Analysing non-literary texts

IB DP English A: Language and Literature Paper 1: guided analysis of non-literary texts

Analysing non-literary texts (Paper 1)

- explain what Paper 1 asks at SL and HL and plan your time;
- identify a text's type, audience, **purpose**, **sender**, **context** and register;
- name language and visual features and explain their effects;

Analysing non-literary texts (Paper 1) (2)

- write an analysis with a **thesis** and claim–evidence–effect paragraphs;
- plan an answer to an unseen opinion column.

First questions: who, why, where

- Before you look at single words, answer five questions:
- **Register** 语域 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

- Every word in a short persuasive text has been chosen, and the table lists the features you will meet most often.
- Naming a feature is only the first step: say what it does for this audience and this **purpose**.
- A **rhetorical question** on a poster for teenagers works differently from the same question in a government report.

Visual features

- **Layout 版面**: what is at the top, in the centre, or large? The most noticeable element has **salience 显著性**.
- **Colour 色彩**: colours link ideas (green with nature, red with danger) and connect parts of the page.
- **Typography 字体排印**: 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.

Writing the analysis

- Paper 1 is marked on four criteria, equal in weight:
- Use this structure:

Writing the analysis (2)

- 1. **Introduction**: **text type**, audience and **purpose**, then a **thesis 论点** 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.

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.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Language A: Language and Literature guide* (first assessment 2021).
- Xinhua and *China Daily*, reports on the **Clean Plate campaign**, January–February 2013.
- G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nd edition, 2006), on **salience**, demand and offer.
- M. H. Abrams and G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th edition, 2014).

Common errors

- Feature spotting: naming a **rhetorical question** or **alliteration** without explaining its effect on this audience.
- Ignoring the visual half of a **multimodal** text, or describing images without analysing them.
- Forgetting context: who sent the text, to whom, where and why.

Common errors (2)

- Retelling what the text says instead of analysing how it persuades.
- Leaving the guiding question until the conclusion.
- Writing in an informal **register**, with "you" and contractions, when the analysis should be formal.

Key terms

- **Non-literary text**: a text such as an advertisement, speech, column, infographic or web page.
- **Guiding question**: the question printed with each Paper 1 text, which points to one aspect to analyse.
- **Register**: how formal or informal language is.

Key terms (2)

- **Multimodal**: combining words with images, **colour**, **layout** or sound.
- **Salience**: how strongly an element stands out and draws the eye.
- **Imperative**: a sentence that gives a command.

Check yourself

- 1.
- How many texts, marks and minutes does Paper 1 have at HL and at SL? 2.
- Name the five "first questions" to ask about a text. 3.
- What is the difference between a "demand" image and an "offer" image? 4.