

Higher (N6) English Close Reading Advice



Understanding Questions

These questions ask you to:

- summarise ideas
- identify points
- find arguments
- the context question (identify meanings)
- find links

Questions that ask you to summarise ideas, identify points, and find arguments.

Step 1: Look at how many points the question is worth. This should help you figure out how many pieces of information to include in your answer.

Step 2: Pay attention to the line reference, only take your answer from the lines you are directed to.

Step 3: Carefully read the lines given in the question then highlight or underline or bracket off the appropriate number of points.

Step 4: Make sure that you use your **own words** unless the question specifically tells you to 'refer closely' or use 'detailed reference to the passage'.

The context question

Step 1: Give the definition of the word or expression.

Step 2: Carefully read the relevant lines and highlight, underline or bracket off the key information.

Step 3: Quote and explain how, the key words helped you to arrive at your understanding.

The link question

Step 1: Quote the words from the sentence which refer back to the previous paragraph.

Step 2: Explain the connection. Do these words continue the point or do they change the direction of the argument? Explain how by referring to the writer's ideas.

Step 3: Quote the words from the sentence which link to the ideas which follow in the remainder of the paragraph and perhaps beyond.

Step 4: Explain the connection. Do these words continue the point or do they change the direction of the argument? Explain how by referring to the writer's ideas.



Analysis Questions

Analysing Word Choice

Step 1: Identify a relevant word or expression. Underline, highlight or bracket it off.

Step 2: Quote it.

Step 3: Write down the connotations. Think about the connotations of the word. What ideas do you think of when you see this word? For example, 'comfortable' has connotations of warmth, security, happiness... Or 'swaggered' has connotations of confidence, casual demeanour ...

Step 4: Link your answer to what the question asks.



Analysing Imagery

Step 1: Identify the image you will focus on. This will be a metaphor, a simile or sometimes personification. Underline, highlight or bracket it off.

Step 2: Quote the example of imagery.

Step 3: Say what two things are being compared

Step 4: Explain the *literal* meaning of the image. What are its usual characteristics, features, traits, properties?

Step 5: Explain the *figurative* meaning of the image. How are these characteristics, features, traits, properties applied in the chosen example?

Step 6: Link back to the question using the key words.

For example, from the 2004 Close Reading paper Paranoid Parents:

How does the writer's use of imagery convey her attitude towards some modern parenting?
(2)

'Children caged like battery hens'. Overly protected children are being compared to factory bred hens which are given very little freedom to exist naturally. So this suggests that children of so called paranoid parents are not being allowed the freedom to thrive naturally or interact freely with their friends but instead are restricted in their movements and social interactions by their parents. This clearly shows that the writer's attitude is critical of such parenting.

Analysing sentence structure

Step 1: Identify a relevant feature of sentence structure. It could be, for example, length, type, word order, repetition, use of conjunctions, punctuation, or listing. Underline, highlight or bracket it off.

Step 2: Quote or refer to your chosen example.

Step 3: Comment on its effect or impact – you **MUST** explain the reason why the writer has used this feature of sentence structure.

Step 4: Link back to the question.

Analysing the structure of the passage (sequencing of ideas, line of thought, development of argument).

Step 1: Identify a relevant feature of structure. It could be single sentence paragraphs, introduction and conclusion being linked, contrast in ideas, building ideas to a climax, balancing of one viewpoint with another... Look at the main point being made in each paragraph- topic sentences are a clue.

Step 2: Refer to your chosen example.

Step 3: Explain its effect.

Step 4: Link back to the question.



Analysing tone

When the tone is identified within the question...

Step 1: Identify the word(s) and phrase(s) that are key to creating the tone. Underline, highlight or bracket it (them) off.

Step 2: Quote it (them).

Step 3: Follow appropriate steps for word choice, imagery or sentence structure, explaining how the feature contributes to the tone.

Step 4: Link back to the question.

When the tone is not identified within the question...

Step 1: Identify the piece of the passage which highlights the tone. Underline, highlight or bracket it (them) off.

Step 2: State what the tone is. Remember 'tone' is the underlying feeling or emotion suggested by the writer. You need to use words that are related to emotions when specifying the tone. E.g. angry, hostile, critical, sarcastic, bitter, disapproving or admiring, humorous, nostalgic, tongue-in-cheek...

Step 3: Quote the relevant word(s) or phrase(s) which creates the tone.

Step 4: Explain how the connotations or the image or the impact of the structure allow you to understand the tone of the section.

Remember: Tone relates to *how* something is being said.

Think about the tone of voice that the writer may be using if they were to read it aloud. Look out for the word choice used by the writer to convey their attitude.

You must establish the writer's purpose- is it to shock? To entertain? To persuade?

Examples of tone: humorous, light-hearted, funny, amusing, sad, ironic, sarcastic, persuasive, argumentative, colloquial, nostalgic, sermonising, frustrated, anger, etc.

For example: *Comment on the tone of this paragraph.*

“Naked and starving children roamed the cemeteries of St. Petersburg at the turn of the century, begging a pittance from mourners. But now it's not just the children. Row upon row of wasted human beings shamble through St. Petersburg. Only when the bodies of the dead start stinking up the slums do the authorities take action.”

Sample Answer:

“The tone of this paragraph is one of anger and frustration. The writer feels this way about what is happening in his country. The word choice highlights the plight of the homeless, making them sound pitiful, using words and phrases such as: “naked” which implies exposed and vulnerable; “starving”, which is extreme hunger; “begging a pittance” suggests desperation and “wasted human beings” implies that there is no point in them existing; they are half-dead already.



Evaluation questions

These questions ask you to identify and explain features of language. You could be asked to analyse any feature of language, however, the process is still the same. You must:

- Identify
- Quote
- Explain

Evaluating a technique

Step 1: Identify the technique you will focus on. This could be a metaphor, a simile, personification or an example of word choice.

Step 2: Quote your chosen example.

Step 3: Explain the example (Just like in an analysis question).

Step 4: Make your judgement. Follow the wording of the question. (Effective, successful...)

Evaluating sentence structure

Step 1: Identify a relevant feature of sentence structure. It could be length, type, word order, repetition, use of conjunctions, punctuation, or listing. Underline, highlight or bracket it off.

Step 2: Quote or refer to your chosen example.

Step 3: Explain its effect.

Step 4: Make your judgement. Follow the wording of the question. (Effective, successful...)



The Final Question

The final question is usually worth five marks and asks you to **compare** the two passages. **'Compare'** means that you have to explain the **similarities and differences** between the two passages.

You will be asked to **compare the ideas**, the points that the writer has made, the opinions and viewpoints given within the passage.

Step 1: Pay close attention to the wording of the question. Underline or highlight the key components of the question. Be sure you **understand** what the question is asking of you before you begin your answer.

Step 2: Quote one of the chosen examples from the first passage of your choice and follow the process for analysing that feature.

Step 3: Quote one of the chosen examples from the second passage you've chosen to look at. Again follow the process for analysing that feature.

Step 4: Compare the similarities or differences from the two quotations you have just used.

Step 5: Repeat the above steps two or three times more, depending on how confident you are in the quality of your analysis.

Step 6: If the question asks for an evaluative comment, make sure you clearly state your preferred passage, using the wording of the question. For example: which passage did you find more enjoyable, clearer, interesting etc.