Course Companion

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Language A: Language and Literature · HL

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

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Paper 1 · analysing non-literary texts

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Language A: Language and Literature · HL

Analysing non-literary texts (Paper 1)

IB Diploma Programme English A: Language and Literature HL (first assessment 2021). The course is organised in three **areas of exploration**: *readers, writers and texts*, *time and space*, and *intertextuality: connecting texts*. This topic prepares Paper 1, the **guided textual analysis** of **non-literary texts**: advertisements, speeches, opinion columns, infographics, cartoons, web pages and many more. HL students get two unseen texts and write an analysis of each (2 hours 15 minutes, 40 marks). SL students choose one of the two (1 hour 15 minutes, 20 marks). Each text comes with a **guiding question**, such as "How does the writer use visual and verbal features to persuade the reader?"

In 2013 Chinese students started an online campaign called the **Clean Plate campaign**, against food waste in restaurants. Posters showed an empty plate and a short slogan, and restaurants were asked to offer half portions and take-away boxes. A few words and one picture made millions of people think again about what they left on the plate. Paper 1 asks you to explain *how* texts like that work.

Must-know for Paper 1:

Area	Key content
context	text type, audience, purpose, sender, place and time
language	diction, register, sentence types, rhetorical devices
visuals	layout, colour, typography, image, gaze, salience
structure	order, headings, contrast, the movement of the text
writing	a thesis that answers the guiding question; analysis paragraphs; a conclusion

First questions: who, why, where

Before you look at single words, answer five questions:

Question	What it means	Example: the poster below
text type	what kind of text it is	a public-information poster
audience	who it is for	students at one school
purpose	what it wants to do: inform, persuade, entertain	persuade students to refill bottles
sender	who made it, and with what authority	the student council
context	where and when it appears	on a corridor wall, read while walking

Register is how formal or informal the language is. A government report uses a formal register; a poster for teenagers usually uses an informal one, with short sentences and the word "you".

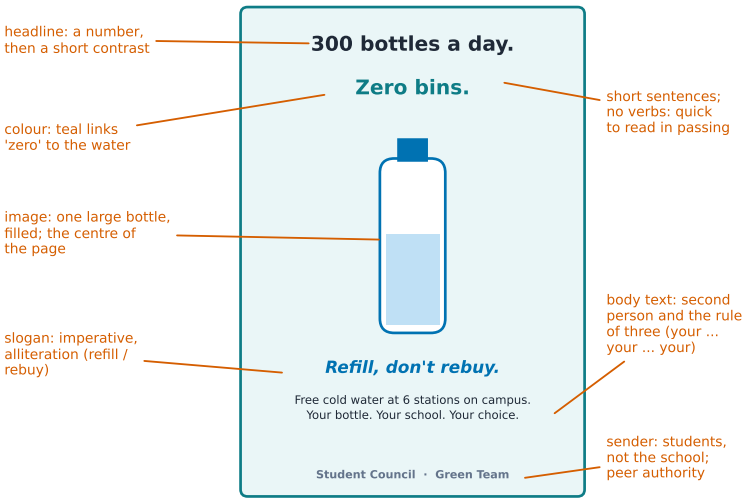
Language features

Feature	What it is	Typical effect
diction	the choice of words	"slaughter" and "kill" give very different feelings
direct address	speaking to the reader as "you"	makes the message personal
imperative	a command: "Refill."	asks for action now
rhetorical question	a question with no expected answer	makes the reader think and agree
rule of three	three parallel items	sounds complete and memorable
statistics	numbers	look objective and give authority
emotive language	words that cause strong feelings	pushes the reader to care
alliteration	repeated first sounds	makes a slogan easy to remember
metaphor	describing one thing as another	creates a picture in the reader's mind
hyperbole	deliberate exaggeration	adds force or humour

Visual features

Many Paper 1 texts are **multimodal** : they combine words and images. Analyse the visual choices as carefully as the words:

- **Layout** : what is at the top, in the centre, or large? The most noticeable element has **salience** .
- **Colour** : colours link ideas (green with nature, red with danger) and connect parts of the page.
- **Typography** : bold, large or italic type makes some words louder.
- **Images**: who or what is shown, from which angle? A person looking at the viewer makes a "demand"; a person looking away is "offered" for us to look at.



