# **A Level English Language**



# **Bridging Course: Week 1**



****St Mary’s Catholic School

A-level English Language Bridging Course

**Entry Requirements for Studying A-level English Language?**

* Students who are expected to achieve at least a grade 6 in GCSE English Language.
* Students who have enjoyed their GCSE English Language course, and who are keen readers.
* Students who love a lively debate and discussion in lessons, and who are willing, and able, to share their ideas.
* Students who enjoy planning and writing essays.

**What to expect from A-level English Language.**

A-level English Language is demanding and rewarding in equal measure. Ideas that are studied are challenging ones which pose many questions. These questions are often philosophical or contentious, leading lessons to be filled with discussion and debate. Students are expected to complete substantial amounts of reading and preparation for lessons, in order to engage fully with class discussion. Students should expect to prepare and complete essays regularly, and these essays will often present some form of debate, asking students ‘to what extent do you agree?’ Therefore, engagement with class debate is essential in order to be fully prepared for the demands of writing academic and advanced level essays. English Language will make you ask important questions about society, power and communication.

**This bridging course will provide you with a mixture of information about A-level English Language, and what to expect from the course, as well as key work to complete. Students who are expecting to study English Language at A-level, and are likely to meet the entry requirements, must complete the bridging course fully and thoroughly, to the best of their ability. You should complete all work on paper and keep it in a file, in an ordered way. You will submit it to your teacher in September. All of the work will be reviewed and selected work will be assessed, and you will be given feedback on it. This work will be signalled to you. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the school and appropriate resources will be sent to you. If you are thinking about studying English Language at A-level you should attempt this work to see whether or not you think studying a subject like this is right for you. If you later decide to study English Language , you must ensure you complete this work in full. This work should be completed after you have read and completed the Study Skills work that all of Year 12 should complete.**

# Course outline

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| **Paper 1 – Language the Individual and Society (40%)** | **Paper 2 – Language Diversity and Change (40%)** |
| * An exam lasting 2hours 30 minutes.   **Section A - Textual Variations and Representations**  Analysis of two texts (one contemporary and one older text) linked by topic or theme.  **Section B - Children's Language Development**  A discursive essay on children’s language development, with a choice of two questions where the data provided will focus on spoken, written or multimodal language | * An exam lasting 2 hours and 30 minutes .   **Section A - Diversity and Change**  One question from a choice of two:  Either: an evaluative essay on language diversity  Or: an evaluative essay on language change  **Section B - Language Discourses**  Two texts about a topic linked to the study of diversity and change.  A question requiring analysis of how the texts use language to present ideas, attitudes and opinions  A directed writing task linked to the same topic and the ideas in the texts |
| **NEA – a coursework folder of 2 pieces worth 20%**   * You will write your own piece of original writing and accompanying commentary in which you analyse your won linguistic choices. * You will carry out a language investigation into a language topic of your choice. | |

The following work requires a lot of reading, and some of the ideas might be challenging to understand on first reading. Remember to take regular breaks, go back to any of the tasks after some time away, and try your best. Your English Language teacher will go over the following work with you in lessons, early in Year 12.

# So, you want to study English Language?

Below is some advice and guidance from some key thinkers in English Language for those considering studying it at A Level:

## Becoming an A Level Language Student – a Quick Guide

## Examiner and university lecturer Dr Marcello Giovanelli tells students embarking on an A Level language course what to expect and how to make the most of the course.

If you're reading this then you may well have just started your A Level studies in English Language. Congratulations on choosing an exciting, modern and engaging A Level course! However, the transition from GCSE to A Level can be a demanding one, and so in this article, I'll share some key principles of A Level language study with you that will help you to bridge the gap and get the most from your studies. Together, these form a 'quick guide' to becoming an A Level English Language student.

1. Learning a Metalanguage and Avoiding Impressionism

Given that you may not have had to do much explicit language work at KS4, you will find that you need to acquire a new terminology to deal with the kinds of analyses that you will undertake at A Level. We call this type of language about language a metalanguage. For English Language, most of this revolves around what we term levels of language (discourse, grammar, semantics, lexis,phonology), or what are currently known as linguistic methods or frameworks in examination board specifications. As a beginning linguist, it's important to start using these terms confidently and accurately to ensure that all descriptive linguistic work (any analysis that identifies and explores language features) that you do is as precise and clear as is possible, and avoids merely making impressionistic and speculative claims that are not rooted in language analysis.

