English Language A-Level Bridging Unit 2024

You're thinking about studying English Language at A Level – fantastic! The activities in this booklet will give you a taste of what might be in store for you as a student of this subject and you might be surprised quite how different it is to the English you've been doing so far in your time at school.

Some of the activities ask you to step back and think about the nature of language and communication (in all its forms – not just writing), while others encourage you to try out some different ways of approaching your learning – whether that's reading, writing, discussing or listening to others. The activities will prepare you for the kinds of work you would do on the English Language A-Level course and will hopefully be interesting in their own right.

Mr Webster

Complete <u>EVERY</u> part of task 1, then choose whether to option task 2 <u>OR</u> 3 <u>OR</u> 4.

Task 1: An Introduction to Contextual Concepts

<u>Context, Audience and Purpose</u>
   a) Look at text 1 below and write down your answers to the following questions:
• Who might have written this text?
• What was their motivation for doing so?
• Why did they do it?
• Who were they intending to read it?

This note was found in a shared kitchen space in a large company. It was attached to a cupboard door where employees keep their personal mugs for hot drinks.

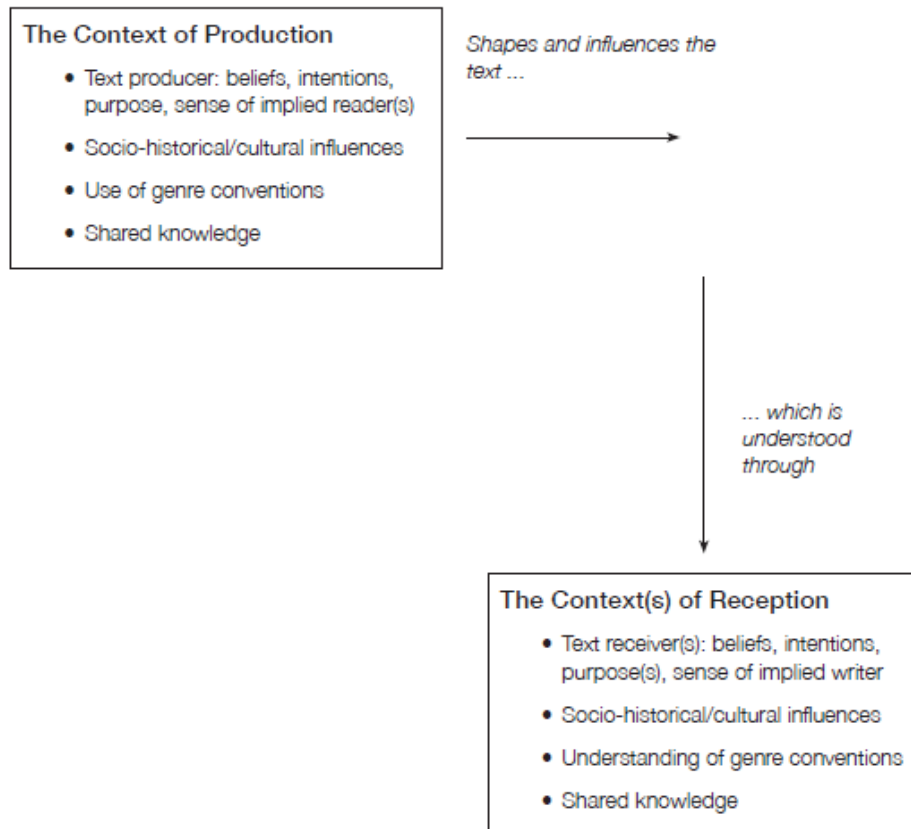<u>Context, Audience and Purpose - Text 1</u>

All texts have writers/speakers (or **text producers**) and readers/listeners (or **text receivers**). The beliefs, intentions, motivations and knowledge of text producers play a role in determining the language choices he or she makes. These all form part of a text's **context of production** along with broader more external factors such as the period in which the text was written (the **socio-historical/ cultural context**) and aspects of genre. Equally, the beliefs, intentions, motivation and knowledge of a text receiver, in addition to the situation in which reading or listening takes place, form the **context of reception** and influence the meaning a text receiver takes from a text.

So, **context** is the term used to cover the wide range of influences on either the production of a text or the way it is likely to be interpreted. In text 1, the context of production includes all of the motivating factors behind the writer's decision to place the note in the kitchen cupboard, the reason why she made the decisions she did and any other external influences. In this sense, the context includes an aspect of a text's **purpose** (why it was written) and an understanding of its likely **audience** (who will read it). The fact that producers often have readers in mind is important. In the case of text 1, the text producer has an intended audience in mind (what we can term an **implied reader**). However, the **actual reader** of the message may well be different. Equally, although a reader may have ideas about the kind of person who wrote the message (the **implied writer**), the **actual writer** may, of course, be very different.

