

Examining The Five Language Genres

Paper One requires students to know the difference between the five language genres and to be able to write a composition in the genre appropriate to the set task.

There are occasions when more than one style of language can be used in the same composition, (some newspaper reports may blend the languages of argument and persuasion, for example). However, it is essential to know before you start writing which style you intend to use and make sure you stick to it as far as possible.

In the Comprehension Question A, you may be asked to identify features of a particular language genre. Look at this example from the 2009 Higher Level Leaving Cert.

"Select four features of argumentative and/or persuasive writing evident in the text and comment on their effectiveness. Refer to the text in support of your answer. (20).

In these notes, I have given lists of the main features of each of the language genres. You should familiarise yourself with all of these and practise picking them out in the comprehension texts in the past papers.

In Comprehension Question B, the short writing task, you may be asked to write a letter, a report, a speech, a talk or a diary entry, to choose but a few examples. The examiner will expect you to use the appropriate language genre or genres.

In the composition, you will also be expected to show that you know which language genre or genres are appropriate to the task. If you do take the time to study the five language genres, you may find that you are able to tackle compositions which seemed daunting in the past. Speeches and newspaper articles appear frequently, and they can be a good choice for students who have an organised mind and strong opinions, or students who shy away from the thought of writing an imaginative piece.

The Language of Information

- The information should be given in as straightforward a way as possible.
- Be clear. Give facts and figures wherever possible and avoid vague descriptions.
- It is not necessary to use many adjectives or adverbs as these can make your writing subjective.
- It should not be long winded; the facts should be presented without embellishment.
- It should be as objective as possible.
- Personal opinions and anecdotes should not be included.
- It is difficult to make a piece written in the language of information really gripping, particularly if the subject matter is one in which your reader has very little interest. Don't assume that the hobby you enjoy will be equally riveting to others.
- The language of information is used in objective media reports, memos, summaries and instructions.

Sample 1 – Animal Testing

Animal testing / animal experimentation is the use of non-human animals in scientific experimentation. It is estimated that 50 to 100 million vertebrate animals worldwide — from zebrafish to non-human primates— are used annually. Most animals are euthanised after being used in an experiment.

The research is conducted inside universities, medical schools, pharmaceutical companies, farms, defence establishments, and commercial facilities that provide animal-testing services to industry. It includes pure research such as genetics and developmental biology as well as applied research such as drug testing and cosmetic testing. Animals are also used for education, breeding, and defence research.

Supporters of the practice, such as the British Royal Society, argue that virtually every medical achievement in the 20th century relied on the use of animals in some way, with the U.S. National Academy for Science arguing that even sophisticated computers are unable to model interactions between molecules, cells, tissues, organs, organisms, and the environment, making animal research necessary in some areas. The U.S. and British governments both support the advancement of medical and scientific goals using animal testing, provided that the testing minimizes animal use and suffering. Others, such as the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, question the necessity of it. These opponents make a range of arguments: that it is cruel, poor scientific practice, cannot reliably predict effects in humans, poorly regulated, that the costs outweigh the benefits, or that animals have an intrinsic right not to be used for experimentation.

Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_testing

The writer gets straight to the point. Facts and figures are given.

There is no embellishment, nor is there any opinion. We do not know the writer's opinion on the topic.

The piece is objective throughout.

The writer acknowledges that the topic is a controversial one, and the arguments for and against it are outlined, but equal weight is given to both.

Sample 2 – Gun Control

Gun politics in the United States, incorporating the political aspects of gun politics and firearms rights, has long been among the most controversial and intractable issues in American politics. For the last several decades, this debate has been characterized by stalemate between debate on an individual's right to firearms under the Constitution and the duty of government to legislate gun laws to prevent crime and maintain order. In *District of Columbia v. Heller*, No. 07-290, the Supreme Court of the United States held that an individual right to bear arms is protected under the Second Amendment. Repeated polling has found that a majority of Americans believe that they have a right to own a gun while at the same time a majority also believes that there is a need for stricter firearm law enforcement. Relative to enacting new gun laws, however, the support drops to a minority; only 43 percent believe new laws would be more effective in reducing gun violence in the United States than the better enforcement of existing laws.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

Again, this is a controversial topic, but the writer does not express an opinion.

Facts and figures are taken from polls and legal documents.

