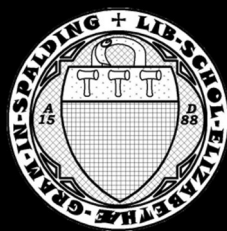


# A Guide to



# A level English Language

**Spalding Grammar School**



**English Department**



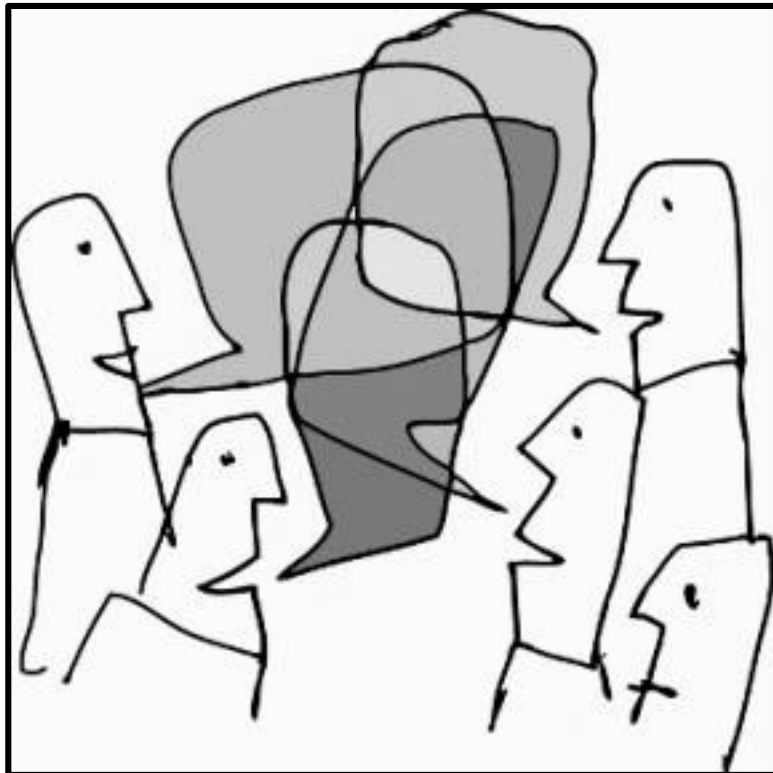


# A level English Language

Language, in its many forms, is central to human life. Think what our existence would be like if we could not speak, or hear, or read, or write. An understanding of language and how it operates is vital to what it is to be a person. It enables us to function in all manner of relationships and situations, and gives us the power to express our innermost thoughts and feelings.

You already know an awful lot about language – much of your learning about language was done in the first five years of your life! Now that you have chosen to study English Language in the Sixth Form, you will be able to look at language in greater depth.

At A level, English Language involves just about every aspect of human communication, from body language to text messaging, from a baby's first words to top-level business meetings. It appeals to students who are lively, inquiring and nosy – as a student of English Language, you have to be interested in people! It is certainly not a subject that can be left safely in the classroom at the end of a lesson. Success at A level depends very much on your willingness to extend your knowledge of whatever you're studying, exploring your own ideas and enthusiasms – but that's part of the pleasure. We hope you enjoy studying English Language at A level.



# What does the subject involve?

The course is made up of three units.

## Unit 1: Language, the Individual and Society

40% of A level

Exam: 2 hours 30 minutes

This part of the course covers two major aspects of language study.

The first of these is textual variety and representation. This will involve examining the ways in which texts work: how they build relationships with their readers, use the features of particular genres and represent the world around them. It will introduce you to methods of language analysis, including the different levels of language such as lexis, semantics, grammar and pragmatics and the key concepts of audience, purpose, genre and mode. You'll explore a wide range of texts, taken from both the past and the present, and learn how to compare texts as well as analysing them individually.

The second area you'll explore is children's language development. You'll learn about how children learn to talk and how their language develops from birth to the age of 11. You'll also learn about how children gain the key skills of reading and writing.

### Assessment

The exam consists of two sections.

**Section A: Text Variations and Representation** requires you to explore two texts (one contemporary and one older text) that are linked by a particular topic or theme.

