An Introductory Activity

Before you embark on Section 1, let's have a look at some of the ways in which language analysis at AS is different from what you will have done before at GCSE. Take a look at the sentence below and think about what each individual word is doing and how it is operating to create meaning.

The small things in our lives can make a really big difference.

Let's look at some of these words in a bit more detail and think about how they work together.

Two types of word stand out here: **adjectives** and **nouns**. These are the building blocks of many phrases and sentences and they tend to cluster together.

In this sentence we can see that the nouns are: *things*, *lives* and *difference*. Why? Well, we can apply tests to see if they are nouns and we generally have some kind of sense that nouns name things (and you can't get much more 'thing-like' than the noun *things*), people and places.

One test we can apply and which works quite well here, is can you add an *-s* to make nouns plural? Here, both *things* and *lives* are already plurals, so that rule works fine, and it's easy to see that *difference* could be turned into a plural too by adding an *-s*.

Difference is probably not quite as simple a noun as *things*, because it is an **abstract noun**, one that is used to refer to a concept or idea, rather than a physical object or person.

Nouns also tend to have words like *a*, *the* or *an* somewhere in front of them, and we can see that *the small things* and *a really big difference* fit this quite well, with the **determiners** *a* and *the* lining up in front of them, not directly in front admittedly, but in front of other words which also help us identify *things* and *difference* as nouns.

These words – *little* and *big* – are probably familiar to you from GCSE and earlier as **adjectives**. Adjectives are often termed descriptive words, but that is a bit vague, because nearly all words describe something if you think about it. At A Level we talk about these as words which **modify**. Here the adjectives modify the nouns they go in front of, changing them or adding more detail in some way.

You will probably have noticed too that as well as an adjective modifying the noun *difference*, we also have the word *really*. When you look at what this word does, it performs a similar function to an adjective, but this time it is modifying not a noun but an adjective. *Really* is an **adverb**. Adverbs are members of a quite useful word class, because they can do several different things. Adverbs can modify adjectives (usually being called **adverbs of degree** when they do this, because they tell us something about how much or how little the adjective is doing) but they also modify verbs (often being easily identifiable because of their *-ly* endings in these cases: *quickly*, *slowly*, *silently*, etc.).

When you look at the section on phrases and modification, you'll see how these individual words can be grouped into larger units, but for now we will just deal with them as separate words.

The other words in this sentence also need some attention. Sentences need **verbs** and this sentence has two of them working together (in what you will see is a **verb phrase** when you reach **Section 1**). The main verb – the verb that carries the main meaning in the sentence – is *make* and it is assisted by another verb, what is called a **modal verb**, *can*. The modal verb works with the main verb to assist it in creating possibility, prediction or a degree of certainty, among other things. Think about the different modals you could put in front of a verb like *to happen* and you can see what modals do: *it can happen, it might happen, it should happen, it will happen.*

There are nine modal verbs in English and some others that function in a similar way but don't quite follow the same rules, so this is one area of language study that it's just best to get used to and memorise. The modal verbs are: *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would* and *must*.

That leaves us with two very small words: *in* and *our*. *In* is quite simple: it's a **preposition**. These are part of a word class that tell us where things are, sometimes literally and sometimes metaphorically (like in the phrase *in a couple of days*). Prepositions are powerful words that help create **prepositional phrases**, groups of words that tell us where, when and how actions or events take place (again more of which you'll be looking at in the section on phrases and modification).

Finally, we come to *our*, which is slightly problematic, because on one level it functions exactly like *a*, and *the* as a determiner, which is why many people call words like this **possessive determiners** because they tell us who or what the noun belongs to (*our* lives = the lives belonging to us). However, because lots of other words like *we*, *us*, *I* and *she* have similar properties and often take the place of nouns, they are sometimes called **possessive pronouns** too. Either will work fine for our purposes.

So, now you have a label for each of these word classes what can we do with the sentence we looked at earlier? Well, first of all, English Language A Level is a course that rewards you for what you know, so the simple act of being able to label a word in a text with its correct word class will get you some marks, but obviously you can't just label every word because a) that would be boring and b) that would not really help you explain what the text means.

