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# GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

How structure is assessed  
Paper 1, Question 3

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Further insight series

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## Aims:

- to explain the Assessment Objective and the key requirements of the question
- to explore the progression in the mark scheme for the question
- to share some ways of considering features of structure that students can use as starting points for their analysis
- to look at marked student responses as a way of helping students to better understand the standard that is required in the top level of the mark scheme.

### Read in conjunction with:

- sample papers and mark schemes, available free to download on Secure Key Materials
- fully annotated student responses to Paper 1 Question 3 that relate to Sample Assessment Material set 4.

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## What Question 3 assesses

Paper 1, Question 3 assesses AO2, in this case **how the writer has structured a text**. Specifically:

“Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.”

As per the mark scheme, structural features can be:

- at a whole text level, including reference to
  - beginnings
  - endings
  - perspective shifts
- at a paragraph level, including, if relevant
  - topic change
  - aspects of cohesion
- at a sentence level, when it contributes to the structure as a whole.

Note: assessing structure in this context is relatively new, but the mark scheme is based on the same hierarchy and progression as the much more familiar approach to assessing writers' use of language from Paper 1 Question 2, and Paper 2 Question 3.

## The meaning behind the wording

This table represents Paper 1, Question 3 from our fourth set of sample assessment materials (SAMs 4), available from [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

Question text	Explanation
You now need to think about the whole of the source.	This part of the question will stay consistent each series. It reminds students to make reference to the whole source.
This text is from the beginning of a novel.	This part of the question provides a context to where the source is taken from within the novel or short story.
How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?	This part of the question will stay consistent in each series. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The phrase: 'interest you as a reader' allows students the freedom to choose their own examples.</li><li>• The word 'interest' reminds students to consider the effects on them as a reader.</li></ul>
You could write about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning</li><li>• how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops</li><li>• any other structural features that interest you.</li></ul>	This part of the question will stay consistent each series.  In an un-tiered assessment, the bullet points can offer additional support if required.

## Key mark scheme descriptors

The key mark scheme descriptors show the hierarchy of skills that are being assessed by this question, and helpfully, outline what it is a student needs to do to be successful.

Level	Skills descriptors	How to arrive at a mark
Level 4 Perceptive, detailed analysis  7-8 marks	Shows detailed and perceptive understanding of structural features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyses the effects of the writer's choice of structural features.</li> <li>Selects a judicious range of examples.</li> <li>Makes sophisticated and accurate use of subject terminology.</li> </ul>	At the top of the level, a student's response will meet all of the skills descriptors.  At the bottom of the level, a student will have Level 3 and at least one of the skills descriptors.
Level 3 Clear, relevant explanation 5-6 marks	Shows clear understanding of structural features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains clearly the effects of the writer's choice of structural features.</li> <li>Selects a range of relevant examples.</li> <li>Makes clear and accurate use of subject terminology.</li> </ul>	At the top of the level, a student's response will meet all of the skills descriptors.  At the bottom of the level, a student will have Level 2 and at least one of the skills descriptors.
Level 2 Some understanding and comment 3-4 marks	Shows some understanding of structural features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempts to comment on the effect of structural features.</li> <li>Selects some appropriate examples.</li> <li>Makes some use of subject terminology, mainly appropriately.</li> </ul>	At the top of the level, a student's response will meet all of the skills descriptors.  At the bottom of the level, a student will have Level 1 and at least one of the skills descriptors.
Level 1 Simple, limited comment 1-2 marks	Shows simple awareness of structural features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers simple comment on the effect of structure.</li> <li>Selects simple references or examples.</li> <li>Makes simple use of subject terminology, not always appropriately.</li> </ul>	At the top of the level, a student's response will meet all of the skills descriptors. At the bottom of the level, a student will have at least one of the skills descriptors.
Level 0 No marks	No comments offered on the use of structure. Nothing to reward.	

At Level 1, a student will make simple, often generic, comments on the effect of structure.

At Level 2, there will be a genuine attempt to engage with some selected structural features and comment on their effect, although these comments will not yet be sufficiently developed into the clear, precise and contextualised explanation required of a student at Level 3.

The most able student at Level 4 will demonstrate a detailed analysis of the writer's choices of structural features, and frequently offer an overview of the source's structure before then focusing on one or two specific examples.

