

# WGHS Senior English



## Language Features

Name:

Whenever we speak and/or write, we use a variety of **language features**, often without realising that we are doing so. In order to raise the level of our understanding of written and spoken language, and also to become more aware of how language can be used to manipulate meaning, we must know the most common basic language features and how they work.

We must:

- know the **correct terminology** for each language feature;
- be able to **recognise language features** in what we read and hear, know the **effect** each language feature can have on readers/listeners and **be able to explain it**;
- be able to **use language features correctly and effectively**; and

It is these skills, amongst others, that will be tested in the Unfamiliar Texts Standards at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

## A. Vocabulary

---

### COMPARISON OF ADJECTIVES

Adjectives can be compared. The three degrees of comparison are the **positive degree**, the **comparative degree** and the **superlative degree**.

Positive Degree	Comparative Degree	Superlative Degree
good	better	best
much	more	most
thin	thinner	thinnest
significant	more significant	most significant
beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful

#### COMPARATIVES

This house is **bigger** than that one. Smith Street is **longer** than West Street. This is the **most** money I have ever had.

#### INCOMPLETE COMPARATIVES

An incomplete comparative occurs when the full comparative statement is not made.  
Smith Street is **longer**. (longer than what?)  
Anchor Butter is **better**. (better than what?)

#### SUPERLATIVES

This house is the **biggest** house in the street.  
John achieved the **highest** grades in Year 13 English this year.

A superlative implies that the **quality being attributed** to the noun being described **cannot be exceeded**. (Advertisers thus often use superlatives.)

*Biggest* – there is none bigger.

*Most beautiful* – there is nothing more beautiful.

*Best* – there is none better.

*Greediest* – there is nobody greedier.

---

### EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

This term refers to words used deliberately to create an emotional impact or response.

e.g. The **unruly** crowd **swarmed** onto the field after **smashing** its way through the gates.

This has more impact than *The crowd ran onto the field after forcing open the gates.*

The **courageous teenager** walked an **amazing** fifteen kilometres to **summon** help.

*The brave young person walked fifteen kilometres to get help.*

---

## **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONNOTATION**

All words have a literal (exact, original) meaning (called **denotation**). However, many words also have good (positive) or bad (negative) meanings associated with them. These associated meanings are **connotations**.

Literal	Positive connotation	Negative connotation
red (a colour)	love	danger, hot, stop
group (a number of people)	team, committee	gang, mob
smell (an odour or scent)	perfume, scent	stench, stink

Positive and negative connotation are also ways of expressing **emotion** and **tone**. Words are deliberately selected in order to give just the right effect to suit the purpose of the text/speech.

---

## **B. Figures of Speech**

### **METAPHOR**

A **direct comparison** between two unlike objects in which a common aspect is used to suggest that object A **is** object B.

Your eyes are like the sun. (Simile)

You are my sunshine. (Metaphor)

#### Other examples of metaphor

- Solar panels are used to harness the power of the sun.
- The new plan generated a heated debate.
- She gave him an icy stare.
- He showered her with gifts.
- Relationships between them began to thaw.

The purpose of using metaphor is to **make new connections to surprise and interest the reader, engaging the reader's intellect**

An **extended metaphor** is a metaphor in which the same comparison is repeated in a text, though using different aspects of it.

e.g. *The teacher descended upon the exam papers, sank his talons into the pages, ripped the answers to shreds, and then, perching on his chair, began to digest them.*

The metaphorical comparison of the teacher to a bird of prey is extended over the full two lines by means of the repetition of different aspects of the actions of a bird of prey.

---

**PERSONIFICATION** is a particular type of metaphor in which **human characteristics are attributed to inanimate objects**.

e.g. The **lonely train** whistle **cried out** in the night.

**Angry clouds marched** across the sky.

Art is a **jealous mistress**.

My **computer hates** me.

The **night embraced** me and the **moon smiled** down upon me.

