Language Analysis

Revision in preparation for the VCE Exam

“How is written and visual language used to persuade readers to share the points of view presented to them”

Criteria:

• Understanding of ideas and points-of-view
• Analysis of the ways features are used to present point of view and persuade readers
• Controlled and effective use of language
Order of presentation

• 1. key points, ‘Meet the Assessor 2016’ comments and samples
• 2. Chief examiner’s 2014 comments
• 3. ‘First 15 minutes’ plan
• 4. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider
• 5. General advice and reminders
Language Analysis – key points

• Precision, detail and sophistication of analysis are key in this task
• You must develop your analytical vocabulary
• Look for layers of meaning – issue, contention, points-of-view, superficial aim, underlying purpose, implied bias and targeted audiences – explain how all of them are layered across all the texts, supported with close analysis of detail.
‘Meet the examiner’ comments - 2016

- Cold, analytical, lean, mean - neat and tight expression
- Responding to totally unfamiliar texts – challenging and frightening task
- Not many students find it exciting - must force yourself to practice
- Focus on language – do not get caught up in a commentary or a rebuttal
- Must focus on ‘how’ it persuades
- Do it first, while intellectually fresh
- MUST read background info and consider its clues
- Most now know the task - middle-band responses lack clarity and complexity or expression – must explicitly focus on metalanguage and techniques
- Middle band responses struggled to articulate – did not have language and clarity – ‘lean and mean’ – not like text response or context writing
- Consider the subtle layering of points-of-view
- Exam pieces are very layered - the obvious, the implied and a third layer of subtlety and nuance
- Must discuss graphics – practice ‘visual reading’ – examiners accept most discussions of visuals
Layers of meaning and purpose – 2015 exam

1. The two speeches and two images present slightly different points-of-view about the value, rewards and recognition of volunteer workers. *(general issue linking the texts)*

2. Bennett’s contention is that volunteers are under recognized and that these awards are away to offer this recognition. Nguyen’s contention differs slightly; he suggests that volunteers are appreciated by those that they help, and that the satisfaction of providing help is reward enough. *(contentions)*

3. Bennett’s underlying purpose is the promotion and celebration of ‘bigsplash’, the ‘large financial institution’, by emphasizing that ‘bigsplash inaugurated this award’. Nguyen subtly condemns this Bennett’s purpose and her emphasis on recognition and reward. *(Underlying purpose)*

4. *The banner under the speaker’s rostrum has a prominent ‘bigsplash’ logo, etc. Nguyen’s informal language and style, particularly his casual comment ‘and thanks to bigsplash’, almost as an afterthought, suggests his disregard for Bennett’s motivations, etc.* *(subtle effects of language)*
Johnston believes the census should be for basic information only. She uses familiar language and colloquial phrases to convey this idea. Later in the article, she then uses humour to make her arguments more appealing. She uses the simile ‘the census is like a very bad boyfriend’. She does this to illustrate her ideas and position the reader to share her point-of-view.

Johnston raises, then firmly rebuts, the counter-argument that the census is more important than privacy concerns in her sixth paragraph, when she makes a frightening implicit comparison between the ABS and arrogant assumptions that led to the recent US banking crisis by ironically borrowing the phrase ‘to big to fail’ to describe the census, positioning the reader to fear the ABS as reckless and shortsighted. She then reinforces this with a triad of phrases, ‘more arrogance, more heavy-handed treatment of citizens and more privacy invasions’, with the forceful repetition of ‘more’ and the threatening noun ‘invasions’ to depict the ABS as a malevolent and dangerous force praying on those who do not resist them. In doing so, Johnston aims to make the reader feel they are obliged to join her and resist the census.
1. Chief examiner’s 2014 comments:

- “There was no expected manner in which the pieces were to be analysed”
- “While students were expected to respond to all pieces, they were free to determine the amount of response time spent of each”
- “The more successful response made analytical comparisons between the pieces, focusing on tone, structure and language”
- “Successful response were able to identify the inherent connection between the general ideas in each piece and the language used to present those views”
- “Students needed to demonstrate an understanding of how written and visual language is used to persuade”
1. Chief examiner’s 2014 comments:

• “Students were expected to explore the way visual pieces were used in adding persuasiveness to the entire piece.”