The Language of Argument

- The language of argument presents a viewpoint and tries to win the reader over by appealing to his or her logic rather than emotion.
 - There is no emotionally charged language used, the tone is quite calm and logical.
 - The evidence is presented and the reader is encouraged to make up his or her own mind.
 - **Analogy** is a useful tool here, (a comparison between two things which are otherwise dissimilar). Remember, however, that analogies cannot prove anything. Comparisons only go so far.
 - **Rhetorical questions** (questions to which an answer is not expected or an argument phrased in the form of a question to which there is only one possible answer) are commonly used to engage the reader and to try to make him or her believe that there is a conversation taking place between the writer and the reader. Using rhetorical questions cleverly avoids giving the reader the impression that he or she is on the receiving end of a lecture. If people feel they are being lectured to, they may decide that the writer is arrogant, and the writer may lose their support.
 - **Facts and figures are given**, but they are carefully chosen to support the point the writer is making. Using statistics can make the writer's case seem well-researched and therefore more credible.
- " Repeated polling has found that a majority of Americans believe that they have a right to own a gun while at the same time a majority also believes that there is a need for stricter firearm law enforcement. Relative to enacting new gun laws, however, the support drops to a minority; only 43 percent believe new laws would be more effective in reducing gun violence in the United States than the better enforcement of existing laws."

- It is acceptable to anticipate and briefly respond to the reader's possible objections to the argument you are putting forward but be careful that you don't weaken your case by doing so. Giving both sides of the argument equal weight is not a good idea. However, acknowledging other viewpoints can be an effective technique, as it makes the writer appear rational and fair-minded. It implies the the writer has approached this argument in a balanced way.

"What about all the important breakthroughs, as a result of animal research, that have aided human health? The animal research industry cites many examples of treatments or cures for illness that have been found using animals. They claim that if animal research is discontinued, it will be at the expense of human health and life. Industry groups, such as Americans for Medical Progress credit animal research with advances such as the development of the polio vaccine, anaesthesia, and the discovery of insulin. But a close examination of medical history clearly disputes these claims."

The writer of this piece went on to argue strongly against animal testing, giving statistics and quotes to support his point.

- **Quotations** can give the impression that the writer is just one of many people who feels this way and can imply that the writer's opinion is shared by independent, learned individuals. A quote can be an effective way to begin or end a piece written in the language of argument.

"The outcome and extent of gun control has strong political implications because it basically determines the present day meaning of the Second Amendment. While each side has strong points to their arguments, one quote by writer Michael Warfel basically sums up the need for gun control. He writes, “ an individual’s right to own and bear arms must be balanced by the greater social needs of a society” . Today, based on the number of crimes and violent acts committed with guns, society needs more gun control."

- **The word 'We'** is often used instead of 'I' to draw the reader in and make him or her feel on the same side as the writer.

- **'Persuader'** words and phrases can be used to good effect:
 - *Clearly*
 - *Plainly*

- *Surely*
- *Undoubtedly*
- *Obviously*
- *As we all know...*
- *Everybody is fully aware that...*

These words and phrases make the reader feel that they, and everybody else, has always agreed with the statement being made. The information now takes on the appearance of being an well-known, established fact. The reader feels that if he or she does not agree with the statement, then he or she is in a minority.

- **Distancing phrases** make the writing seem more formal and less personal. "There are those who claim that..." "It is often said that..." They can also make the reader feel that the views being put forward are generally accepted.
- **Repetition** can add emphasis and can make a piece memorable.
- **Antithesis** can be an elegant way to contrast ideas using parallel arrangements of words or phrases. Look at this example from John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." Or think of Benjamin Franklin's famous line, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Such lines are memorable and very effective.
- Just because the language of argument doesn't try to win the reader over with emotion doesn't mean that the writer doesn't have a strong opinion themselves; it simply means they give all the points in favour of their argument and trust the reader will be intelligent enough to weigh the evidence and come to the right conclusion.
- The language of argument is used in certain newspaper reports, scientific journals and legal documents.

Sample 1 – Animal Testing

The Scientific Argument Against Animal Testing

The most commonly held perception regarding animal experimentation is that it is necessary for the development of vaccines, cures and treatments for human illness. Proponents ask the important question, what will happen to research on AIDS, heart disease, and cancer if animal experimentation is completely stopped? Will the progress in cures and treatments for these types of illnesses also come to a halt?

