

Activity

The following speech by Abraham Lincoln is famous for its brevity and effect. The speech was delivered from the back of a train as Lincoln was about to leave his home town to take up the presidency in Washington, DC in 1861. Many people have noticed the rhetoric employed in the speech including antithesis, parallel structure and anaphora. Read the speech and consider the purposeful use of syntax or word order. Why would Lincoln have made the choices he did?

"My friends: No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Source: Abraham Lincoln. "Farewell Address at Springfield, Illinois". *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Vol IV. Basler, RP (ed.) 1953.

Extension

Shakespeare is considered a master of the artful employment of syntax. Turn to the excerpt on page 206 and note places where the syntax seems unusual or important. What is the purpose or effect of this unusual syntax?

Production Analysis and Comparative Analysis

Giving advice on how to do an analysis of a passage (as in **paper 1 standard level**) or a comparative analysis (as in **paper 1 higher level**) is simply giving advice on how to read and how to communicate your understanding and appreciation to a quite specialized audience (an examiner). This entire book is meant to break the elements of reading and communication into as many small parts as possible so that, over time, your overall reading and communication habits will improve. In this brief section, however, we will outline some basic steps to approaching the analysis and comparative analysis of paper 1.

Here are some **steps to take in the examination room**, and some **approaches to take to the passages**.

1. **Read all of the passages without making a mark.** You will probably be nervous in the examination and more than anything else you need to get an overall sense of what the passages are about. In the standard level examination you will choose between two passages, in the higher level examination you will choose between two pairs of passages. Read the available passages, ponder briefly, then go with your gut instinct and choose a passage to analyse. Do not over-think your choice: pick the passage or pair you understand the best or find most interesting.
2. **After choosing, note basics such as text type.** If you recognize the text type (letter, editorial, blog, advertisement) or genre (poem, graphic novel)

note it at the top. If you have already recognized a possible audience and general purpose (to inform, persuade, sell), note this as well.

3. **Reread and mark main points, confusing points, concerns.** The second time you read the passages you should be looking for the most important elements that get at meaning as well as the elements that seem confusing. Remember, too, simply to note what you find interesting. The chances are that if you find something interesting, important or confusing, the examiner does too, so you will be expected to comment on the element. At this point you may also note the important overall qualities of the passage such as the **tone** or any obvious elements of **structure** (for example long paragraphs, captions and images, dialogue, short sentences.)
4. **For the comparative commentary, repeat step 3 with the second passage.** Some of the elements you note at the beginning (key points, major issue, audience) are **likely to be important links between passages**.
5. **Read a third time.** Now you should really pick a passage apart. What do you notice in terms of stylistic or literary devices? What elements do you notice about any images present? This is when you start to make notes about the meaning and effect of elements that you see throughout this book. Remember, if you notice something, it is important.
6. **Take notes and begin to outline.** While you may want to read again, at this stage you are probably ready to make some summative or evaluative notes and to work towards an outline. This will help you tie together all of the elements you have marked or commented upon.

Here are a few warnings:

- **Embrace ambiguity.** Keep in mind that ambiguity or the lack of a clear “meaning” or “answer” can be a purposeful rhetorical strategy on the part of the author. Passages are not puzzles to be solved nor do they often have one meaning or intent.
- **Beware of theme.** Yes, stories, poems and even pieces of journalism can have themes but it is rare that a passage has one basic theme or intent. In the IB examination, candidates often use theme as a crutch, resorting to a broad, vague idea such as “love”, “the cruelty of man” or “hope” rather than looking at the complex issues and questions raised by a passage. A discussion of theme can be both reductive and general. At the very least, think in the plural: a passage may raise many issues, ideas or themes.
- **Always integrate technique and meaning.** When you write, you should talk about what is going on, what it suggests, and how the writer has managed to convey these notions. Literary or linguistic features should be discussed at the same time as you are discussing meaning, intent or effect.

Finally, here are some big questions to consider:

- What is the text type, purpose, audience?
- Who is speaking?
- Whose eyes do we see through: do we see through a character in the piece or the narrator?
- What is the general situation?
- What is most striking?
- What is most surprising or confusing?
- What questions are raised?
- What does it mean?

- What does it suggest?
- Why is it interesting?
- How is it all put together?
- How is the writing itself interesting?
- How do images contribute to meaning and effect?
- How are the images visually interesting?
- How are the two pieces similar?
- How are the pieces different?

The writing itself

While there are other sections of this book that deal with particulars such as writing a good introduction or integrating quotations into the body of your essay, here are a few things to consider when coming up with an outline and writing your analysis.

- Always structure your writing with an introduction, a body and a conclusion.
- There is no “correct” formula for an introduction. Let the reader know what you will talk about, what your main focus is (a passage analysis can have a broad thesis that incorporates a couple of ideas and some main techniques, or it may focus on the element that you found most interesting and will eventually branch to other elements).
- Be sure that you are writing a coherent, continuous essay rather than a list of disjointed points or observations.
- Let the examiner know from the start, either in the introduction or in the next paragraph, that you know the basics in terms of what the pieces are about or their type or intention.
- It is often helpful to start with a holistic view of the passage and then move to an analysis that goes from beginning to end. Some students organize by issue or idea instead, which is fine as long as important elements of the passage are not skipped over in order to adhere to particular ideas.
- Remember, the passages in front of you are interesting. Tell the examiner how and why the passages are interesting.

Activity

For a good practice at the skills of passage analysis or comparative analysis, use the texts found throughout the book. For the analysis of an individual passage, try looking at the war reporting on pages 99–102. If you are taking higher level, practise by comparing this passage to the graphic novel on page 207. Feel free to move on from there by mixing and matching passages in this book.

Reception

Semantics

Semantics is the linguistic study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences (as opposed to syntax, for example, that focuses on structure). While the field of semantics can be quite complex, there are some key notions in the field that can help to draw your attention to the complexity of making meaning with words and may help in your close analysis of texts. The following key concepts in semantics clearly relate to principles you encounter throughout this course.

- Language communicates information about our world.
- The meaning of words and sentences resides in the minds of senders and receivers.
- The meaning of language is social and depends on context.
- Meaning depends on a variety of relationships between and among words, phrases and sentences.