

PMC

Ophelia first appears in Act I, sc(iii), when she is lectured by her brother about her relationship with Prince Hamlet:

*"For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour  
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,  
A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent. Sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,  
No more."*

Laertes' speech is important for a number of reasons:

- 1) Ophelia is the subject of Hamlet's 'favour' – he is attracted to her and they have a relationship.
- 2) Hamlet is regarded as **flighty and unreliable**. Laertes' warning about the danger of a relationship with the Prince foreshadows Ophelia's later tragedy.
- 3) As a young woman, Ophelia is of **inferior status to her brother**, who feels justified in speaking to her in a paternalistic tone.

This scene is extremely significant as it is the only scene in the play to feature a speech which reveals Ophelia's

- a) Wit
- b) Intelligence
- c) Strength

This is because it is **the only scene in which she converses with a person of fairly equal status** – her brother:

*"Do not, as some ungracious pastors do, / Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven / Whilst, like a puffed and reckless libertine, / Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads."*

Ophelia is:

- 1) A noblewoman
- 2) Hamlet's lover
- 3) A symbol of injustice
- 4) Emblematic of the tragedy of the play
- 5) A victim of mistreatment by 3 powerful men:
  - a) Her father
  - b) Her lover
  - c) Her king

## Ophelia

*"At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him."* Polonius

This chimes with Laertes' words earlier in the scene when he warned his sister *"...or your chaste treasure open / To his unmaster'd importunity."* The meaning is clear.

Ophelia's worth lies in her 'marriageability' and therefore in her chastity. This is why Polonius instructs his daughter to sever all connection with Hamlet: *"I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth, / Have you so slander any moment's leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet."* This is an instruction **she is duty-bound to obey**.

There is a notable change in tone when her father enters. He is angry with Ophelia because he has heard of her relationship with Hamlet and his words reveal his **proprietary attitude to his daughter**: *"tender yourself more dearly, or you'll tender me a fool..."*

The choice of the verb '**tender**' is crucial here. It means 'to sell.' It is clear that, to Polonius (and he is **representative of the wider society**), a daughter is an asset, a piece of property, as much as a human being.

Key Scenes:

- 1) Act I, sc(ii)
- 2) Act II, sc(ii)
- 3) Act III, sc(i)
- 4) Act III, sc(ii)
- 5) Act IV, sc(iv)
- 6) Act V, sc(i)

Later, when Hamlet targets Ophelia for manipulation in the '**antic disposition**' scheme, she reports *"Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd... / As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors, he comes before me..."*

Polonius' reaction: *"I feared he did but trifle and meant to wrack thee"*, is of crucial importance. Again, the verb choice is vital here – *wrack* means to *wreak*. **How could Hamlet wreak Ophelia? By seducing here and sleeping with her before marriage.**

In many ways, **Ophelia is a cipher character**. She represents / symbolises the reality of life for a young woman in her society. **She loves Hamlet, but has no choice other than to obey her father:** *“As you did command, / I did repel his letters and denied / His access to me.”*

The play depicts a **patriarchal society**, and therefore she has no independence and is completely subject to her father’s authority.

**Ophelia’s presence in the play also plays an important role in developing our understanding of the protagonist, Hamlet.** He does love her, but **his treatment of her is cruel and hypocritical.** He does not hesitate in manipulating her as part of his quest to reveal Claudius’ villainy.

His ‘antic disposition’ plan involves manipulating her. In Act II, sc(i), she tells her father *“Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac’d...As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.”*

**Here, Hamlet is using Ophelia to distract Claudius from his real intention, which is to establish the veracity of the Ghost’s regicide accusation.** The plan works, as Polonius feels *“This is the very ecstasy of love”* and Claudius feels Hamlet has been driven mad by unrequited love. **While Hamlet’s plan may be logical and successful, it is also cruel, as it deceives Ophelia, the woman he professes to love, and uses her as an instrument of convenience**

Ophelia’s good standing is clear from Gertrude’s wish that *“I do wish  
That your beauties be the happy  
cause / Of Hamlet’s madness.”*

