

A-Level English Language

How to Answer Every Question - Exam Technique Guide

Edexcel English Language (9EN0)

A-Level

8 question types

THE NILE METHOD - every question, every time

1. Read the COMMAND WORD first - it tells you the skill (state / explain / evaluate).
2. Check the MARKS - roughly one developed point (or mark-scheme line) per mark.
3. Match the ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES the marks reward (AO1 knowledge / AO2 application / AO3 evaluation).
4. PLAN before long answers - jot points, then write in clear PEEL / chain-of-reasoning paragraphs.
5. Use precise terminology, evidence and (where relevant) named studies or data.
6. For evaluation, write developed chains and a justified judgement - not a list.

P1 Sec A Individual variation analysis · “Analyse”

TESTS	AO1, AO3 - 30 marks
METHOD	1. Read the single text and identify mode, audience, purpose and context. 2. Work systematically through language levels: lexis, grammar, pragmatics, discourse. 3. Use precise terminology and label features accurately (AO1). 4. Link every feature to context of production and reception (AO3). 5. Organise by idea, not by random feature spotting. 6. Keep concept and theory references relevant, not decorative.
STRUCTURE	'The (level) feature of (term) here functions to... Given the context of..., this suggests...'
MODEL	<i>Identifying field-specific lexis and a formal register in a workplace text, then linking that register to the professional context and intended reader.</i>
PITFALLS	› Feature-spotting with no link to meaning or context › Imprecise or wrong terminology, capping AO1 › Ignoring AO3 context of production and reception

P1 Sec B Comparative analysis · “Compare and analyse”

TESTS	AO1, AO3, AO4 - 40 marks
METHOD	1. Read both texts noting differences in time, mode, region or purpose. 2. Plan integrated paragraphs comparing one language feature across both (AO4). 3. Select features at several language levels for range. 4. Connect each comparison to the differing contexts (AO3). 5. Use comparative connectives and accurate metalanguage throughout. 6. Draw a conclusion about what the variation reveals.
STRUCTURE	'Whereas Text A uses..., Text B favours... reflecting their different contexts of...'
MODEL	<i>Comparing a modern digital text and an older print text: shorter, elliptical constructions in one reflect immediacy and mode, while the other's complex subordination reflects formality.</i>
PITFALLS	› Analysing texts separately rather than connecting them (AO4) › Comparing only content, not language and context › Unbalanced coverage of the two texts

P2 Sec A Children's language development · “Analyse”

TESTS	AO1, AO2, AO3 - 30 marks
METHOD	1. Read the transcript or data and note the child's age and stage. 2. Identify features of phonology, lexis, grammar and pragmatics in the data. 3. Apply relevant theory and concepts (AO2) such as stages and key theorists. 4. Use data evidence to support or challenge each concept. 5. Comment on the context, including caregiver interaction (AO3). 6. Stay analytical: link each feature to development, not just label it.
STRUCTURE	'The child's use of (feature) reflects the (stage); this supports the idea that... as the data shows...'
MODEL	<i>Noting telegraphic, content-word utterances and over-extension in a young child's data, linking these to recognised acquisition stages and a supportive caregiver.</i>
PITFALLS	› Naming a theorist without applying their idea to the data › Describing the data with no developmental concepts (weak AO2) › Ignoring caregiver and context (AO3)

P2 Sec B Language and identity essay · “Evaluate”

TESTS	AO1, AO2, AO3 - 40 marks
METHOD	1. Read the data and the essay focus on identity or variation. 2. Build an argument that uses the data as central evidence. 3. Apply and evaluate relevant theories and concepts, not just name them. 4. Weigh competing views to reach a critical line of argument (AO2). 5. Link features to social context: identity, audience, power (AO3). 6. Conclude with a justified evaluative judgement.
STRUCTURE	'The data suggests... which supports (concept); however... so overall...'
MODEL	<i>Arguing that a speaker's code choices construct a regional identity, using transcript evidence and weighing one theory against another before judging which best fits.</i>
PITFALLS	› Listing theories instead of evaluating them › Asserting claims without grounding them in the data › Description with no critical argument (low AO2)

Spoken transcript handling · “Analyse spoken data”

TESTS	AO1, AO3 - within data tasks
METHOD	1. Read the transcript noting the key and any annotation conventions. 2. Identify spoken features: pauses, fillers, overlaps, false starts, turn taking. 3. Use accurate prosodic and conversational terminology (AO1). 4. Link features to interaction, context and relationship of speakers (AO3). 5. Quote transcript lines precisely, including any timed pauses. 6. Interpret what features reveal, rather than only labelling them.
STRUCTURE	'The (feature) in line (n) functions to... given the context of...'
MODEL	<i>Noting frequent overlaps and minimal responses in a casual exchange and linking them to a close, informal relationship between speakers.</i>
PITFALLS	› Treating spoken data as if it were written prose › Labelling features with no link to interaction › Misreading transcript conventions in the key

Theory and concept application · “Apply theory”

TESTS	AO2 across papers
METHOD	1. Recall theories and concepts relevant to the named focus. 2. State the concept clearly and, where useful, attribute it. 3. Apply it directly to specific evidence in the text or data. 4. Show where the evidence supports and where it challenges the idea. 5. Avoid name-dropping: the application earns the marks, not the name. 6. Use concepts to build evaluation, not as decoration.
STRUCTURE	'This supports the idea that... as the data shows... though it can also be read as...'
MODEL	<i>Using an acquisition concept to interpret a child's over-generalised grammar, then noting where the data does not fully fit the model.</i>
PITFALLS	› Naming a theorist without applying the idea › Forcing a concept that does not fit the evidence › Treating concepts as facts rather than testable claims

NEA Investigation · “Investigate”

TESTS	AO1, AO2, AO3 - coursework
METHOD	1. Choose a focused, manageable language question and a clear data set. 2. Write a tight introduction setting aim, hypothesis and method. 3. Apply systematic analysis using language levels and accurate terminology. 4. Integrate relevant theory and concepts to interpret findings (AO2). 5. Link findings to context throughout (AO3). 6. Conclude by answering the question and reflecting on limitations.
STRUCTURE	Introduction and aim -> methodology -> analysis by theme -> evaluation -> conclusion -> references.
MODEL	<i>An investigation comparing two speech communities that states a hypothesis, analyses transcript data by language level, applies theory and concludes with a measured judgement.</i>
PITFALLS	› Topic too broad to analyse in depth › Analysis that describes rather than interprets with theory › Weak referencing and no evaluation of method

NEA Original writing and commentary · “Craft and reflect”

TESTS	AO5 and reflective commentary - coursework
METHOD	1. Select a genre and a clear style model to inform your choices. 2. Plan audience, purpose and form before drafting. 3. Craft the piece using deliberate stylistic features for effect (AO5). 4. In the commentary, analyse your own language choices with terminology. 5. Justify decisions by reference to your style model and audience. 6. Keep the commentary analytical and concise, not a narrative of drafting.
STRUCTURE	Original piece -> commentary: 'I chose (feature) to... in order to achieve... for my audience of...'
MODEL	<i>An original article written to a chosen style model, with a commentary that explains specific lexical and structural choices and how they suit the target reader.</i>
PITFALLS	› Commentary that narrates the writing process instead of analysing › No clear style model behind the original piece › Vague choices not tied to audience and purpose