2. The Importance of Context

At A Level, engaging with context means moving beyond simple GCSE notions of audience and purpose. Now what's really important to remember is that by context we are referring to a range of factors both within and outside of the text, paying close attention to situations where a text is both written or spoken (the context of production), and where it is read or listened to (the context of reception).

3. Ideas about Language

Another key skill that you will develop as you progress through your studies will be your ability to read and engage with ideas about language study. This will move you beyond seeing yourself as someone who analyses language to someone who actively explores ideas and concepts that researchers and academics have grappled with. Whichever specification you are following for your own studies, being able to understand the various debates surrounding language topics, and integrating these into your own analyses of data is an important skill that you will need to master.

4. Read Around the Subject

Of course, one of the best ways to explore issues and ideas in language is to read as widely as you can around the subject. As a start, you might try David Crystal's The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language (Cambridge University Press) for a good reference book and overall guide to language topics, Louise Mullany and Peter Stockwell's Introducing English Language (Routledge) for an excellent, albeit quite advanced, guide to the study of language and linguistics. Language: A Student Handbook on Key Topics and Theories (ed. Dan Clayton, English and Media Centre) offers an excellent collection of essays by leading academics on A Level language topics. It's also a good idea to use the internet to keep up to date with news stories and the latest debates involving language. Whether it's schools banning students from using non-standard English, how the latest innovations in technology are affecting the ways that we use language, or what the latest research in child language learning is, there's always something to interest the language student. Regularly visiting the online pages of tabloid newspapers will lead to no end of stories to read and discuss in class.

To make things easier for yourself, you could subscribe to a blog which collects the

latest news for you such as Dan Clayton's peerless EngLangBlog <http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk>

5. Become a Data Collector

Another important part of becoming a student of language is learning how to become a researcher of language. In fact your career as a collector of language data begins the moment you start your course. The wonderful thing about language data, of course, is that it's everywhere: in the conversations we have with friends, the TV we watch, the books, magazines, social media pages, and tweets we read, the websites we browse, the computer games we play and so on. Make a point of collecting interesting examples of language you see, either in hard copy form or using the camera facility or a scanning app on your smartphone. Record conversations of both real (do ask for permission!) and represented (on the TV and radio) speech, practise transcriptions, start a scrapbook,

and share ideas with your fellow students via a blog. Get used to working with data and start applying learning in class to your own examples that you collect. You've got an exciting two years of study ahead of you!

Dr Marcello Giovanelli is a Lecturer in English in Education at the University of Nottingham.

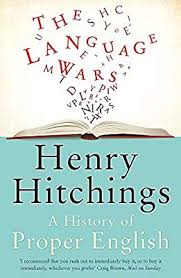
# Attitudes to Language

A key idea which underpins our study of language is the idea of attitudes to language. People’s attitudes to language can be categorised in different ways, but arguably the most important distinctions in language attitudes is between a **descriptive** attitude to language a **prescriptive** attitude, This is a crucial distinction which underpins our study of language and it is crucial to understand this distinction at the start of this course. The table below explains the difference between a **prescriptive** attitude and a **descriptive** attitude.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Prescriptivism | Descriptivism |
| This the practice of elevating one variety or manner of language use over another. It may imply some forms are incorrect, improper, and illogical, lack communicative effect, or are of low aesthetic value.  Prescriptivism may address such linguistic aspects as spelling, grammar, semantics, pronunciation, and syntax. It may also include judgments on socially proper and politically correct language use.  Linguistic prescriptivism may aim to establish a standard language, teach what a particular society perceives as a correct form, or advise on effective communication. Prescription might appear resistant to language change. | In the study of language, description or descriptive linguistics is the work of objectively analysing and describing how language is actually used (or how it was used in the past) by a group of people in a speech community.  All scholarly research in linguistics is descriptive; like all other sciences, its aim is to observe the linguistic world as it is, without the bias of preconceived ideas about how it ought to be.  Linguistic description is often contrasted with linguistic prescriptivism. |

As people studying language, we ought therefore to be descriptive in our attitude. That means we should not judge different forms of language, but we should examine them objectively. A statement such as “It is much better to use standard English than Geordie dialect” is problematic to a descriptivist, who might argue, why? In what context? Might there be some contests where Geordie dialect is “better”? And what do we mean by “better” in the first place?

However, it is sometimes difficult be a descriptivist, or to maintain a truly descriptivist outlook. This is because, as you will see, many common attitudes to language are very prescriptive. The Media typically adopt a very negative attitude to any form of language change, and imply that standards of language use are slipping. This can be seen very frequently in newspaper headlines about language change, as we will see.