**However, it is clear that Gertrude wants Hamlet to be troubled by unrequited love for Ophelia as this would absolve her of her own guilt.**

**Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia in Act III is shocking and abusive.** In the 1<sup>st</sup> scene of that act, he tells her *“I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.”* It is clear that he knows that Polonius and Claudius are watching the encounter, but **his words are unnecessarily cruel and he humiliates her.**

Using hurtful and sexually explicit language, he tells her *“It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge.”*

He then becomes infuriated and accuses her of trying to manipulate him: *“You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops.”*

It is clear that Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia here is born out of his fury with this mother. **Ophelia is defenceless and his behaviour alienates the audience, creating antipathy towards him and sympathy for the target of his vituperation.**

**Hamlet’s attack on Ophelia in Act III, sc(i) crosses the line into misogyny** when he tells her *“get thee to a nunnery”*, and asks *“why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners”*, before declaring *“you jig, you amble and you lisp. You nickname God’s creatures and you make your wantonness your ignorance.”*

These words must be seen for what they are – sexist and condescending - but **should also be considered in the light of Hamlet’s fragile mental and emotional state.** On a basic level, they are indicative of the terrible impact Gertrude’s ‘betrayal’ had on her son, and the very real suffering he endures as a result.

His cruelty and humiliation of Ophelia continues in the Mousetrap scene in the following exchange:

**HAMLET**

*Lady, shall I lie in your lap?  
Lying down at OPHELIA’s feet*

**OPHELIA**

*No, my lord.*

**HAMLET**

*I mean, my head upon your lap?*

**OPHELIA**

*Ay, my lord.*

**HAMLET**

*Do you think I meant country matters?*

**Ophelia's rapid decline and premature death, which occurs in Act IV, is one of the most important tragic features of the play.** Her descent into actual madness is ironic given Hamlet's feigned madness. There is no question that Hamlet is culpable for much of her suffering. **The fact that her lover killed her father is devastating, as indeed is his flippant attitude to the act:**

C: "Where is Polonius?"

H: "In heaven; send thither to see:  
if your messenger  
Find him not there, seek him i'  
the other place yourself."

By Act IV, sc(v), Ophelia is mad, driven to "desperate terms" by grief and a broken heart. She appears "larded with sweet flowers", an Elizabethan symbol of madness. The selection of flowers is significant. She carries:

- 1) **Daisies**, which are representative of **unhappy love and heart break**
- 2) **Rue**, which is symbolic of **sorrow**
- 3) **Fennel**, which symbolizes **infidelity**
- 4) **Rosemary**, which suggests **remembrance of loved ones who have died.**

Most tellingly, she carries **no violets**, because, she says they "withered all when my father died." **Violets were symbolic of young love.**

A gentleman tells Gertrude "Her speech is nothing."

Shakespeare leaves no doubt that her suffering is directly related to Hamlet's actions. Ophelia is heard to say "But I cannot Choose to weep, to think they should lay him i The cold ground."

**Any sympathy for Hamlet and his suffering must be mitigated by the fact that he is responsible for inflicting such suffering on a woman he professed to love.**

**Ophelia's death is announced by Gertrude in Act IV sc(vii) when she says "One woe doth tread upon another's heel. So fast they follow: Your sister's drowned, Laertes."**

It seems she committed **suicide** (if this is possible in her distracted state) this is insinuated by the gravediggers in Act V, sc(i). They say her "death was doubtful" and "If this had not been a gentlewoman, She would have been buried out of Christian burial."

In the end, Ophelia is the recipient of beautiful tributes from three men – her brother, her king and her lover, who all, to some degree, were responsible for manipulating her. There is a touch of hypocrisy to these words of lamentation from men who, in theory had a duty to protect and love Ophelia, but who, in reality, **used her as a pawn in their patriarchal power struggle.**

"O rose of May! Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! O heavens! Is't possible a young maid's wits / Should be as mortal as an old man's life?"

**Laertes**

"Poor Ophelia, / Divided from herself and her fair judgement, / Without the which we are as pictures, or mere beasts."