So it's important to think about how you can pick out the most significant language features to comment on. This will mean identifying the most important aspects of language as well as thinking about how and why contextual factors are important. Perhaps in this sentence, it's the contrast between the two **adjectives** that helps create a memorable impression from the sentence, or perhaps it's the level of doubt created by the **modal verb** *can* (instead of *will*, perhaps). Maybe it's the use of the **possessive determiner** *our* which suggests the reader is being grouped in with the writer as part of a collective whole, addressing us as one of them. This is what we start to think about as we move into Section 1.

5. Phrases and Modification

On one level textual analysis is about making sense of how words are used, but on another level it's about looking to see which words go together and the structures that are formed.

Phrases are groups of words that are centred around a **head word**: a key word class within the phrase that gives the phrase its bigger identity. For example, in a **noun phrase**, the head word is a **noun** (or sometimes a **pronoun**, which is often viewed as a type of noun) so the whole phrase takes the identity of this head word.

■ See if you can identify the head word in each of the noun phrases in texts 1 to 3.

In noun phrases we can see a whole range of other word classes modifying the noun. Often adjectives will be used (*lazy, hopeless* idiot) and sometimes the adjectives will be modified themselves by adverbs (*hopelessly* lazy idiot). Determiners, such as *a* and *the* will often feature in noun phrases too (*a* long prison sentence).

Writers will often use adjectives to modify nouns and to provide more descriptive detail or precision to their work, and we can also see that adjectives will often carry with them some of the more obvious opinions of their writers. This makes noun phrases, and the level of modification within a noun phrase, a key area in text analysis.

Other word classes can give their identity to different types of phrase too. We can see **adjective phrases, adverb phrases, prepositional phrases** and very importantly to sentence construction **verb phrases**. The same basic rule is true for all of these, that they gain their form and identity as a phrase from the head word.

■ See if you can identify the head word in each of the phrases in texts 4 to 6 and from that work out what kind of phrase each one is.

If you are unsure about whether certain words are nouns, verbs or adjectives, go back to the introduction section on word classes (pages 5-6).

As a general rule of thumb, the more sophisticated and formal a text is the longer the noun phrases that we might expect to see within it.

■ Take a look at texts 7 to 9 and see if you notice the difference between the noun phrases used in them.

Obviously not all texts will provide you with such clear differences, but they are worth looking out for.

With verb phrases the length is often connected to the amount of detail being conveyed about time, certainty and who is doing what to whom.

■ Look at texts 10-14 and see if you can identify the differences between what is being described in the verb phrases.

In brief, the concept of time is conveyed using two devices: **tense** and **aspect**. Tense indicates how far away from the present time an action took place, while aspect tells us whether the action or process is (or was) ongoing or completed. When you think of the difference between *I cycle to college* and *I am cycling to college*, you should be able to see that one is very much concerned with exactly what is happening at a given moment, while the other is concerned with what generally happens.

Phrases and Modification – Texts 1, 2 and 3

1. Long, sandy beach

2. The man who loves you

3. Your favourite worst nightmare

Phrases and Modification – Texts 4, 5 and 6

4. Should have been revising

5. Under the surface

6. Completely inconsiderate

Phrases and Modification – Texts 7, 8 and 9

7. Private payroll growth is a better barometer of animal spirits than total employment, which includes government.
   (source: http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2011/09/americas-jobs-report)

8. Analysis and validation of support strategies for customer satisfaction parameters is required before maximized systems of strategic environmental processes can progress
   (source: http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/writsamp0.htm)

9. We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one.

Phrases and Modification – Texts 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14

10. You did that work very well.

11. You were doing that work for ages.

12. You could have done that work so much better.

13. You were being worked very hard in your last job.

14. Your bananas may have been picked by farmers on very low wages.

6. Clauses and Sentences

At A Level you're expected to be able to talk about how different sentences are constructed and how they function and communicate meaning. Whole books have been written about the grammar of clauses and sentences so this is only a very brief outline.