Prescriptivism is nothing new. In fact you could argue that people have been complaining about language change for a long time. Many writers and commentators hark back to a “Golden Age” when Language was perfect, but when we look back in history we can see that people have always complained about change and a perceived slipping of standards. A good book to read about this issue is **The Language Wars by Henry Hitchings**. If you can get a copy of this it would be some excellent wider reading, but below is a review of the book which summarises the main points it makes. Read the article and answer the questions below:

# Review of The Language Wars by Henry Hitchings

Here linguist Dan Clayton reviews The Language Wars.

'Dig beneath the present,' says Henry Hitchings in his new book The Language Wars, 'and instead of

hitting something solid you open what appears to be a bottomless shaft into the past'. While most of

us are used to the modern debates about supposedly declining standards of literacy, texting ruining

our language and slang making us all speak like wannabe-gangstas with speech impediments, what

Henry Hitchings reveals in his excellent survey of arguments about 'proper' English is that these

debates , gripes and groans have been around for a very long time. In fact, he suggests that they've

been around ever since we've had a language.

Did you think that writing should of instead of should have (as in 'You should of phoned me!') was a

recent problem? They argued about it in the Seventeenth Century.

Is it it's or its? They were confused about it over a hundred years ago.

You was or you were? This was problematic even for the writers of grammar books in the Eighteenth

Century, who would tell their readers to do one thing and then do the precise opposite in their own

private letters.

Should we be worried about young people in Twenty First Century Britain not being literate by the

time they leave school? In Victorian times they were more worried about too many young people

learning how to read.

And so it goes on. Hitchings looks at arguments about what our language is, what different groups of

people think it should be and how we've arrived at a point now when English is pretty much a global

phenomenon, admittedly a global phenomenon (Greek) that has taken much of its vocabulary (Latin)

from other languages (French).

The Language Wars is a great read, not just for its balanced approach to the debate about what we

might see as 'proper' English, but also for its neat overviews of language topics covered at A level,

such as gender and talk, political correctness, attitudes to accents and the growth of global Englishes.

Article Written By: Dan Clayton is a Senior Examiner for AQA A English Language and a research

fellow at The Survey of English Usage at UCL.

# Questions:

1. What does Hitchings suggest about modern debates about declining standards of language?
2. Give some examples of language use which have been subject to controversy in the past?
3. What point is Hitchings making generally about attitudes to language?

# David Crystal

A key figure in English Language and Linguistics who you will come to be very familiar with is the writer and academic David Crystal.

David Crystal has written over 100 books about language. In the article below, he is interviewed on his attitude towards the future of English including the role of full stops. What has says might surprise you. Read the article and then answer the questions below.

# Period. Full Stop. Point. Whatever It’s Called, It’s Going Out of Style

By DAN BILEFSKYJUNE 9, 2016

“We are at a momentous moment in the history of the full stop,” said David Crystal, who has written more than 100 books on language

One of the oldest forms of punctuation may be dying

The period — the full-stop signal we all learn as children, whose use stretches back at least to the Middle Ages — is gradually being felled in the barrage of instant messaging that has become synonymous with the digital age

So says David Crystal, who has written more than 100 books on language and is a former master of original pronunciation at Shakespeare’s Globe theater in London — a man who understands the power of tradition in language

The conspicuous omission of the period in text messages and in instant messaging on social media, he says, is a product of the punctuation-free staccato sentences favoured by millennials — and increasingly their elders — a trend fuelled by the freewheeling style of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter

“We are at a momentous moment in the history of the full stop,” Professor Crystal, an honorary professor of linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, said in an interview after he expounded on his view recently at the Hay Festival in Wales

“In an instant message, it is pretty obvious a sentence has come to an end, and none will have a full stop,” he added “So why use it?”

In fact, the understated period — the punctuation equivalent of stagehands who dress in black to be less conspicuous — may have suddenly taken on meanings all its own

Increasingly, says Professor Crystal, whose books include “Making a Point: The Persnickety Story of English Punctuation,” the period is being deployed as a weapon to show irony, syntactic snark, insincerity, even aggression

If the love of your life just cancelled the candlelit, six-course, home-cooked dinner you have prepared, you are best advised to include a period when you respond “Fine.” to show annoyance

“Fine” or “Fine!,” in contrast, could denote acquiescence or blithe acceptance

“The period now has an emotional charge and has become an emoticon of sorts,” Professor Crystal said “In the 1990s the internet created an ethos of linguistic free love where breaking the rules was encouraged and punctuation was one of the ways this could be done”

Social media sites have only intensified that sense of liberation

Professor Crystal’s observations on the fate of the period are driven in part by frequent visits to high schools across Britain, where he analyzes students’ text messages

