edexcel

AS and A Level English Language and Literature

GUIDE TO GENERIC COVENTIONS

To accompany *Voices in Speech and Writing: An Anthology*

PEARSON

GCE English Language and Literature

Guide to Genre and Generic Conventions

Contents

Introduction

This guide attempts to offer not just some explanation of the types of texts we see in the *Voices in Speech and Writing Anthology*[1], but also to promote a deeper understanding of definitions of genre and genre conventions that will be of use for both AS and A Level students, and perhaps challenge some teachers to refresh their thoughts on these subjects too.

This guide has multiple audiences in mind and it is hoped will serve multiple purposes: as a teaching aid or resource book for teachers; an introductory document for students taking AS and/or A Level English Language and Literature; and also as revision support for student nearing the end of their studies.

Let's start with some thoughts on definitions.

What is genre?

We can define genre in a number of ways – try using several dictionaries to look up definitions, any well-known online search engine or an online resource that is universally trusted, such as this example from the Oxford English Dictionary (the OED).

> a. Kind; sort; style.
>
> b. A particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose.

Note the use of 'particular' with reference to form, style and purpose. In this guide we will be looking at the form, style and purpose of the texts in the *Voices* anthology but most importantly what typifies or exemplifies a text of that genre, and how each text is affected by the text's aims and audiences.

Let's have another look at defining genre, and this time instead of using a dictionary, let's use a thesaurus. An online browse delivers quite a few extra or extended definitions, which will hopefully get you thinking a bit more deeply about useful definitions.

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[1] Note that non-literary is used with regard to the Anthology as an umbrella term for texts outside the traditional genres of poetry, prose and drama.

class	description	genus
branch	brand	brand
brand	breed	breed
breed	category	category
cast	character	class
caste		
character		
classification		
collection		
color		
degree		
denomination		
department		

Taken from: www.thesaurus.com

This exercise is intended to prompt thought on these subtly different but similar ways of thinking about the concept of genre. If the word itself can be defined in both simple and complex ways and holds a large number of related definitions, then this tells us something about its complexity in the first place.

This is useful when we try and pin down generic conventions that exist within a genre. When a text is defined as belonging to one genre it may also have associated features with other genres. This influences the way in which we interpret texts in the first place. Equally we should not forget the whys and hows that create a text if we seek to fully understand it. We are talking here about context, audience and purpose, of course, but also about how these things relate to our very understanding of what we mean when we define a text as belonging to, or having features of, a particular genre or genres.

A note on structure

This guide has been broken up into sections. Each section relates to the genre types from the Pearson Edexcel AS and A Level *Voices in Speech and Writing Anthology*:

- Article
- Autobiography/Biography
- Diary/Memoir
- Digital Texts: blog, podcast
- Interview
- Radio Drama/Screenplay
- Reportage
- Review
- Speech
- Travelogue.

Under each genre type, the following sections appear.

Defining the genre offers thoughts and discussion on definitions of the genre itself, often to explain how we might consider the genre, or as a 'potted history'.

Typical generic conventions lists the particular set of rules or conventions for each genre. It is not meant to be a feature spotting list and so is not exhaustive.

Points to consider asks questions based on the points we have looked at in the rest of the section, and across the guide, and gives some hints at learning activities or further thoughts.

This guide does not give you a full and comprehensive listing of all the generic conventions as contained in the anthology, or indeed anywhere else. No list is ever complete and it is expected that you will perhaps add to this using your own research into these genres. What the guide does do is give you some tips and hints on how you might approach transforming one genre of text into another, as well as challenge you with wider reading to inform some background thinking on creating texts as authors. In doing all of this, I hope to inspire confidence in deconstructing and reconstructing almost any text that you may encounter.

Matt Gordon, August 2015

Article

Defining the genre

Articles may come in several different shapes and forms. Examples are usually found in newspapers and magazines (print and online versions) and may appear as regular opinion columns or feature articles that deal with a particular topic. They might be about current affairs, politics or news, significant events or on regular (repeated) themes.

As such, the article is a broad category where the texts might appear on websites or webpages that are linked to printed publications, and so in a sense form an extension of the printed versions. Newspapers often have online versions of their printed products, which then link to web-only material and in doing so form a different kind of article that would still come under the broader generic definition of 'an article'.

If we take online versions of newspapers, such as the *Guardian Online* or *Mail Online* as examples, each web version also gives access to linked websites (the US version, previous articles, celebrity gossip sections, etc) which allow access to articles not available in the print versions.