• “…focus on the intent, not the result. Focus on the writer’s intention not the exact response from the reading audience”

• “Some students offered topic sentences that suggested they were searching for particular ‘techniques’, with little regard for the instruction for this section: how is written and visual language used to persuade reader’s to share the point’s of view presented to them”
  • “Simply identifying techniques demonstrates a limited approach”
1. The task

- Persuaders use a variety of techniques to grab our attention, to establish credibility and trust, to stimulate desire for.....to motivate us to.....

- Your task is to **ANALYSE** the language of persuasion in a particular set of texts.

- You must create a purposeful and smoothly unfolding discussion of how the texts are intended to work
1. A holistic approach to the task

• Use your reading time to look closely at all the texts provided and ensure you can integrate them all, in some way, into your essay. Try to bring them all under some “umbrella” of meaning, issue or purpose. Why are they all there? Chunk them according to their arguments, or ‘points of view’, under this “umbrella”.

• Read them several times so that you gain an overview – the big picture is as important as the smaller detailed analysis that forms the body of your essay.

What overarching ideas can you use to gather the texts together? (topic sentences)
2. So how do we start? ‘First 15 minutes’ plan: (try to memorise the steps by practicing them)

(Remember, this method is just one of many approaches. The examiners note that there is no expected method. The important thing is that you go in with an approach that works for you.)

1. Consider the relationship between writer/speaker, reader/audience and subject.

   • Look for the three or four layers of meaning/purpose/point-of-view (see earlier slide)
   • This is sometimes referred to as the ‘contention and intended audience’, etc.
   • Often done in the introduction
2. ‘First 15 minutes’ plan:

2. Consider how the points-of-view/ideas are organised. These could form your topic sentences and define your paragraphs.
   - Are they organised per paragraph?
   - Per small article? (How will I incorporate similar or contrasting articles per point-of-view?)
   - Images? (Can I match the image with similar or contrasting paragraph?)
     - Once writing time begins, chunk the paper according to these points-of-view or ideas, perhaps three or four, either by drawing lines, numbering or highlighting with different colours
     - Make a statement about the holistic organisation of the points-of-view or ideas at some point, perhaps in the first body paragraph or the conclusion.

   - See sample annotated 2014 exam
2. ‘First 15 minutes’ plan:

3. Consider the **devices** that support each of these arguments.
   - Use the ‘idea, device and effect’ formula’.
     - This will be the majority of your essay. Use as much detail as possible and clearly discuss the writer’s intended effect. You’ll need to know lots of tone, appeal and metalanguage words for this.
     - Quickly organise your paragraphs and then spend most of your time on this close analysis.
2. ‘First 15 minutes’ plan:

4. How does the writer **involve the reader**? (you might consider this in a first body paragraph or a conclusion)
   - How does the writer present and control the **context** of the issue? (historical scope, scale, future, immediacy? The 2014 exam did all three) (dystopian?)
   - How does the writer make the issue **relevant** to the reader?
   - Does the writer **rebuke** the reader?
     - Implicit responsibility?
     - Direct culpability?
     - Guilt and consequence?
   - Does the writer create a sense of **urgency** or imperative to act?
   - Does the writer seek to **inspire** the reader? How?
     - Alternatives, actions, solutions?
5. **Problems?** ‘The discerning reader may recognise the lack of/be alienated by...’
   - Implicit bias?
   - What’s missing?
   - Too extreme? (sanctimonious, hectoring, didactic, blinkered, blindly idealistic, naïve, informal, etc?)
     - Only include point 5 in your response if you have done everything else first. Do not make it one of your main points. You might raise one of these ‘problems’ at the end of a body paragraph or in the conclusion.