One key point about grammar is that it helps us to convey concepts that words on their own cannot do. If we only used single words we would be able to label a few things, describe some actions and perhaps identify specific people or objects, but grammar allows us to do much more. But like many other areas of language study, grammar also depends on context. Language users make decisions about the structures they employ depending on whether they are writing or speaking, who they are addressing and what they are trying to convey.

The section on phrases and modification will have given you some idea of how grammar can be used on a small scale, but with clauses and sentences we are dealing with grammar on a larger scale. Firstly, it's important to establish a connection between words, phrases, **clauses** and **sentences**. At the simplest level, clauses tend to consist of phrases which work together. Phrases themselves – as we have seen – consist of groups of individual words centred on a head word.

A single clause can form a short sentence (**simple sentence**) but when we link clauses together we create different types of sentence.

■ Look at texts 1-3 to see simple sentences.

Sentences consisting of two or more **main clauses** linked by *or*, *but* or *and* have traditionally been called **compound sentences**.

■ Take a look at texts 4-6.

In these sentences, the two clauses do not depend on each other, but could exist as sentences in their own right.

■ Try to test this by removing the conjunction from each example.

Sentences consisting of two or more clauses, where one is **dependent** on a main clause have traditionally been called **complex sentences**.

■ Look at texts 7-10. When you look at the different clauses in these examples, only one can actually make sense on its own.

As well as these types of sentence, you will often see sentences which aren't really sentences. These are called **minor sentences** and are often abbreviated versions of longer sentences which have been punctuated in the same way as a genuine sentence.

■ See if you can work out what would have been included to make texts 11-13 full grammatical sentences.

Different models of grammar offer their own takes on clauses and sentences, and in more recent years, linguists have avoided talking about simple, compound and complex, but instead focused on the relationships between the clauses and how this relates to meaning. At A Level you will get some credit for being able to label sentences and clauses, but you will get more marks if you are able to talk about how they create meaning or how patterns are created and what effects they have.

■ Take a look at texts 14 and 15 and see what you make of the clause and sentence patterns used.

Along with how clauses work together, we also need to consider clause types (or sentence functions, as they are sometimes called).

There are three common types of clause – **declarative**, **imperative** and **interrogative** – and they are used in different ways.

Declarative clauses are statements which convey information. They start with the subject of the clause (a noun phrase).

■   See texts 16 and 17.

Imperative clauses are commands which are directed towards another person. They start with a verb phrase.

■   See texts 18 and 19.

Interrogative clauses are questions which can be either **open** or **closed**. Closed questions require just a yes or no answer, while open ones need more detail. Closed questions use a special word order where the subject and a verb are inverted (see the difference between texts 16 and 20) and open questions do the same but start with a **wh- phrase**.

■   See texts 21 and 22.

A fourth type of clause is much less common. **Exclamative** clauses start with a **wh- phrase** and end with an exclamation mark.

■   See texts 23 and 24.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 1, 2 and 3

1. We drove all night.

2. I gave a lunch hour lecture about this.

3. She gave her own summing up of his character in an article.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 4, 5 and 6

4. I like to paint and it's one of my few remaining pleasures.

5. Steven Winyard used to be a croupier in Nassau but has since turned Stobo Castle into a health spa.

6. You either study pure dance or you study dance therapy.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 7, 8, 9 and 10

7. He hadn't ever considered doing Linguistics until he saw Deborah Cameron speak.

8. If you donate just ten pounds, we can start to save hundreds of lives.

9. Because he knew what prison was like, he was unwilling to go back inside.

10. These powers could be decisive if there were ever a hung Parliament.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 11, 12 and 13

11. Doctor: How are you feeling?
    Patient: Not too good.

12. (Child to parent): When Granny come?

13. (In a text message): Yeah cool. See you there in a bit.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 14 and 15

14. If you donate just ten pounds, we can start to save hundreds of lives.

    If you give just one day a month, we can work together to improve conditions for a whole village.