An annotated poster: each label names a feature and hints at its effect

Writing the analysis

Paper 1 is marked on four criteria, equal in weight:

Criterion	It asks
A: understanding and interpretation	Do you understand the text and its meaning, with good evidence?
B: analysis and evaluation	Do you explain *how* the features create meaning and effects?
C: focus and organisation	Is the answer clear, focused and well structured?
D: language	Is your English clear, accurate and suitably formal?

Use this structure:

1. **Introduction**: text type, audience and purpose, then a **thesis** that answers the guiding question in one sentence.
2. **Body paragraphs** (three or four): each has a point, a short quotation or a precise visual detail as evidence, the name of the feature, and an explanation of its effect on the reader.
3. **Conclusion**: return to the thesis and say how the features work together.

Do not "feature spot": naming alliteration earns little unless you explain what it does for this text and this audience.

Worked paragraph (the poster above; guiding question: *How does the poster persuade students to change their behaviour?*).

> The poster opens with a statistic, "300 bottles a day.", followed by the contrast "Zero bins." The number makes the problem concrete and slightly shocking, while the two short, verbless sentences can be read in a second by a student walking past. The teal colour of "Zero bins." matches the water in the bottle, so the solution is visually linked to the goal before the reader has read the slogan. The imperative "Refill, don't rebuy." then turns the problem into a simple action, and its alliteration makes it easy to remember. Because the sender is the student council, not the school, the message feels like advice from peers rather than a rule.

Practice

Read this original opinion column, written for a school magazine.

> **Ten minutes of nothing**
>
> When did you last sit for ten minutes without a screen? Not on the bus, not in the lunch queue, not in bed at midnight. We check our phones dozens of times a day. We call it "staying connected". But connected to what? This week, try an experiment: ten minutes, every evening, of nothing at all. No music, no messages, no scrolling. You may feel bored. Good. Boredom is the waiting room of every new idea.

Guiding question: How does the writer try to change the reader's habits?

Model plan.

1. Thesis: the writer uses direct questions, a shared "we" and a final metaphor to make a small, possible change feel worth trying.
2. The opening rhetorical question and the list of three places ("not on the bus, not in the lunch queue, not in bed") make readers check their own day.
3. "We" and "dozens of times a day" include the writer in the problem, so the column sounds like a friend, not a teacher.
4. The imperative "try an experiment" and the exact "ten minutes" make the action small and specific.
5. The one-word sentence "Good." surprises the reader, and the metaphor "the waiting room of every new idea" changes boredom from a problem into an opportunity.

Checklist

- The three areas of exploration; Paper 1 at HL (two texts, 40 marks) and SL (one text, 20 marks); the guiding question.
- Text type, audience, purpose, sender, context and register.
- Ten language features and their typical effects.
- Visual features: layout and salience, colour, typography, images and gaze.
- The four criteria; thesis, analysis paragraphs and conclusion; no feature spotting.

- A worked paragraph on the poster and a model plan for the column.

Paper 2 · comparing literary works

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Language A: Language and Literature · HL

Comparing literary works (Paper 2)

IB Diploma Programme English A: Language and Literature HL (first assessment 2021). This topic prepares Paper 2, the **comparative essay** on literature, which SL and HL students both sit (1 hour 45 minutes, 30 marks). You get four general questions and answer one, comparing two **literary works** you have studied in class. The questions are about ideas such as power, identity, conflict or the role of setting, so they fit many works. You may not use a work you already used for your individual oral or HL essay. This topic also covers the area of exploration *time and space*: how the **context** of a work shapes its meaning.

In 1879 Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* ended with a married woman leaving her husband and children, and closing the door behind her. Audiences were shocked. In Germany, the leading actress refused to play that ending, and Ibsen wrote a different one in which Nora stays. Fifteen years later, in 1894, Kate Chopin's short story "The Story of an Hour" showed a wife's secret joy at hearing that her husband was dead. Two writers, two countries, two forms, one question: what did marriage cost women? That is a Paper 2 comparison.

