearly as you can.

Next repeat the exercise with these nouns:

Happiness	Armchair	Light Bulb	Hate
Sky	Heart	Tree	Charity
Christianity	Flag	Woman	Time
Wheelbarrow	Loneliness	Jug	Mystery

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Will Shall May/Might Would Can/Could Must Should Ought to

Modal verbs are used to express ideas such as possibility, intention, obligation and necessity e.g.

- I would have told you, if you had wanted me to.
- Yes, I can do that.

They are not used to talk about things that definitely exist, or events that definitely happened. These meanings are sometimes divided into two groups:

DEGREES OF CERTAINTY - certainty; probability; possibility; impossibility.
OBLIGATION/FREEDOM TO ACT - permission; lack of permission; ability; obligation.

Modal verbs are verbs that 'help' other verbs to express a meaning; it is important to realise that modal verbs have no meaning by themselves. A modal verb such as *would* has several functions: it can be used, for example, to help verbs express ideas about the past, the present and the future.

Sentence Types

There are four sentence types in English. The first sentence type is the most common:

Declarative
A declarative sentence "declares" or states a fact, arrangement or opinion. Declarative sentences can be either positive or negative. A declarative sentence ends with a full stop.

Examples: 'I'll meet you at the train station.' 'The sun rises in the East.'
'He doesn't get up early.'

Imperative
The imperative commands (or sometimes requests). The imperative has no subject as 'you' is the implied subject. The imperative form ends with either a full stop or an exclamation mark.

Examples: 'Open the door.' 'Finish your homework!'
'Pick up that mess!'

Interrogative
The interrogative asks a question. The interrogative form ends with a question mark.

Examples: 'How long have you lived in France?' 'When does the bus leave?'
'Do you enjoy listening to classical music?'

Exclamatory
The exclamatory form emphasises a statement (either declarative or imperative) with an exclamation mark.

Examples: 'Hurry up!' 'That sounds fantastic!'
'I can't believe you said that!'

More about Sentences:

All of the sentence types fall into three further categories:

- *Simple*
- *Compound*
- *Complex*

Simple Sentences
Simple sentences contain no conjunction (and, but, or, etc.).

Examples: 'Jack ate his dinner quickly.'
'Peter and Sue visited the museum last Saturday.'
'Are you coming to the party?'

Compound Sentences
Compound sentences contain two statements that are connected by a conjunction (and, but, or, etc.).

Examples: 'I wanted to watch TV, but it was late.'
'I went shopping and my wife went to her classes.'
'The company had an excellent year, so they gave everyone a bonus.'

Complex Sentences
Complex sentences have an independent main clause and at least one other clause that is added. They are joined by a subordinating conjunction, such as which, who, although, despite, if, since, etc.

Examples: 'My daughter, who was late for class, arrived shortly after the bell rang.'
'Although it was difficult, the class passed the test with excellent marks.'

ACTIVITY 1

Analyse a text or some data to spot the sentence types. Try also to consider the effects of the different types.

ACTIVITY 2

Write your own piece with as many sentence types and varieties as you can *but* your writing should be as polished and fluent as possible. Write in the style of a review.

Phonetics / Phonology

Phonetics *is the study of the sounds made by speakers.*

Phonology *is the use of vocal elements to add extra force to what is being said.*

Phonetics:

Part of the study of spoken texts is to record and transcribe conversations yourself, as well as analysing those done by others. This is a skill that you will gradually develop; you will find useful information on Wikipedia, among other sites, and details about the phonetic symbols. You will need to know that a **phoneme** is the smallest unit of sound in a language and that each phoneme has its own phonetic symbol. The symbols represent the sounds of Received Pronunciation.

Phonology:

Key Features may include:

- Characteristics of normal spoken delivery, e.g. volume, stress, pitch, intonation, (pitch pattern or melody), tempo, silent pauses, voiced pauses (fillers, e.g. 'er', 'erm'), alliteration, assonance. These are called **prosodic** features.
- Elision (partial loss of sounds from words in connected speech, indicated through spelling), e.g. I'm, can't, 'cos, fish 'n' chips, livin', cuppa tea).
- Phonology can even be a characteristic of written English as well as spoken and can be spotted in certain patterns. You will be used to this with the poems that you studied for GCSE, but remember that we are not just thinking about poems anymore. The patterns can include: rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, assonance.
- Significant aspects of accent, indicated by means of deviant spelling, e.g. West Lancashire 'th'reet mon' ('the right man'), Somerset 'zo I zaid' ('so I said').

ACTIVITY 1

Write some headlines for a tabloid newspaper which use phonological devices for effect. Your subjects can be "real", based on current affairs or celebrity gossip, or you could take a school in-house issue.

ACTIVITY 2

Imagine that you are a traditional market trader, calling out to attract customers. Write a few lines, using phonological devices for effect.

ACTIVITY 3

Record a conversation so that you can look for as many of the characteristics listed above as possible. Note down examples, for example of volume, pauses, fillers etc.

Pragmatics

The study of the meanings people are really trying to communicate. For example, "How lovely to see you" can convey different meanings: the speaker is genuinely pleased to see the other person; the speaker is being sarcastic and would prefer not to see the other person; there might be an element of malice because of the appalling dress sense of the second person which provides entertainment; etc.