In fact, a text may have many different possible contexts of reception depending on who the actual reader might be. This is certainly true of text 1: think about the different meanings that might occur when it is read by the person responsible for using the mug and someone else picking up on the humorous way in which the message is written. And what about the reader who misses the humour and takes the 'threat' of the message seriously? You can see from these possible interpretations how beliefs, intentions, motivations and knowledge all play a role in shaping a sense of meaning and consequently can explain the concepts of **multi-audience** and **multi-purpose** texts.

It's also useful to remember that is some situations, text producers and receivers share the same physical context (this is true in face to face conversations where participants are both producers and receivers and, for example, in a situation where your friend passes you a handwritten note). In other cases, producers and receivers are located in different physical contexts, often in different time periods (think about reading a nineteenth-century poem!). In both cases, however, producers and receivers rely on both their understanding of the conventions of the text's **genre** and on more general **shared knowledge** to help them communicate effectively (see the diagrammatic representation of this on page 9).

The Context of Production
- Text producer: beliefs, intentions, purpose, sense of implied reader(s)
- Socio-historical/cultural influences
- Use of genre conventions
- Shared knowledge

Shapes and influences the text ...

... which is understood through

The Context(s) of Reception
- Text receiver(s): beliefs, intentions, purpose(s), sense of implied writer
- Socio-historical/cultural influences
- Understanding of genre conventions
- Shared knowledge

b) Have a look at texts 2 and 3 below. For each text, answer this question in detail in your notes:
- What shared knowledge must the text producer and receiver(s) have for any communication to take place?

Context, Audience and Purpose – Text 2
This is the opening of the poem 'To Autumn' by the nineteenth-century poet John Keats.
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun

Context, Audience and Purpose – Text 3
This is a conversation between two friends. They are talking about a TV programme that aired the previous evening.

Key: (.) indicates a brief pause

A: Great episode last night

B: yeah much better than the last one (.) funny guy (.) top stuff as always (.)

beats that BBC rubbish

A: did your mum enjoy (.) she feeling better now

B: OK yeah (.) still bit sore after crash though

In a text, a text producer's decision to choose one particular word over another is significant. For example in text 4 below, the choice of the word *scintillating* is taken at the expense of a number of potential others. To test this, try replacing scintillating with a word that has a similar meaning and then with a word that has a very different meaning – how do you think this would alter the message that the text producer is attempting to convey?

Consequently, we can say that text producers make decisions about the likely impact of their choices that they hope will be picked up by text receivers, who in turn will attach some kind of significance to a choice a text producer has made.

c) For each text, 4 to 8, write down in your notes:
• Who might have written this text?
• What was their motivation for doing so?
• Why did they do it?
• Who were they intending to read it?

Then, annotate for which words or phrases led you to answer the questions above. When you have done this, label the word class of each of these words. You may need to use a dictionary to help you with this! Challenge: Can you spot any patterns in each writer's use of language?

Text 4

Our products are a scintillating range of top quality workmanship

Text 5

Harrison hits hard ground as Haye's the heavyweight king

Text 6

Cut the chicken into strips. Fry and then add the onions and peppers. Put the tomatoes into the pan and then follow with the herbs.

Text 7

We believe in top quality education. We believe in your child's education. We believe in your child.

Whilst our rivals are still using tatty sponges and dirty buckets of water,

Round-developers use the cutting-edge technology of a reverse osmosis waterfed

pole system.

Investigating Language

Choose <u>one</u> of the remaining tasks to complete: task 2, 3 or 4.

Task 2: Your Language Profile

Create a 'language profile' of yourself by answering the following questions and then

writing them up as a set of bullet points that highlight what you think are the most

interesting and important aspects of the language you use:

o What's your earliest language memory? Can you remember a nursery rhyme, song or

picture book from when you were very little?

o Have your family or extended family kept any records – video, audio, family memories – of

any of your earliest words?

o Have you kept any old school books from when you were learning to read and write?

o Where were you born and where in the UK, or the wider world, are your family from? Go

back a few generations if you like and think about any other languages that your family

members might speak, or other places your family members might have lived.

o Are there any words or expressions only you or your family use, which others don't really

understand?

o Do you or your friends at school use language in any ways that you notice as being different from other people around you? These could be other people in your year, your teachers, your family, whoever.

o Do you listen to or watch anyone on TV, online or in films or music videos who uses language in a way that interests or annoys you?

o Do you ever look at or hear someone else using language in a way that you find is totally new or strange to you?

o Have your teachers or family ever talked to you about the way you speak?

