

Language Genres

The Leaving Cert will test your ability to recognise and write in the appropriate style for the task you are set.

Remember, writing styles can overlap. 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 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 take the time to study the five language genres, you will find that you are able to confidently tackle compositions which seemed too difficult 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. If you are thinking of writing a speech, talk or article, you need to brush up on the following language genres: argument, persuasion, information.

The Language of Information

- The information should be given in as brief, clear and straightforward a way as possible.
- Give facts and figures wherever possible and avoid vague descriptions.
- Pieces written in the language of information should be as objective as possible. This means that the writer's tastes, feelings or opinions should not be revealed.
- It is not necessary to use many adjectives or adverbs as these can make your writing subjective (influenced by personal tastes, opinions or feelings).
- Personal pronouns: 'I', 'You', 'We' etc. are rarely used in informative writing.
- Anecdotes (short, personal stories) should not be used as they too make the writing subjective.
- Avoid qualifiers: 'Quite', 'Very', 'Fairly' etc. as they weaken your writing. Be specific.

The language of information is used in objective media reports, memos proposals, summaries and instructions.

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). 'Raising a child is like raising a plant. You must

nurture, protect and care for both if they are to flourish.’ 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 believable.
- 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 that the writer has approached this argument in a balanced way.
- 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.
- Inclusive language, such as using the word 'We' is often used instead of 'I' draws the reader in and makes him or her feel on the same side as the writer.
- 'Pressure' words and phrases can be used to good effect. They make the reader feel that they, and everybody else, have always agreed with the point being made. The information now takes on the appearance of being a well-known, established fact. The reader feels that if he or she does not agree with the point, they are in the minority. Here are some examples: Clearly, plainly, undoubtedly, obviously, surely, as we all know..., everybody is fully aware that...

- 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, particularly if a triadic pattern (also known as 'the rule of three') is used. This rule states that having three of something creates a memorable pattern. Advertisers are well aware of this and the rule of three often features in their slogans. You probably know this example, in use since 1959: 'A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play'.
- Antithesis can be an elegant way to contrast ideas by 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.
- Reference / Allusion: The writer may refer to other sources, literary, biblical or historical, for example, to support his or her point. This can give the impression that the writer is learned and well-read and that the piece is well-researched and thought-out.

The language of argument is used in certain newspaper reports, scientific journals and legal documents.

The Language of Persuasion

- The language of persuasion is similar in many ways to the language of argument and uses some of the same techniques, such as rhetorical questions and pressure words or phrases. 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: 'L'Oreal, because you're worth it'.

- Strong, emotive language can be used to win the reader over.
- 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 add to the manipulative effect of persuasive writing because the implication is 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'.

- Personal opinion and anecdotes are often used. A short account of an amusing or humorous incident can add human interest to the writing and can help to illustrate the writer's point. They can prevent an informative piece from becoming too dull and dry an account of whatever the subject is.

The language of persuasion is used in advertising, political speeches and some newspaper reports, particularly in tabloid newspapers.

The 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.
- Particularly if the piece is written in the first person, there will be personal engagement with the topic, characters etc.
- The set novels on your course are examples of narrative language.
- The language of narration often contains an element of aesthetic language. Setting will usually be well-described in order to draw the reader in and allow him or her to visualise the scenes.
- Hooks may be used in the introduction in particular and intriguing details dropped in from time to time, raising questions the reader will want answered.
- Dialogue is a common feature of narrative writing.
- Characterisation plays an important role in most narrative writing.
- There may be dramatic or exciting moments to hold the reader's attention.
- Syntax: Long sentences can engage the readers and make them more inclined to agree with the point the writer is making. Short sentences can have a dramatic effect, particularly if used after a few long sentences. Varied sentence length can stop the piece from becoming monotonous and can keep the reader's attention.

Aesthetic Language

- Aesthetic language is used to create images of beauty through carefully chosen words.
- Aesthetic language appeals to the senses. If a reader can imagine the sights, sounds, smells etc., they will be engaged by the writing.
- 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.
- Just as in poetry, alliteration and assonance can be used in prose to create a sense of atmosphere. Look at the following sentence from James Joyce's *The Dead*: '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.'

The repeated 's' sounds add to the sense of peace and silence and the repetition of the alliterative words 'faintly' and 'falling' mimic the relentless snowfall.

- Personification can make the writing more interesting and can add drama. 'Flowers danced on the lawn.' 'The wind howled angrily around me and tugged at my clothes.'

'The operation is over. On the table, the knife lies spent, on its side, the bloody meal smear-dried upon its flanks. The knife rests.' Richard Selzer: *The Knife*