So, if we are looking to redefine the genre itself, our thinking should encompass not just different versions of what we might consider 'typical' or common types of article, but rather reflect on the **purpose** and **context** of each – and of course their perceived or expected **audiences**.

If we consider the various kinds of article – news, opinion (including 'serious' and 'non serious' approaches), feature articles about unique events or on a unique subject, regular articles (usually offering analysis of a well-discussed theme or related themes), and so on – they can all can be grouped under the broad definition of an article: that is, distinct, separate piece(s) of writing that form(s) part of a whole publication.

Newspaper or magazine articles are often topical, but can of course be reflective, or reference the past, or continue an ongoing subject of interest. A common form of structuring, i.e. set out as linear paragraphs within columns, helps us immediately perceive a familiar article format. In other words, we recognise an article as separate from a news story in a newspaper because of visual, **graphological** cues as much as we do by interpreting the language and language choices. Articles in their earlier forms in early newspapers had to employ an economical use of language as well as the page space to make their points.

Typical generic conventions

We should consider the following not as an exhaustive listing of typical or expected generic conventions, but as a series of indicators to common features that define articles.

When thinking about generic conventions, we should consider the following.

- Context and provenance: where does the article appear and in what form – i.e. newspaper, magazine, online – and how are these publications viewed by the readership or the general reading public? Compare tabloid newspapers with broadsheets, focusing on the context of the wider publication.

- Use of headlines, headings and sub headings: these usually help to physically structure the text, but also to make clear the argument(s) or point(s) of view being expressed. Many articles feature these techniques in order to give a short snappy summary of the article's thrust, for example by using quotations from the article that function to attract the eye and give a sense of the article's point.

- Use of **bylines**: these appear under the main heading or at the end of the article, and may include the use of pseudonyms.

- Use of visuals, tables, graphs and other statistical representations: these often add to the effects of the language choices, and/or support the points being made.

- Clear paragraphing, with a cohesive (but not always linear) structure: this includes use of columns to structure the text, underlying the need for economical use of space, which in turn influences language choices and thus language features.

- A sense of audience: this may involve a direct address or appeal to the reader, and a mixture of formal and informal tone and register to engage all sections of the audience.

- A clearly structured argument: this is enhanced with the use of persuasive and engaging language choices, offering a sense of balance even when outlining a clear agenda.

- Use of **rhetorical devices** to persuade, inform and convince: these may be used to prompt agreement or disagreement, as well as for emphasis.

- Use of quotations, or other points of view, and links that point outwards from the text to underline or extend the argument, often subtly mixing fact and opinion.

- An introduction and development that leads to a conclusion or summary. Sign-offs or summary remarks may be included to redefine the original points, or they may be reinforced through other examples.

Points to consider

In what ways might printed newspapers and those produced online differ?

How important is graphology (the layout of the text) in the overall structure of the text itself? Do we engage with the language choices differently if the article is given to us as 'plain' text only?

Consider an online newspaper or magazine article that has links to **blogs**. Are they written by journalists who work on the main publication? If so, are these blogs just more articles under a different guise? What could be the purpose of this? Do we take blogs such as these less seriously than we do articles by the same author?

Compare and contrast any 'serious' blogs – for example ones written by a political commentator, or on a political theme by different authors – with articles written on the same subject. What are the similarities and differences between them? Think about context, purpose and audience as well as literary and linguistic features.

Autobiography/biography

Defining the genre

Autobiographies are written as a commentary on the author's life – so written by them, about themselves. They may be in the form of a book or volume of a set, or a series, perhaps about the author's earlier life, and may be followed up with later instalments. An exception to this would be the celebrity autobiography or perhaps a sportsperson's autobiography, which may be **ghost written** ('ghosted') – in other words written by a professional writer, and often based on a series of interviews with the celebrity, combined with general research on their life.

Comedic or humorous autobiographies appear as part of this genre by their nature (a slant or take on a writer's own life) but also help blur lines between literary and non-literary genres, especially if we stray into considerations of fiction. Often cited as one of the earliest novels, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* by Lawrence Sterne (1759) is presented as an autobiography and as such reflects many of the generic features of a 'typical' autobiography that we might consider as a non-literary form, and indeed as non-fiction. In the 20th century, Gertrude Stein also plays with this blurring of lines with her book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933).