<p align="center"><u>OR</u></p>

Task 3: Do We Need New Words?

The English language is always generating new words. New words can be created out of nothing (neologisms) or be formed by using other words – or parts of words – together in new combinations (what are called compounds and blends). Sometimes initials of words in a phrase might be used (acronyms and initialisms) and you might also see parts of words being added to the front or end of another word to give it a new form (prefixes and suffixes). The A Level English Language course looks at how and why new words are formed, but there is also debate about whether we need new words and when (or whether) they should appear in dictionaries.

• **Look at the list of some of the new words that have appeared (or suddenly become much more popular) in English over the last few years below.**

• **Have you heard of these words before? Have you used any of them? Tick the relevant columns for each word.**

• **Choose two words from the list that you think are an important addition to the language. Try to come up with a sentence or two explaining why they are so important.**

• Then choose two words from the list that you think are pointless and insignificant.

What's the problem with these words and why do you think they shouldn't be included?

Again, write a sentence or two explaining your thinking.

• Are there any other new words – or new meanings for older words – that you have

heard about? Perhaps you could make a note of new and interesting uses of words over

the next few months.

• What are your predictions for the most popular and widely-used words for the next 12

months?

Word	Definition	Have heard/seen this word being used	Have used this word myself
Gaslight	To manipulate or trick someone by pretending that they cannot trust what they see or hear until they doubt their own sanity.		
Twerking	A way of dancing that involves bending forward and shaking or thrusting your buttocks in a rhythmic motion.		
Dadbod	A term used to describe the typically flabby and unsculpted male physique that most dads have.		
Cancel culture	A way of describing the movement to 'cancel' - to publicly disapprove of and then attempt to ignore - celebrities or organisations because of their perceived immoral or unpopular actions.		
Climate strike	A protest in which people leave work, school or college when they should be attending to take part in a protest about climate change.		

Influencer	A person who uses social media to promote a particular way of life or commercial products to their online followers.		
Nonbinary	A word describing a sexual identity that does not conform to binary categories of male and female.		
Hamsterkaufing	Stockpiling food like a hamster storing food in its cheeks (from German)		
WFH	Working From Home		
Mansplaining	A patronising way of explaining something (by a man to a woman).		

OR

Task 4: Language Fingerprints

As you learn more about language use, you'll start to see that everybody has their own

unique language style. Lots of things influence this – where we're from, how old we are, the

type of work we do and our interests, our family backgrounds and our own individual

personalities – but we all have what's called an idiolect (an individual language style). It's

not quite the same as a fingerprint, but there are some similarities. And while detectives can

use fingerprints to track down individuals, forensic linguists can also use this idea of

individual language style to identify people, or aspects of a person's background.

This activity puts you in the role of a language detective trying to solve a crime. The police

need your help to work out who might have sent an abusive social media message from an

anonymous account to a local politician. They have three suspects in custody and your job is

to offer a view on which one you think is most likely to have sent the message, based on

possible language clues.

• Read Exhibit 1, the abusive message that the police are investigating. Is there anything that stands out in this message as being potentially interesting about how language is being used?

• Social media messages about the same issue which were used to identify three suspects. Read through these in turn, again making a note of anything that strikes you as interesting about how language is being used.

• Based on this small amount of data, have you got any suggestions about who might have sent the abusive message? Write a short police report explaining your thoughts. Try to pin your thinking down to specific bits of language evidence in the data.

Data sets

Exhibit 1: the abusive message

Hope your really proud of yourself for what you done but you gotta no that one day your gonna get payback!!! We have had enough of politicians like you not listening to us, you should of listened!!! Watch your back

Suspect 1's social media message

I don't like what's been happening in this area since the new housing development started. This used to be a nice place to live!!! I'm so disappointed in are local representatives for not sticking up for us!!!

Suspect 2's social media message

When are local councillors gonna realise that they should of been standing up for us and not for they're mates in the big building firms, these people are gonna make a fortune from this

Suspect 3's social media message

Your joking! Are they seriously going to build 200 new houses on the fields up by the hospital?! That is crazy. There's not enough facilities for the rest of us at the moment. Madness!!!