



Department  
for Education

# English language

**GCSE subject content and assessment  
objectives**

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## Introduction

GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for progression to A level.

## Subject aims and learning outcomes

This document sets out the learning outcomes and content coverage required for GCSE specifications in English language. In subjects such as English language, where topics are taught in progressively greater depth over the course of key stage 3 and key stage 4, GCSE outcomes may reflect or build upon subject content which is typically taught at key stage 3. There is no expectation that teaching of such content should be repeated during the GCSE course where it has already been covered at an earlier stage.

GCSE specifications in English language should ensure students can read fluently and write effectively. They should be able to demonstrate a confident control of Standard English and they should be able to write grammatically correct sentences, deploy figurative language and analyse texts.

GCSE specifications in English language should enable students to:

- read a wide range of texts, fluently and with good understanding
- read critically, and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly, punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary, alongside a knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology,<sup>1</sup> and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language
- write legibly and clearly.

In addition, GCSE specifications in English language must enable students to:

- listen to and understand spoken language, and use spoken Standard English effectively.

Spoken language will be reported on as part of the qualification, but it will not form part of the final mark and grade.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the glossary of grammatical terms that supports the national curriculum programmes of study for English.

## Subject content

This content sets out the full range of content for GCSE specifications in English language. Awarding organisations may, however, use any flexibility to increase depth, breadth or context within the specified topics or to consolidate teaching of the subject content.

The assessment of GCSE English language will be designed on the basis that students should have read high-quality, challenging texts from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The number and types of text are not prescribed. All texts studied must make significant demands on students. The texts may include literature, extended literary non-fiction, and other writing such as essays and journalism. Digital texts must not be included.

All texts in the examination will be ‘unseen’, that is, students will not have studied the examination texts during the course. The unseen texts will be drawn from each of the three centuries above and it will therefore be expected that students will read texts drawn from across each century.

## Scope of study

GCSE specifications in English language should require students to study:

### Reading comprehension

- *Finding, interpreting and using information and evidence:* reading a range of continuous and non-continuous texts,<sup>2</sup> both literature and other high-quality writing; reading in different ways for different purposes; accessing, retrieving and interpreting information and evidence within a single text and from across more than one text; comparing and evaluating the usefulness and relevance of information and ideas to meet a defined purpose; identifying and distinguishing between main and subsidiary themes; synthesising and summarising information; paying attention to detail, and supporting comprehension by commenting on the use of a wide vocabulary, knowledge of grammar and the context of the text.

### Reading critically

- *Critical reading:* recognising and drawing inferences; reflecting critically and evaluatively on text, using the context of the text, drawing on knowledge and skills gained from wider reading; recognising the possibility of different reactions to a text; supporting a point of view about the text by referring to evidence within it;

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Continuous’ and ‘non-continuous’ are categories used in PISA, describing “two ways in which texts are commonly structured, either in sentences and paragraphs (continuous), or in other formats such as lists, diagrams, graphs and tables (non-continuous)”.

distinguishing between statements that are supported by evidence and those that are not; identifying bias and misuse of evidence

- *Evaluation of a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, grammatical and structural features:* explaining and illustrating how vocabulary and grammar contribute to effectiveness and impact, and using linguistic and literary terminology accurately to do so; evaluating how form and structure contribute to the effectiveness and impact of a text
- *Comparing texts:* comparing two or more texts critically with respect to the above.

## Writing

- *Producing clear and coherent text:* writing effectively for different purposes, and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue; selecting vocabulary, grammar, form, and structural and organisational features judiciously to reflect audience, purpose and context; using language imaginatively and creatively; using information provided by others to write (in different forms); maintaining a consistent point of view; maintaining coherence and consistency across a text
- *Writing for impact:* selecting, organising and emphasising facts, ideas and key points; citing evidence and quotation effectively and pertinently to support views; creating emotional impact; using language creatively, imaginatively and persuasively, including rhetorical devices (such as rhetorical questions, antithesis, parenthesis).

## Spoken language

- *Present information and ideas:* selecting and organising information and ideas effectively and persuasively for prepared spoken presentations; planning effectively for different purposes and audiences; making presentations and speeches
- *Respond to spoken language:* listening to and responding appropriately to any questions and feedback
- *Spoken Standard English:* expressing ideas using Standard English whenever and wherever appropriate.

## Assessment objectives

	Assessment objectives	Weighting
AO1	<p>Reading comprehension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ retrieve literal and implicit information and evidence from at least two texts</li> <li>▪ interpret, understand and summarise texts</li> <li>▪ evaluate the usefulness and relevance of information, and synthesise it for specific purposes.</li> </ul>	40%
AO2	<p>Reading critically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ describe, analyse and comment on how a writer has achieved particular effects, using linguistic terminology effectively</li> <li>▪ evaluate text and support their evaluation with illustrative examples</li> <li>▪ use the skills of description, analysis and evaluation to compare and contrast texts.</li> </ul>	20%
AO3	<p>Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ write clear, coherent and effective texts, applying their understanding of tone, style and register, including vocabulary and grammar</li> <li>▪ write for a range of specific purposes and audiences, structuring the writing by selecting form and using organisational devices to reflect the purpose of and the audience for the writing.</li> </ul> <p>One half of the available credit for AO3 should be awarded to the use of a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</p>	40%
AO4	<p>Spoken language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ demonstrating presentation skills in a formal setting</li> <li>▪ listening and responding appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations</li> <li>▪ use spoken Standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.</li> </ul>	Unweighted*

*\* While it is compulsory for students to demonstrate the skills in AO4 in spoken language it will not count towards the overall grade awarded.*

GCSE specifications must be assessed through external assessment that includes requirements for both extended writing [essays] and short-answer responses.

## **Literacy**

The assessment for GCSE English language provides, within it, for the assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar.



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