Key Features may include:

- Specific features of turns in speech, e.g. utterance length, speech acts, indirectives, backtracking, repairing, forms (terms) of address, repetition, reformulation, minimal responses, backchannelling, hedging, mitigating devices.
- Recognition of function (force) where different from grammatical form, e.g. use of grammatical declarative to ask question or of interrogative to command.
- Grice's co-operative principle and four maxims**.**
- Politeness and face (positive v. negative), face-threatening act.
- Recognition of cultural allusions.
- Identification of implied meanings over and above the semantic or more obvious.
- Explanation and interpretation as to why speaker(s) or writer(s) make their particular choices of language in the specific context.

ACTIVITY 1

Write a conversation which has layers of meaning in addition to the semantic meanings.

ACTIVITY 2

Write another review, a short one or an extract, which is rich in pragmatic meaning.

Discourse

(i) *Longer stretches of text, looking particularly at aspects of cohesion (the way different parts of a text are connected through either grammar or lexis).*

(ii) *The way texts create identities for particular individuals, groups or institutions e.g. the discourse of law, politics, the media.*

Key Features may include:

- The written genre
- The context of a conversation e.g. an unequal encounter or a peer group chat
- The speakers' roles
- In a written text, the point of view: perspective and voice
- Management by speakers of turn-taking and topics, openings and closings
- Register (topic, level of formality and tone), register switching
- External coherence established through consistent reference to the real world
- Intertextuality
- Use by speakers of frames (scripts or norms of interaction), discourse markers, adjacency pairs, interruptions and overlaps

ACTIVITY

Take a text you have found and annotate using (i) and (ii) above as your guide.

Graphology

The visual appearance of language.

Key Features may include:

- Nature of characters, e.g. handwritten or printed, plain or ornamental, upper or lower case.
- Font type e.g. Arial, Parisian BT, Times New Roman**.**
- Font style e.g. standard, **emboldened**, *italic.*
- Font size (measured in points – 72 points to the inch, e.g. eight point, ten point, twelve point).
- The concept of the grapheme, the fundamental unit in written language such as letters of the alphabet, numbers, punctuation marks.
- Organisation of text, e.g. headings, columns, bullet points, numeration, borders, boxes, paragraph size, line spacing, use of white space.
- Other aspects, e.g. use of colour, logos, drawings, photographs, captions, diagrams, charts.

*A key word to learn: **semiotics**. It is the study of how we read signs.*

ACTIVITY 1

Find a leaflet, poster or blog and analyse its graphological features.

Related Concepts

Register
How language varies in relation to situation (audience, purpose and context). Register can be a spectrum of formality through to informality: the style or tone reflects the attitude adopted by the writer/speaker to the reader/audience and the topic. This is called the **tenor**.

The language used in connection with a specific topic is called the **field**. A text from a computer magazine, for example, will include field specific words to do with computing.

Mode
The two main types are spoken and written, with the computer-mediated communication (CMC) also now taking its own important place. Language varies from mode to mode, for example a letter, a phone call and an email will not use the same language even if they have the same audience, purpose and context. Within each mode, there are variations and for the same reasons, e.g. a letter to a friend has different language compared to a letter applying for a job.

Multimodality
Using more than one mode within a text.

Idiolect
The language used by an individual. Everyone expresses themselves in their own style, depending on the influences that have been brought to bear, such as family, travel, education, region, peer group etc.

Sociolect
The language associated with a particular social group, produced due to the effects of education, occupation, social class, religion etc.

Dialect
This has its own distinctive vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. It is a sub-division of the main language and can exist with several other dialects within the one language; they are mutually intelligible. Usually regional dialects are the most common; in England, you can find the Norfolk dialect, the Liverpudlian and the Geordie dialects, for example.

Accent is not as broad as dialect as it relates only to pronunciation.

Representation
How language represents reality, such as thought, social values and so on.

2. Useful websites to explore

Andrew Moore's website is a good place to start. There is a lot of info here, so start by browsing for different topics http://universalteacher.org.uk/

If your knowledge of grammar isn't up to scratch, improve it by using www.englishbiz.co.uk/grammar

The British Library has a fantastic site with a vast range of resources. www.bl.uk
Try 'The history of the English Language'.

If you're looking for a brief introduction to some key aspects of linguistics, try the site for the Linguistic Society of America: lsadc.org/web2/index.html

Under 'Field of Linguistics', you'll find useful articles e.g. by Deborah Tannen (useful for studying gender theories).

Try the Museum of Human Language – a virtual site
www.geocities.com/agihard/mohl/mohl.html

Look up interesting words in www.worldwidewords.org

Listen to a variety of British accents on YouTube: One Woman, 17 British Accents – Anglophenia

3. Visits

A visit to the British Library will give you a fascinating insight into texts across the ages.

4. Using Technology

Your pc and the internet is of course an unlimited linguistic resource! Use it to look up articles about how language is used and to read people's ideas about language.

The opinion pages in The Guardian online is a good starting point.

You should also familiarise yourself with a range of online texts. **Visit The Student Room to explore how blogs work.**

And then there's your smartphone. Use it to record your friends' conversations – with their permission of course! – and then listen to how they communicate. Do the guys interrupt the ladies all the time? Do the girls really talk about their feelings and make-up? You could find this useful when studying identity or language and gender.

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