## SIMILE

An **indirect comparison** in which a **similarity** between two usually unlike objects is identified. e.g. He has a voice LIKE a foghorn. (His voice is very loud / deep.)

The house was LIKE a pig sty. (The house is very untidy and dirty.) She was AS MAD AS a hatter. (She is very eccentric / crazy.) Her hands were AS COLD AS ice. (Her hands were very cold.)

Simile is a comparison, *used for the purpose of explanation, allusion or decoration*, which uses 'like' or 'as' or 'as ...as' to introduce it.

---

## ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a **SOUND EFFECT**. By means of the **repetition of the same consonant at the start of two or more words** that are close together in a text, a sound effect occurs that can make the words easier to remember or can suggest something of a sound associated with the particular words.

e.g. careless cars cutting corners cause collisions (in a road safety poem)  
Bradford Brothers – Be beaten by the best! (an advert for a panel shop)  
"... the wind blew, the foam flew, the furrow followed free ... (Coleridge poem)

The repeated use of an 's' sound, as in the example above, is known as **sibilance**.

e.g. The silver stream sparkled as it trickled softly over the stones (descriptive text)

Sounds suggested by letters b, d, g, j, p are usually "hard" or "heavy" sounds (such as the b's in the panel beater's slogan above which are reminiscent of a hammer beating out metal), while sounds suggested by letters f, s are "soft" or "lighter" sounds (such as the s's in the line of descriptive text above which could suggest the sound the water makes, or the f's in Coleridge's poem that suggest the hissing sound a boat makes as it cuts through water).

---

## ASSONANCE

Assonance is also a **SOUND EFFECT** and refers to the **similarity in sound between internal vowels** in nearby words. The main purpose is to provide a rhyming effect internally, though **it can also contribute to a rhythmic effect**.

e.g. He shouted out loudly. Big boys' toys make more noise.  
"I know an old lady who swallowed a spider  
that wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her ..." (from a children's folk song)

---

## ONOMATOPOEIA

This is also a **SOUND EFFECT**. By using a word that represents the required sound in word form, a writer/speaker can give greater impact to the text.

e.g. The buzz of conversation ...  
the crash of cymbals ...  
the tinkle of the tiny bell ...

---

## **HYPERBOLE** (EXAGGERATION)

The use of **deliberate exaggeration for the sake of effect.**

- e.g. My teacher is so old **he remembers when the dinosaurs died!**  
It was so cold **even the polar bears were wearing jackets!**  
I'm so hungry **I could eat a horse!**  
My school bag **weighs a tonne!**
- 

## **UNDERSTATEMENT**

The opposite of exaggeration. A figure of speech in which a writer or a speaker deliberately makes a situation seem less important or serious than it is. A technique **for developing irony and/or humour where one writes or says less than intended.** A statement which apparently **lessens or minimises the importance of what is meant.**

- e.g. 'I think I could just get by on six million this month.'  
'It's a little warm today.' (on a day when the temperature is above 30°C)  
'210 kilograms? Yes, you are a little overweight.'
- 

## **EUPHEMISM**

**The substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague term for one that is considered harsh, blunt, or offensive.**

- |  |   |                          |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| e.g. If something happens to me ...                          | = | If I die ...             |
| Praying to the porcelain altar                               | = | vomiting into the toilet |
| Ethnic cleansing   | = | genocide                 |
| Adult language / explicit language                           | = | swearing                 |
| Passed away, kicked the bucket, carked it, departed, croaked | = | died                     |
| five-finger discount   | = | shoplifting/theft        |
- 

## **PUN**

**A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words.** Usually used for humorous effect or satire.

- e.g. Let's not meet by accident. (a road safety bumper sticker)  
A flush beats a full house! (Sign on a plumber's truck.)  
Archaeologist – a man whose career lies in ruins.  
I used to be a lumberjack, but then I got the axe.  
Maths puns are the first sine of madness!
- 

## **OXYMORON**

A figure of speech in which **incongruous or contradictory terms are combined** for (often humorous or satirical) effect.