There will be three questions. The first two will ask you to analyse how language is used in each individual text. The third question will ask you to compare the two texts

**Section B: Child Language Development** requires you to answer one question from a choice of two on children's language development from the age of 0 to 11.



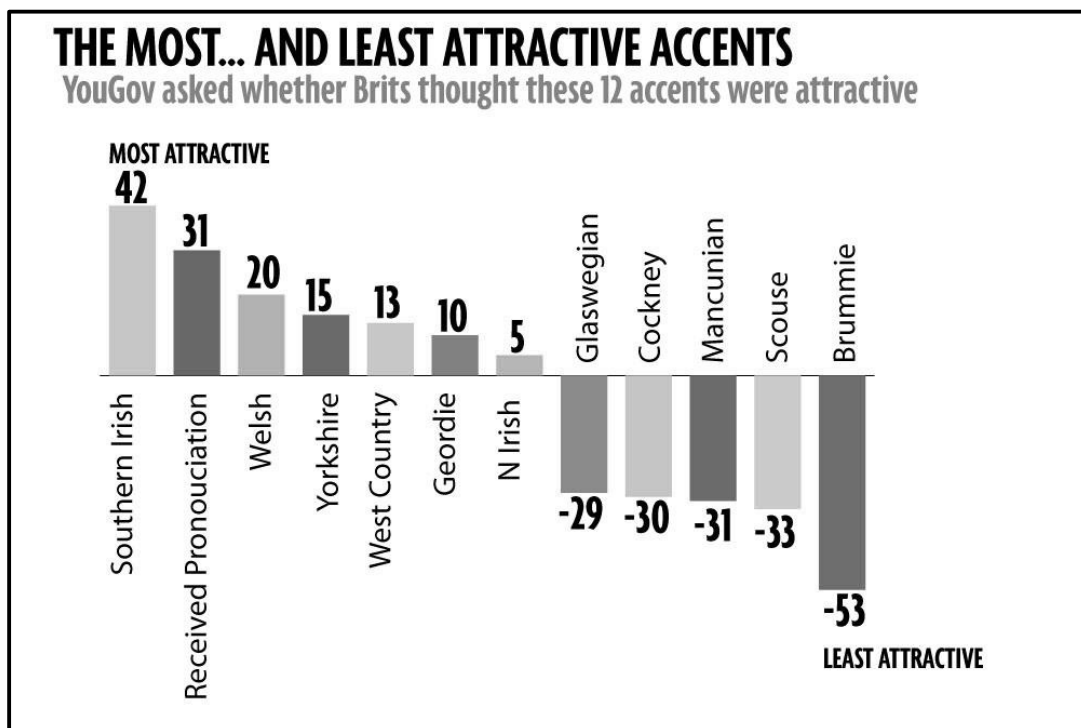
## Unit 2: Language Diversity and Change

40% of A level

Exam: 2 hours 30 minutes

The aim of this unit is to allow you to explore language diversity and change over time. You will study language in its wider social and geographical contexts, considering how our language is shaped by where we live and by the different social groups we belong to, including gender, occupation and social class. You will also explore the processes by which the English language has changed over time, from 1600 to the present day.

A further element of this unit involves looking at debates about language diversity and change – topics about which people often have extremely strong opinions.



*A YouGov poll showing opinions about British accents.*

*Why do you think people feel so strongly about different accents?*

### Assessment

The exam contains two sections.

**Section A: Language Diversity and Change** offers a choice of two essay questions, one on language diversity and one on language change. You will be required to answer one question.

**Section B: Language Discourses** is based on two texts about a topic linked to the study of diversity and change. You will analyse how the texts use language to present ideas, attitudes and opinions, and then do a directed writing task linked to the same topic and the ideas in the texts.

## Unit 3: Language in Action

20% of A level

Coursework: 3500 words total

This unit gives you the opportunity to carry out an independent piece of research on an area of language of your choice. It therefore enables you to pursue an interest in a particular field of linguistic study, such as an aspect of children's language use, the language of different occupations or pastimes, historical language change, or how different social groups are represented. You will also produce a piece of original writing with an accompanying commentary.