Is labelling a text as an autobiography or biography as a genre in fact a slippery definition?

There are so many routes into the structure and indeed production of autobiographies or biographies that have developed over time, and which enable us to see the genre as a series of **subgenres**, individually distinct but actually loosely linked under the same banner. Some interesting examples might include the ghosted autobiographies mentioned above, but also posthumously published versions (and so edited without the author's input). There are also collected writings brought together as anthologies of autobiographical writings. Some interesting examples of these include the autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr (1998), which was compiled from his writings on his life and then published as an autobiography after his death, and Bill Hicks' *Love All the People: Letters, Lyrics, Routines* (2005), a collection of previously published and unpublished autobiographical writings collected and published as one volume.

A biography, then, can be defined in similar ways, but is clearer as a genre to define because as readers and consumers we are instantly aware that it is an account of a life written by another – often professional – writer. We might expect there to be more distance from the subject, but there is also almost invariably a significant element of subjectivity in the presentation because it is conveyed via one perspective. The writer selects, organises and edits the material to portray the subject in a particular way.

Typical generic conventions

When talking about genre conventions as typical or atypical we invariably must think about context, purpose and audience.

With this in mind, the following will apply, but are also subject to the form in which they appear.

- Awareness of audience (especially in autobiography), and the use of the first person – how this relates to the author talking to the perceived or actual audience (including themselves).

- Contextual elements and purpose – the presentation or representation of the author or subject and the reasons behind this. In the 'ghost' written examples above of autobiographies, there may well be evidence of spoken language features where the subject has been interviewed. Some aspects of what we mean by spoken language features are discussed in the section under digital texts.

- Writing in a retrospective manner or as a retrospective account – so usually in the past tense. There may be changes in tense, for example, in the use of retrospective/reported speech, to give more immediacy and thus to engage the audience.

- Descriptive phrasing and the use of **figurative language** (including metaphor and simile) for effect.

- Characteristics of fiction – especially novels – in the use of a strong narrative line with extended or snapshot descriptions of events, people and locations.

- Oblique referencing to a range of contexts, including historical, social, personal, political etc.

- Use of **deixis**, in terms of 'pointing' outwards from the text to events in the author's/subject's life and the lives of others (e.g. family, friends, significant figures).

- A personal, often emotional, tone – used to engage the audience, maintain interest, as well as to fulfil expectations of the audience (e.g. in learning something new or previously hidden about the subject).

- A linear, though not necessarily chronological, structure.

- Chapters or sections that relate to particular dates or episodes in the subject's life, clearly indicated within the text or forming the overall structure of the work.

Points to consider

What are the most significant differences and similarities between an autobiography and biography?

How important are contextual elements in the reader's reception of the text? Consider reactions to Oscar Wilde's autobiographical writings when they were first published compared to their reception now. If we consider aspects such as Wilde's reputation as a canonical writer, as well as changing attitudes (and legislation) towards homosexuality since *De Profundis* was written and published, do we interpret the work in a very different way to the original audience?

How do the varying types of autobiographies and biographies (e.g. literary biography, celebrity biography, a political figure's autobiography, sports person's autobiography) differ? They may feature similar generic conventions but will be vastly different in purpose, tone, register, and context, and especially in language choice.

Reconsider the points made above about the genre being termed as 'slippery'.

A contemporary derivation of autobiography is the comic book autobiography (in turn related to the graphic novel), in which writers construct an autobiography in the same way they would a graphic novel, i.e. with extensive use of images and comic book generic features such as speech bubbles, striking visuals and a storyboard structure. To what extent does this new form overlap with fiction and the traditional autobiographical form? *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (1980) is an interesting example of both autobiography and biography in graphic novel form.

There are a number of examples of autobiographical texts which have links with the diary genre. For instance, Alan Clarke in *Diaries: In Power 1983-1992* (2003) stated that his book is "not 'Memoir'. They are not written to throw light on the events in the past, or retrospectively to justify the actions of the author…". How might the difference between diary and autobiography be defined? How are the boundaries blurred?

Diary/memoir

Defining the genre

As with the autobiography/biography genre, the diary/memoir genre reflects two distinct genres but there are also many overlaps between the forms via the use of generic conventions: dairies and memoirs are very similar. Both, for example, use a confessional and/or personal tone.