Must-know for Paper 2:

Area	Key content
format	1 hour 45 minutes; one of four questions; two works; 30 marks
literary features	narrative voice, characterisation, setting, structure, symbol, irony, dialogue, stage directions
context	the time and place a work was written, and the time and place it is read
essay	point-by-point comparison; a thesis; quotations; a judgement
criteria	A and B (10 marks each), C and D (5 marks each)

Literary features to compare

Each **literary form** has its own tools:

Form	Features to analyse
prose fiction	**narrative voice** (first or third person), **point of view**, setting, time, dialogue
drama	**stage directions**, dialogue, entrances and exits, props, dramatic irony
poetry	**imagery**, rhythm, rhyme, line breaks, stanza form, the speaker

All forms use **characterisation** (how a character is presented), **symbol** (an object that stands for an idea), **structure** (the order and shape of the work) and **irony** (a gap between what is said or expected and what is true).

Context: time and space

The **context of production** is when and where a work was written; the **context of reception** is when and where it is read. In the world of the play, a wife could not borrow money without her husband's agreement, so Nora borrows money secretly, by forging her father's signature, to save her husband's life. A modern reader may see her as brave; many readers in 1879 saw her as a criminal and a bad mother. The same text can mean different things in different contexts.

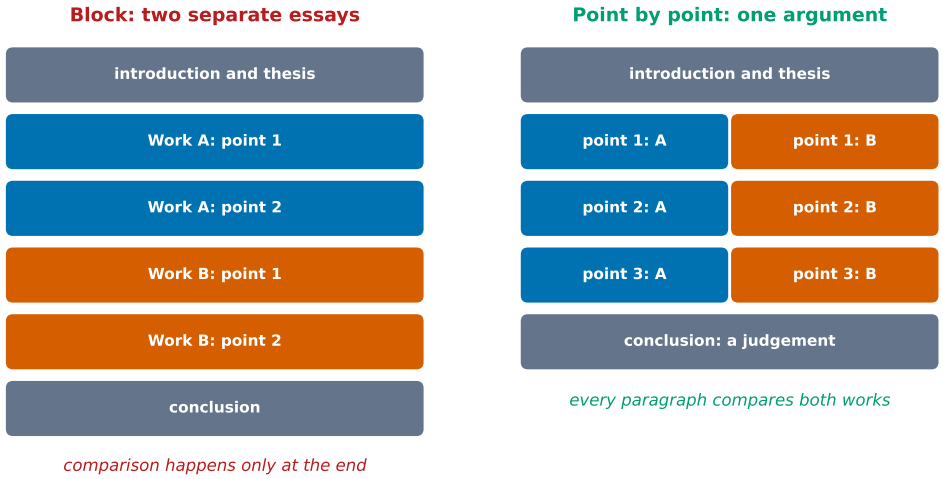
Two works, one question

Question: *"Discuss how two works you have studied present the limits placed on a character's freedom."*

	***A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 1879)**	**"The Story of an Hour" (Chopin, 1894)**
form	play in three acts	very short story, third-person narrator
main character	Nora Helmer	Louise Mallard
limits	her husband treats her as a child: "my little lark", "my little squirrel"	a "heart trouble" that makes others protect her
key moment	Nora's decision to leave: "I must try and become one" (a reasonable human being)	alone in her room: "Free! Body and soul free!"
symbol	the Christmas tree, "stripped of its ornaments" at the start of Act II	the "open window" and the "patches of blue sky"
ending	the door slams; Nora is free but alone	her husband returns alive and she dies "of the joy that kills"

Thesis: Both works show marriage as a cage that a woman escapes only by breaking the rules of her time, but Ibsen lets Nora walk out, while Chopin, writing in a very short form, allows Louise freedom only inside her own mind and for one hour.

Structuring the essay



A point-by-point structure keeps the comparison in every paragraph

Write **point by point**: each body paragraph compares both works on one idea. Use linking words: *similarly*, *whereas*, *in contrast*, *both*, *while*.

Worked paragraph.