**Claudius**

"I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, Make up my sum."

**Hamlet**

### Question A

The usual requirements for successful answering also of course apply here:

1. The work needs to have a discernible, **circular structure**
2. The paragraphs need to have a **logical sequence**
3. The work needs to have a laser sharp **focus on the question**
4. The **language** should be **clear and accessible**
5. There should be very **few if any basic errors** in spelling and punctuation

- The task will be split into **3 sections**
- **QA #(i) & #(ii)** will each be marked **ex 15**
- **QA #(iii)** will be marked **ex 20 marks**
- Candidates should aim to write **1 paragraph for every 5 marks available**

Paragraphs need to follow the **RICC Rules**

The **QA #(i)** is always **simple and straightforward**. The answer will clearly evident in the text. **Very little, if any critical thinking skills are required to answer this**

**Example of a QA (i) task from 2022 exam, Text 1:**

*Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain three insights you gain into the power of poetry. Support your answer with reference to the text.*

### The Reading Comprehension 'Question A' Task

The QA task is allocated **50 marks**, or **12.5%** of the available marks

**A Question A is a critical analysis task.**

**Example of a QA (ii) task from 2022 exam, Text 2:**

*In Extract 1, Tom Gatti observes that the music we listen to has a greater and a longer lasting impact on us than the books that we read and the films that we watch. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this observation.*

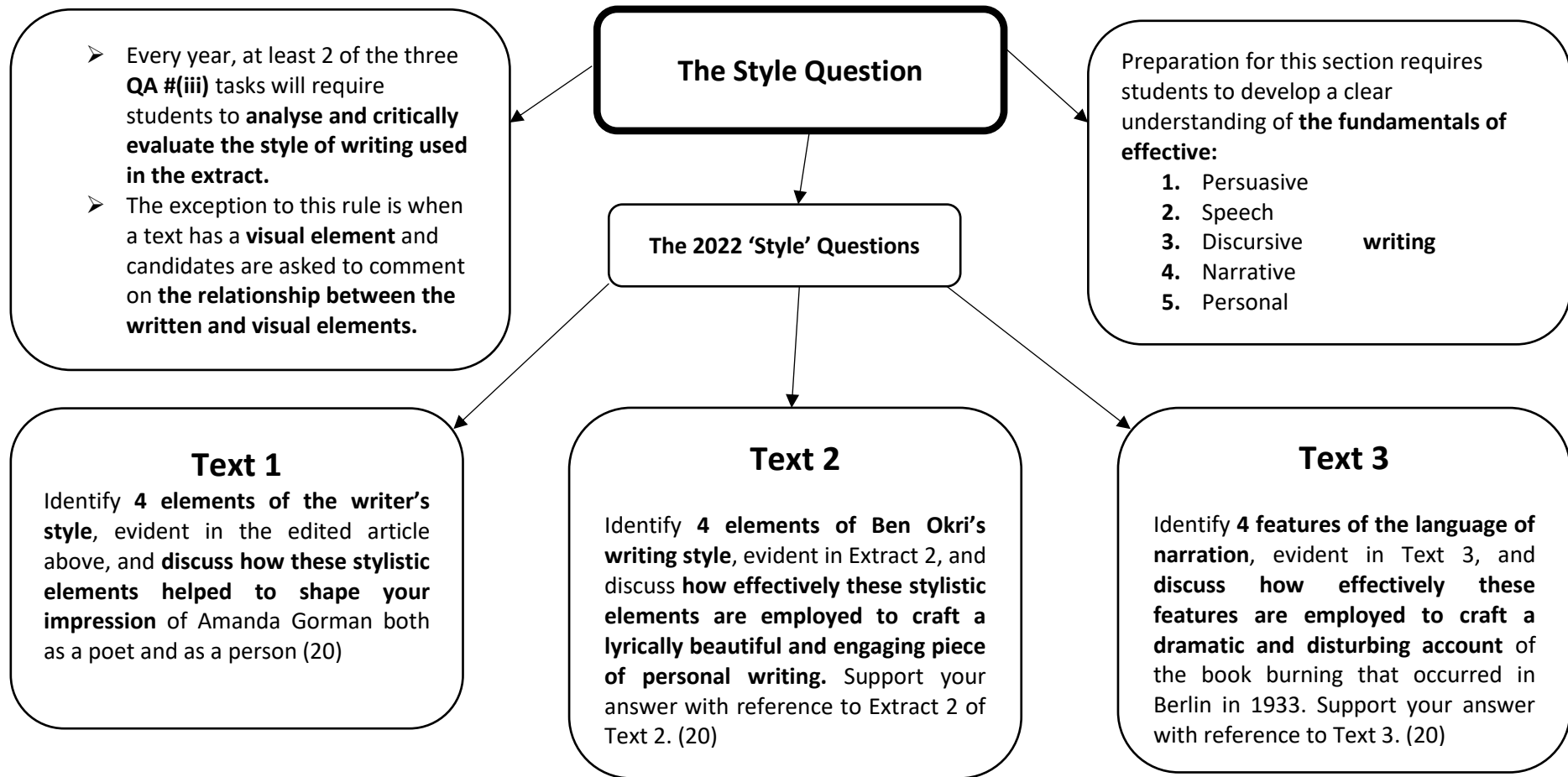
- **The QA (ii)** questions are more challenging,
- They require **creative thinking and imagination**.
- Often the question is inspired by the text, but **the answer is not to be found within the text** (as is the case with both #(i) & #(iii) tasks.
- Instead, **the #(ii) tasks require students to offer an opinion based on their own experience.**

