

Assessment Objectives for reading

Most people can read. We do it all the time and it certainly seems easier than writing. So why does reading amount to 40% of the marks for GCSE English? The answer is found in what examiners are required to assess.

Under the topic of reading you are required to show that you can read with insight, distinguish between fact and fiction, follow an argument, select material from different sources and comment on language. In other words, there is much more to reading than simply casting your eyes over pages of print. In fact, unless an examiner could plug into your brain and find out your thoughts directly, the only way your reading can be tested is through your writing. To read successfully for the examination, you must learn how to **write** about what you read.

What are you required to read? First, you must read some literature, regardless of whether or not you are entering the English Literature examination. Some is set for coursework under the guidance of your teacher, but you also need to study poetry from different cultures for the written examination. Second, you have to study some non-fiction, including media texts, for the written examination.

Your reading will be assessed against the following five **Assessment Objectives (AOs)**:

AO2(i)	Read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts and developing and sustaining interpretations of them.
AO2(ii)	Distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented.
AO2(iii)	Follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies.
AO2(iv)	Select material appropriate to your purpose, collate material from different sources, and make cross-references.
AO2(v)	Understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects, and comment on ways language varies and changes.



Where are these assessed?

Assessment Objective	Paper 1	Paper 2	Coursework task 1 (Shakespeare)	Coursework task 2 (prose study)
2(i)	✓	✓	✓	✓
2(ii)	✓			
2(iii)	✓			
2(iv)	✓	✓	✓	✓
2(v)	✓	✓	✓	✓

As the grid above shows, some Assessment Objectives are more important than others because they are tested in all four reading tasks. One of these is AO2(i).

AO2(i)

Read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts and developing and sustaining interpretations of them



Key words	What the key words mean
read with insight and engagement	You can find out about a text and look beyond its word-for-word meaning. You can look at the text from different angles and show an interest in the writing.
appropriate references	You can choose the relevant parts of a text to support your comments.
developing and sustaining interpretations	You can develop a series of connected comments about a whole text and show that a text can have wider meanings.

In order to meet AO2(i) you need to think about what it means in practice.

- ✱ You must understand the basic **content** — what the words and sentences mean literally. For example, if your teacher announced, ‘You are the most supremely perspicacious group of cognoscenti I have ever encountered’, you would obviously need to know the meaning of ‘perspicacious’ and ‘cognoscenti’ before you could work out what is being said.
- ✱ You must be able to grasp the overall **subject** of the words. In the example in the point above, the subject of the teacher’s words is the students’ ability.
- ✱ You must interpret, or ‘read between the lines’, and understand the real **meaning** of the words. At first you may be flattered to discover that perspicacious means ‘clear-sighted’ and cognoscenti means ‘knowledgeable’

people'. But when you take into account that the teacher is returning some poor homework, you will realise that he/she is being sarcastic and intends the exact opposite of the words' literal meaning. Of course, a clue to the teacher's intention would be revealed in the tone of voice and gestures used. But even when we are dealing purely with the written word, we must always look beyond the simple, basic meaning.

Remember: when you are reading, you must decide **what** has happened, **how** it happened and **why** it happened.

To find out the content, subject and meaning, you must think like a detective. You need to look at the **evidence**, search for **clues** and come to some **conclusions**. Look at the two short pieces of text below. Both passages are almost exactly the same length and provide information about Corsica.

Text 1

Island in the Mediterranean Sea immediately north of Sardinia, from which it is separated by the Strait of Bonifacio; a department of France. Area 8,700 km². Pop. 269,831. Prefecture Ajaccio. The interior is mountainous (with plains only along the east coast), rising to 8,891 ft in Monte Cinto. The rocky west coast has many headlands and gulfs. Over the lower mountain slopes is spread a tangled undergrowth of shrubs (Fr. maquis, Italian macchid) which used to provide cover for bandits. Farming primitive. Sheep and goats raised in large numbers. Produces olives, vines, citrus fruits, chestnuts. Growing tourist industry. The seaports Ajaccio and Bastia are the largest towns. Exports olive oil, wine, fruits etc.