### Assessment

A language investigation (2000 words excluding data)

A piece of original writing linked to the power of storytelling, the power of persuasion or the power of information (750 words)

A commentary on your original writing (750 words)

These will be assessed in school by your English teachers and moderated by AQA.



1889.] COUNTY ADVERTISEMENTS. 27

ESTABLISHED 1840.

TRADE MARK  
G. B. & Co.  
G. B. & Co.  
TRADE MARK  
G. B. & Co.

**GEORGE BAILEY & Co.,**  
Mushroom Ketchup Manufacturers,  
FACTORY—  
**SPALDING, LINCOLNSHIRE.**

Having been Established upwards of Half a Century, we have every confidence in recommending our Genuine Mushroom Ketchup to Customers.

Wholesale Buyers, Druggists, Oilmen, &c., before purchasing elsewhere, should not fail to send for Samples, and test the quality. Carefully prepared from Mushrooms only, our Stock is continuously kept up in Hhds. and Half Hhds., duly numbered, from which Samples are drawn, and the Bulk can be dispatched without delay.

A Trial Order is respectfully solicited. Samples sent and Prices Quoted on Application.

**MUSHROOM PULP AND FRESH MUSHROOMS SUPPLIED.**

*An 1889 advertisement for George Bailey's Mushroom Ketchup. How does the language used in this advert differ from the language used in contemporary advertising?*

## How is the course organised?

You'll have two teachers, each of whom will be responsible for certain aspects of the course. They may approach the subject in very different ways, but you'll benefit from having your thinking extended in this manner. They'll expect you to draw widely on your own observations of language use in everyday life, making connections between what you learn in class and what you see and hear in the wider world. You should be prepared, from the very start of the course, to express your thoughts and offer contributions.

The style of your lessons will vary. Sometimes you'll be given very structured lessons, led by the teacher. At other times, you will be asked to take over – by giving a presentation (singly or in small groups), taking part in a debate, doing some display work, or even doing some multimedia work like creating a podcast or webpage. This will encourage you to be as active as possible, and to build your interpretations of literature in different ways. This will be a challenge, and it may be difficult at first – but you'll get much more from lessons if you join in!

## How will my work be assessed?

You will do a number of formally-assessed pieces each term. Usually, these will take the form of an essay: sometimes, they might be timed exam questions. In addition, your teachers will be assessing your work on an informal basis all the time – making judgements based on the contributions and ideas you put forward in class and your willingness to participate in lessons.

Your written work will be marked in accordance with a number of Assessment Objectives. These are set out by the exam board, and specify the skills involved in the study of English literature at A level. These Assessment Objectives are as follows:

### Assessment objectives

- AO1:** Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
- AO2:** Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.
- AO3:** Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.
- AO4:** Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.
- AO5:** Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

You will also be asked to assess your own work, and that of other students – this is an essential part of developing your own skills and understanding.

# Getting used to A level

There is a big gap between GCSE and A level, and some students take longer to bridge this gap than others. As well as coping with changes in the volume and difficulty of the work, you'll also find that lessons are different: the groups are smaller, and you'll be expected to take on much more responsibility for organising your workload. You may need time to adjust to this – but it's important that you take control, and don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed.

There are certain expectations that the English department will have of you. These are as follows:

1. Play an active role in your studies, contributing regularly to classroom discussions and participating fully in group work.
2. Use your Private Study periods, ghost lessons (one per fortnight) and homework time productively.
3. Equip yourself with an A4 ring binder, dividers and plastic wallets.
4. File any notes and handouts you are given in clear sections for each topic area.
5. Come to lessons with the correct equipment, including your folder, textbook and any relevant notes.
6. Attend lessons punctually.
7. Notify your English teacher in advance of any planned absence.
8. Catch up on any missed lesson work at the earliest opportunity.
9. Make use of the guidance your teachers give you and take responsibility for acting on feedback.
10. Don't be afraid to let us know if you're having any problems.