Diaries

We must consider the purpose underlying the writing in the first place – for example whether or not the diary was always intended for publication, or was (is) clearly meant as a personal record with only the writer in mind as an audience. Even with the latter purpose in mind, there could be a sense of a potential audience in the future, perhaps shown by how the writer addresses the diary as a friend, or acknowledges that it is privy to (very) personal emotions and opinions. By this we mean that the writer may 'project' onto the diary itself a persona of sorts, and in doing so pretend to have a dialogue with it. We may agree that this type of diary was never intended for publication, but we can equally argue that the writer wanted to keep an external record of their inner thoughts, feelings and outlook on their life and/or situation with the view that at some point in the future (long after their death perhaps) the diary would be discovered. It could then be received by another audience to whom the author could explain or justify their actions or life. Or it may serve as a contemporary record which will be used as a historical document, shedding light on the writer/their life/the times. In other words, recorded for posterity.

If we briefly reflect on the diary as a form of literature, or take a broadly historical view of the diary as a form in itself, we see early novels such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). It is an example of the diary form used in a fictional context that shares conventions with the non-literary forms. From this we can glean that the form lends itself to a particular method of presentation – of a persona as much as of an event, say, or a significant historical period.

Memoirs

The term is derived from French, meaning 'from the memory'. This perhaps helps us think of the memoir as a distinct form, separate but still related to the diary. Diaries are usually written chronologically and are seen as being more immediate than memoirs, which are characterised by a sense of reflection – looking back over a particular episode or episodes in the writer's life, and so always intended for publication. The range of the intended audience might differ between individuals and might be intended for only family/friends to read, or in the case of famous people, intended for a wide audience, and not necessarily for those who know or are fans of the writer.

Fictional memoirs, like fictional diaries, often share the same or very similar genre conventions, and may even play with the concepts of the intended audience and related contexts. This is another area where there is a crossover, or perhaps a hybridisation process, taking place in the consumption of the memoir or diary by the audience (intended and other) as well as in the production – the actual writing and purpose behind it.

These distinctions serve to remind us that while we can classify texts into separate genres by identifying certain expected and supported conventions, we also have to often acknowledge and discuss how related genres can combine to produce new genres. This also means that by reflecting on those areas that overlap or join, we can further understand how the conventions themselves are determined by language and literary frameworks and features as much as being informed and influenced by context, purpose and of course audience.

Typical generic conventions

Diaries and memoirs, then, share similar generic conventions that we may view as typical to both forms, with variations that relate to different purposes, audience and contexts. Some examples might include the following points.

- Layout and graphology: diaries are often set out under dates, or date headings, for each entry. They are usually chronological, but not always day by day. Memoirs are more likely to be divided into chapters covering date ranges, or perhaps by theme/location and/or significant events in the writer's life.

- A reflective tone: usually written using the past tense. For both forms the first person is likely to be used. The sense of looking back and/or re-evaluation is more likely for memoirs, but may also be a feature of diaries where the author makes entries at the end of the day/week or other time period.

- A sense of an audience: this will vary between memoirs (for public consumption) and diaries (intended for publication or not). The audience may be an imagined friend – with the dairy itself portrayed as the receiver (see Anne Frank's diary) – or presented as thoughts 'out loud' on paper, where the writer is their own audience.

- Diaries may be characterised by a sense of the 'everyday': this includes semantic fields that relate to the author's life, using personal or home context(s), and syntactical structures that feature internal references, such as in-jokes, sociolect and **phatic** subject matter (social interaction rather than informative, e.g. 'hello, how are you?)'.

- Changes in tone and register: these may be characteristic of both forms, with diaries more likely to feature informal registers, shorthand and abbreviations. However, the context of the writers themselves is likely to be relevant – in other words the diary of a professional writer (e.g. poet or novelist) may well feature a formal register mixed with less formal structures. The use of contemporary English types (e.g. Samuel Pepys' *Diary*) and influences on what constitutes appropriate register in these contexts will also predominate.

- In memoirs, there may be figurative language, use of metaphor, simile and **synecdoche** as a result of the reflective nature and purpose, for example, to explain or reveal new information; in both modes there may also be exaggeration for emphasis and effect.

- Memoirs are likely to be presented as a narrative, whereas diaries are formed by a series of entries connected by date, or possibly by events.

Points to consider

For both forms, we might reflect on:

- how individual diaries differ from each other, and to what extent

- how the similarities between the forms can be identified even when the texts are distanced by time/epoch/geography

- how different types of diary can be categorised further in the same way we might categorise autobiography/biography – i.e. celebrity, literary figure, politician – and the significance of whether intended for publication (consider the audience[s])

- how diaries are seen as a more personal form when compared to memoirs, although this depends heavily on context and purpose.