Text 2

Corsica is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It sits 170 km south of France, to which it belongs, and 83 km west of Italy. Its 8,700 km² of land offer striking contrasts and a wealth of natural wonders to explore. The land itself offers much to be proud of. Nature has bestowed the gift of amazing geographical variety here. With 1,000 km of coastline, there are beaches of fine golden sand, rocky bays where fishing villages cling to sheltered coves, and sheer cliffs dropping dramatically into the azure water below. Inland a spine of vertiginous granite peaks climb to 8,891 ft, giving Corsica the nickname 'mountain in the sea'.



Task

- 1 In what ways are the two passages similar in the kind of basic information they provide?
- 2 In what ways does the second passage do more than the first?
- 3 From what kinds of book do you think the passages are taken and why?

Remember:
you are
searching for
clues.

Now look at a different kind of text and see what you can find out about it. In the following passage a German woman who has moved to the Ukraine describes some of her experiences of television in that country.

Where I live, the advert breaks in programmes are so long I once walked away from the TV, had a shower, washed my hair, made a cup of tea and still made it back to the couch before the show started again. Welcome to commercial breaks, Ukraine-style.¹

It's been exceedingly difficult for me not to judge Ukrainian culture by its advertising. If nothing else, I think it reflects the culture's stage of development in regard to gender equality. For example, I have yet to see a single advert where a man does any kind of domestic activity.²

There's one commercial for a stove where a husband in a suit, complete with briefcase, arrives home and says the classic line: 'Honey, I'm home.' His small son hurls himself at his father's legs and shouts, 'Papa!' The trophy wife in a frilly pinny looks on fondly.³

With a game-show flourish of her hand over the stove, she proudly lists



the 12 things she cooked for dinner that night. The husband shakes his head in disbelief and says, 'Wow.' The whole thing ends with the three of them gathered around the amazing appliance.⁴



Task

What tone of voice do you think the person writing would be using if she were telling you this out loud?

Beer commercials are more reminiscent of early 80s advertising. They consist mostly of men on fishing or camping trips, doing manly things that are rewarded with a cold beer.⁵

I just love it at the end when they take a long swig, smack their chops in satisfaction and inevitably wipe their mouths on the back of their hands. Classic.⁶

I've never seen so many adverts for toothpaste, shampoo, fridges and, of course, vodka.⁷

Once again, we see a middle-aged wifey tidying in the kitchen, with her frilled apron and 50s-style hair. From another room her husband shouts imperiously: 'Coffee!' Frowning slightly at the tone, she nevertheless begins preparations for making coffee.

'Vodka!' yells her husband. Alarmed now, she scurries around the kitchen looking for vodka and a glass. Then the husband shouts another order, whereupon she frantically starts making something to eat. 'Angelina Jolie!' screams the voice from the other room. This time he's gone too far. She slams down the knife she was using and marches into the living room to investigate. On stepping into the room, the husband punches the air in triumph as he answers yet another question correctly from the game show on TV. Wifey plops down next to him on the sofa heaving a big sigh of relief. She then laughs at herself for ever having doubted him. I could honestly vomit every time I see this ad.⁸

Let's look at what is really happening in the passage. First, what does the woman tell us literally? This can be summarised by paragraph:

- Paragraph **1** The adverts are extremely long.
- Paragraph **2** One can judge a country's attitudes and culture through its advertisements. No men appear in adverts doing domestic chores.
- Paragraphs **3** and **4** A particular advert is described.
- Paragraph **5** Beer adverts are described.
- Paragraph **6** She loves the way the beer adverts end.
- Paragraph **7** She lists the kinds of product that appear frequently.
- Paragraph **8** Another advert is described and the author says she almost vomits when she sees it.

Look at the section of this book on fact and opinion (see pages 10–17).

All of the above is true, and if you simply wanted to know the content of Ukrainian advertisements it would be sufficient. However, the writer is not just telling us what appears in the advertisements — she is giving us her opinion of them.

Task

1 Answer each of the questions below.

- (a) '*...commercial breaks, Ukrainian-style.*' What does 'style' suggest here?
- (b) '*...gender equality.*' What has this to do with the writer's viewpoint?
- (c) '*...(no advertisement) where a man does any kind of domestic activity.*' What is this evidence of?
- (d) '*...classic line: "Honey, I'm home."*' What is meant by 'classic' here and what does 'honey' suggest?
- (e) '*...frilly pinny...*' What picture does this call up?
- (f) '*...proudly lists the 12 things...*' Why proudly?
- (g) '*Wow!*' Where have you heard that word before?
- (h) '*I just love it...*' What does the writer mean: does she really love the advertisements?
- (i) '*...husband punches the air in triumph...*' What sort of man does that?
- (j) '*Wifey...*' What's the difference between 'wifey' and 'wife'?
- (k) '*I could honestly vomit...*' Why?

