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### 3.1 WRITERS' METHODS AND EFFECTS

Writers' methods – the techniques authors employ – are a vital element of both English Language and English Literature study. You will need to comment critically on such methods and analyse the effects they create.

#### COMMENTING ON WRITERS' METHODS

Writers' methods are the techniques writers use – the 'how' of writing.

Consider the following extract from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë in which Jane speaks to Rochester:

5 'Do you think, because I am **poor, obscure, plain, and little**, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much **soul** as you, – and full as much **heart**! And if **God** had **gifted** me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of **custom, conventionalities**, or even of mortal flesh: – it is my spirit that addresses your **spirit**; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, – as we are!'

Some of the methods used here to communicate the writer's view on women's position in society include:

- Narrative view – written from Jane's perspective
- Character and voice – Jane addresses Rochester strongly and directly
- Language and style – effective **simple language and short adjectives**, 'poor, obscure, plain, and little'. Also uses vocabulary from a specific **semantic field** such as 'soul', 'heart' and 'spirit'. **Literary techniques** – listing in the first line, are combined with the **assonance** of the 'o' sound and the **alliteration** of 'God' and 'gifted' in line 3, and 'custom' and 'conventionalities' in line 6.

1 Identify the different uses and styles of:

- Punctuation
- Sentences

#### ANALYSING EFFECTS

Effects are the result of the writer's methods – their impact on the reader.

Consider the effect of the different methods employed in the extract.

- Narrative view – Jane's perspective makes the reader identify and sympathise with Jane
- Character and voice – the effect is to make Jane seem a brave and determined voice
- Language and style – Jane's strong speech, comparing her situation with Rochester's emphasises their common humanity against a backdrop of social inequality

#### TOP TIP

Note that in GCSE English Literature, AO2 is solely dedicated to writers' methods and effects, indicating their importance.

- Now explain the effects of these methods:
  - Punctuation – what mood is created by Brontë's use of question marks, **dashes**, exclamations?
  - Structure – what effect is created by the mixture of sentences styles you noted earlier? What effect do the **rhetorical questions** have? What is Brontë attempting to show in the longer sentences?
  - Literary techniques – what is the effect of the alliteration and assonance?
- Bearing all these things in mind, what overall impression is given of Jane from this passage? Write at least one paragraph. You could start: *Brontë presents Jane as someone who ...*

#### APPLYING YOUR SKILLS

A02 A02

Read the following passage from *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman about a woman suffering from mental illness.

*This bed will not move!*

*I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner – but it hurt my teeth.*

*Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!*

*I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.*

*Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.*

- Create a table like the one below giving examples of the different methods used here by Perkins Gilman, and their effects.

Writer's method	Examples from <i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	Effect on reader
Narrative view	First person – direct account of events	
Character and voice		
Language and style	Starts with a short exclamatory sentence	
Structure		
Literary techniques		
Punctuation		

- Select one or two of the methods used with examples and write about their effects in explanatory sentences. You should write between 50–75 words.



## 5.1 DECODING THE QUESTION

Once you have mastered the reading skills required for English and English Literature GCSEs, the next stage is to put them into practice under exam conditions.

Follow these steps:

- Be prepared. Ensure that you know the format of each exam paper; how many questions you need to answer and what type they are likely to be.
- Read the instructions on the front of the paper to remind yourself of what you need to do. This is something you can do while you are waiting for the exam to begin.
- Manage the time you have well by being clear about the number of questions, their value in marks and work out how much time you can spend on each question, then sticking to this.

### THE PROCESS INVOLVED AND CONTENT OF THE QUESTION

First, make sure you understand exactly what you are being asked to do. Questions consist of two main parts: the content and the process involved.

**The content** – this is the ‘what you have been asked to write about’. Make sure you focus specifically on the topic in the task.

Only cover the part of the text that is specified. If this is a section of an extract, mark it off on the question paper. If one extract is part of a longer piece and the other extract is a whole piece, note this, as it could affect your comments on structural aspects.

**The process involved** – parts of the question will indicate exactly what you have **to do**. Some common process terms are as follows (most are action words but some are questions words):

- Analyse – examine in detail to establish meanings and key features
- Describe – provide a detailed account or picture of something
- Explain – give a reasoned account that clarifies something
- Evaluate – form a judgement about the effectiveness of something
- Identify – find key points or features
- Summarise – a brief account of the main issues or points
- Consider – look attentively and think carefully about something
- Compare – examine the similarities or differences between things
- Contrast – explore differences between two texts and ideas
- List – Make a series of brief points

#### TOP TIP



If you've been provided with guidance (usually in bullet point form) as to what your response should include, it's important to use this to structure your answer.

Read the question below, paying careful attention to the completed annotations:

Q1 – Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the Source from **line 19 to the end**. [1]

A critic, having read this section of the text said: ‘The writer’s characters are exaggerated and unreal.’ [2]

To what extent do you agree? [3]

In your response, you could:

- Write about [4] your own impressions of the characters [5]
- Identify how [6] the writer has created these impressions [7] and evaluate [8] the effect on the characters overall [9]
- Support your opinions with references to the text. [10]

[20 marks]

[1] Content

[2] Content

[3] Process

[4] Process

[5] Content

[6] Process

- 1 Now decide for yourself whether each of the four remaining highlighted parts of the question are ‘content’ or ‘process’.

### JUDGING YOUR RESPONSE AGAINST THE NUMBER OF MARKS

**Answer length** – The number of marks awarded and the time allowed will give you a clear guide as to how long the answers need to be.

For example, if you have been asked to list four things and there are four marks, you only need to write sufficient to justify a mark for each. If a question has thirty marks then a substantial response will be required.

**Planning and checking** – It is always best to:

- Make a brief plan before start writing as it will focus your response and improve the structure. Spend no more than 5 minutes on this for a longer response and 2 minutes for a shorter one
- Check that the planned response directly addresses the question and tick off the points on the plan as you write them
- Neatly cross out the plan to show that it is not part of the answer

Also allow a few minutes at the end to check back through your answers for spelling or grammar errors. Remember that 20% of your marks for English Language and 5% of the marks for English Literature are awarded for spelling punctuation and grammar.

### APPLYING YOUR SKILLS

A01

- 2 Consider the question below and identify the content and process words: Starting with the above speech, explain how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards women in this play.

Write about:

- what is said about women in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards women in the play as a whole.

#### AIMING HIGH



During revision time, divide up each paper into the time you will spend on each type of question. Ideally, do this to the minute for each question and memorise it. Then make sure in the exam that you write almost up to the time the exam ends (leaving a few minutes for checking) – this will help to maximise your potential for top marks.