*See sample 2014 plan*
2. ‘First 15 minutes’ plan:

This 5 point process should give you the plan for your response. Now build body paragraphs based on the texts’ ‘points of view’/arguments and the features that convey them.

- now put it all together in a smoothly unfolding analysis with lots of linking phrases

- I like a holistic comment, perhaps in an early body paragraph or the conclusion, about how the writer/speaker of the main text shapes and unfolds their arguments/tone/mood. How do they intend to use this to shape and control the reader’s response?
verbs

- coaxes, permeates, patronises, rebukes, derides, cajoles, emanates, alienates, radiates, supports, erodes, criticises, challenges, delineates, reproaches, condemns, enhances, reveals, deprecates, fuels fear, invites, berates, chastises, exacerbates, connects, disparages, threatens, denounces, suggests, positions the reader, illustrates, reprimands, destroys, warns, works to, demonstrates, encourages...
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider: Different TEXT TYPES – BE PREPARED!!

Over the last few years, these have included:

- **2008**: “A word from our Coach” (an open letter in a club newsletter) with accompanying cartoon
- **2009**: “Keyed In” - Voxi’s opinion piece on digital technology from an online journal – included a computer generated graphic
- **2010**: Transcript of a Keynote Speech on Biodiversity at an international conference, accompanied by opening and closing PowerPoint slides
- **2011**: Online Blog *Street Beat* – “Indelible Ink” including two photographs and two posted responses
- **2012**: A transcript of a speech by a retired teacher-librarian “Reading: the future”, delivered at the opening session of a forum on reading and literacy with two slides used during the presentation. The audience included teachers, librarians and senior school students.
- **2013**: a community group newsletter, a graph and a historical promotional poster
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider: **BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING!**

Consider the format and the layout of what you are analysing – remember **that every text type has its own special features.** (A speech transcript will be different to an opinion piece, for example.) An essay (perhaps from a journal of some kind) will be designed to be read slowly and carefully, and allow for repeated readings. It might be quite sophisticated in style. View the whole layout (perhaps with associated cartoons or photographs.) **Be familiar with ALL text types.** You might, for instance, get a **WRITTEN SUBMISSION** – which is a formal proposal, often aimed at governments or private businesses or councils, that proposes a course of action. These would probably include topic sections with appropriate headings. You could have a transcript of a radio interview, or a review (of a film, book, video game...). **Each will have its particular audience.**
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider:

A submission – for example!

• The given viewpoint will be representative of an organisation or a particular action group. This might include groups like: “Reclaim the Night Organisation”; the Anti-Bike Helmets Association; RAN - Residents against Noise; or SWAG - the “Save Water Action Group”!

• There would probably be a mixture of paragraphs and bullet points

• Clear recommendations or proposals would be outlined in the conclusion

• Key arguments and supporting evidence would be provided

• This might be written in a formal letter format

• There might be a variety of proposals or recommendations for consideration

Who are they trying to persuade? The 2013 exam community newsletter was put in local letterboxes with the intention of prompting residents to pressure the local council. How does that relate to the way it is written or structured?

• IGNORE THE LAYOUT AND STYLE AT YOUR PERIL!
A 3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider:

**REVIEW**

- This could be a written or oral (in the exam, transcribed into print) text.
- Its purpose is to critically evaluate a text such as a book or a film.
- It will often include background information, an overview of content, a critical assessment of the text’s elements and sometimes a rating of some kind.
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider:

- KNOW The difference between...

  • Opinion pieces
  • Editorials
  • Letters to the editor
  • Essays
  • Advertisements
  • Posters
  • News reports and articles
  • Cartoons
  • Photographs

  • Multimodal texts
  • Tabloids
  • Broadsheets
  • Headline and subheading
  • Byline
  • Demographic (a particular section of the population)
  • Infograph
  • Digital images
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider:

Other Text Types

• **Ezines**: (=electronic + magazine) a magazine delivered in electronic form. They cater to people interested in a particular subject matter and are usually constructed as a series of web pages that are released periodically.