Researchers at Binghamton University in New York and Rutgers University in New Jersey have also recently noted the period’s new semantic force

They asked 126 undergraduate students to review 16 exchanges, some in text messages, some in handwritten notes, that had one-word affirmative responses (Okay, Sure, Yeah, Yup) Some had periods, while others did not

Those text message with periods were rated as less sincere, the study found, whereas it made no difference in the notes penned by hand

Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, noted that the 140-character limit imposed by Twitter and the reading of messages on a cellphone or hand-held device has repurposed the punctuation mark

“It is not necessary to use a period in a text message, so to make something explicit that is already implicit makes a point of it,” he said “It’s like when you say, ‘I am not going – period’ It’s a mark It can be aggressive It can be emphatic It can mean, ‘I have no more to say’

Can ardent fans of punctuation take heart in any part of the period’s decline? Perhaps.

The shunning of the period, Professor Crystal said, has paradoxically been accompanied by spasms of overpunctuation

“If someone texts, ‘Are you coming to the party?’ the response,” he noted, was increasingly, “Yes, fantastic!!!!!!!!!!!”

But, of course, that exuberance would never be tolerated in a classroom

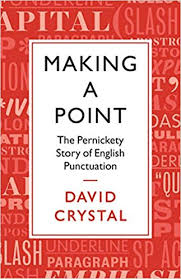
At the same time, he said he found that British teenagers were increasingly eschewing emoticons and abbreviations such as “LOL” (laughing out loud) or “ROTF” (rolling on the floor) in text messages because they had been adopted by their parents and were therefore considered “uncool”

Now all we need to know is, what’s next to go? The question mark

# Questions:

1. What does Crystal say is happening to the full stop?
2. Why is this happening?
3. In what way has the meaning of the full stop changed in recent years, according to Crystal?
4. What other changes in language has Crystal observed recently according to the article?

# Making a Point by David Crystal

Another of David Crystal’s more recent books is Making a Point: The Pernickety Story of English Punctuation. Read the article below in which Crystal talks about his book.

**Making a Point – The Story of English**

**Punctuation**

Professor David Crystal’s new book on punctuation takes a historical approach to a subject that is often hotly debated without drawing on this kind of knowledge. In this article, he gives a flavour of both the ‘stories’ and the arguments presented in the book.

Imagine this. You are a famous poet unsure of your punctuation, so you decide to write to the greatest scientist you know to ask him to correct the punctuation of a poetry book you’re preparing for press.

You’ve never met him. Moreover, you ask him to send on the corrected manuscript to the printer, without bothering to refer back to you. And he does it.

An unlikely scenario? Not so. This was William Wordsworth, preparing the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads. On 28 July 1800, at the suggestion of Coleridge, he wrote to the chemist Humphry Davy:

*You would greatly oblige me by looking over the enclosed poems, and correcting anything you find amiss in the punctuation, a business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept.*

Wordsworth wasn’t alone. Thomas Gray in a 1768 letter gives over eight pages of instructions to Foulis Press about how to print his poems, but adds:

*please to observe, that I am entirely unversed in the doctrine of stops, whoever therefore shall deign to correct them, will do me a friendly office.*

And Byron writes to John Murray in 1813 to ask:

*Do you know any body who can stop—I mean point—commas, and so forth? for I am, I fear, a sad hand at your punctuation.*

On the other hand, Ben Jonson was scrupulous about punctuation, and insisted on checking every mark for printing accuracy, getting very annoyed if a printer dared to change anything. Keats also took a keen interest in the way his publisher dealt with his punctuation. In an 1818 letter to John Taylor, he expresses his indebtedness for his suggestions:

*the comma should be at soberly, and in the other passage the comma should follow quiet...*

My favourite Jonsonian is Mark Twain. Here he is in 1889:

*Yesterday Mr Hall wrote that the printer’s proof-reader was improving my punctuation for me, & I telegraphed orders to have him shot without giving him time to pray.*

And in 1897:

*I give it up. These printers pay no attention to my punctuation, Nine-tenths of the labor &vexation put upon me by Messrs Spottiswoode & Co consists in annihilating their ignorant & purposeless punctuation & restoring my own. This latest batch, beginning with page 145 & running to page 192 starts out like all that went before it – with my punctuation ignored & their insanities substituted for it. I have read two pages of it – I can’t stand any more. If they will restore my punctuation themselves & then send the purified pages to me I will read it for errors of grammar & construction – that is enough to require of an author who writes as legible a hand as I do, & who knows more about punctuation in two minutes than any damned bastard of a proof-reader can learn in two centuries.*

Never a calm subject, punctuation.