    If you spread the word, we can reach more and more potential volunteers.

    You can make a world of difference.

15. Be bold.
    Be brave.
    Be beautiful.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 16 and 17

16. You are going to get married in the Summer.

17. You should have listened to him.

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 18 and 19

18. Stop messing around.

19. Step away from the vehicle.

Clauses and Sentences – Comparing Texts 16 and 20

16. You are going to get married in the Summer.

20. Are you going to get married in the Summer?

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 21 and 22

21. When are you getting married?

22. Why are you staring at me?

Clauses and Sentences – Texts 23 and 24

23. What big teeth you have!

24. How true that is!

4. Lexis and Semantics

All language users make choices about the words they use and the meanings they wish to convey. These choices can range from how formal or informal words are, how sophisticated or simple, through to the contrasts and similarities in meaning between the words they use. In language study we refer to the words themselves as **lexis** and meanings as **semantics**.

Some lexis – **core vocabulary** – is known to about every user of English, while other words demand a higher level of education or knowledge.

■ Take a look at the examples of words and phrases in texts 1 and 2. What do you notice about the levels of formality of the words or pairs of words?

  • Are there situations where you think you might use one of these words instead of another?
  • If so, what factors might influence you?
  • If you were writing, do you think you might choose one over the other?

Semantics is the area of language study concerned with meaning. Words can have quite literal meanings, which are unproblematic and that we can usually agree upon, but they can also have wider associations.

■ Take a look at texts 3 and 4 and see why the words here might be perceived as having more than just one meaning.

■ Then look at texts 5 and 6.

  • What do you notice about the meanings of these words?
  • How would you group them?

Words have their own individual meanings which can be easily defined, but at the same time they can draw on our own individual experiences and outlooks.

■ For example, the words in text 7 may well make particular images spring to mind, but these could be the result of your own experiences or existing stereotypes in society.

But it's not just the individual word meanings that matter: it's the relationships between them that are important to text study. We can see contrasts and similarities between words and group words of related meanings into what are called **semantic fields**.

These fields form text patterns and how we recognise and respond to these patterns is at the heart of textual analysis.

■ What do you notice about the ways in which patterns of meaning are used in the slightly longer texts 8 and 9?

Lexis and Semantics – Texts 1 and 2

1.   Grub   Food   Nourishment

2.   Go up & ascend   Go down & descend

Lexis and Semantics – Texts 3 and 4

3.   Born in Dudley. Grew up in Iraq.
   (*text of an army recruitment advertisement*)

4.   Instinct says: I want to change my life
   VSO says: Why stop at your own?
   (*text of a Voluntary Service Overseas advertisement*)

Lexis and Semantics – Texts 5 and 6

5.   black   white   rich   poor   young   old

6.   gun   knife   shield   apple   raspberry   mango

Lexis and Semantics – Text 7

7.   i. Festival   iii. Football

         ii. Professor

Lexis and Semantics – Texts 8 and 9

8.   Jermaine Beckford used to patrol the roads for the RAC, assisting the stranded, but yesterday, amid tumultuous scenes, he took great pride in engineering a breakdown. Manchester United will recover — they always do — but Beckford's decisive strike left them looking an emotional wreck. Not even the usually reliable home-start service offered by Wayne Rooney could rescue them on the road to Wembley.
   (*source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/leagues/premierleague/manutd/6921206/*
   Manchester-United-0-Leeds-United-1-match-report.html)

9. **Top heart surgeon's furious parting salvo at Andrew Lansley**

   The country's top heart specialist yesterday launched an angry attack on Government reform of the NHS. Heart 'tsar' Sir Roger Boyle said he had decided to retire partly in protest at the Health Secretary's plans, which would abolish 'large chunks of the NHS'... Sir Roger said more competition was 'not the answer' and blasted Mr Lansley for axing managers: 'To say we're over-managed is baloney.'
   (*source: http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/2011/07/06/top-heart-surgeon-s-furious-parting-*
   salvo-at-andrew-lansley-115875-23250539/)