**A-level English Language**

**Bridging the gap between GCSE and A-level**

**A group of people sitting on the floor

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**

The tasks in this pack are designed to give you an insight into studying English Language.

Please complete them all to the best of your ability and bring them to your first lesson in September. They are designed to help you understand some of the main topics you will study in the next two years.

1. **Becoming a Student of English Language A Level**

This activity will give you an insight into what studying A Level English Language entails, as well as the learning approaches that will help you excel in both exams and coursework. More importantly, it will show you how to enjoy and make the most of the course.

* Use the table below to get an idea of what the A Level English Language course involves. Tick the topics that interest you and those you have encountered before—whether in Primary or Secondary school or through personal interest.
* Choose three areas of language study that you are most eager to explore further. Write a few sentences explaining what you already know about these areas (from studies or general knowledge) and what you would like to learn more about, including your reasons for choosing these topics.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What you might study** | **I know a bit about this but have never studied it** | **I’ve studied this** | **I would like to learn about this** |
| How children start to say their first words |  |  |  |
| Why everyone has an accent but why some are liked more than others |  |  |  |
| Where new words come from and why |  |  |  |
| Why people in India, Nigeria and the USA all have their own ways of speaking English |  |  |  |
| How men and women use language in similar and different ways |  |  |  |
| How and why slang develops |  |  |  |
| Why some occupations develop their own specialist vocabulary |  |  |  |
| How people switch the ways they use language in different situations |  |  |  |
| How English changed from something that only the common people spoke to being the language of all parts of society |  |  |  |

**2. Text Analysis**

One of the main parts of the course is language analysis. You won’t be studying heavy, serious books, but instead will explore all kinds of language, looking at how it is spoken, written and texted! You will study a range of texts about various subjects, for various audiences and purposes, in a variety of modes (written, spoken, electronic), from different times and from different places.

When analysing texts, you will explore how language is shaped according to audience, purpose, genre and mode and used to construct meanings and representations.

To help prepare for this, take a quick look at each of the following texts and consider:

* + What is the topic?
  + What might the text be trying to convey — what ideas, messages, opinions, or personalities come through?
  + How does it use different communication tools, such as design, colour, word choice, structure, style, and interaction?

Jot down some brief notes in the table below about how each text compares in its language use. How formal/informal are they? What audience are they trying to reach? Is there anything interesting in the word choices that is influenced by the fact they are written/spoken?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Recipe for banoffee pie from BBC ‘Good Food’ website |  |
| Part of a radio commentary on a live football match  *And it’s controlled beautifully by Jack Harrison who beats his man and whips a ball across the face of goal. It’s an inviting ball aaaaand it’s Ben White who gets on the end of it to put it past the keeper’s outstretched hand. First goal of the season for the central defender and what a great team goal that was* |  |
| An Instagram post from an ‘influencer’ |  |
| Charity poster displayed in an underground railway station    The small text reads: “Stima does everything she can for her little boy, as any mother would. But when there’s only dirty water to drink, when it’s deadly, disease-ridden water or nothing – all the love in the world can’t keep him safe. £3 from you can.” |  |

**3. Language Profile**

One of the most fascinating parts of studying language is discovering more about your own language use—so let’s make this task all about you!

Create a ‘language profile’ by answering the following questions and summarising your responses in bullet points. Focus on the most interesting and significant aspects of how you use language:

* What is your earliest memory of language? Can you recall a favourite nursery rhyme, song, or picture book from early childhood? Do you know, or can you find out, what your first word was? Has your family or extended family kept any records—such as videos, audio clips, or shared memories—of your first words?
* Where were you born, and where are your family members from, whether in the UK or beyond? Have you *ever* lived somewhere else?
* Looking back a few generations, are there any other languages spoken in your family, or have family members lived in different parts of the world?
* Are there any unique words or phrases that only you or your family use, which others might not understand?
* Do you or your friends at school use language in ways that stand out from those around you, such as your teachers, family, or other students?
* Are there any people on TV, online, in films, or in music videos whose way of speaking interests or even irritates you?

Language is much more than just words on a page, so keep these ideas in mind to explore its full range. We are often taught that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to use language, but the more you study it, the more you’ll realize that language is far more complex and intriguing. Over time, you’ll develop a deeper understanding of the different influences that shape your own language identity and how you can adapt your language use in different situations.

**4. Language Fingerprints**

As you explore language use, you’ll notice that everyone has their own distinctive way of speaking and writing. This is shaped by various factors, including where we come from, our age, profession, interests, family background, and personality. This unique linguistic style is known as an idiolect. While it’s not as distinct as a fingerprint, there are similarities—just as detectives use fingerprints to identify individuals, forensic linguists analyse language patterns to determine a person’s identity or background.

In this activity, you’ll take on the role of a language detective. A local college needs your expertise to determine who might have sent a threatening note to a teacher. With three suspects, your task is to analyse possible linguistic clues and provide your opinion on which suspect is most likely responsible.

**The Case of the Threatening Note: A Forensic Linguistics Challenge**

**Background:** A threatening note was found in a teacher's office at Cowes Enterprise College. The Headteacher has narrowed down the suspects to three individuals based on their recent conflicts with the teacher. Your task is to use forensic linguistics to determine which suspect likely wrote the note.