> Both writers use a symbol to show the change in their heroine's freedom. In *A Doll's House*, the stage directions at the start of Act II describe the Christmas tree "stripped of its ornaments", with "burnt-down candle-ends". The tree, the centre of a happy family scene in Act I, now shows Nora's position: the pretty decorations of her marriage are falling away as Krogstad's threat comes closer. Chopin, in contrast, uses an open window looking onto "patches of blue sky". Where Ibsen's symbol shows something being lost, Chopin's shows something being found: the world outside the window becomes the free life Louise suddenly imagines. The difference reflects the forms: a play must show change on stage, so Ibsen uses a physical object that the audience sees decay, while Chopin's narrator can take us inside Louise's mind.

The paragraph names a feature in both works, quotes briefly, explains the effect, and links the difference to form, which is what criterion B rewards.

The criteria

Criterion	Marks	It asks
A: knowledge, understanding and interpretation	10	Do you know both works well and interpret them in answer to the question?
B: analysis and evaluation	10	Do you analyse the writers' choices and compare their effects?
C: focus and organisation	5	Is the comparison clear and balanced?
D: language	5	Is your English clear, accurate and suitably formal?

Preparing: for each work you study, learn 10 to 15 short quotations, and group them by idea (power, identity, gender, family, freedom). Then any question will find you ready.

Checklist

- Paper 2: 1 hour 45 minutes, one of four questions, two literary works, 30 marks; not the works used in the IO or HL essay.
- Features of prose, drama and poetry; characterisation, symbol, structure and irony.
- Context of production and context of reception (Nora in 1879 and today).
- The Ibsen–Chopin comparison: thesis, comparison table and worked paragraph.
- Point-by-point structure with linking words; the four criteria.

The individual oral · a global issue in two texts

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Language A: Language and Literature · HL

The individual oral

IB Diploma Programme English A: Language and Literature HL (first assessment 2021). The **individual oral** (IO) is the internal assessment that SL and HL students both do. You speak for 10 minutes about a **global issue**, using an extract from one literary work and an extract from one non-literary **body of work**, and then answer your teacher's questions for 5 minutes. It is marked out of 40 and is worth 30% at SL and 20% at HL. This topic also covers the area of exploration *intertextuality: connecting texts*: how two very different texts can speak about the same issue.

In April 2016 a skincare company released a four-minute film in China called *Marriage Market Takeover*. It showed women in their late twenties whose parents had posted their details at the "marriage market" in Shanghai's People's Park. The women answered with their own messages: they were happy and did not want to be called "leftover women". The film was watched millions of times. A short story written in America in 1894 asks a similar question about women, marriage and freedom. An IO puts texts like these side by side.

Must-know for the IO:

Area	Key content
format	10 minutes of speaking, then 5 minutes of questions; 40 marks
texts	one literary extract (up to 40 lines) and one non-literary text from a body of work
global issue	one of five fields of inquiry; significant, transnational, felt in everyday life
structure	introduction, literary extract, non-literary text, comparison and conclusion
criteria	four criteria of 10 marks each

Choosing a global issue

A global issue has three features: it is **significant** (it matters to many people), **transnational** (it exists in more than one country) and its effects are felt in everyday life. It must belong to one of five **fields of inquiry**:

Field of inquiry	Example of a global issue
culture, identity and community	family pressure on young people's life choices
beliefs, values and education	how exam pressure shapes students' sense of worth
politics, power and justice	who is allowed to speak in public debate
art, creativity and the imagination	how censorship limits what artists create
science, technology and the environment	how advertising makes consumption look natural

A topic ("marriage") is not yet an issue. An issue is a problem or tension: "the social pressure on women to marry by a certain age".

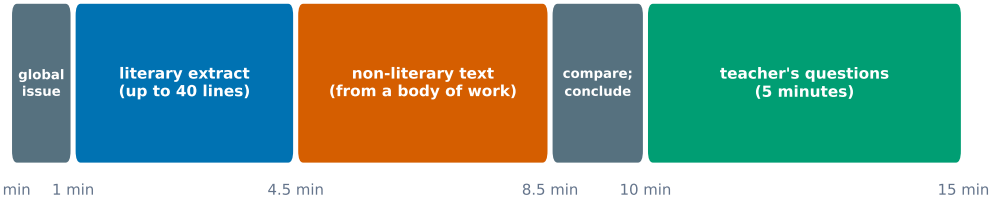
The two texts

The **literary extract** comes from a work you studied in class and is no more than 40 lines. The non-literary text comes from a **body of work** you studied: several texts by the same author or in the same campaign, such as a series of advertisements or an artist's set of cartoons. You choose a short text or extract from that body of work.