• **Forums and Discussion Groups**: Places for the exchange of views on a topic. They can involve a number of participants, delivering prepared speeches on an issue to an audience. (Sometimes *online forums* - or blogs – with a virtual community) These can be highly interactive. Blogs can also be, on the contrary, very personalised – like online diaries...

• **A television forum** (such as Q & A) has a host and a panel discussing a current issue in detail. A host will introduce the issue, give the forum structure with prepared focus questions and strive to steer the forum in the right direction. A studio audience is usually present and able to contribute to the discussion.
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider....:

• Speech transcripts that are “verbatim” will include every interruption and question etc.

• You may get the transcript of an interview (consider the interviewer’s style of questioning and how it hinders or encourages dialogue, whether it is aggressive or friendly) or

• The transcript of a current affairs television programme (with a diverse group of people forming a panel)

• An online discussion

• A Book or Film Review

• Whatever it is, consider how the text type impacts upon the persuasive language and all the other factors

• DO NOT IGNORE “BACKGROUND INFORMATION” – this can provide you with vital clues (especially the readership)!!
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider: **VISUAL MATERIAL**

- They can be CENTRAL TO THE MEANING OF A WRITTEN TEXT
- CAN BE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED – SHOCKING EVEN
- GRAPHS
- DIAGRAMS
- CHARTS
- PHOTOGRAPHS
- CARTOONS
- IRONIC
- SARCASTIC
- SUBVERSIVE
- CRITICAL
- SATIRICAL
- HUMOROUS
3. Things to remember beforehand and important things to consider:

**BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR APPROACH AND IN YOUR THINKING** – be ready to dance across the texts

- You may get opposing views or varied views that expand or concentrate on a particular area; you may find every text more or less affirming the same viewpoint. It may be that the different texts require an equal depth of analysis or some may just need one or two sentences while another needs two or three paragraphs. **BE PREPARED for anything! It is vital that you acknowledge and think about the text type/s as the layout will affect everything else** – the language, the purpose, the audience, the style...

- Remember not to JUDGE the writer (even if you find them outrageous!) **KEEP AN OBJECTIVE APPROACH AT ALL TIMES**

- **THE MOST COMMON MISTAKE IS THAT STUDENTS SUMMARISE or PARAPHRASE THE TEXTS.** You must **focus single-mindedly on analysing.**

- Try to **weave in discussion of the visuals** rather than tacking them on separately. **Making links** between the texts shows sophisticated thinking and creates a better discussion. Consider how they support or comment upon the contention.
4. General advice and reminders

• **Avoid the listing** of techniques at all times! If you are analysing carefully, and in detail, this simply will not be an issue. Lists inevitably involve generalisations. If you mention a technique, provide an example, analyse it and explore the intended effect.

• **Be VERY careful of using “throughout” or “constantly”** (it is unlikely to be the case – the technique or word or whatever it is would lose its persuasive effectiveness, if it were so!)

• Do not use sweeping, meaningless statements that add little to the analysis. (Eg. *Rhetorical questions force us to think about the issue more carefully.*) **ALWAYS BE SPECIFIC!** Only mention the rhetorical question if you have something significant to say – such as, it might be targeting a particular subset of the readership, it might have been used at the very start for some dramatic effect, perhaps with three in a row, it might be intended to instil guilt...Look closely at its specific, intended effect which is dependent upon the text you are analysing. It will necessarily involve how the audience is being **positioned**.
4. General advice and reminders
- Questions to be asked

• What is the contention? You need to be able to write this in under five minutes (in your own words)
• Who is the intended audience?
• To whom are the criticisms or the laudatory comments aimed at?
• What do you think is the main emotion felt by the audience?
• Why?
4. General advice and reminders