2 Consider the details the author uses in her account and show how they suggest what she thinks of advertisements on Ukrainian television.

So far we have considered **non-fictional** texts, but the reading of **literary** texts is a major part of your assessment. The procedure is basically the same: you must look beyond the literal information for clues as to what the author is really saying. The difference is that plays, novels and poems often do many things at once. Literary texts are much more open to different **interpretations** than non-literary texts, so you need to have your wits about you.

Here is the opening of a short story.

Excitement boiled in the woman and overflowed in an almost incoherent torrent of words in which the gatekeeper's puny inquiry bobbed for a second, unheeded, and was lost.

'An accident, y'say?' he asked again as the woman caught at her breath. 'Jack Lister?' Her vigorous nod set heavy flesh trembling on cheeks and chin. 'His wife...I'm his mother. They've taken her to hospital.'

'Just a minute, then.' The gatekeeper went into the gatehouse and the woman watched him through the dusty side-window as he lifted the receiver of the telephone and spoke to someone inside the low sprawl of factory buildings. In a few minutes he came out again. 'He'll be out in a minute,' he said. He eased the peak of his

uniform cap, then clasped his hands behind his back and rocked backwards and forwards, almost imperceptibly, on toes and heels as he looked down at the woman.

She said, 'Thank you,' repeating the words absently a moment later. Then suddenly, as though a tap had been turned on inside her, **the gush of words started again.** The gatekeeper listened placidly until she touched on the nature of the accident, when his face screwed itself into a grimace.

'Ooh, that's nasty,' he said. 'That's nasty.'

At first when the foreman spoke to him the man did not appear to understand. 'Somebody wanting me?' he said, knitting his eyebrows in perplexity.

'Aye, up at the gate. There's been a bit o' trouble or summat. I should go up an' see what's doin', if I were you.'

His mother hurried to meet him as he came out of the building into the yard, **pulling on his jacket as he walked.**

'It's Sylvia, Jack,' **she blurted.** 'She's had an accident.'

He stopped and stared at her, seeming to be wrested from his troubled absorption by her words and the sight of her, hatless and with the flowered apron visible under the unbuttoned coat. He gripped her by the upper arm, the flesh soft and yielding under his fingers. 'What's she done?' he said. 'What's happened?'

'They came to tell me, Jack. They've taken her to the infirmary. **It's her hair — she's had her hair fast in a machine.'**

'Oh! God,' he said.

She ran clumsily alongside him as he started for the gate. 'All that hair, Jack... She wouldn't have it cut short an' sensible. An' I bet she never even wore it fastened up like other women. She never should ha' gone out to work again anyway, but she wanted too much brass for lipstick an' donnin' up in fancy clothes... Your wage wouldn't do for her. Any decent woman would ha' been content to stop at home an' look after her bairn... I told her it wasn't right, an' she knew you didn't like it... It's a judgement on her, that's what it is... a judgement.'

Stan Barstow, 'One Wednesday Afternoon', Black Swan, 1986.

Do not
simply retell
the story and
then stop.

The basic situation in this extract is simple. Jack's mother has come to his place of work to inform him that his wife, Sylvia, has had an accident in which her hair became entangled in a machine. They set off together for the hospital. You must understand this in order to make any sense of the story. If you do no more than this, however, you will probably get no further than Grade F.

Even in these opening paragraphs we learn more about Jack's mother and her relationship with her son and daughter-in-law than about the accident itself. Look at the highlighted words, which provide clues. Note that some of them have nothing directly to do with what is said. Try to think yourself into the situation and picture it in your mind. This is what is meant by the term '**engagement**'.

Task

- 1 Think about the character Jack in the above extract. He is not described directly but there are clues about him from his behaviour. Choose the actor from the four pictured below who you think would be most suitable to play Jack. Explain your choice.



Alun Armstrong



Leonardo DiCaprio



Christopher Biggins



Harrison Ford

- 2 Why is Jack so excited?
3 What does the way the mother speaks suggest about her feelings and attitudes?

We know that authors use their imaginations but readers have to as well. Here is a very short story. The outline is simple and easy to follow but something strange is going on.

