

# A-level English Language at The Blue Coat Sixth Form



## Part 2

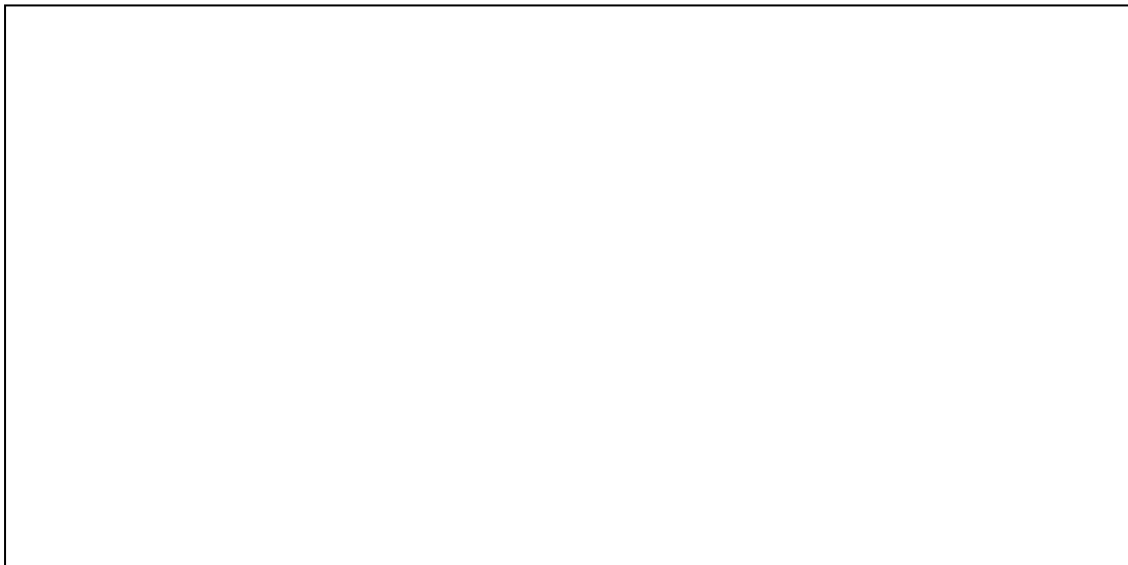
Welcome linguists! This is Part 2 of the bridging course aimed to prepare you for your English Language A Level.

The purpose of the bridging course is to give you a head start in your studies and to introduce you to some of the key concepts and terms you will be using throughout your English Language A Level.

You have chosen a subject that will open your eyes to a world that has previously been hidden in plain sight. Such critical awareness will allow you to be a conscious, critical human being who is able to challenge assumptions and understand the role that language plays in shaping our identity and the society we live in.

In Part 1 of the bridging course, you began to look at the importance of context when both writing and analysing a text. In this module, you are going to continue applying your analytical skills to a selection of text messages. This type of activity would be part of **Component 2 Language Change Over Time - Section B Language in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Component 2 Section B** is based on the study of the ways in which language is used distinctively in the twenty-first century and is designed to introduce you to how language is evolving to reflect technological and cultural change.

What technological advancements do you think have impacted upon the English Language in the past 20 years?



The English Language is constantly evolving. Professor David Crystal writes,

*“The language is in a constant state of multidimensional flux. There is no predictable direction for the changes that are taking place. They are just that, changes. Not changes for the better; nor changes for the worse; just changes, sometimes going one way, sometimes another.”*

To fully appreciate the extent to which our language has evolved, we must go back to the 410AD with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. The Open University has created a ten-minute video that gives you a whistle stop tour of things that have made the English Language what it is today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s> (Full Version)

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/english-language/the-history-english-ten-minutes>  
(Divided into parts)

Obviously, for this particular section, we are only concerned with changes that have taken place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here is the transcript of the section of the video that directly link to this period.

[http://media-podcast.open.ac.uk/feeds/history-of-english/transcript/historyofenglish09\\_01478\\_14767.pdf](http://media-podcast.open.ac.uk/feeds/history-of-english/transcript/historyofenglish09_01478_14767.pdf)

#### **The History of English in Ten Minutes Internet English Narrator:**

In 1972 the first email was sent. Soon the Internet arrived – a free global space to share information, ideas and amusing pictures of cats. Before then English changed through people speaking it – but the net brought typing back into fashion and hundreds of cases of repetitive strain syndrome.

Nobody had ever had to ‘download’ anything before, let alone use a ‘toolbar’ - And the only time someone set up a ‘firewall’, it ended with a massive insurance claim and a huge pile of charred wallpaper.

Conversations were getting shorter than the average attention span – why bother writing a sentence when an abbreviation would do and leave you more time to ‘blog’, ‘poke’ and ‘reboot’ when your ‘hard drive’ crashed?

‘In my humble opinion’ became ‘IMHO’, ‘by the way’ became ‘BTW’ and ‘if we’re honest that life-threatening accident was pretty hilarious!’ simply became ‘fail’.

Some changes even passed into spoken English. For your information people frequently asked questions like “how can ‘LOL’ mean ‘laugh out loud’ and ‘lots of love’? But if you’re going to complain about that then UG2BK.

It is clear to see that the impact of technology on the English Language has been immense. In particular the introduction of the mobile phone in 1985. With the mobile phone came messaging and with messaging came SMS. (Short Message System).

SMS language, textspeak or texting language is the abbreviated language and slang commonly used with mobile phone text messaging, or other Internet-based communication such as email and instant messaging.

Features of early mobile phone messaging encouraged users to use abbreviations. Text entry was difficult, requiring multiple key presses on a small keypad to generate each letter, and messages were generally limited to 160 characters. Additionally, SMS language made text messages quicker to compose.