There is a growing movement of healthcare professionals including doctors, scientists, and educated members of the public who are opposed to non-human animal-based experimentation on specifically medical and scientific grounds. They argue that animal research is based on a false premise, that results obtained through animal experimentation can be applied to the human body.

Animals not only react differently than humans to different drugs, vaccines, and experiments, they also react differently from one another. Ignoring this difference has been and continues to be very costly to human health.

What about all the important breakthroughs, as a result of animal research, that have aided human health? The animal research industry cites many examples of treatments or cures for illness that have been found using animals. They claim that if animal research is discontinued, it will be at the expense of human health and life. Industry groups, such as Americans for Medical Progress credit animal research with advances such as the development of the polio vaccine, anaesthesia, and the discovery of insulin. But a close examination of medical history clearly disputes these claims.

Surgical anaesthesia was discovered in the mid nineteenth century when Crawford Williamson Long observed the effects of ether on humans during "ether parties", a popular form of entertainment involving ether inhalation. Long observed that while etherized, people appeared impervious to pain. He transformed this observation into a more practical use in surgery. The discovery of anaesthesia, like many other medical discoveries, came from the critical observation of humans.

Clearly, if we are going to make medical progress, a new approach is needed. Human medicine can no longer be based on veterinary medicine. It is fraudulent and dangerous to apply data from one species to another. There are endless examples of the differences between humans and non-human animals.

1. PCP is a sedative for chimps
2. Penicillin kills cats and guinea pigs but has saved many human lives.
3. Arsenic is not poisonous to rats, mice, or sheep.

4. Morphine is a sedative for humans but is a stimulant for cats, goats, and horses.
5. Digitalis while dangerously raising blood pressure in dogs continues to save countless cardiac patients by lowering heart rate.

The National Institutes of Health alone pours well over five billion dollars annually into superfluous animal experimentation. Abolishing animal research will mean these resources could be redirected into prevention and the types of research which actually have a chance of advancing human medicine and human health.

Arguments on Gun Control

With the Second Amendment giving American citizens the right to bear arms, and approximately fifty percent of Americans owning some form of a firearm, issues involving the ownership and possession of guns have led to heated debates in American society. Most notably is the issue of gun control. Many feel that the some form of gun regulation is necessary in order to lower the level of gun related violence in the country. On the other hand, the opponents of gun control feel that it would be an infringement on their second amendment rights. The outcome and extent of gun control has strong political implications because it basically determines the present day meaning of the Second Amendment. While each side has strong points to their arguments, one quote by writer Michael Warfel basically sums up the need for gun control. He writes, “ an individual’s right to own and bear arms must be balanced by the greater social needs of a society” . Today, based on the number of crimes and violent acts committed with guns, society needs more gun control.



Language of Persuasion

- The language of persuasion is similar in many ways to the language of argument. Both outline a case for or against a particular point of view.
- The difference is that language of persuasion deliberately tries to influence the reader by appealing to his or her emotions, not reason.
- Manipulation can be a major part of the language of persuasion. It often plays on the reader's conscience, making him or her feel guilty or pressurised into agreeing with the case being made. It can also flatter the reader into agreeing; this is a common technique in advertising, 'As a discerning customer, we know you want nothing but the best', etc.
- Strong, emotive language can be used to win the reader over.
- The word 'We' is often used instead of 'I' to draw the reader in and make him or her feel on the same side as the writer.
- Adjectives and adverbs are used freely and they are often quite extreme.
- The writer's opinion is usually crystal clear from the opening sentence.
- Facts and figures may be given but they may be vague or exaggerated, 'The vast majority of people', 'Almost every student in the country', etc. This can aid the manipulative effect of persuasive writing, the implication is often there that if you don't agree, you are going against popular opinion and you don't fit in. Obviously, this is very useful in advertising. Generalisations are used without the support of a source – watch out for 'All' or 'Every'.
- Rhetorical questions, an argument framed in the form of a question to which there can be only one possible answer, may be used. 'Why should we allow our parents to rule every aspect of our lives?' (Answer expected – we shouldn't.)

- 'Persuader' words can be used to good effect:

Clearly

Plainly

Surely

Undoubtedly

Obviously

- Personal opinion and anecdotes are often used.
- The language of persuasion is used in advertising, political speeches and some newspaper reports.