**Instructions:**

1. **Analyse the Note:** Carefully examine the threatening note, focusing on linguistic features such as word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, and tone.
2. **Compare with Suspect Profiles:** Compare the note's linguistic features with the writing samples provided by each suspect. Consider how each suspect’s writing style and language use might match or differ from the note.
3. **Identify the Suspect:** Write a short paragraph explaining who you think the culprit is, and what linguistic evidence you have got for this.

**The Threatening Note:**

**YOU WILL REGRET YOUR DECISION. THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING. WATCH OUT.**

**Note Details:**

* **Written in:** Black ink, printed in uppercase letters
* **Punctuation:** what can you comment on?
* **Language Style:** what can you comment on?

**Suspect Profiles and Writing Samples**

**Suspect 1: Jamie Turner**

**Profile:**  
Jamie is a sixth form student known for being outspoken in class discussions. They often express their opinions strongly, especially when they feel an injustice has occurred. Jamie recently had a heated argument with the teacher over a grade dispute.

**Writing Sample:**  
"I can’t believe I got a C on that paper. It’s absolutely ridiculous! The grading is completely UNFAIR. But FINE, whatever, I’ll just have to deal with it."

**Suspect 2: Alex Morgan**

**Profile:**  
Alex is a quiet student who prefers to keep to themselves. They often communicate via text messages or emails, preferring brief communication. Alex was recently reprimanded by the teacher for not participating in group work, which they found unfair.

**Writing Sample:**  
"Group work is not for everyone. I did not think it was fair to be singled out, but I will try to do better next time."

**Suspect 3: Casey Lee**

**Profile:**  
Casey is an athletic student who is very involved in sports. They are known for their competitive nature and can be quite intense and passionate when they feel challenged. Recently, Casey was benched by the teacher (also the coach) for missing a practice, which led to a tense confrontation.

**Writing Sample:**  
"I missed one practice, and now I’m benched? Seriously? This is so frustrating, and it’s not fair at all. I’ll prove that I should be back on the team."

So, WHODDUNIT? What’s your verdict, and why? Explain here:

This task encourages you to think critically about language use and how small details can provide significant clues in solving a case. Every word matters! This is a *very* simplified version of the kind of analysis forensic linguists sometimes do.

1. **The History of English**

One of the most fascinating aspects of any A Level English Language course is examining how the language we use today has evolved. Even now, English continues to change and is spoken in diverse ways both in the UK and around the world. Since its origins in the 5th century CE, the language has undergone numerous transformations and reached significant historical milestones.

* This activity invites you to create a timeline of key moments in the history of English. You may not be familiar with all the dates yet, but that’s okay—you can still begin arranging major developments in sequence.
* You can complete this task by either writing the events in the order you believe they occurred or by printing and cutting out the tiles to arrange them in sequence.
* If you are writing the dates, list them in chronological order on a sheet of paper, with the earliest events on the left and the most recent on the right.
* If you choose to print and cut out the tiles, shuffle them first, then attempt to arrange them in order from oldest to most recent. Add each tile one at a time, considering its placement before finalising your timeline.
* If you’d like to learn more about major developments in the English language, explore the British Library timeline and the Open University’s *History of English in 10 Minutes.*

British Library English Language and Literature Timeline (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html>)

Open University The History of English in 10 Minutes (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s>

**Events on the Timeline of English**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First printing press in the UK | First bible translation to English |
| Norman Invasion of Britain | First email sent |
| Establishment of first university in the UK | First telephone call |
| First SMS (text) message sent | First English settlement in America |
| Education Act that led to compulsory schooling age 15 | First TV broadcast in the world |
| Facebook first launched | Shakespeare’s first play performed |

1. **Accents and dialects**

Everyone has an accent. You might not think you do, but it’s a linguistic fact. Accents are normally associated with particular regions and places but can also be linked to a person’s social class – how ‘posh’ they sound, for example.

In this taster activity, you will familiarise yourself with some of the main regional varieties of English spoken in the UK. Look at the table below.

* Firstly, consider how familiar you are with this accent. Do you know what it sounds like? If not, spend some time listening to this accent on YouTube so that you start to recognise this variety.
* Next, have a think about the connotations of the accent. What thoughts/feelings do you have about it? Do you like/dislike it? Does it sound ‘posh’ or ‘common’? Does it sound intelligent or not? Jot down some of your reactions.
* Do some research into the main features of this accent. Make a note of one pronunciation feature, and one dialect term (a word or phrase used in that region), for each one.
* Lastly, see if you can match the accent to the correct place on the map on the next page! Jot down the name of the accent wherever you think it is spoken on the map.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of accent/dialect** | **Associated thoughts/feelings** | **Features of accent/dialect** |
| ‘Scouse’ (Liverpool) |  |  |
| ‘Brummy’ (Birmingham) |  |  |
| ‘Cockney’ (London) |  |  |
| ‘Geordie’ (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne) |  |  |
| MLE - Multicultural London English (London) |  |  |
| RP - Received Pronunciation |  |  |
| Cardiff |  |  |
| Glasgow |  |  |
| Belfast |  |  |

Now, write down the names of the accents/places where you think they are on this map:

