

Passage based Questions

by [C BARRINGTON](#) - 12 Sep 2017 @ 22:17

You must know the passage concerned in great detail. It is demanding because you HAVE TO look at aspects of structure, form and language. You are not being asked to remember vaguely what was presented in lectures and tutorials, you are being asked to **consider in detail** and you have no excuse because the material is there and waiting for you.

Read the question carefully, and make sure you know what it is asking you to do. Think hard about the **'trigger'** words like 'presentation': these are there to point you towards discussing the writer's techniques and away from general unsupported points.

Read the poem/passage very carefully before you start to write. Make sure that it is one you recognise and understand – do not attempt to do it 'unseen'.

Focus all the time on the passage/poem that is set. **Work outwards from the detail of the passage**, not in from some grand, big idea that you have had.

Discuss **how** the writer is creating effects in the poem/passage.

Do not waste time simply identifying and listing literary devices: it is **how** they work, and the **effects** they create, that matter. If the question asks for this, look for how the poem/passage seems characteristic of other things in the whole text.

Essay Length for the Exam

by [C BARRINGTON](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 19:42

It depends on your handwriting, really.

If it is small to average, it is 2-2.5 exam script pages. Which is not a lot, really. The larger your handwriting, the more pages. But you should focus on the content - Have you looked at the What, Why and How in detail? Have you answered the question?

Also, try to maintain an essay structure – paragraphs, please!

Spelling is not a focal point, but basic language ability is considered – the question is, can I (as the marker) read and comprehend the language used?

The focus is content – be relevant, be direct, don't waffle and don't try to impress. I find that is when students lose sight of the question in exams.

Some possible key terms

by [C BARRINGTON](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 19:42

Comment on ...; Discuss ...; Consider ...

These are just ways of asking you to think about a particular view or angle, and to write about your own thoughts, but with careful and detailed supporting illustration from the text itself.

Discuss the importance of ...; Discuss the effects of ...; Discuss the writer's treatment of ...; Discuss your response to ...; How does ...? How effective is ...?

Each of these instructions appears to be more exact and specific, but again the thrust is similar – the Examiner is asking you to look at one particular aspect of the text, and to write about it, and about how you react to it. If it asks about ‘the importance’, it is really much the same as if it said ‘what you think is important’

Concerns and methods..., Dramatic effects/effectiveness..., Style and concerns..., With close reference to...

These should be fairly self-explanatory. ‘Concerns’ may be an unfamiliar word, but it simply means whatever it is that the writer is writing about in the text – his/her ideas, topics, themes, problems, interests, characters and so on. ‘Methods’ and ‘style’ mean much the same – they refer to how the work is written, and expect you to look at the language, images, structure and so on. ‘With close reference to ...’ – which very clearly reminds you to use as much reference and quotation as you can from the passage or wider text.

1. Reading the exam question and what and how to focus on the QUESTION.

by [C BARRINGTON](#) - 18 Sep 2017 @ 19:54

Hello All.

Today we will look at how to interpret an exam question for **prose fiction** and begin planning out an answer based on **WHAT_HOW_WHY triangle**.

The exam paper that we will look at is last year's November paper (ENG2602-2014-E-1.pdf) which can be found on the ENG2602-15-S2 website.

First thing you need to do on any exam is to make sure:

- a) The paper you have been given is on the topic and module you are meant to be writing on. The paper is not missing any questions and/or pages.

It is YOUR responsibility to alert the examiner that they have given you the incorrect paper/that pages are missing.

- b) Find out how many marks each question is out of versus how many questions you need to answer versus the time you have. You then need to plan. If you have 2.5 hours, but only have two long essay questions, schedule an hour a question. Once the hour is up, no matter what you have written, move on. That way, you will have 15 minutes to go back, read over and write a concluding paragraph for each question, and you will use your time to its fullest capacity.

Now that you have done the above and nothing is wrong with the paper, it is time to look at the question:

(Please have the question paper for this exam in front of you; I will not be re-typing the actual question.)

The question asks you to 1. Write an ESSAY.

- This means you need, to the best of your abilities, to include an introduction and conclusion in your exam answer. Now this does not need to be long – time is a factor, but you still need to, at the least include the title and the author’s name and the major elements that you will focus on in the beginning and indicate what you have looked at in a sentence or two at the end.
- Use quotes (citing in an exam is not necessary, but if you are able to, then do so)
- Unpack the significance of the quote in relation to the characterisation, setting, theme, point of view, and et cetera.

So, now onto the detail of the question:

In this particular paper I first read over the question to gain a general idea of what the examiner wants of me: In essence, *I am to provide an analysis of an extract.*

Now I pick up key words: **discuss -> literary and linguistic devices.**

Then, using those devices, I am to consider how they are **thematically** (what themes can be found in them) and **symbolically relevant** (what is the significance/meaning of such elements –what can we read into the text because of it).

Specific focus to be applied to **characterisation.**

Remember NO headings or subheadings in an essay.

My introduction will be something similar to:

The extract from page 16 of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) focuses strongly on the theme of education, expanding into themes of critical thinking and the challenging of traditional and patriarchal rule. As such, the essay will consider the characterisations of the figure of the mother, the father and the daughter/speaker in relation to the themes of gender politics, education and sensibilities.

Notice how I have not rewritten the essay question. Instead I have AT the BEGINNING identified the main themes which will assist me in exploring the characters within the extract.

1. What are my literary and linguistic devices?

Let us consider 'Linguistic devices' first, because it has not, as of yet, been at the centre of any posts.

Here we want to look at any language that might affect the way we read the text and how/why that language has an impact.

- DO NOT GET TIED UP IN PARTS OF SPEECH. In fact, do not even mention "this verb" or "that pronoun". You will get distracted and will not be answering the question.

- What you DO want to look for:

- DRAMATIC language – those words or phrases that attract our attention through their emotional or subjective implications. For example (from the exam extract):

**"His intention was to soothe me with comforting, sensible words"
(Dangarembge 16)**

The words I identify as particularly important: **"sooth"** and **"sensible"**.

Why? When I read the extract, I understand that *it is a little girl speaking about wanting to go to school. She is obviously being denied this by a patriarchal father who would rather she stay home and learn what would best be termed in the author's own words "the business of womanhood"*.

The term **"sooth"** suggests that the father is attempting to pacify his daughter, but there are connotations of the word within the context, of the father denying his child an education based on gender. He perhaps unintentionally, is being patronising towards his daughter by **"sooth[ing]"**

her as he would a temperamental animal or baby. This automatically removes or at least diminishes the daughter's capacity for autonomy and associates the father negatively with issues related to gender politics. Not only this, but his denial is, as the speaker suggests, constructed as a "sensible" expectation. Here, this suggests two primary ideas: Firstly, the daughter is being unreasonable for wanting to go to school. Secondly, that it is reasonable for the father to deny her this right (which here is perceived as a privilege and NOT a right). The two words together demean the daughter's ambitions and, in effect, reduce her to a pre-defined inescapable gendered role. In the extreme, here she becomes more an object than a subject.

As you can see from the above paragraph, just by focusing on dramatic and emotive language, you can unpack a lot of connotative meaning from the smallest of sentences. If you continue to focus of the extract in this way, you will find that you will have MORE than enough to write on, just by using language alone.

Notice how I did not once mention that anything was an adjective or a verb or a pronoun. Focus on the meaning of the language, not the structure.

- Now, language also implies we consider elements such as any **slang or colloquial language**. Such language allows us to (potentially) identify with the text if we are familiar with the informal language (A South African author will often use South African slang such as "My China" to suggest a friend; a "robot" to suggest a traffic light; and so on and so forth.), and if not, at least will allow us to contextualise the work in terms of setting and location and period.

- Can I see any colloquial or slang language in the extract? No, none is obvious at a glance. Perhaps when I look at it in more detail I will notice something. For now, I move on.

- Point of View may be placed under this heading as well:

The daughter/speaker, whose name is never mentioned in the extract, is a first person speaker. This implies that what is narrated to the reader is from her biased and subjective view. As such, the extract's overall tone is that of a young girl, bewildered by the slight both her parents have given her by refusing to consider that she is capable of being educated and still being able to fulfil the expected role of mother and wife as her culture dictates. Nevertheless, the text is written as a reflective narration, suggesting that it is an older version of the daughter/speaker who is retelling the story of her youth. As such, we can see that the elder daughter/speaker does attempt

to be critical of her limited perspective as a youth. Even then however, the narrative is still framed from the perspective of only the single speaker, leaving us dependant on her point of view alone.

2. LITERARY Devices:

- We have focused on this in last week's post. If you have not, please go to the additional resources and download the figures of speech document I created.
- Actively look for ANY figures of speech in the extract. Use a coloured pen or a highlighter to mark them so that when you begin writing your analysis, they are easily identifiable, and all you need to worry about is writing them into the essay (identify the figure of speech, quote and explain the significance).

For example (from the exam extract):

“My father thought I should not mind.” -> Indicates that the speaker should not think about or be concerned about being educated.

The author is also PLAYING with words here: “mind” also implies that the father says she should NOT THINK. The ‘mind’ is the abstract concept that we use when activating the more intellectual functions of the brain – essentially, when one thinks, logically and critically, employing memory and reason. The ‘do “not mind” attitude is coupled with her father’s quote of “it’s nothing”...

The best way to write a literature essay is to merge your devices and your analysis with language. Here I am picking out words which I feel are important to the overall meaning of the extract, and which if I argued further, will help me in creating an analysis of themes, characterisation and meaning.

For example:

The father, who tells his daughter not to think, clearly does little of it himself. He is characterised as being lazy and ignorant by the speaker who states that her father “jump[s] whichever way was easiest” and labels the man arguing for a “sensible” domesticated life for a daughter as “not [being] sensible”. Clearly, sensibleness is an important motif, which is repetitively mentioned in relation to both the speaker and her parents.

So I have introduced the concept of ‘mind’ (thinking, logic and intelligence) and linked it to a brief characterisation of one of the characters. I can, and am able to expand this further, because the theme of sensibleness is linked to all three major

characters. I can now compare the mother and the father, discussing how they are different from and similar to each other, and then contrast them with the daughter.

Once this is complete, I will have looked at language, LITERARY DEVICES, characterisations and **write a conclusion which will have something similar** (if more refined for a continuous flowing uninterrupted essay) to:

This essay has developed an overarching argument that the extract argues from the daughter/speaker's perspective that an education is important regardless of gendered stereotypes and that the traditional arguments for not allowing a female child to be educated are not logical.

WHAT, WHY?, HOW?

by [C BARRINGTON](#) - 23 Sep 2017 @ 12:35

Remember in Unit one, we considered the 'WHAT', 'WHY', 'HOW' and 'WHO' of a text?

Now, I am going to quickly recap the terms, and then consider how they relate to one of the categories of prose fiction and non-fiction we have examined within the semester. I will only do one here, and it will be a general consideration, as I will use the old exam paper's to provide more detailed example's of how to use these terms.

WHAT?

- What is the text about?

Here, in **your own words** explain the **concepts** that the text considers.

If you do this correctly, then it should really take 1-2 sentences, which you then need to in the subsequent sentences, **unpack and explain**.

The expansion of the 'what' comments you make are essential, as you will begin to substantiate your reading (your interpretation of the 'WHAT').

This is not a request of a summary!

- How can 'WHAT' be used in **PROSE FICTION**:

This is perhaps the easiest section to consider the 'WHAT' of the text, because novels often have obvious social, historical and political implications. These are the elements you would look for.

That being said, YOU will (in the exam) only examine an extract. Therefore, you have a limited scope from which to consider the purpose of the text.

Think back to the **Essay and Exam writing** forum, specifically the **Passage based Questions**. The trick is to pick out the 'trigger' or key words, phrases and concepts.

So, if an extract focuses on the exchange between two children, one male, one female, and they are fighting about who gets to go to school and who has to stay home: Then the **general concepts raised here are connected to gender relations and politics, as well as education**.

To support this argument (highlighted in yellow), I will then quote the key phrases and explain the context (of only the extract) as evidence (This is essentially a part of the 'HOW' element of literary analysis).

Once this is complete, I move onto the:

WHY?

- Why has the text been written?

Moving on from the 'WHAT', I must now hypothesise on any messages the text might be advancing

for example, that good always trumps evil

and extrapolate the possible purpose of the text, and (if possible) the intentions of the text. Here the focus is often on the THEMES.

for example, the reason why good (themes of **good** and **evil**) always wins: Good becomes synonymous with the 'average' individual's position in society being assured and protected from any potential aggressors.

This in turn suggests social stability, and in turn reinforces cultural behaviours of the society the story represents.

As with the 'WHAT', my 'WHY' needs to have support, and I must turn to the 'HOW' to find my evidence.

- In fictional works, the authorial intent is not as important as the readers' response to the text. (What do **you** understand from the text?)

HOW?

- How does the text produce meaning? How does it stress or emphasise the themes and ideas of the text? How is the text structured?

- **Language, diction, tone, characterisation and figures of speech** are all elements of a text which you will need to consider when discussing HOW a text is filled with meaning.

Most you can find in the original post of 'What, why, how and who' in Unit one, and I shall not go through them all.

However, a few ones based off of what I have seen in your assignments:

- Based on the language (syntax, diction and imagery) used, you may be able to recognise the tone of the text. The tone suggests the overall attitude (emotional) to the theme or topic of the text.
 - Language usage.

TIP: do not focus on elements such as 'verbs' 'adverbs' 'adjectives' or 'punctuation' unless you can explain how such elements add to the texts meaning: for example, short sentences, all with heavy punctuation might signal an urgency related to the action.
 - Figures of Speech: Please know your figures of speech (I will upload a post on them and direct you to a number of videos to assist you)
- When reading critically, you need to focus **on a number of aspects** within the text to answer your questions.

WHO?

- In addition to the WHAT, WHY and HOW considerations of a textual analysis, you must also be aware of 'WHO'. (This can be taken as part of the 'how' – the support of your reading of the text.)
- Who is **the creator** (author/poet/playwright) of the text and **what is the text's name?**

Please identify BOTH in the first few sentences of your essay.
- Who is **the speaker** AND how does identifying him/her add to your reading of the text?

Poetry - Aunt Jennifer's Tigersby [C BARRINGTON](#) - 25 Sep 2017 @ 22:45

Hello All,

Remember when I put up the poem with annotations on it? That was a poem from one of the exam papers. Please go to additional resources for the poem, if you have yet to look at how an annotated poem should look like (and for the poem itself!)

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Poetry Essay question:

Now that you have analysed the poem directly, it is time to look at the question:

In the exam paper from November 2014, the poetry question first provides the poem, and then the essay question.

As with the prose section, you need to identify key words, and from those words understand what the question is asking from you.

Firstly, the poetry question here provides a short contextualisation of the poem. The provided paragraph informs the reader that Aunt Jennifer is creating a tapestry, something that might not be obvious for those reading the poem for the first time. It indicates that the poem is linked to notions of 'freedom', 'imagination', 'gender roles' and 'expectations'. In your reading of the poem, you will need to consider how such concepts are introduced and used, and what significance are you able to deduce from the analysis of the literary elements and figurative language.

Now, the actual essay question:

In the essay you need to focus on the SUBJECT Aunt Jennifer.

You need to focus on the literary elements and figurative language in order to support your analysis of

Remember the What, How and Why.

What?

Can you identify what type of text this is?

- This is a poem with three stanzas. Each stanza is made up of six lines, all of which make up three pairs of rhyming couplets.

What is the poem about?

- Having read and deconstructed the poem, you should be able to tell the marker that the poem is about patriarchal oppression and freedom of artistic expression.

Remember, you are not here to REWRITE the poem, or explain the sequence of events. To do so will cost you time which will be wasted.

Therefore, my introduction will have two key elements:

Adrienne Rich's poem *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* focuses on a single individual, Aunt Jennifer, in relation to her social position, which is defined by her gender. The three stanza poem, divided further into three rhyming couplets each, speaks of Aunt Jennifer's oppression within her marriage, and her escape through her art. This essay will analyse the poem, looking in detail at the gendered themes with specific interest in how Aunt Jennifer is presented, by taking into consideration literary elements and figurative language.

- 1) I have identified the text I am writing on and the poet.
- 2) I have indicated that it is a poem I will be analysing.
- 3) I have given a very general statement relating to the poem, just so that the reader has some knowledge of the poem.
- 4) I have given a basic explanation of what will happen in the poem.

If you have formulated an academic opinion (perhaps that Aunt Jennifer is symbolic of something, for example) you can include a more definitive thesis statement. A thesis statement will in one or two sentences explain to the reader your primary argument.

Within this particular example, given that the question has asked to focus on Aunt Jennifer, further limiting your reading of the text through a definitive argument might be problematic.

Once you have written your introduction, you need to have at least four and a maximum of eight paragraphs within your essay. Remember that you have more than one long essay to tackle in an exam, and you must be able to answer all questions.

In the body of the essay, you need to consider closely the WHY?:

- Remember here you need to identify the themes and consider **why** they are important (oppression and artistic expression, for example).

You also, once you have considered the themes, you will need to, through close analysis explain **HOW** the themes are significant.

Before you write anything, look at the poem you have deconstructed. Consider how the images and figures of speech interact to present a representation of Aunt Jennifer. What do we know about her and what comparisons are drawn within the poem? What themes are introduced and how might we expand on those themes.

Now create an essay plan. Each paragraph needs to build on the last, until you have considered all aspects of Aunt Jennifer. Her relationship to her husband and to herself; the presence of the tiger's and how they are related to both Aunt Jennifer and men . . . Be as detailed as you can.

Once you have written your analysis based off your reading, do not forget to write your conclusion.