Example pairing for the issue *the social pressure on women to marry*:

	Literary	Non-literary
text	Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (1894): Louise alone in her room	*Marriage Market Takeover* (2016), part of a campaign of short films
how it presents the issue	marriage as an invisible weight; freedom imagined only in private	social pressure made visible; the women's own voices answer it
key features	the open window, "Free! Body and soul free!", irony of the ending	the crowded park, the parents' adverts, close-ups, the women's letters

Structuring the 10 minutes



Plan the 10 minutes, then expect 5 minutes of questions

1. **Introduction** (about 1 minute): name the global issue and the two texts, and give your main argument.
2. **Literary extract** (about 3½ minutes): analyse three or four features, each with a short quotation, and link each back to the issue.
3. **Non-literary text** (about 4 minutes): the same, using its own features: images, camera, layout, voice-over, captions.
4. **Comparison and conclusion** (about 1½ minutes): how the two texts present the issue differently, and why, given their forms and contexts.

You may bring the two extracts (clean copies) and up to 10 bullet points of notes. You must not read a script.

Worked opening.

> Today I will discuss the social pressure on women to marry, an issue from the field of culture, identity and community. I will look at an extract from Kate Chopin's 1894 story "The Story of an Hour" and a short film from a 2016 advertising campaign, *Marriage Market Takeover*. My argument is that both texts show this pressure as something placed on women by others, but while Chopin can only imagine escape inside one woman's mind, the film lets women answer the pressure in public.

The criteria

Criterion	Marks	It asks
A: knowledge, understanding and interpretation	10	Do you understand both texts and connect them to the global issue?
B: analysis and evaluation	10	Do you analyse how the authors' choices present the issue?
C: focus and organisation	10	Is the oral balanced between the two texts and well structured?
D: language	10	Is your spoken English clear, accurate and suitably formal?

Common mistakes: spending eight minutes on one text; describing the issue in general without analysing the texts; choosing a non-literary text that is not part of a body of work you studied.

Checklist

- The IO format: 10 + 5 minutes, 40 marks, 30% SL and 20% HL.
- A global issue: significant, transnational, felt in everyday life; the five fields of inquiry; topic versus issue.
- The literary extract (40 lines) and the non-literary text from a body of work.
- The four-part structure and a worked opening; notes, not a script.
- The four criteria and the common mistakes.

The HL essay · a line of inquiry

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Language A: Language and Literature · HL

The HL essay

IB Diploma Programme English A: Language and Literature HL (first assessment 2021). The **HL essay** is a formal essay of 1,200 to 1,500 words on one literary work or one non-literary body of work studied in class. It is written during the course, marked by the IB out of 20, and worth 20% of the final grade. Its core is a **line of inquiry**: a focused question that you answer through close analysis. You may not use a work you use in your individual oral or in Paper 2.

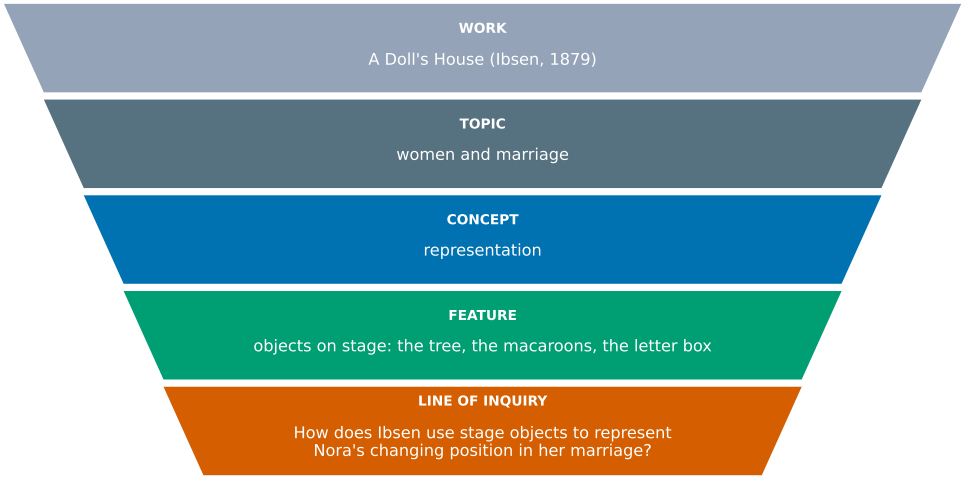
Students often begin with a large topic, such as "women in *A Doll's House*". After 1,500 words, they have said a little about many things and proved nothing. The best HL essays ask a narrow question and answer it deeply. This topic shows how to narrow a topic into a line of inquiry and build an essay around it.