Many lessons are discussion-based, and you will be expected to join in. Don't worry about being 'wrong'! A level is a steep learning curve and mistakes are part of the learning process.

# Wider reading and listening

If you want to invest in any books to support your A level study, the most useful are those in the Cambridge Topics in English Language series, published to support the AQA specification. These are listed below:

Dan Clayton and Rob Drummond	<i>Language Diversity and World Englishes</i>
Dan Clayton	<i>Attitudes to Language</i>
Ian Cushing	<i>Text Analysis and Representation</i>
Ian Cushing	<i>Language Change</i>
Gary Ives	<i>Language and Power</i>
Rachel Rudman	<i>Language Development</i>
Felicity Titjen	<i>Language and Gender</i>

You also need to acquaint yourself with the following websites:

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/> - The website for Emag, the English and Media Centre's quarterly magazine aimed at A level students. Emag contains articles on a wide variety of English Language-related topics, written by A level teachers, examiners, researchers – and sometimes by A level students. To access it, you will need to go to the homepage, click on 'Sign In' at the top of the page and enter the school's login details. This will give you access to the current issue and to Emag's vast archive of past articles. Use the Search facility to look for articles on relevant topics.

<http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk/> - A fantastic blog dedicated to all things English Language, written by teacher and examiner Dan Clayton. Dan explores language-related issues in the news and links them to relevant bits of the A level course, showing how you can make connections between language in the wider world and what you're doing in class. He also has a Twitter feed: @EngLangBlog.

The Lexis podcast is dedicated to A level English Language and allows you to take a deeper dive into many of the topics we study on the course. It's also an excellent way of furthering your study outside lessons – you could listen to it on the bus, while walking to school, in the gym ... It can be accessed on Spotify at <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/lexispodcast>.

There are also a number of websites dedicated to all things language-related:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/boo6qtnz> - Michael Rosen's 'Word of Mouth' programme on Radio 4 offers accessible, thought-provoking discussions on topics that include child language development, slang, regional varieties, the way language is used in different contexts and language change. All past episodes are available on the BBC website.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/routesofenglish/index.shtml> - Melvyn Bragg's 'Routes of English' series was broadcast on Radio 4 in the early 2000s. It's still very useful for exploring the history of the English language (series 1) and regional varieties (series 3).

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/index.html> - The British Library's 'Sounds Familiar?' website – lots of information about regional varieties of English, with clips and sound files.

<http://www.dialectsarchive.com/> - The International Dialects of English Archive – a fantastic website for exploring regional and international varieties of English.

<http://www.btplc.com/BetterFuture/ConnectedSociety/LearningAndSkillsFreeResources/AllTalk/> - British Telecom's 'All Talk?' site – resources and activities to help you study spoken English.

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/> - The website of the National Literacy Trust – information and resources on children's language development. Brilliant on how adults can support the development of children's language skills and especially helpful if you're thinking of a career in primary teaching.

Other than this, any general reading you can do will be valuable. Newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, fiction and non-fiction will all help to broaden your experience of language as well as providing some enjoyable reading.

More subject-specific reading includes:

Bill Bryson	<i>Mother Tongue</i>
Deborah Cameron	<i>The Myth of Mars and Venus</i>
Dan Clayton and Ron Carter	<i>Language: A Student Handbook on Key Topics and Theories</i>
Ben and David Crystal	<i>You Say Potato: The Story of English Accents</i>
David Crystal	<i>The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language</i>
	<i>How Language Works</i>
	<i>The Fight for English</i>
	<i>Txting: The Gr8 Db8</i>
Rob Drummond	<i>You're All Talk</i>
Lynne Truss	<i>Eats, Shoots and Leaves</i>

In addition, remember that the study of the English language also involves spoken language. Get into the habit of reflecting on the way people speak – how they express themselves in different situations, and the accents, dialects and social codes they use.

## **And finally ...**

Your two years of studying A level English Language will give you the chance to explore, reflect on and challenge something that is at the heart of all our lives. The English language is brilliantly varied and rich, and your study of it may take you in directions you hadn't expected. If there's anything you're not sure about, we're here to help – just ask!

Good luck!

The English Department