- e.g. deafening silence  
mournful  
optimist  
bittersweet  
living death  
poor little rich girl

### **ALLUSION**

A brief, usually indirect, **reference to a person, place, or event**--real or fictional. An allusion serves as a kind of shorthand, drawing on this outside work to provide greater context or meaning to the situation being written about. While allusions can be an economical way of communicating with the reader, they risk alienating readers who do not recognise these references.

- e.g. "I violated the Noah rule: predicting rain doesn't count; building arks does." (Reference to Noah, a Biblical figure who built the Ark)  
"We can't all be Einsteins." (reference to Albert Einstein, 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific thinker)  
"I wonder if his name is Hamlet?" (about a person who is slow to make a decision – an allusion to the character Hamlet in Shakespeare's play of the same name).
- 

### **CLICHE**

A phrase, expression, or idea **that has been overused to the point of losing its intended force or novelty**. The fact that they have been over-used means clichés are well-known and can thus be useful in conveying a message/idea to a large number of readers / listeners.

- |      |                    |                                |
|------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| e.g. | live and learn     | what goes around, comes around |
|      | over the moon      | leave no stone unturned        |
|      | back to square one | a whole different ballgame     |
- 

### **RHETORICAL QUESTION**

**A question to which no vocal answer is required; rather, listeners are intended to reflect on the answer personally and apply it to themselves.** Often used by writers and speakers for rhetorical effect – mainly to get audiences to **agree with what they are saying**.

- Example:      Do we really have to put up with this?  
                  Can we trust these politicians to tell us the  
                  truth? Have you ever been tricked by someone?
- 

## **C. General Language Features**

### **JUXTAPOSITION**

The **placing together of two contrasting ideas** for the sake of emphasising the contrast between them.

- e.g.      Let us break the chains, shackles and nightmare of slavery and embrace each other in the dream of freedom. (Martin Luther King)  
            Clean invasion  
            Concrete jungle
-

## ANTITHESIS

The **placing together of contrasting ideas or words** to produce an effect of balance; a **contrast of words or sentiments** occurring in the same sentence; a contrast of ideas or words **in a balanced or parallel construction**.

- e.g. The prodigal robs his heir; the miser robs himself.  
To err is human; to forgive, divine.  
Love is an ideal thing; marriage a real thing. (Goethe)  
We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools. (Martin Luther King)  
One small step for a man; one giant leap for all mankind. (Neil Armstrong)

The placing together of two contrasting ideas is known as **juxtaposition**. These examples above are also examples of **balanced sentences**.

---

## PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION (Parallelism, parallel structure)

Parallel structure means **using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance** in a sentence.

- e.g. The teacher said that he was a poor student because **he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, and lacked motivation**.

**I came. I saw. I conquered. Veni Vidi Vici** Julius Caesar

---

## SYNTAX

Good writers try to vary the way they construct their sentences. Different sentence structures have various specific effects that writers may wish to use in order to influence their readers.

### SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence, also called an independent clause, **contains a subject and a verb, and it expresses a complete thought**.

- e.g. Some students like to study.  
John and Steve both play football.  
Melissa and her friend went to the library.

Simple sentences contain one complete thought and are **useful for conveying information to a reader quickly**. When a number of them are used together, they **can increase the pace of a text, suggesting rapid or jerky movement**. When a simple sentence is used alone directly after a number of compound or complex sentences, **it has the effect of emphasising the single thought it contains**.

### COMPOUND SENTENCE

A compound sentence **contains two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions**. [The coordinators are as follows: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. (Helpful hint: The first letter of each of the coordinators spells *FANBOYS*.)]

- e.g. I tried to speak Spanish **and** my friend tried to speak English.  
Alex was playing football, **so** Maria went shopping.  
Joe's father was very angry, **but** he did not shout at the children.  
We can try to keep fit, **or** we can become lazy **and** only we can make the choice.