She was standing by the river looking at the stepping stones and remembering each one. There was the round unsteady stone, the pointed one, the flat one in the middle — the safe stone where you could stand and look around. The next wasn't so safe, for when the river was full the water flowed over it and even when it showed dry it was slippery. But after that it was easy and soon she was standing on the other side.

The road was much wider than it used to be but the work had been done carelessly. The felled trees had not been cleared away and the bushes looked trampled. Yet it was the same road and she walked along feeling extraordinarily happy.

It was a fine day, a blue day. The only thing was that the sky had a glassy look that she didn't remember. That was the only word she could think of. Glassy. She turned the corner, saw that what had been the old pavé had been taken up, and there too the road was much wider, but it had the same unfinished look.

She came to the worn stone steps that led up to the house and her heart began to beat. The screw pine was gone, so was the mock summer house called the ajoupa, but the clove tree was still there and at the top of the steps the rough lawn stretched away, just as she remembered it. She stopped and looked towards the house that had been added to and painted white. It was strange to see a car standing in front of it.

There were two children under the big mango tree, a boy and a little girl, and she waved to them and called 'Hello' but they didn't answer her or turn their heads. Very



fair children, as Europeans born in the West Indies so often are: as if the white blood is asserting itself against all odds.

The grass was yellow in the hot sunlight as she walked towards them. When she was quite close she called again, shyly: 'Hello'. Then, 'I used to live here once,' she said.

Still they didn't answer. When she said for the third time 'Hello' she was quite near them. Her arms went out instinctively with the longing to touch them.

It was the boy who turned. His grey eyes looked straight into hers. His expression didn't change. He said, 'Hasn't it gone cold all of a sudden. D'you notice? Let's go in.' 'Yes let's', said the girl.

Her arms fell to her sides as she watched them running across the grass to the house. That was the first time she knew.

Jean Rhys, 'I Used to Live Here Once', from *Best West Indian Stories*, Nelson Caribbean, 1968.

Task

- 1 What is it that the narrator knew for the first time?
- 2 Explain **how** you know. What are the clues?
- 3 What do you think the writer is trying to express about her past?

AO2(ii)

Distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented



Key words	What the key words mean
distinguish between fact and opinion	You are able to identify facts and opinions and explain how they are different.
evaluate how information is presented	You can compare and contrast the different ways in which information is presented on the page

Distinguish between fact and opinion

- * A **fact** is something that can be proved.
- * An **opinion** is a personal view or belief that cannot be proved.

Sometimes, however, it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two because writers might:

- * disguise opinion as though it is fact
- * express an opinion that uses conveniently chosen facts to support it

Task

Read the following passage, which is taken from a regional leaflet on road safety, and identify the facts and opinions.

Deaths and serious injuries on our roads bring misery to thousands, including the relatives and friends of the dead and injured. Over the past three years, on average, 74 people have been killed each year, 608 seriously injured and a further 3,630 slightly injured as a result of speed-related road collisions. Most of us know someone who has been killed or seriously injured on the roads, if not as a driver or a motor-bike rider then as a cyclist or pedestrian. Many of these deaths and injuries are avoidable.

'Who? What? Why?', a leaflet published by the Safety Camera Partnership in West Mercia.

Task

Explain how each of the following could be both facts and opinions:

- * Arsenal are the best!
- * Girls are better than boys.
- * Boys are better than girls.
- * The USA is the richest country in the world.
- * Rain is bad.

You might find the following example useful:

Arsenal have been arguably the best football team over recent years because of the number of cups they have won. However, it could also be argued that they have never won any cups in Europe.

Of course, people can use spurious (silly and pointless) 'facts' that are not really facts at all. It is good to be suspicious of arguments that seem to be clearly put forward.

Read the following passage from the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975).

Crowd: A witch! A witch! A witch! We've found a witch! Burn her! Burn her! Burn her! We've found a witch! We've found a witch! A witch! A witch! A witch!

Villager 1: We have found a witch. May we burn her?

Crowd: Burn her! Burn! Burn her! Burn her!

Bedevere: How do you know she is a witch?

Villager 2: She looks like one.

Bedevere: Quiet! Quiet! Quiet! Quiet! There are ways of telling whether she is a witch.

Villager 1: Are there? What are they?

Crowd: Tell us! Tell us!...

Bedevere: Tell me. What do you do with witches?

Crowd: Burn! Burn them up! Burn!...

Bedevere: And what do you burn apart from witches?

Villager 1: More witches!