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## What a student needs to do

Students should:

- select appropriate examples or features of structure
- analyse the effects of the selected structural feature(s)
- make use of subject terminology in their response.

The most important part of the assessment is the **analysis of the effects of** a writer's choice of **structure**. Analysis of effects should be precise, and contextualized to a specific point in the text. The use of subject terminology is judged in the way that its **use** enhances the points made.

### Develop the right thinking

Students need the right approach and analytical skills to effectively interrogate the text.

It can help students to consider some key questions of the text. Their responses can help select the structural features that are of interest to them.

### Consider key questions of the text

Possible key questions move from the **what**, to **how** and on to **why**. They could include:

1. When I first start to read the text, what is the writer focusing my attention on?
2. How is this being developed?
3. What feature of structure is evident at this point?
4. Why might the writer have deliberately chosen to begin the text with this focus and therefore make use of this particular feature of structure?
5. What main points of focus does the writer develop in sequence after the starting point?
6. How is each being developed?
7. Why is the writer taking me through this particular sequence?
8. How is this specific to helping me relate to the intended meaning(s) at these points?
9. What does the writer focus my attention on at the end of the text?
10. How is this developed as a structural feature?
11. How am I left thinking or feeling at the end?
12. Why might the writer have sought to bring me to this point of interest/understanding?

### Be specific and avoid generalisations

At an early stage of their learning, students should look to build on their self-questioning of the text in order to be as specific as they can be. They should aim for precise detail where possible, and include reference to particular points and how they might relate to the meaning as a whole:

1. What specific aspect the writer focuses attention on (for example, at the start).
2. A feature of structure that is of **interest at that particular point**.
3. Why it is effective or significant **at that point in the text** because of how the writer shapes the reader's response.
4. What it makes the reader realise **at that particular point in the text**, and then in relation to the text as a whole.

## Example indicative standards content

Find indicative standards content for each level in the end column of this question's mark scheme. The mark scheme is downloadable as part of our SAMs 4 at [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

An indicative standard is not prescribed content; its purpose is to help those marking apply standards fairly and consistently. Students could be rewarded for taking an entirely different focus if it is of a similar standard. Below are two examples from Paper 1, Question 3 of SAMs 4.

Level 1	Indicative Standard
Simple	"The first half of the text is about a boy called Alexander Cold so we know he's the main character in the story. It begins with him in bed and he has just had a nightmare about his mother. Then it tells us all the details about how she was 'carried off' by a bird..."

### Level 1 commentary

Here, a simple example of a structural feature is selected, 'The first half of the text is about a boy called Alexander Cold', followed by a simple comment on the effect of this example: '...so we know he's the main character in the story'. There is also a simple use of subject terminology with the words 'the first half...', 'it begins...' and 'then...'.

Level 4	Indicative Standard
Detailed and sophisticated	"The text is divided into two parts that are linked by one character and an increasing sense of foreboding. At the beginning, the writer immediately establishes person, place and time by focusing our attention on Alexander waking in his bedroom 'at dawn, startled by a nightmare', before narrowing to the specific details of the dream, where a black bird 'carried off his mother'. The use of the word 'startled' in the first sentence creates an urgent, abrupt opening, and this, together with a focus on the nightmare which follows, generates an atmosphere of unease in the reader that is carried over into the second half of the text when Alex interacts with the rest of the family at breakfast."

### Level 4 commentary

Here, the opening sentence presents an overview of the whole source, 'The text is divided into two parts that are linked by one character and an increasing sense of foreboding,' before then analysing some specific examples of structure to support this point of view.

It recognises the writer's use of structural features at the beginning of the text to establish person, place and time, and makes a perceptive analysis about sequence in that the positioning of the word 'startled' in the first sentence, followed by a switch in focus to the specific details of Alex's nightmare, generates unease in the reader at this point, which is then 'carried over into the second half of the text' by both Alex and also the reader through Alex.

The opening sentence sets out an original premise, and the rest of the response analyses in detail how it could be true.



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## Structural features: ideas to get you started

The below features are in no particular order and should only be applied where relevant to the text assessed.

### Changes or structural shifts in focus

- what these shifts are and where they occur
- how they are developed in and through the text
- why the writer might have chosen to take the reader on this particular reading 'journey' of discovery.