Must-know for the HL essay:

Area	Key content
format	1,200–1,500 words; one work or body of work; 20 marks; 20%
line of inquiry	a focused question linked to a concept and to the author's choices
concepts	identity, culture, creativity, communication, perspective, transformation, representation
structure	introduction with thesis; analytical paragraphs; conclusion
process	plan, research, draft, one round of teacher feedback, final version, citations

From topic to line of inquiry

The course has seven **concepts**: **identity**, **culture**, **creativity**, **communication**, **perspective**, **transformation** and **representation**. Linking your topic to one concept, and then to a feature of the writer's craft, turns a topic into a question you can answer in 1,500 words.



Narrow the topic step by step until the question fits the word limit

Too broad	Focused line of inquiry
Women in *A Doll's House*	How does Ibsen use stage objects to represent Nora's changing position in her marriage?
Advertising and gender	How does a series of sports-shoe adverts use camera angle to construct an image of the female athlete?
Poverty in a novel	How does the narrator's voice shape the reader's sympathy for the poor family?

A good line of inquiry names the work, points to the writer's choices ("how does ... use"), and leaves room for an argument.

Structure

1. **Introduction** (about 150 words): the work, the line of inquiry, a little context, and a **thesis** that answers the question.
2. **Body paragraphs** (three or four, about 300 words each): each makes one step in the argument, with short quotations, analysis of the writer's choices, and a link back to the thesis.
3. **Conclusion** (about 150 words): what the analysis shows, and why it matters for the whole work.

Worked plan. *How does Ibsen use stage objects to represent Nora's changing position in her marriage?*

- Thesis: Ibsen's stage objects move from signs of Nora's childlike dependence to signs of the lies her marriage rests on, so that the audience sees her position change before she says it.
- Paragraph 1: the macaroons. Nora eats them secretly because her husband has forbidden them, a small lie that shows she is treated like a child, and that she already resists.
- Paragraph 2: the Christmas tree, decorated in Act I and "stripped of its ornaments" at the start of Act II, as Krogstad's threat grows.
- Paragraph 3: the locked letter box. Krogstad's letter sits inside it, and only Helmer has the key: the truth is in the house, but the husband controls it.
- Paragraph 4: the final door. The sound of the door closing replaces all the objects: Nora leaves the "doll's house" itself.
- Conclusion: the objects make the play's argument visible on stage.

Assessment criteria

Criterion	Marks	It asks
A: knowledge, understanding and interpretation	5	Do you understand the work and interpret it in answer to your line of inquiry?
B: analysis and evaluation	5	Do you analyse the writer's choices and evaluate their effects?
C: focus, organisation and development	5	Does the argument develop step by step and stay focused?
D: language	5	Is your writing clear, accurate and suitably academic?

Writing well

- Quote briefly: a few words in your sentence, not long blocks.
- Use the present tense for what happens in the work: "Nora leaves."
- **Cite** every quotation and every idea from another writer, using one referencing style (for example MLA) and a list of **works cited** .
- Your teacher can comment on one draft only, so make that draft complete.
- The essay must be your own work: using someone else's ideas or writing, including text generated by AI tools, without citing it is **academic misconduct** .

Checklist

- The format: 1,200–1,500 words, 20 marks, 20%, one work not used in the IO or Paper 2.
- The seven concepts; narrowing topic → concept → feature → line of inquiry.
- The structure and the worked plan on stage objects in *A Doll's House*.
- The four criteria (5 marks each).
- Short quotations, present tense, citations, one draft with feedback, academic honesty.