SMS language is similar to that used by those sending telegraphs that charged by the word. It seeks to use the fewest letters to produce ultra-concise words and sentiments in dealing with space, time and cost constraints of text messaging. This follows from how early SMS permitted only 160 characters and that carriers began charging a small fee for each message sent (and sometimes received). This, together with the difficulty and inefficiency in creating messages led the desire for a more economical language for the new medium.

Similarly elliptical styles of writing can be traced to the days of telegraphese 120 years back, where telegraph operators were reported to use abbreviations similar to those used in modern text when chatting amongst themselves in between sending of official messages.

The invention of mobile phone messaging is considered to be the source for the invention of SMS language. In general, SMS language thus permits the sender to type less and communicate more quickly than one could without such shortcuts. One example is the use of "tomoz" instead of "tomorrow". Nevertheless, there are no standard rules for the creation and use of SMS languages. Any word may be shortened (for example, "text" to "txt"). Words can also be combined with numbers to make them shorter (for example, "later" to "l8r"), using the numeral "8" for its homophonic quality.

The primary motivation for the creation and use of SMS language was to convey a comprehensible message using the fewest characters possible. This was for two reasons; one, telecommunication companies limited the number of characters per SMS, and also charged the user per SMS sent. To keep costs down, users had to find a way of being concise while still communicating the desired message. Two, typing on a phone is normally slower than with a keyboard, and capitalisation is even slower. As a result, punctuation, grammar, and capitalisation are largely ignored. In many countries, people now have access to unlimited text options in their monthly plan, although this varies widely from country to country, and operator to operator. However, screens are still small and the input problem persists, so SMS language is still widely used for brevity.

Observations and classifications as to the linguistic and stylistic properties of SMS language have been made and proposed by Crispin Thurlow, López Rúa and David Crystal among many others. Although they are by no means exhaustive, some of these marked properties involve the use of:

- Initialisations (acronyms and abbreviations composed of initials)
- Reductions and shortenings, and omission of parts of speech
- Pragmatics and context in interpretation of ambiguous shortenings
- Reactive tokens
- Pictograms and logograms (rebus abbreviation)
- Paralinguistic and prosodic features
- Capitalisation
- Emoticons
- Variations in spelling
- Punctuation, or lack thereof

If you are unsure about any of these terms, then please look them up! Researching unfamiliar words is something you need to get into the habit of during your study of the English Language.

Can you translate the following SMS Abbreviations?

Abbreviation	Definition
OMW	
NP	
b4	
ATM	
Thx	
SMH	
TMI	
ne1	
J/k	
l8r	
IKR	

The introduction of textspeak has not only impacted upon the ways in which we message one another, but the ways in which we communicate in general. This variety of language use has and continues to incite much debate.

Some people take a **descriptivist** attitude towards the use of textspeak in our everyday lives whilst others' attitudes are more **prescriptivist**.

**Descriptivism** is a non-judgmental approach to language that focuses on how it is actually spoken and written.

**Prescriptivism** is the attitude or belief that one variety of a language is superior to others and should be promoted as such.

Based upon these definitions. Do you think you have a more **prescriptivist** or **descriptivist** attitude towards textspeak? Give reasons for your response.

Read the article written by leading descriptivist David Crystal about the impact of textspeak on our language. **Highlight any key information and ideas as you go!**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview>

## 2b or not 2b?

Despite doom-laden prophecies, texting has not been the disaster for language many feared, argues linguistics professor David Crystal. On the contrary, it improves children's writing and spelling

Last year, in a newspaper article headed "I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language", John Humphrys argued that texters are "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped."

As a new variety of language, texting has been condemned as "textese", "slanguage", a "digital virus". According to John Sutherland of University College London, writing in this paper in 2002, it is "bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab shrinktalk ... Linguistically it's all pig's ear ... it masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates."

Ever since the arrival of printing - thought to be the invention of the devil because it would put false opinions into people's minds - people have been arguing that new technology would have disastrous consequences for language. Scares accompanied the introduction of the telegraph, telephone, and broadcasting. But has there ever been a linguistic phenomenon that has aroused such curiosity, suspicion, fear, confusion, antagonism, fascination, excitement and enthusiasm all at once as texting? And in such a short space of time. Less than a decade ago, hardly anyone had heard of it.

The idea of a point-to-point short message service (or SMS) began to be discussed as part of the development of the Global System for Mobile Communications network in the mid-1980s, but it wasn't until the early 90s that phone companies started to develop its commercial possibilities. Text communicated by pagers were replaced by text messages, at first only 20 characters in length. It took five years or more before numbers of users started to build up. The average number of texts per GSM customer in 1995 was 0.4 per month; by the end of 2000 it was still only 35.

The slow start, it seems, was because the companies had trouble working out reliable ways of charging for the new service. But once procedures were in place, texting rocketed. In the UK, in 2001, 12.2bn text messages were sent. This had doubled by 2004, and was forecast to be 45bn in 2007. On Christmas Day alone in 2006, over 205m texts went out. World figures went from 17bn in 2000 to 250bn in 2001. They passed a trillion in 2005. Text messaging generated around \$70bn in 2005. That's more than three times as much as all Hollywood box office returns that year.

People think that the written language seen on mobile phone screens is new and alien, but all the popular beliefs about texting are wrong. Its graphic distinctiveness is not a new phenomenon, nor is its use restricted to the young. There is increasing evidence that it helps rather than hinders literacy. And only a very tiny part of it uses a distinctive orthography. A trillion text messages might seem a lot, but when we set these alongside the multi-trillion instances of standard orthography in everyday life, they appear as no more than a few ripples on the surface of the sea of language. Texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long-term impact is negligible. It is not a disaster.

Although many texters enjoy breaking linguistic rules, they also know they need to be understood. There is no point in paying to send a message if it breaks so many rules that it ceases to be intelligible. When messages are longer, containing more information, the amount of standard orthography increases. Many texters alter just

the grammatical words (such as "you" and "be"). As older and more conservative language users have begun to text, an even more standardised style has appeared. Some texters refuse to depart at all from traditional orthography. And conventional spelling and punctuation is the norm when institutions send out information messages, as in this university text to students: "Weather Alert! No classes today due to snow storm", or in the texts which radio listeners are invited to send in to programmes. These institutional messages now form the majority of texts in cyberspace - and several organisations forbid the use of abbreviations, knowing that many readers will not understand them. Bad textiquette.

Research has made it clear that the early media hysteria about the novelty (and thus the dangers) of text messaging was misplaced. In one American study, less than 20% of the text messages looked at showed abbreviated forms of any kind - about three per message. And in a Norwegian study, the proportion was even lower, with just 6% using abbreviations. In my own text collection, the figure is about 10%.

People seem to have swallowed whole the stories that youngsters use nothing else but abbreviations when they text, such as the reports in 2003 that a teenager had written an essay so full of textspeak that her teacher was unable to understand it. An extract was posted online, and quoted incessantly, but as no one was ever able to track down the entire essay, it was probably a hoax.

There are several distinctive features of the way texts are written that combine to give the impression of novelty, but none of them is, in fact, linguistically novel. Many of them were being used in chatroom interactions that predated the arrival of mobile phones. Some can be found in pre-computer informal writing, dating back a hundred years or more.

The most noticeable feature is the use of single letters, numerals, and symbols to represent words or parts of words, as with b "be" and 2 "to". They are called rebuses, and they go back centuries. Adults who condemn a "c u" in a young person's texting have forgotten that they once did the same thing themselves (though not on a mobile phone). In countless Christmas annuals, they solved puzzles like this one:

YY U R YY U B I C U R YY 4 ME

("Too wise you are . . .")

Similarly, the use of initial letters for whole words (n for "no", gf for "girlfriend", cmb "call me back") is not at all new. People have been initialising common phrases for ages. IOU is known from 1618. There is no difference, apart from the medium of communication, between a modern kid's "lol" ("laughing out loud") and an earlier generation's "Swalk" ("sealed with a loving kiss").

In texts we find such forms as msg ("message") and xlnt ("excellent"). Almst any wrd cn be abbrvtd in ths wy - though there is no consistency between texters. But this isn't new either. Eric Partridge published his Dictionary of Abbreviations in 1942. It contained dozens of SMS-looking examples, such as agn "again", mth "month", and gd "good" - 50 years before texting was born.

English has had abbreviated words ever since it began to be written down. Words such as exam, vet, fridge, cox and bus are so familiar that they have effectively become new words. When some of these abbreviated forms first came into use, they also attracted criticism. In 1711, for example, Joseph Addison complained about the way words were being "miserably curtailed" - he mentioned pos (itive) and incog (nito). And Jonathan Swift thought that abbreviating words was a "barbarous custom".

What novelty there is in texting lies chiefly in the way it takes further some of the processes used in the past. Some of its juxtapositions create forms which have little precedent, apart from in puzzles. All conceivable types of feature can be juxtaposed - sequences of shortened and full words (hldmecls "hold me close"), logograms and shortened words (2bctnd "to be continued"), logograms and nonstandard spellings (cu2nite) and so on. There are no less than four processes combined in iowan2bwu "I only want to be with you" - full word + an initialism + a shortened word + two logograms + an initialism + a logogram. And some messages contain unusual processes: in iohis4u "I only have eyes for you", we see the addition of a plural ending to a logogram. One characteristic runs through all these examples: the letters, symbols and words are run together,

without spaces. This is certainly unusual in the history of special writing systems. But few texts string together long sequences of puzzling graphic units.

There are also individual differences in texting, as in any other linguistic domain. In 2002, Stuart Campbell was found guilty of the murder of his 15-year-old niece after his text message alibi was shown to be a forgery. He had claimed that certain texts sent by the girl showed he was innocent. But a detailed comparison of the vocabulary and other stylistic features of his own text messages and those of his niece showed that he had written the messages himself. The forensic possibilities have been further explored by a team at the University of Leicester. The fact that texting is a relatively unstandardised mode of communication, prone to idiosyncrasy, turns out to be an advantage in such a context, as authorship differences are likely to be more easily detectable than in writing using standard English.

Texters use deviant spellings - and they know they are deviant. But they are by no means the first to use such nonstandard forms as *cos* "because", *wot* "what", or *gissa* "give us a". Several of these are so much part of English literary tradition that they have been given entries in the Oxford English Dictionary. "*Cos*" is there from 1828 and "*wot*" from 1829. Many can be found in literary dialect representations, such as by Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Walter Scott, DH Lawrence, or Alan Bleasdale ("*Gissa job!*").

Sending a message on a mobile phone is not the most natural of ways to communicate. The keypad isn't linguistically sensible. No one took letter-frequency considerations into account when designing it. For example, key 7 on my mobile contains four symbols, *pqrs*. It takes four key-presses to access the letter *s*, and yet *s* is one of the most frequently occurring letters in English. It is twice as easy to input *q*, which is one of the least frequently occurring letters. It should be the other way round. So any strategy that reduces the time and awkwardness of inputting graphic symbols is bound to be attractive.

Abbreviations were used as a natural, intuitive response to a technological problem. And they appeared in next to no time. Texters simply transferred (and then embellished) what they had encountered in other settings. We have all left notes in which we have replaced an *and* by an *&*, a *three* by a *3*, and so on. Anglo-Saxon scribes used abbreviations of this kind.

But the need to save time and energy is by no means the whole story of texting. When we look at some texts, they are linguistically quite complex. There are an extraordinary number of ways in which people play with language - creating riddles, solving crosswords, playing Scrabble, inventing new words. Professional writers do the same - providing catchy copy for advertising slogans, thinking up puns in newspaper headlines, and writing poems, novels and plays. Children quickly learn that one of the most enjoyable things you can do with language is to play with its sounds, words, grammar - and spelling.

The drive to be playful is there when we text, and it is hugely powerful. Within two or three years of the arrival of texting, it developed a ludic dimension. In short, it's fun.

To celebrate World Poetry day in 2007, T-Mobile tried to find the UK's first "Txt laureate" in a competition for the best romantic poem in SMS. They had 200 entrants, and as with previous competitions the entries were a mixture of unabbreviated and abbreviated texts.

The winner, Ben Ziman-Bright, wrote conventionally:

The wet rustle of rain

can dampen today. Your text

buoys me above oil-rainbow puddles

like a paper boat, so that even

soaked to the skin

I am grinning.



The runner-up did not:

O hart tht sorz

My luv adorz

He mAks me liv

He mAks me giv

Myslf 2 him

As my luv porz

(The author of the latter was, incidentally, in her late 60s.)

The length constraint in text-poetry fosters economy of expression in much the same way as other tightly constrained forms of poetry do, such as the haiku or the Welsh englyn. To say a poem must be written within 160 characters at first seems just as pointless as to say that a poem must be written in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. But put such a discipline into the hands of a master, and the result can be poetic magic. Of course, SMS poetry has some way to go before it can match the haiku tradition; but then, haikus have had a head-start of several hundred years.

There is something about the genre which has no parallel elsewhere. This is nothing to do with the use of texting abbreviations. It is more to do with the way the short lines have an individual force. Reading a text poem, wrote Peter Sansom, who co-judged a Guardian competition in 2002, is "an urgent business ... with a text poem you stay focused as it were in the now of each arriving line." The impact is evident even in one-liners, whose effect relies on the kind of succinctness we find in a maxim or proverb. UA Fanthorpe, Sansom's fellow judge, admired "Basildon: imagine a carpark." And they both liked "They phone you up, your mum and dad."

Several competitions have focussed on reworking famous lines, titles, or quotations:

txt me ishmael

zen & T @ f m2 cycl mn10nc

The brevity of the SMS genre disallows complex formal patterning - of, say, the kind we might find in a sonnet. It isn't so easy to include more than a couple of images, such as similes, simply because there isn't the space. Writers have nonetheless tried to extend the potential of the medium. The SMS novel, for example, operates on a screen-by-screen basis. Each screen is a "chapter" describing an event in the story. Here is an interactive example from 2005, from an Indian website called "Cloakroom":

Chptr 6: While Surching 4 Her Father, Rita Bumps In2 A Chaiwalla & Tea Spills On Her Blouse. She Goes Inside Da Washroom, & Da Train Halts @ A Station.

In Japan, an author known as Yoshi has had a huge success with his text-messaging novel Deep Love. Readers sent feedback as the story unfolded, and some of their ideas were incorporated into it. He went on to make a film of the novel.

A mobile literature channel began in China in 2004. The "m-novel", as it is called, started with a love story, "Distance", by writer and broadcaster Xuan Huang. A young couple get to know each other because of a wrongly sent SMS message. The whole story is 1008 Chinese characters, told in 15 chapters, with one chapter sent each day.

Plainly, there are severe limits to the expressive power of the medium, when it is restricted to a screen in this way. So it is not surprising that, very early on, writers dispensed with the 160-character constraint, and engaged in SMS creative writing of any length using hard copy. Immediately there was a problem. By taking the writing away from the mobile phone screen, how could the distinctiveness of the genre be maintained? So

the stylistic character of SMS writing changed, and texting abbreviations, previously optional, became obligatory.

Several SMS poets, such as Norman Silver, go well beyond text-messaging conventions, introducing variations in line-shape, type-size, font, and colour that are reminiscent of the concrete poetry creations of the 1960s. They illustrate the way the genre is being shaped by the more powerful applications available on computers.

In 2007 Finnish writer Hannu Luntiala published *The Last Messages*, in which the whole 332-page narrative consists of SMS messages. It tells the story of an IT-executive who resigns his job and travels the world, using text messages to keep in touch with everyone. And the growing independence of the genre from its mobile-phone origins is well illustrated by the French novelist Phil Marso, who published a book in 2004 written entirely in French SMS shorthand, *Pas Sage a Tabac vo SMS* - a piece of word-play intended to discourage young people from smoking. The next year he produced *L*, an SMS retelling of French poetic classics.

An extraordinary number of doom-laden prophecies have been made about the supposed linguistic evils unleashed by texting. Sadly, its creative potential has been virtually ignored. But five years of research has at last begun to dispel the myths. The most important finding is that texting does not erode children's ability to read and write. On the contrary, literacy improves. The latest studies (from a team at Coventry University) have found strong positive links between the use of text language and the skills underlying success in standard English in pre-teenage children. The more abbreviations in their messages, the higher they scored on tests of reading and vocabulary. The children who were better at spelling and writing used the most textisms. And the younger they received their first phone, the higher their scores.

Children could not be good at texting if they had not already developed considerable literacy awareness. Before you can write and play with abbreviated forms, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters. You need to know that there are such things as alternative spellings. If you are aware that your texting behaviour is different, you must have already intuited that there is such a thing as a standard. If you are using such abbreviations as lol and brb ("be right back"), you must have developed a sensitivity to the communicative needs of your textees.

Some people dislike texting. Some are bemused by it. But it is merely the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. There is no disaster pending. We will not see a new generation of adults growing up unable to write proper English. The language as a whole will not decline. In texting what we are seeing, in a small way, is language in evolution.

Can you summarise the main points of this article into five bullet points?

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Now watch or read the following TED talk by John McWhorter: Texting is killing language. JK!**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_txtng\\_is\\_killing\\_language\\_jk/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk/transcript?language=en)

00:10

We always hear that texting is a scourge. The idea is that texting spells the decline and fall of any kind of serious literacy, or at least writing ability, among young people in the United States and now the whole world today. The fact of the matter is that it just isn't true, and it's easy to think that it is true, but in order to see it in another way, in order to see that actually texting is a miraculous thing, not just energetic, but a miraculous thing, a kind of emergent complexity that we're seeing happening right now, we have to pull the camera back for a bit and look at what language really is, in which case, one thing that we see is that texting is not writing at all. What do I mean by that?

00:58

Basically, if we think about language, language has existed for perhaps 150,000 years, at least 80,000 years, and what it arose as is speech. People talked. That's what we're probably genetically specified for. That's how we use language most. Writing is something that came along much later, and as we saw in the last talk, there's a little bit of controversy as to exactly when that happened, but according to traditional estimates, if humanity had existed for 24 hours, then writing only came along at about 11:07 p.m. That's how much of a latterly thing writing is. So first there's speech, and then writing comes along as a kind of artifice.

01:44

Now don't get me wrong, writing has certain advantages. When you write, because it's a conscious process, because you can look backwards, you can do things with language that are much less likely if you're just talking. For example, imagine a passage from Edward Gibbon's "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire:"

02:06

"The whole engagement lasted above twelve hours, till the graduate retreat of the Persians was changed into a disorderly flight, of which the shameful example was given by the principal leaders and the Surenas himself."

02:17

That's beautiful, but let's face it, nobody talks that way. Or at least, they shouldn't if they're interested in reproducing. That -- (Laughter) is not the way any human being speaks casually.

02:34

Casual speech is something quite different. Linguists have actually shown that when we're speaking casually in an unmonitored way, we tend to speak in word packets of maybe seven to 10 words. You'll notice this if you ever have occasion to record yourself or a group of people talking. That's what speech is like. Speech is much looser. It's much more telegraphic. It's much less reflective -- very different from writing. So we naturally tend to think, because we see language written so often, that that's what language is, but actually what language is, is speech. They are two things.

03:10

Now of course, as history has gone by, it's been natural for there to be a certain amount of bleed between speech and writing. So, for example, in a distant era now, it was common when one gave a speech to basically talk like writing. So I mean the kind of speech that you see someone giving in an old movie where they clear their throat, and they go, "Ahem, ladies and gentlemen," and then they speak in a certain way which has nothing to do with casual speech. It's formal. It uses long sentences like this Gibbon one. It's basically talking like you write, and so, for example, we're thinking so much these days about Lincoln because of the movie. The Gettysburg Address was not the main meal of that event. For two hours before that, Edward Everett spoke on

a topic that, frankly, cannot engage us today and barely did then. The point of it was to listen to him speaking like writing. Ordinary people stood and listened to that for two hours. It was perfectly natural. That's what people did then, speaking like writing.

04:14

Well, if you can speak like writing, then logically it follows that you might want to also sometimes write like you speak. The problem was just that in the material, mechanical sense, that was harder back in the day for the simple reason that materials don't lend themselves to it. It's almost impossible to do that with your hand except in shorthand, and then communication is limited. On a manual typewriter it was very difficult, and even when we had electric typewriters, or then computer keyboards, the fact is that even if you can type easily enough to keep up with the pace of speech, more or less, you have to have somebody who can receive your message quickly.

04:52

Once you have things in your pocket that can receive that message, then you have the conditions that allow that we can write like we speak. And that's where texting comes in. And so, texting is very loose in its structure. No one thinks about capital letters or punctuation when one texts, but then again, do you think about those things when you talk? No, and so therefore why would you when you were texting?

05:18

What texting is, despite the fact that it involves the brute mechanics of something that we call writing, is fingered speech. That's what texting is. Now we can write the way we talk. And it's a very interesting thing, but nevertheless easy to think that still it represents some sort of decline. We see this general bagginess of the structure, the lack of concern with rules and the way that we're used to learning on the blackboard, and so we think that something has gone wrong. It's a very natural sense.

05:54

But the fact of the matter is that what is going on is a kind of emergent complexity. That's what we're seeing in this fingered speech. And in order to understand it, what we want to see is the way, in this new kind of language, there is new structure coming up.

06:16

And so, for example, there is in texting a convention, which is LOL. Now LOL, we generally think of as meaning "laughing out loud." And of course, theoretically, it does, and if you look at older texts, then people used it to actually indicate laughing out loud. But if you text now, or if you are someone who is aware of the substrate of texting the way it's become, you'll notice that LOL does not mean laughing out loud anymore. It's evolved into something that is much subtler.

06:52

This is an actual text that was done by a non-male person of about 20 years old not too long ago.

07:01

"I love the font you're using, btw."

07:04

Julie: "lol thanks gmail is being slow right now"

07:07

Now if you think about it, that's not funny. No one's laughing. (Laughter) And yet, there it is, so you assume there's been some kind of hiccup.

07:15

Then Susan says "lol, I know," again more guffawing than we're used to when you're talking about these inconveniences.

07:23

So Julie says, "I just sent you an email."

07:25

Susan: "lol, I see it."

07:27

Very funny people, if that's what LOL means.

07:31

This Julie says, "So what's up?"

07:33

Susan: "lol, I have to write a 10 page paper."

07:35

She's not amused. Let's think about it. LOL is being used in a very particular way. It's a marker of empathy. It's a marker of accommodation. We linguists call things like that pragmatic particles. Any spoken language that's used by real people has them. If you happen to speak Japanese, think about that little word "ne" that you use at the end of a lot of sentences. If you listen to the way black youth today speak, think about the use of the word "yo." Whole dissertations could be written about it, and probably are being written about it. A pragmatic particle, that's what LOL has gradually become. It's a way of using the language between actual people.

08:13

Another example is "slash." Now, we can use slash in the way that we're used to, along the lines of, "We're going to have a party-slash-networking session." That's kind of like what we're at. Slash is used in a very different way in texting among young people today. It's used to change the scene.

08:34

So for example, this Sally person says, "So I need to find people to chill with" and Jake says, "Haha" -- you could write a dissertation about "Haha" too, but we don't have time for that — "Haha so you're going by yourself? Why?"

08:46

Sally: "For this summer program at NYU."

08:48

Jake: "Haha. Slash I'm watching this video with suns players trying to shoot with one eye."

08:53

The slash is interesting. I don't really even know what Jake is talking about after that, but you notice that he's changing the topic. Now that seems kind of mundane, but think about how in real life, if we're having a conversation and we want to change the topic, there are ways of doing it gracefully. You don't just zip right into it. You'll pat your thighs and look wistfully off into the distance, or you'll say something like, "Hmm, makes you think --" when it really didn't, but what you're really -- (Laughter) — what you're really trying to do is change the topic. You can't do that while you're texting, and so ways are developing of doing it within this

medium. All spoken languages have what a linguist calls a new information marker -- or two, or three. Texting has developed one from this slash.

09:43

So we have a whole battery of new constructions that are developing, and yet it's easy to think, well, something is still wrong. There's a lack of structure of some sort. It's not as sophisticated as the language of The Wall Street Journal. Well, the fact of the matter is, look at this person in 1956, and this is when texting doesn't exist, "I Love Lucy" is still on the air.

10:07

"Many do not know the alphabet or multiplication table, cannot write grammatically -- "

10:12

We've heard that sort of thing before, not just in 1956. 1917, Connecticut schoolteacher. 1917. This is the time when we all assume that everything somehow in terms of writing was perfect because the people on "Downton Abbey" are articulate, or something like that.

10:28

So, "From every college in the country goes up the cry, 'Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate.'"

10:33

And so on. You can go even further back than this. It's the President of Harvard. It's 1871. There's no electricity. People have three names.

10:41

"Bad spelling, incorrectness as well as inelegance of expression in writing."

10:47

And he's talking about people who are otherwise well prepared for college studies.

10:51

You can go even further back. 1841, some long-lost superintendent of schools is upset because of what he has for a long time "noted with regret the almost entire neglect of the original" blah blah blah blah.

11:04

Or you can go all the way back to 63 A.D. -- (Laughter) -- and there's this poor man who doesn't like the way people are speaking Latin. As it happens, he was writing about what had become French. And so, there are always — (Laughter) (Applause) — there are always people worrying about these things and the planet somehow seems to keep spinning.

11:28

And so, the way I'm thinking of texting these days is that what we're seeing is a whole new way of writing that young people are developing, which they're using alongside their ordinary writing skills, and that means that they're able to do two things. Increasing evidence is that being bilingual is cognitively beneficial. That's also true of being bidialectal. That's certainly true of being bidialectal in terms of your writing. And so texting actually is evidence of a balancing act that young people are using today, not consciously, of course, but it's an expansion of their linguistic repertoire. It's very simple. If somebody from 1973 looked at what was on a dormitory message board in 1993, the slang would have changed a little bit since the era of "Love Story," but they would understand what was on that message board. Take that person from 1993 -- not that long ago, this is "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure" -- those people. Take those people and they read a very typical text

written by a 20-year-old today. Often they would have no idea what half of it meant because a whole new language has developed among our young people doing something as mundane as what it looks like to us when they're batting around on their little devices.

12:47

So in closing, if I could go into the future, if I could go into 2033, the first thing I would ask is whether David Simon had done a sequel to "The Wire." I would want to know. And — I really would ask that — and then I'd want to know actually what was going on on "Downton Abbey." That'd be the second thing. And then the third thing would be, please show me a sheaf of texts written by 16-year-old girls, because I would want to know where this language had developed since our times, and ideally I would then send them back to you and me now so we could examine this linguistic miracle happening right under our noses. Thank you very much.

13:31

(Applause) Thank you. (Applause)

**Having watched or read the TED talk, answer the following questions.**

- What are the main arguments that McWhorter puts forward in his talk?
- What does McWhorter state are the advantages of writing?
- Why is casual speech so different?
- What examples are given to show the correlation between writing and speaking in the past?
- Why didn't people write like they spoke in the past?
- What is texting?
- Why do some people believe that texting is destroying language?
- How has 'LOL' evolved?
- What are pragmatic participles? Give examples.
- What is meant by the term 'bidalectal'?

Now take a look at the following resources about texting on the Eduqas Website. Why not have a go at some of the online activities?

<https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rlid=961>



The screenshot shows the Eduqas website interface. At the top left is the Eduqas logo. Below it is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Find Resources', and 'Contact' links. The main content area is titled 'Resource' and features a large image of a hand holding a smartphone displaying a text message conversation. To the right of the image, the title 'English in the 21st Century - Text messaging' is displayed, followed by 'English Language' and 'KS5 >'. A descriptive paragraph below states: 'A range of resources to support the teaching of lexis, grammar and structural patterns of text messaging and consideration of the related issues and concepts. These cover analysis of how language is used to suit context of messaging and how we adapt our language choices when sending text messages based on audience and purpose.'

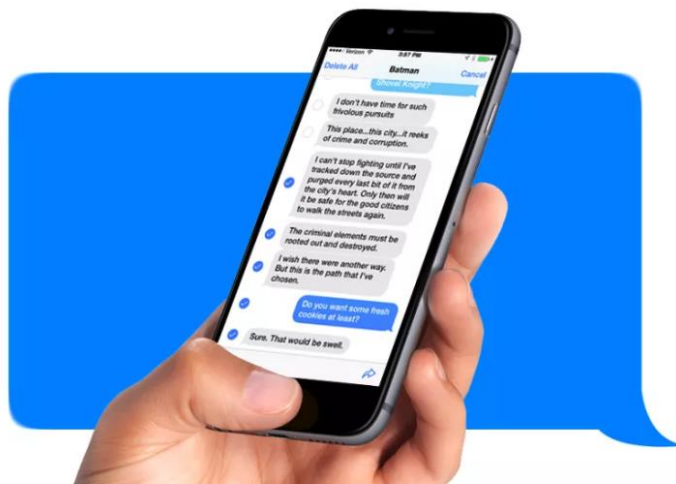
Key Terms	
<b>Vowel Omission</b>	Leaving out vowel sound in textspeak and other electronic communication
<b>Homophonic representation</b>	The use of single letters and numbers to represent word based on a similarity in sound
<b>Phonetic Spelling</b>	A spelling that represents the sound of a word as opposed to its conventional spelling
<b>Initialism</b>	An abbreviation that uses the first letter of a group of words and is pronounced as individual letters
<b>Acronymy</b>	The process of abbreviating that uses the first letter of a group of words but, unlike an initialism, an acronym is pronounced as a single word.
<b>Variant Spelling</b>	Deliberately non-standard spelling for effect.



Common ways in which textspeak is created	Example
Vowel Omission	pls (please)
Homophonic representation	2L8 (too late)
Phonetic spelling	cos (because)
Initialism	lmk (Let me know)
Acronymy	lol (laughs out loud)
Variant spelling	wot (what)

### Useful Notes for Analysing Textspeak

- As with any communication, register will depend on context: the situation and purpose of the message and the relationship between speakers or writers. Where some examples of textspeak are more generally used, some are highly idiosyncratic and may only exist among certain discourse communities. They are part of a *sociolect* just as much as other form of language.
- The variation and creativity in such language means that there can never be a standard form. Instead there is a range of varieties and sub varieties.



### Assessment Question

Using your newly acquired knowledge of textspeak, have a go analysing the following text messages. Consider the audience and purpose of the message as well the way in which the text has been constructed. There is an example for you to refer to on the next page.

(from one friend to another)  
?4U W@ time train to Newport?  
can u txt me times  
TLK2UL8R

(from student to his mother)  
Hahahahaha!!!! Quite tired tho. Found 2 of books prof told me abt. gotta email Philip now to make appt with him. btw dont forget to send flash drive!!??!!

**Annotate the messages before  
writing up your observations into  
full sentences.**

**Work** colleague – may have their own discourse community? Use jargon?

**Colleague** not friend!

Likely to be polite and reasonably formal.

Uses longhand (number name) as opposed to numeral.

(from one work colleague to another)  
Sounds good! Will it be okay if I leave early tonight? I've been through everything for tomorrow and the room is booked for ten. Conference packs are already in from the printers and the tech guys have been in. See you tomorrow. Steve.

Uses punctuation.

Elliptical style sentence. Leaves out the definite article for brevity

Uses tentative language – 'will it be okay' – seeking permission which implies the 'colleague' has positional power over the text producer.

'Tech-guys' – abbreviation of 'technology'. 'Guys' generic term for all the workers. Evidence of inter-communication.

Polite sign off.

Contraction 'I've' used – colloquial style

### Example

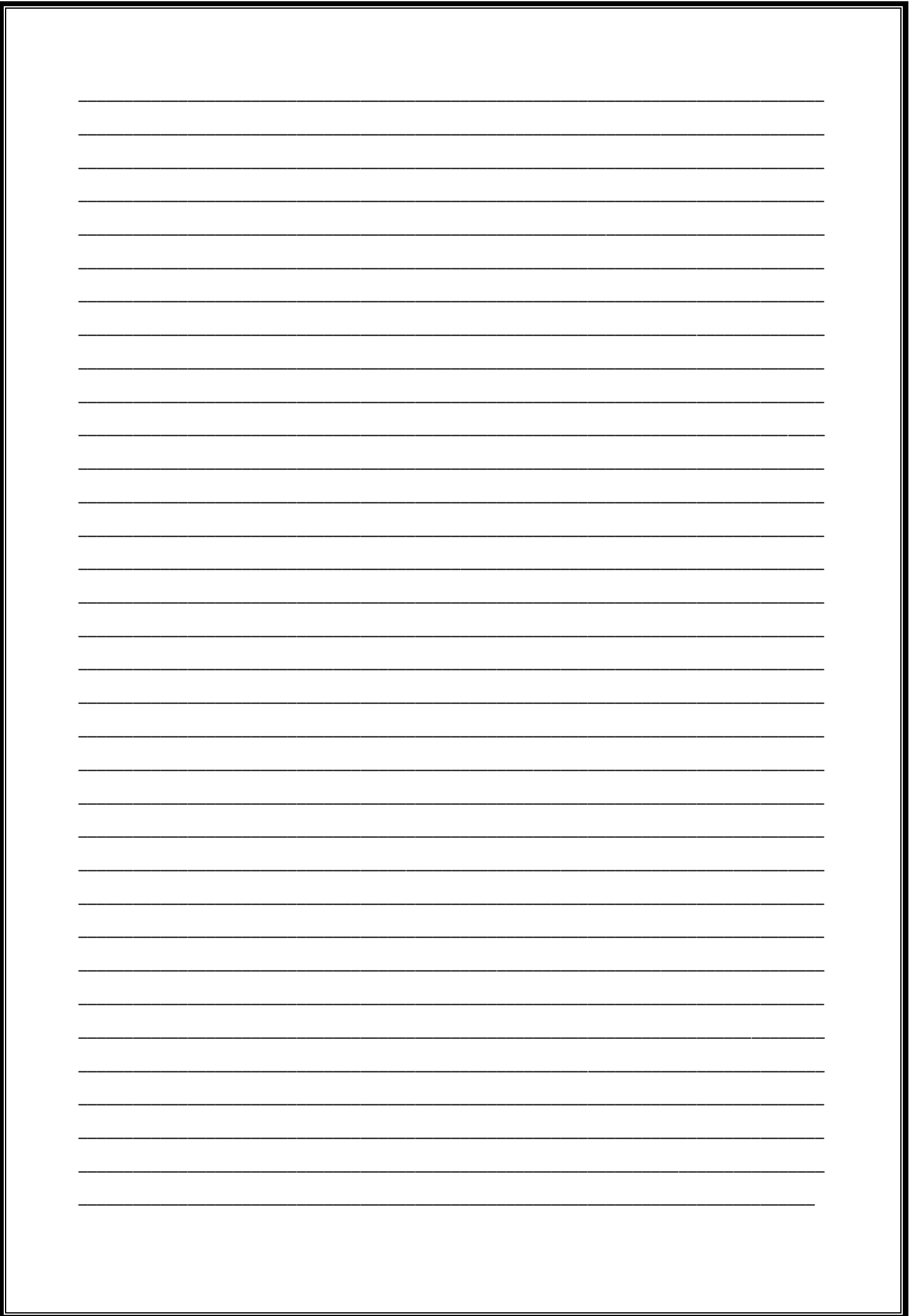
This message is from 'one work colleague to another' which justifies the increasingly formal and standardised nature of the text. For example, the use of long hand (number name) as opposed to numeration for time, 'booked for ten'. It obviously forms part of an ongoing conversation as the message begins with, 'sounds good!'

The text producer has used punctuation to express emotion (via the exclamation mark) and to raise a question. The question that is posed implies that the 'colleague' has some degree of positional power as the text producer is requesting permission to 'leave early'. This is therefore likely to be an 'unequal encounter'.

Despite the increasing formality, there is some use of elliptical sentence structure, 'conference packs...' Here the text producer has omitted the definite article for brevity.

The use of the term, 'Tech-guys' reinforces that the text producer and receiver are members of the same discourse community and that there is a mutual understanding between them as to who the 'Tech-guys' are. The word 'tech' is an acronym or abbreviation of 'technician'. There is also a contraction 'I've' as opposed to 'I have' which emulates everyday speech.

At the end of the message the sign off is polite and in keeping with the formality of the rest of the text. There are no initialisms or homophonic representations which might suggest that the text producer and receiver are possibly older?



## KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

### Language Change Over Time

Written examination: 2 ¼ hours (120 marks) 30% of qualification

### Section B: English in the Twenty-First Century

One question based on the ways language is used in the twenty-first century

Section B is based on the study of the ways in which language is used distinctively in the **twenty-first century**. It is designed to introduce you to how language is evolving to reflect technological and cultural change. **There will be a set of data with a focused question**. This section requires you to write an extended response in which you show your understanding of contemporary language concepts and issues. You must consider the effect of contextual factors (pragmatics) and analyse the way language is used to construct meaning.

In preparation for this section, you should be familiar with concepts such as new channels of communication, code shifting, changes in the vocabulary and structural patterns of twenty-first century English.

I can:

- show critical understanding of concepts and issues underpinning language use
- provide appropriate examples to support their argument
- critically evaluate how contextual factors affect form and structure
- analyse how language features shape meaning.

### You should have a sound understanding of:

- the contextual factors that change language
- **the key periods: Early Modern English (1500-1700), Modern English (1700-1900), Late Modern English (1900-2000), present day English (2000-)**
- etymology and word formation
- the spelling system and dictionaries; language rule-books and the punctuation system
- the significance of informalisation in the twenty-first century and its effect on written language
- genre and the ways in which specific text types change over time e.g. letters, newspaper reports, advertisements, narratives, prefaces, reviews, biographies, 'conduct' literature, diaries etc.
- twenty-first century genres e.g. digital media and electronic communication
- writers' representations of and attitudes to their subject matter e.g. women, religion, relationships, social and cultural expectations
- the language levels.

### This knowledge will help you to identify and describe:

- the distinctive orthographic, lexical and grammatical, and punctuation features of the English language in each period
- the ways in which a specific text type has changed over time
- changes in attitude.

### Using your knowledge to interpret texts will you learners:

- to set texts in their physical and linguistic context
- to explore how texts work in the light of a focused question
- to make connections between texts of similar genres, or with similar content.

### Key Dates:

1<sup>st</sup> Email 1971  
1<sup>st</sup> Text 1992 (SMS)  
LinkedIn 2002  
MySpace 2003  
Skype 2003  
Facebook 2004

Twitter 2006  
WhatsApp 2009  
Pinterest  
Instagram 2010  
Snapchat 2011  
Tinder 2012  
TikTok 2017

### Key Vocabulary: I can use and/or identify...

Abbreviation  
Acronym  
Affixation  
Amelioration  
Asynchronous  
Back Formation  
Borrowing  
Blend  
Broadening  
Clipping  
Coinage  
Compound/ing  
Contraction  
Conversion  
Convergence  
deletion  
Dysphemism  
Divergence

Emoji  
Emoticon  
Elision  
Elliptical Features  
Euphemism  
Hashtag  
Idiom  
Initialism  
Jargon  
Unfollow  
Unfriend  
Rebus Abbreviation  
Retweet  
Metaphor  
Morphology  
Narrowing

Negation  
Neologism  
Netspeak  
Pejoration  
Podcast  
Phatic  
Prefix  
Semantic drift  
Sexting  
Slang  
Social Media  
Specialist Lexis  
Suffix  
Synchronous  
Textspeak  
Tweet  
Vlog  
Weakening