### How and why a writer might use 'cinematic' techniques

For example to foreground or emphasise:

- starting points and end points
- developments
- sequential or causal points in the reader's understanding.

### How and why a writer might change narrative perspectives, or change between narrative and dialogue

For example, through particular or changing narrative perspectives or changes between narrative and dialogue.

In particular: what, how and why these aspects might help a reader to engage with a character, theme, or mood at specific points in the text. For example: an inside perspective looking outwards or an outward perspective looking inwards.

### Structural links between external actions or internal thoughts

For example, use and impact of techniques like 'flashback' to forewarn or foreshadow things to come, or remind the reader of things past.

### How and why a writer might introduce, develop or end with the reader considering a character's positioning

For example in a particular setting, or through time, manner and place – possibly developed through chronological or non-chronological aspects of structure. Within this, are there any echoes, reiterations, repetitions, or recurring uses of imagery or motifs?

### The writer's use of discourse markers or connectives and their impact on the whole

In particular, specific points in the text where the writer might position information or revelation to have impact at that moment of reading.

### Possible aspects of structural stability or instability as a way of form helping to reinforce meaning

For example, switching from one point to another, juxtapositions or incongruities for effect at the specific points they might occur and how this might impact on meaning as a whole.

### How the writer's conclusion might generate unanswered questions

For example, questions about earlier aspects of the text, or how this might contribute to wider meaning and shades of interpretation.

## Sentence analysis in Question 2 and Question 3

A writer's use of sentences can be a relevant aspect of structure if referenced differently from how they might be analysed for language in Question 2.

**Guidance:** "A successful question 3 response could focus on sentence-level analysis, but only when that sentence contributes to the overall structure of the text."

**Question 2** on Paper 1 will focus on a writer's use of language.

### Paper 1, Question 2: A02

Candidate response from our SAMs 4 visit [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

"The sentence 'What had awakened him was the noise from the storm: wind lashing the trees, rain on the rooftop, and thunder' is important because the list creates a cumulative effect of all the threatening noises that are combining to make Alex wake up. Each element of the 'wind', the 'rain' and then the 'thunder' creates an increasingly violent picture of weather that nobody could possibly sleep through."

#### Chief Examiner's explanation

This response focuses on one particular sentence and the way it is constructed is at a sentence level. It explains the significance of a list within the sentence, where each part contains a threatening storm noise. When we read this sentence, it builds up a picture of increasingly violent weather conditions for us, and we understand why Alex has been woken from his nightmare. Therefore the sentence is linguistically important, and has nothing to do with structure. It would be awarded a mark in level 3.

**Question 3** on Paper 1 will focus on a writer's use of structure.

### Paper 1, Question 3: A02

Candidate response from our SAMs 4 visit [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

"The sentence 'There had been a lot of days like that since his mother got sick' is important because it is the first mention of his mother being ill. It reminds us of the nightmare at the beginning and at this point we understand the meaning of it and that Alex is scared she is going to die."

#### Chief Examiner's explanation

Although this response focuses on one particular sentence, the comment is at whole text level. It explains the significance of the sentence at this point in the text, ie where the sentence is placed contributes to the reader's understanding of the text as a whole. When we read this sentence, it makes us re-evaluate the meaning of Alex's nightmare at the beginning and we now recognise how scared he is. Therefore the sentence is structurally important, and has nothing to do with language. It would be awarded a mark in level 3.

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## Example responses with commentaries

Attached overleaf are two student responses for use as standalone resources.

There are more example student responses to different SAMs questions on [aqa.org.uk/log-in](https://www.aqa.org.uk/log-in)

### **Making use of annotated responses**

Annotated responses can be used:

- to show how a certain mark scheme level has been met
- to show how students typically approach questions
- to internally standardise your exam marking.

If your students need more awareness of the different standards, you may want to share marked responses directly.

Students could compare a marked answer of their own against marked answers at the levels above and below. This may help them understand opportunities for further improvement in their responses.

## Marked level 3 response

03

You now need to think about the **whole** of the Source.

This text is taken from the beginning of a novel.

How is the text structured to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the Source develops
- any other structural features that interest you.

[8 marks]

The writer **zooms in on** the character's situation at the start in order to introduce us to them.

This gives us an insight ~~to~~ of who they are.