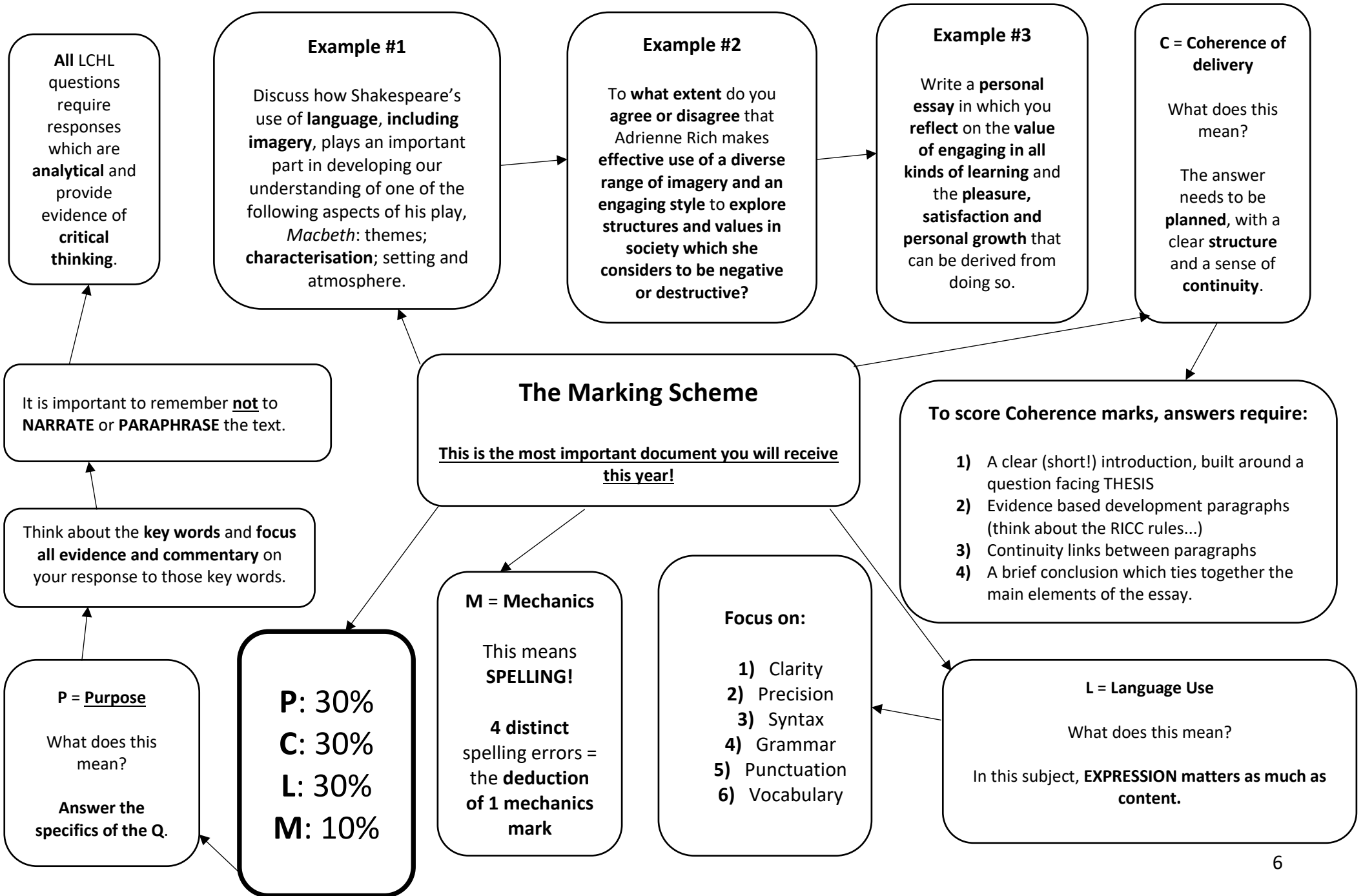
There will be **3 QA tasks on Paper 1**

Students must **answer 1 QA task**

The QA selected **must be from a different text than the QB selected.**

A clear understanding of the different **language genres** is required to answer a QA task effectively.





If you want to be a good writer, you need to concentrate not just on

What you say

But also on

How you say what you say

**Marking Scheme - PCLM**

- **Purpose (30%)**
- **Coherence of Delivery (30%)**
- **Language (30%)**
- **Mechanics (10%)**

**Paper 1 -200 marks**

**Timing** – 2hrs 50mins = **170 mins**

- ✓ QA (50m – 12.5%) - One from 3 options **and**
  - ✓ QB (50m – 12.5%) – One from 3 options
  - ✓ Composition (100m – 25%) – One from 7 options
- Timing:** Composition 70 minutes  
 QA 60-70 minutes  
 QB 30-40 minutes

**Comprehension – QA** - 50m = 12.5%

- ✓ 3 texts – **Answer on 1**
- ✓ 3 Questions: 2x15m + 1x20 marks
- ✓ Expectation – **5 marks = 1 paragraph**
- ✓ NO opening or closing paragraph required

Expect **Q(i)** to be very straightforward – often a simple character analysis task.

Example:

*Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain three insights you gained into the impact of time on memories. Support your answer with reference to the text.*

Expect **Q(iii)** to be a **style** question – vital to prepare and be able to identify the key qualities of different styles of writing:

- a) Argument Discursive
- b) Persuasion Speech / talk
- c) Story / narrative
- d) Description / Aesthetic
- e) Personal writing

*Identify four features of the aesthetic use of language, evident in the above text, and discuss how effectively these features are employed by Doireann Ni Ghriofa to convey her personal experiences, hopes and dreams.*

Expect **Q(ii)** to be the **most challenging**. In recent years, these questions have expected candidates to be **imaginative**. These questions often do not require direct reference to the attached Reading Comprehension passage.

**Example:**

*In paragraph 7, Chadwick Boseman observes, “Purpose is an essential element of you.” Give your personal response to this observation by the writer.*

**Comprehension – QB** - 50m = 12.5%

- ✓ 3 tasks – **Answer on 1**
- ✓ Imaginative tasks – often requires candidate to **adopt a persona**
- ✓ Task usually involves a **‘framework’ instruction**, i.e. A speech; A talk; An introduction to a collection of essays; A magazine article / A blog post /An article for school website; A formal letter; A Diary entry

Questions will also usually contain a **list of tasks** that must be addressed across the response.