### COMPLEX SENTENCE

A complex sentence has an **independent clause joined by one or more dependent (subordinate) clauses**. [ A complex sentence always has a subordinating conjunction such as *because, since, after, although, if, until, during, before* or *when*, or a relative pronoun such as *that, who, or which*.]

- e.g. The students are studying, **because** they have a test tomorrow.  
John and Mary went to the movies **after** they had finished studying.  
**Although** he knows me well, he often does not greet me.

Compound and complex sentences ***provide a way of conveying increased amounts of information / detail***. They can ***also have the effect of slowing the pace of the text***.

### BALANCED SENTENCE

A sentence consisting of **two or more clauses that are parallel in structure**. Balanced sentences are a memorable way **to contrast or compare two ideas**.

- e.g. The book concentrates on character; the film intensifies the violence.  
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, ..." (Charles Dickens) See the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

### MINOR SENTENCE

A sentence which does not have a main verb, but which can still be understood.

- e.g. Who did you see? Tom.  
'Tom' is a minor sentence; it has no verb, but one still understands that it means "I saw Tom."  
Minor sentences are often used in conversations and informal dialogue.

### SENTENCE FRAGMENT

A part of a sentence that lacks a subject and verb to define it as a sentence. (just like this one).  
Sentence fragments often do not make sense on their own, cannot stand independently.

- e.g. "Hey, Sam, do you want to get some lunch?"  
"I can't. *Too much homework to finish.*"

The words in italics form a sentence fragment – the subject 'I' and the verb 'have' are missing.

### INCOMPLETE SENTENCE

A group of words that creates the subject of a sentence, but fails to provide a predicate.

- e.g. The brown dog with a bushy tail ....

This subject "does nothing"; there is no action described. The words form an incomplete sentence.



### CO-ORDINATED SENTENCE

Sentences which are made up of two or more independent clauses (or simple sentences) that have been joined by a co-ordinating conjunction. Each part of the sentence is given equal weight, has equal value / importance.

- e.g. I am a student. (simple sentence)  
I attend Pukekohe High School. (simple sentence)  
*I am a student **and** I attend Pukekohe High School.* (co-ordinated)

NOTE: The co-ordinating conjunctions in English are: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.  
[Remember the word FANBOYS]

### LOOSE SENTENCE

A sentence in which the **main point is made at the beginning.**

- e.g. **I am willing to pay slightly higher taxes for the privilege of living in Canada,** considering the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programmes, and the wonderful winters.

Loose sentences are the most natural for people who speak English

### PERIODIC SENTENCE

A sentence in which the **main point is placed at the end.**

- e.g. Considering the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programs, and the wonderful winters, **I am willing to pay slightly higher taxes for the privilege of living in Canada.**

Periodic sentences **can be dramatic and persuasive,** but must be used sparingly. Overuse makes writing/speaking sound dull and pompous.

### TAG QUESTION

A question used after a statement when seeking or expecting confirmation of that statement.

- e.g. He was here, wasn't he?  
It's raining, isn't it?

### IMPERATIVE SENTENCE

A sentence that gives advice or instructions or that expresses a request or command.

- e.g. Stand up straight!  
Think about your future!

### DECLARATIVE SENTENCE

A statement.

- e.g. The bus will depart at 7.30 a.m.  
The weather forecast says it will rain.

### INTERROGATIVE SENTENCE

A question.

e.g. What's the time?

How did you do that?

### EXCLAMATIVE SENTENCE

An exclamation.

e.g. I don't believe what I'm seeing!

Awesome!

Fantastic!

---

### PERSONAL ADDRESS

This refers to the **use of personal pronouns** to make it seem a writer is **addressing the reader personally** or **including the reader** in what is being said..

e.g. **You** will succeed if **you** apply yourself to **your** studies.

**We** will work together and **we** will succeed.

Let **us** do **our** best and **we** shall not fail!