The **nightmare** could be foreshadowing what could happen later on in the text or it could be

a **flashback** to something ~~that~~ horrible that had happened when Alex was a child. The text

then **changes** to talk about a storm in paragraph

2. The use of long, complex sentences <sup>shows</sup> ~~shows~~ that there is a lot of things going on at once which overwhelm the protagonist.

The text keeps **changing focus** throughout ~~that~~ because it's the beginning of a novel and it has to introduce everything to set the context. We

can see that Alex has strong feelings towards his mum due to the listing of what he misses about her ~~from~~ from line 37 to line 39. The

long ~~list~~ list shows how Alex has thought

this through many times before hence the length

Some use of subject terminology

Attempt to comment on the effect of structural features

See comment in summary

## Marked level 3 response

Some use of subject terminology

Attempts to comment on the effect of structural features, but lacks textual detail

Relevant example

Clear explanation of the effects of structural features

of his life. The last two paragraphs contradict each other in order for the writer to show the contrast between Alex's mother and father. ~~the last paragraph~~ This has an effect on the reader because it causes a biased view on the mother and how great she was. ~~the last para~~

The last paragraph juxtaposes itself because it talks about how Alex's mother ~~was so important~~ 'affection' ~~that~~ impacted him, how much he loved her but then he compares her to 'not a little more than a silent ghost' showing how she has changed. The juxtaposition could imply the huge change to Alex's every day life, and this makes the reader see the impact ~~it~~<sup>it has</sup> had on Alex, especially when the writer zooms in to describe Alex's mother in the last paragraph.

Level 3: 5 marks

Clear understanding of structural features in the final paragraph; one clear explanation of the effects of structural features is just enough to secure the lower mark in level 3.

This response could have been improved by including a range of relevant examples and greater consistency in offering clear explanations of the writer's choice of structural features.

The comments about sentences in this response would be more appropriate in a response to Q2. In Q2, credit is given for the effect on the reader of sentence forms - length of sentence, word order, use of multiple clauses, etc - whereas in Q3, it is the positioning of the sentence and the contribution it makes to the structure as a whole that is important

## Marked level 4 response

03

You now need to think about the **whole** of the Source.

This text is taken from the beginning of a novel.

How is the text structured to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the Source develops
- any other structural features that interest you.

[8 marks]

The text focuses on a character called Alex Cold, and the reader gets to see him from two different angles.

At the beginning he is alone in his bedroom and waking up from a nightmare where his mother was carried off by 'an enormous black bird'. He

in the second half of the text the writer changes the focus to Alex being with the rest of the family downstairs at breakfast time. He is snappy with his ~~two~~ sisters when Andrew says 'Mamma's going to die.'

This links the two halves of the text together because the fear Alex experienced in the earlier nightmare is now manifested in his behaviour at the breakfast table. Shouting at his sisters makes it seem ~~like~~ as if he disagrees with her, but

because the reader has already had an insight into Alex's subconscious mind, we understand at this point that really it's the opposite. He shouts at his sister because secretly he fears what she is saying is true and his mother might really die.

In the final two paragraphs, we are deliberately

clear and accurate use of subject terminology

range of relevant examples

perceptive analysis of structural features

## Marked level 4 response

sophisticated use of subject terminology

presented with a direct contrast between Alex's parents. First, the focus narrows from the whole family onto Alex's father, who is struggling to look after the children. There is 'nothing in the refrigerator but orange juice' and they are living on take-away food. Then the final paragraph zooms in on both their and now versions of his mother. It

judicious range of examples

begins with the sentence 'Alex had realised during those months how enormous their mother's presence had been and how painful her absence was now.' This structure is effective because by first showing how inadequate his father is, even though it's not his fault, it therefore emphasises how wonderful the mother is, or at least used to be. In a way, this also

detailed and perceptive analysis of structural features

works well to re-evaluate the nightmare at the beginning because we have seen for ourselves the close bond between Alex and his mother and now understand why it startled him so much and why he experienced 'pounding in his chest', a physical reaction to ~~that~~ the fear of losing her.

Level 4: 8 marks

Detailed and perceptive understanding of structural features, with judicious examples and sophisticated and accurate use of subject terminology.

\*This response offers an overview of the whole text, as well as close examination of several pertinent structural features: a typical approach for a very able candidate.

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