The key here is to be

- 1) Accurate
- 2) Consistent
- 3) Imaginative
- 4) Concise

**Example:**

*An assertion that other creatures’ lives are somehow lesser than human life has prompted extensive debate on social media. In order to join in this online debate, write an open letter to be shared on social media, in which you: state your position in relation to animal rights, explore some of the issues associated with our current engagement with animals and outline what you see as the major challenges we face as we share the planet with animals in the future.*

**Composition – 100m = 25%**

- ✓ The most important section of the exam
- ✓ 7 choices – select one
- ✓ Questions **always genre-specific**

**Expect:**

- A speech
- A personal essay
- A short story
- A discursive essay

**There will also likely be an option to write:**

- A descriptive essay
- A persuasive essay
- A magazine / newspaper article

**The style of writing is the most important criteria for assessment here.** Tasks are genre-specific, so:

- ✚ A **short story** should contain obvious elements of narrative / aesthetic language
- ✚ A **speech** should display an understanding of persuasive and argumentative techniques
- ✚ A **discursive essay** should display a balanced, informed, considered approach
- ✚ A **personal essay** should be reflective and contain 'individual observation'

The **marking schemes** very clearly lay out the expectations related to each style of essay and should be studied closely.

**The quality of language and expression** will be closely examined in this task above all others. The expectation is that the candidate will display a strong understanding of the particulars of the selected genre and will write in an articulate and clear style.

**Imagination and Originality are key factors in a successful composition.**

**Paper 2 – 200m – 200 minutes**

**Time management:** Easy – 60 minutes per essay and 20 minutes for Unseen Poetry.

There is an expectation that all answers on Paper 2 will be:

- 1) **Substantial** (anywhere between 1,000 & 1,200 words is a reasonable expectation)
- 2) **Evidence-based.** Quotation is vitally important here. There is an absolute expectation of supporting quotation for answers to Single Text and Studied Poetry answers. Quotation also adds to the quality of Comparative answers.
- 3) **Analytical** – the expectation is that answers will contain thoughtful and considered question-facing commentary. All Paper 2 tasks are exercises in **CRITICAL THINKING.**
- 4) Properly **structured.**

**Note:**

In responses to Single Text and Studied Poetry tasks, **opening and closing paragraphs certainly should be written.** However, they should be **brief** and only need to **accomplish one task** – state the candidate's response to the statement proposal in the question. Every answer on Paper 2 requires an answer that is written in the **Language of Argument** so provide your **THESIS** and move on. Closing paragraphs should again be brief and simply re-iterate the thesis. **Candidates do not need to not 'list' points on the OP or CP**

**Single Text – 60m = 18.5%**

Five Texts are prescribed for study:

- 1) Hamlet
  - 2) All the Light We Cannot See
  - 3) The Crucible
  - 4) Frankenstein
  - 5) The Picture of Dorian Gray
- ✚ There will be **2 questions** on each text and candidates can choose to answer one question.
  - ✚ The question will contain multiple elements



**Examples:**

**#1**

*Discuss how Shakespeare makes effective use, for a variety of purposes, of the contradictions and inconsistencies evident in Hamlet’s character. Develop your discussion with reference to Shakespeare’s play, Othello.*

**#2**

*Discuss how Shakespeare’s use of language, including imagery, plays an important part in developing our understanding of one of the following aspects of his play, Hamlet: themes; characterisation; setting and atmosphere. Develop your answer with reference to the text.*

**Expectations:**

- 1) Answers will be **question-facing**.
- 2) Answers will **not ‘narrate’** the studied text.
- 3) Answers will be thoughtful, and **points and evidence will be contextualised in the light of the question.**
- 4) Between **4-6 relevant points** will be presented in a logical and structured essay.

**Hamlet – Key Topics for Revision:**

- 1) The story-arc of the main characters
- 2) The Modern Appeal
- 3) Universal themes like Corruption and deception are particularly important.

**Comparative**

**Three modes** are prescribed for study.

In 2023, questions will be asked on **2 modes**.