- **Introduction**

  - Outline issue, meaning or purpose (umbrella) straight away in your own words – clearly and concisely
  - Don’t beat about the bush! (too much background palaver wastes time)
  - Provide the obvious details – text type, who, what, when, where
  - Explain the contention(s) simply and clearly in **your own words**
  - You can give overview of obvious features (possibly tone could be mentioned), although saving this for the body paragraphs is fine
  - You can, if you really want, add some quotations but these should be quite short in the introduction - possibly one word or two words only...
4. General advice and reminders

- Conclusion

- Sum up the texts’ style
- Consider who it might appeal to, or offend
- Evaluate overall effectiveness in terms of its purpose, form, and audience
- Perhaps make a holistic comment. Consider where the text takes and leaves the reader/audience
- Problems? (see the first 15 minutes slides)
4. General advice and reminders

- tone

• Refers to how something would sound if read aloud

• Think of how the same words said in different ways could mean or imply different things (Eg Don’t you just love going to her house?) This is why emails and texts get misunderstood!

• Sarcasm and irony are often tricky to recognise – you need to IMAGINE someone reading it aloud – many students seem to exaggerate the tone – and fail to see the subtleties...It is important to look at the whole context for clues

• Ensure you have a good array of words to choose from!

• You must built up your vocabulary bank – there are lots of lists you can use (scathing, despondent, fervent...)

• NOTE SHIFTS OF TONE – a text (especially a lengthy one) will generally involve different tones – consider why.

• Think of other words than “tone” (fashion, voice)

• Work these tone words into your analysis as adjectives that describe response and intended effect
4. General advice and reminders
- Some interesting tones

- **Admonishing** – urging earnestly against..., advising strongly, counselling, warning, cautioning against – reprimanding, authoritatively counselling, chiding, rebuking

- **Authoritative** – having authority, exercising or assuming power, imperative, commanding

- **Disappointed** – frustrated or failing to fulfil desire or expectation, prevented from realising or fulfilling plan, purpose

- **Outraged** – deeply offended, aroused by fierce anger

- **Indignant** – provoked to anger, scorn and contempt (at, with, that...)

- **Passionate** – affected by strong emotion, strongly enthusiastic, fervent, (also) hot-tempered, enraged, (irascible – easily provoked to anger), or inclined to pity, compassionate
4. General advice and reminders
- Some interesting tones

• **Patronising** - supportive, encouraging but in a condescending way

• **Sarcastic** – bitterly cutting or ironic (dissembling, feigned, pretended), actually meaning the opposite, praise that is really contempt

• **Satirical** – ridiculing, humorously exposing faults (often uses sarcasm, irony)

• **Snide** – cunning, devious, sneering, slyly derogatory, disrespectful, disparaging, tending to detract from authority, a snide remark = malicious gossip

• **Despondent** – loss of faith or hope
Verbs that have value!

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4. General advice and reminders
- Think about the total package

Purpose
Why has this text been created?
(Might be multiple reasons)

Audience
(consider subsets)

Form
Text type
Structural features
Language used
4. General advice and reminders

- LASTLY

• Keep your introductions and conclusions short
• Know the metalanguage – (eg. “figurative language”) but don’t just throw it in to sound smart. Use it wisely in your analysis – to show you understand how language is being made to work.
• There is no point identifying a technique without providing an example (giving its context) and explain exactly how it has been used persuasively. This will require a few sentences at least!
• Consider organising your essay around the arguments presented but go straight to discussing HOW they have been presented and do not analyse the argument itself but the language used. It is NOT what is said but HOW it is said (written, conveyed) that is of consequence.
• Make links between discussion of the various texts
• Don’t forget the importance of the likely effect on the audience
• I really like a general comment or two about the main text’s structure. How does the arguments/tone/language develop and/or change? Why? Put this in the first body paragraph or the conclusion.