The following pieces, taken from internet sites, are examples of persuasive language.

ANIMAL TESTING

Animal experimentation involves the incarceration of animals - which itself causes intense psychological distress - who are then poisoned, mutilated, given diseases and killed. It is arguably the most severe form of systematic violence in the modern world. Other terms for animal experimentation include 'vivisection', 'animal testing', and 'animal research'.

The annual Home Office statistics for vivisection have revealed an appalling rise in animal experimentation during 2007. It is the sixth yearly increase in succession and the highest figures since 1991. For the first time in sixteen years, the number of animals used topped the 3 million mark. By law, the Home Office only counts those experiments that have the potential 'to cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm'.

The Government consistently issues blatantly dishonest statements, claiming that UK regulations 'permit only essential research with clear medical benefits'. In fact, the statistics show that thousands of animals are used in poisoning tests for non-pharmaceutical substances. The Government refuses to ban suffering for unarguably trivial purposes such as new laundry liquids, and allows painful and traumatic animals tests for substances like refrigerants and industrial chemicals. Furthermore, the Government admits that they have never actually conducted research to evaluate whether animal experiments benefit human medicine, despite scientific doubts over their applicability and thousands of human deaths caused by drug side-effects not revealed by previous animal tests.

GUN CONTROL

Opposition to gun control, once you strip away the grandstanding and chest thumping, amounts to a child's naked need for comfort and safety. Charlton Heston recently referenced the popular NRA slogan, "You can have my gun when you can pry it loose from my cold, dead hand." How guns can, ultimately, protect you from all adversaries I'm a little unclear on. I subscribe to an e-mail newsletter that sends me tidbits about history. A recent item from this newsletter described an Old West figure, a brilliant gunfighter, a man who could draw, aim and pull the trigger faster than lightning--and his enemies ambushed him and shot him in the back. No matter how many firearms a person owns and uses, no matter how good he or she is with them, it is no absolute guarantee of safety. It's a big world, and there's always room enough in it for someone who will not play fair.

U.S. gun lovers think their weapons give them ultimate safety. I believe David Koresh was responsible for his own destruction - but he's still worth mentioning. His private armoury, and private army, could not save him from the might of the government showing up on his doorstep -ready to destroy him, if necessary.

Language of Narration

- This is almost certainly the first type of language most people used in their compositions when they were younger.
- In the language of narration, the writer simply tells a story.
- The story can be fact or fiction. Autobiographies are written in a narrative style: they generally present us with the events of the subject's life in chronological order.
- The set novels on your course are examples of narrative language.
- The language of narration often contains an element of aesthetic language.

The following example of narrative writing is taken from Peter Mayle's 'A Year In Provence'.

The whole furtive business began with a phone call from London. It was my friend Frank, who had once been described in a glossy magazine as a reclusive magnate. I knew him better as a gourmet of championship standard, a man who takes dinner as seriously as other people take politics. Frank in the kitchen is like a hound on the scent, sniffing, peering into bubbling saucepans, quivering with expectation. The smell of a rich cassoulet puts him in a trance. My wife says that he is one of the most rewarding eaters she has ever cooked for.

There was a hint of alarm in his voice when he explained why he was calling.

'It's March,' he said, 'and I'm worried about the truffles. Are there still some left?'

March is the end of the truffle season, and in the markets around us, as close as we were to the truffle country in the foothills of Mont Ventoux, the dealers seemed to have disappeared. I told Frank that he may have left it too late.

There was a horrified silence while he considered the gastronomic deprivation that stared him in the face – no truffle omelettes, no truffles en croûte, no truffle-studded roast pork. The telephone line was heavy with disappointment.

Aesthetic Language

- Aesthetic language is used to create images of beauty through carefully chosen words.
- It is a common feature of poetry.
- While it is more usually associated with fiction, aesthetic language can be used in non-fiction also. Good examples of aesthetic language may be found in descriptions of travel or of nature.
- It is a good idea to think of the literary terms you learnt for your poetry studies when you are considering writing in this style. Images, metaphors and similes and repetition can all be used to advantage here.

- The language can also be musically pleasing, as in a poem. This is achieved by the use of assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia.

The following example of aesthetic language is from James Joyce's 'The Dead'.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.