- 1) Theme and Issue
- 2) Cultural Context
- 3) Literary Genre

**CANDIDATES MUST CHOOSE TO ANSWER ON ONE MODE.**

- Each mode will offer a **choice** between two questions.
- One choice will be a **stand-alone 70-mark essay**. Candidates are permitted to refer to only 2 texts when answering this task **without fear of penalty**.
- The other choice will be divided into **Part A (30) marks and Part B (40) marks**.
- **Candidates are expected to be able to refer to all three texts when answering questions.**

**Expectations:** Answers will

- 1) Be written in the **comparative spirit**
- 2) Display a **detailed knowledge** of the selected texts
- 3) **Avoid paraphrasing / narrating** the selected texts.

When writing a Comparative answer, ensure you clearly identify your selected texts before you begin to write. The **list technique** is a very effective way to do this.

Try to develop 3-4 points in a thoughtful and analytical style.

**Studied Poetry: Poets Prescribed for Higher Level 2024**

Irish	Women	Dead Old Greats
Seamus Heaney	Sylvia Plath	John Donne
W.B. Yeats	Paula Meehan	GM Hopkins
Paula Meehan	Emily Dickinson	
Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin	Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin	

- ✓ **Expect to see at least one poet from each category on your exam.**
- ✓ **4 poets are examined**

- ✓ Candidates have to answer on **one poet**.
- ✓ Questions will usually explicitly refer to
  - a) The **thematic content** of a poet’s work
  - b) Aspects of the poet’s **style of writing**

**Expectations:**

- ✓ Candidates should refer to between **3-5 poems** in an answer.
- ✓ Candidates will focus in on **3-4 core poems** and then refer to another **1-2 other poems** in context.
- ✓ Candidates will **not summarise** the poems.
- ✓ Candidates will be **selective** in choice of evidence.
- ✓ **You do not have to tell the examiner the story of the poem.**
- ✓ The questions will **vary in difficulty**. **Decision-making** is a key skill here.
- ✓ A good example if this comes from the 2020 Paper 2:

**Emily Dickinson**

*Discuss how Dickinson’s unique approach to language, and the balance between beauty and horror in her imagery, help to relieve some of the darker aspects of her poetry. Develop your response with reference to the poems by Emily Dickinson on your course.*

**John Donne**

*“Donne’s poetry can be simultaneously playful and challenging both in style and content.” To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to the poetry of John Donne on your course.*

One of these questions was **much** easier than the other...

Finally, Some comments from the **Chief Examiner** that are worth considering...

*The Leaving Certificate English Syllabus states that, “Developing **control and power over language is the most essential educational achievement** for all students if they are to become confident, thoughtful and discriminating adults and citizens”, (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, English, para. 3.5). **The importance of key language skills** is emphasised throughout the Marking Schemes for Leaving Certificate English and **candidates who exhibit competence and control in the use of language are rewarded**. It should be remembered that*

*candidates’ language skills are continuously assessed in the marking of answers to all questions on both Papers 1 and Paper 2 of the Leaving Certificate English examination. The criteria for assessment are applied in the case of every answer at both Higher and Ordinary Levels. This means that candidates who exhibit fluency appropriate to the task are rewarded in relation to every question answered. **It is worth noting that some examiners identified candidates who were able to demonstrate knowledge of a text or texts but were less able to deliver this knowledge in a lucid and coherent fashion.***

*An appropriate awareness of grammatical and syntactical conventions contributed to the cohesiveness of **better answers** in the 2013 examination, as did the use of **correct spelling and punctuation**. Weaker responses tended to be characterised by an inability to organise answers in a logical and coherent fashion and a lack of clear expression. The syllabus requires that, “all students will be expected to be assiduous in their attention to **paragraphing, syntax, spelling and punctuation.**”*

*Candidates at both Higher and Ordinary Levels benefited when they exhibited an ability to structure their writing, organise paragraphs, spell accurately and correctly employ punctuation.*

*The criteria for assessment also make explicit reference to the “use of lively interesting phrasing, energy, style and fluency”. It is essential that candidates are aware of the many purposes for which language is used and the diverse forms it can take, to appropriately serve particular purposes and audiences. Creative and thoughtful users of language were rewarded*

PMC Brunner – YouTube