The more idiosyncratic the writer’s punctuational style, the more editors and printers have taken it upon themselves to consistentise it. The way we read Jane Austen now is very little like the way she wrote. Likewise, Emily Dickinson. A 1970 edition prints this stanza following her original:

*Our share of night to bear –*

*Our share of morning –*

*Our blank in bliss to fill*

*Our blank in scorning –*

A 2000 edition edits it thus:

*Our share of night to bear,*

*Our share of morning,*

*Our blank in bliss to fill,*

*Our blank in scorning.*

They are worlds apart.

**Answering the Question Why?**

These are just some of the fascinating stories that I discovered when writing Making a Point. The story of English punctuation goes back over a thousand years – from a time when texts showed no punctuation at all, to the present-day attention to detail – and I was surprised to find that it had never been told in its entirety. A historical approach is essential, because it enables us to do something traditional accounts of punctuation of the Eats, Shoots and Leaves type never did: answer the question ‘why’. Why did Wordsworth have such a problem? Why do people get so incensed over apostrophes? One answer lies in early differences of opinion among writers, grammarians, elocutionists, publishers, and printers about the nature of punctuation, and who was responsible for it.

I explore that history in Making a Point. Another lies in the nature of the punctuation system itself. I think people feel they can get to grips with punctuation more readily than with other features of standard English, and so are more prepared to speak out about it. The standard is defined by four main criteria: grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation. In each case, writers of English have to conform to the rules that educated members of society have come to recognise over the past two hundred years or so. Failure to follow these rules is considered an error that needs to be corrected if the usage is to be deemed acceptable.

Of the four, spelling is the most demanding, because every word on a page has to be spelled correctly if our text is to avoid criticism, and there are tens of thousands of words that have to be spelled. We can never get away from spelling. By contrast, it’s easy to get away from usage issues to do with grammar and vocabulary. In grammar, there are dozens of points of usage that define the difference between standard and nonstandard – Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage lists most of the - but none of them turn up very often. We might read an entire chapter and never encounter a split infinitive or an instance of none is/are. Points of disputed usage in vocabulary, likewise, are sporadic: if you’re concerned about the difference between, say, disinterested and uninterested or decimate meaning other than a tenth, you might read a whole book and never encounter an instance.

Punctuation sits prominently between these two extremes. Like spelling, it is there on every page; yet like grammar and vocabulary, it is sporadic. Many lines of a text will have no punctuation marks at all, and some of the marks may never appear in what you’ve written. There’s not a single exclamation mark in this article, for instance.

**Is it So Simple?**

Correcting a perceived punctuation error seems like a simple task, therefore – and if everything was like potato’s it would be. But there are hidden depths to punctuation, thanks to those differences of opinion, and dangers lurking around corners – which of course is what makes the subject so intriguing. A few years ago, two Americans travelled all over the USA with marker pens correcting every typo they encountered. They added an apostrophe to a notice at the Grand Canyon Heritage Site, and later learned they had committed a federal offence of defacing a national monument. They were fined, received a year of probation, forbidden to enter all National Parks, and were banned from typo correcting. They were lucky. Another outcome would have been six months in jail.

Article Written By: David Crystal is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Bangor. TheDisappearing Dictionary and Making a Point: the Pernickety Story of English Punctuation were

published in 2015.

# Questions:

1. Give an example of a writer Crystal mentions with a prescriptive view on punctuation.
2. Why might readers be surprised at what Wordsworth, Thomas Gray and Byron said about punctuating their own work?
3. What does Crystal mean when he refers to attempts to “consistentise” punctuation?
4. Why does Crystal think that punctuation errors sometimes elicit dramatic and extreme responses?

# Extended answer

You have read a little about the work of Henry Hitchings and David Crystal. Both Crystal and Hitchings have descriptivist attitudes towards language. What evidence is there for their descriptivist views?

Explain your response in two to three paragraphs.

# Extension – Political Correctness as a form of Prescriptivism

Political correctness (PC) is a term used to describe language, ideas, policies, or behaviour seen as seeking to minimize offence to gender, racial, cultural, disabled, aged or other identity groups. Conversely, the term “politically incorrect” is used to refer to language or ideas that may cause offence. Typically political correctness is a movement associated with the political left, as it is seen to advocate social justice for typically marginalised groups. Other people however, have criticised as a movement, arguing that it is draconian and censorious. Research some examples of controversies to do with language and political correctness and collate your ideas in the form of a detailed mind map.