

Question A4: Explaining language and structure

Section A, Question 4 is likely to ask you how the writer shows you something about a character, relationship, setting or event in a particular part of the extract. This could also be presented as an impressions question. Remember, there will not be a definitive order for these questions. You will need to analyse how a writer uses language, structure and any other techniques to achieve a given effect.

What exactly must I do?

You will need to spend approximately 12 minutes explaining how an effect is created by:

- the structure (perhaps the beginning and ending of the extract and/or the stages in the middle)
- the main ideas of the extract
- the language used by the writer.

You must support what you say with relevant quotations and use subject terminology in your answer.

Structure

You may find it difficult to talk meaningfully about structure. One strategy may be to have the following ideas in mind. This is not a checklist (and it by no means includes all aspects of structure) but these are useful features to look out for.

- The opening
- The closing
- Dialogue
- Short sentences
- Questions
- Changes in perspective or focus
- Repetition
- Listing
- Holding back information or hints that link to what is to come.



ACTIVITY 1

Link the features on the left with the examples on the right. (All the examples are from longer passages you will have encountered elsewhere in this book.)

| Feature | Example | Effect |
|-------------|--|--------|
| The opening | He shouted, 'Call her off, Kate.' | |
| The closing | Out of a side street something huge and white moved suddenly into his field of vision. | |

ACTIVITY CONTINUES

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| Dialogue | Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum |
| Short sentences | And the time? |
| Questions | It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope. |
| First person perspective | ... and vanished as silently as it had come. |
| Repetition | I chewed speedily to get rid of it. |
| Listing | Not he. |
| Holding back information or hints that link to what is to come | ... the room seemed tiny, tiny and very low. |

Of course, there are no marks for spotting techniques. What would you say are the effects of each of the above examples? (Add your ideas into the third column.)



ACTIVITY 2

Read the passage below (from *I'm the King of the Castle* by Susan Hill). It is about a man who is about to be attacked by a crow.

Consider the question:

How does the writer build the tension in the extract?

[10]

A useful strategy can be to annotate the extract before writing up your answer. Add your annotations to the bold text in the passage on the next page.

ACTIVITY CONTINUES





When he **first saw the crow**, he **took no notice**. There had been **several crows**. This one glided down into the corn on its **enormous, ragged black wings**. He began to be aware of it when it **rose up suddenly**, circled overhead, and **then dived**, to land not very far away from him.

Kingshaw could see the feathers on his head, **shining blank** in between the butter-coloured corn-stalks. Then it rose, and circled, and **came down again**, this time not quite landing, but **flapping about his head**, beating its wings and making a **sound like flat leather pieces** being slapped together. As it **came down for the third time**, he looked up and noticed its beak, opening in a **screech**. The inside of its mouth was **scarlet**, it had **small glinting eyes**.



ACTIVITY 3

Now have a go at including all your annotations in a full answer. Remember the question:

How does the writer build the tension in this extract?

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ACTIVITY CONTINUES ➔



ACTIVITY 4

This extract is told by a young, black American girl who is playing basketball with her friend Manny. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Then a squad car pulled up and a short cop got out. He looked real hard at me, then at Manny.

'What are you two doing?'

'He's practising shots. I'm watching. Ain't it obvious?' I said with my smart self.

The cop just stood there and finally turned to the other one who was just getting out of the car.

'Who unlocked the park gate?' the big one snarled.

'It's always unlocked,' I said. Then we three just stood there watching Manny go at it.

'Is that true?' the big guy asked, tilting his hat back with the thumb the way tough guys do in the movies. 'Hey you,' he said, walking over to Manny. 'I'm talking to you.' He finally grabbed the ball to get Manny's attention. But that didn't work. Manny just stood there with his arms out waiting for the pass. He wasn't paying no attention to the cop. So, quite naturally, when the cop slapped his head it was a surprise.

'Gimme the ball, man.' Manny's face was all tightened up and ready to pop.

'Did you hear what I said, black boy?'

Now, when somebody says that word like that, I gets warm. And crazy or no crazy, Manny became like my brother at that moment and the cop became the enemy.

'You better give him back his ball,' I said. 'Manny don't take no mess from no cops. He ain't bothering nobody. He's gonna be Mister Basketball when he grows up. Just trying to get a little practice in.'

'Look here, sister, we'll run you in too,' the short cop said.

'I sure can't be your sister seeing as how I'm a black girl and you're a white cop. Boy, I sure will be glad when you run me in so I can tell everybody about that. You're just picking on us because we're black, mister.'

The big guy screwed his mouth up and let out one of them hard-day sighs. 'The park's closed, little girl, so why don't you and your boyfriend go on home.'

That really got me. The 'little girl' was bad enough but that 'boyfriend' was too much.

From 'The Hammer Man' by Toni Cade Bambara

ACTIVITY CONTINUES

The following staged prompts help to break down the question:

How does the writer present the policemen in this extract?

[10]

1 How does the extract begin and what mood is created?

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2 What words are used to describe the policemen? What is the effect of these?

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3 What comparison is used to describe the policeman? What's the effect?

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4 What examples of dialogue can you find that are quite aggressive and threatening?

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5 What verb is used to describe the way that the policemen talk? What's the effect?

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6 What actions do the policemen perform? What are your views on these?

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7 The extract is written in the first person. How do you know this and what effect does it have on our views of the policemen?

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8 How does the extract end? What does it hint might come next?

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Having answered these questions, use the ideas to write up a full answer to the question:

[10]

In this extract, Winston and Julia are captured by the thought police who have been monitoring their discussions.

'Now they can see us,' said Julia.

‘Now we can see you,’ said the voice. ‘Stand out in the middle of the room. Stand back to back. Clasp your hands behind your heads. Do not touch one another.’

They were not touching, but it seemed to him that he could feel Julia's body shaking. Or perhaps it was merely the shaking of his own. He could just stop his teeth from chattering, but his knees were beyond his control. There was a sound of trampling boots below, inside the house and outside. The yard seemed to be full of men. Something was being dragged across the stones. The woman's singing had stopped abruptly. There was a long, rolling clang, as though the washtub had been flung across the yard, and then a confusion of angry shouts which ended in a yell of pain.



'The house is surrounded,' said Winston.

'The house is surrounded,' said the voice.

He heard Julia snap her teeth together. 'I suppose we may as well say good-bye,' she said.

'You may as well say good-bye,' said the voice.

From 1984 by George Orwell

[10]