A level ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Component 1 Section B

Language Issues

Tackling the ‘Language Issues’ essay

The following advice is not a checklist and it is not definitive. Instead, it offers some suggestions about how you might approach the essay in A level English Language Component 1 Section B.

Component 1 Section B Language Issues Essay

1 hour	Language Issues essay	AO1 AO2 AO3	60 marks

Getting started: the question

- you must choose **one** question
- read through Question 2, Question 3, and Question 4 looking **carefully** at the stimulus material and the topic area covered
- **choose the question which you think you can do best**
- underline the key **contextual** or **background** information
- underline the **focus** of the question
- underline any indication of the **mode(s)** you should cover in your response.

First read-through: unpicking the stimulus material

As you read, you need to think about:

- the **context** of the stimulus material (e.g. transcript, text book, newspaper article, website, everyday usage etc.) and its significance (e.g. public/private, formal/informal etc.)
- the **function** of the discourse e.g. create social bond, provide information, explain, interpret, entertain, persuade, argue etc.
- the **participants** in any spoken discourse, and the writers of any written discourse e.g. age, gender, social status, relationship, expert/amateur, professional/members of the public etc.
- the relationship with the **target audience** e.g. direct/indirect, familiar/formal/ somewhere in-between/changing, distant/immediate, primary/secondary
- any **distinctive features** of the genre e.g. turn-taking, prosodic features (spoken); evaluative language (advertisement); persuasive language (political speech) etc.

Close reading: annotating the stimulus material

Re-read the stimulus material. Underline important features and jot notes in the margin. This will help you to find examples quickly when you write your essay. Look for:

- key concepts/issues linked to 'Standard/Non-standard English', 'language and power', 'language and situation', or 'language acquisition'
- information which will help you to argue your case
- examples of language in use that you could use to support your argument
- distinctive points of view about language use
- key features of the genre (where relevant).

Adding your own knowledge: deciding what's relevant

This is where you can bring in the wider knowledge you have gained from your study of language. It will help you to develop the information in the stimulus material. It is worth jotting down any ideas you have so that you can work out the best way to develop your argument. Think about:

- other relevant information about the specified topic
- appropriate theorists, linguists, commentators
- related language use in other contexts (including wider examples).

Answering the question: fitting the pieces together

Remember that you have 1 hour to complete Section B, so always spend a little time thinking about how you are going to approach the essay. Use an appropriate, formal style and try to check that your writing is technically accurate.

1. PLANNING

- your opening paragraph(s) will probably focus on the **stimulus material**
- briefly jot down the other **main areas** you wish to cover—this may include other information about the topic, other examples, references to other contexts/related language use
- think about **timing**—you don't need to write equal amounts on each area you choose, but you should avoid spending too long on one area because it will make your response less balanced.

2. STYLE

- make sure there is a **logical progression** from one paragraph to the next
- **develop your ideas** to avoid list-like sequences of very short paragraphs
- use clear **topic sentences** that relate directly to the subject of the question to show the focus of each paragraph
- avoid **generalisations** e.g. 'A lot of people if not the majority would say …'
- avoid **judgements** about the 'intelligence' of language users (particularly re. non-standard forms)—social status/age/level of education can be more subtle ways of distinguishing between different kinds of language use
- avoid **prescriptive** language e.g. 'mistakes', 'incorrect usage, 'errors', 'wrong' etc.
- write in a **formal, academic** style and try to be **technically accurate**.

3. DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT

- demonstrate your **engagement** with the stimulus material by referencing specific details
- analyse **examples** from the stimulus material as an opportunity to demonstrate your linguistic knowledge
- cover a range of **contexts** that help you to explore the focus of the question e.g. different language users, different language purposes, different locations/occasions etc.
- provide **examples** to support each point you make—these may be from the stimulus material, or from your wider knowledge
- use appropriate **terminology** in your analysis of the examples
- give brief contextual information about **specific people** cited such as their role and/or period (e.g. David Crystal, a PDE linguist; Robert Lowth, a Modern English grammarian; the journalist Lindsay Johns)
- consider **points of view** in context—the context will influence how different commentators respond to language use
- where necessary, distinguish between **your personal point of view** and the viewpoints of others..

4. SUMMING UP

- write a **conclusion**—avoid repeating points from your essay and think about key areas that you haven't yet addressed e.g. the importance of pragmatics, a final interesting example of language use etc.

Assessment objectives: hitting the targets

You need to make sure that you cover all the areas listed below somewhere in your response.

AO1 20 marks

- analyse the **stimulus material** and **wider examples** of language use
- use a range of **linguistic terminology** to describe and interpret examples
- engage with the **topic**, analysing and interpreting key features
- use an appropriate formal **style**—express your ideas logically, clearly and accurately

AO2 20 marks

- demonstrate knowledge of the **topic** or **focus** of the question
- demonstrate knowledge of a range of **language concepts** and relevant **theorists**
- consider relevant language **issues** e.g. appropriateness/acceptability, role of expert, social status, occasion, gender etc.
- provide relevant **examples** (from the stimulus material or from your wider knowledge) to support each point made

AO3 20 marks

- demonstrate an understanding of how **context** shapes language use and points of view about language
- interpret examples and show how **meaning** is created
- use **appropriate terminology** to explore the effect of key language features
- consider the effectiveness of communication.