We may ask ourselves:

- Do fictional diaries share exactly the same genre conventions as non-fiction diaries? Some interesting examples – separated significantly in time – are *The*

Diary of a Nobody (1888/9) by George and Weedon Grossmith, the series of books that began with *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13¾* (1985) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996).

- Is the influence of purpose/context/audience on the diary's or memoir's text more important than our understanding of the literary and linguistic choices made by the writer? (Author's note: the answer is no, but can you explain why?)

- Is diary simply a form of **reportage**?

- Is the recent rise of social media, especially on platforms such as Instagram® and the ubiquitous use of 'selfies', a new genre, that we could term public diaries? Consider blogs too.

- Are fictional diaries essentially failed novels?

Digital Texts

Defining the genre

Digital texts are of course characterised by their very online nature – in other words not usually in a printed form – but they are still texts in the sense that we literally read them as well as interpret them as students of language and literature, exploring how the language functions and determining what literary features might be in play.

That said, if we disregard the technology involved in the production and delivery of these texts then we are missing an essential method of engaging with them. Digital texts are interactive in essence; they often have links that only make sense within the wider context of appearing online, as we are used to clicking through and exploring other websites, blogs and so on. Other features, for example comments sections underneath online articles, mirror the letters pages we see in printed formats. The key difference is of course the immediacy of the responses and that readers can interact with each other and/or comment on others' comments made. Podcasts share these functions; however they are usually audio or video pieces, so the level of interactivity may be similar but we receive them differently until they are turned into texts.

Online and digital texts have the potential to reach much larger audiences than printed texts, as they are made available via a variety of platforms (personal computers, tablets, smart phones, etc), and as such reach the audience at a much faster speed, and on a global scale.

With all of these considerations, we might begin to think about digital texts as having their own set of genre conventions, contexts, purposes and audiences – seeing them as related to but also separate from non-digital texts. Put simply: we engage differently with digital texts as opposed to traditional ones. Before we even consider the use of language and literary features, we may be tempted to make value judgements about the text, determined in part as a result of the way it is produced and received.

Digital texts are accessed or downloaded or shared in ways that the printed form cannot be. The question at the heart of this is: do we take digital texts less seriously than we do printed ones? There are many arguments for and against this question that may be influenced by various prejudices, including age and culture.

Perhaps one reason for some readers not regarding digital texts as highly as traditional print texts is the prevalence of spoken language features.[2] Spoken language features themselves are, of course, not found in only digital texts; we can see some examples in the *Voices* anthology across different texts, including in the transcripts of the televised interviews, the podcast, but you will also identify it in the drama texts you study.

When analysing digital genres it might be useful to keep the following terms in mind.

- Deixis/deictics: devices which ensure that a listener knows what, where and to whom an utterance refers. Examples include: 'this', 'that', 'there'. It might indicate cooperation, monitoring, awareness of context and awareness of audience.

- Discourse markers: these are words and phrases that signal the relationship and connections between utterances. Examples include: 'first', 'now', 'on the other hand'.

- Ellipsis: the omission of part of a grammatical structure, e.g. 'You okay?' It conveys a more casual and informal tone.

- Elision: the omission or slurring (eliding) of one or more sounds or syllables, e.g. 'gonna'. It serves to lower formality and speeds up the interaction.

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[2] Teachers may also wish to refer to topic as expressed in the 'Getting Started Guide' that accompanies the specification.

- False start: when a speaker begins an utterance, then either repeats or reformulates it. It indicates self-correction and monitoring.

- Hedges: vague words or phrases that are used to soften the force of how something is said. Examples include: 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'sort of'. It indicates politeness, uncertainty and co-operation.

- Phatic talk: formulaic utterances with stock responses used to establish or maintain personal relationships. Examples include: 'How are you?', 'Fine, thank you.' It indicates politeness and co-operation, and keeps conversation flowing.

- Vague language: statements that sound imprecise and unassertive e.g. 'and so on', 'whatever', 'and stuff'. Often indicates uncertainty and usually lowers formality.

As students of language and literature we must always come back to the focus of a combined, integrated response to the linguistic and literary frameworks and features in the texts, by analysing the ways in which meanings are shaped, and by an understanding of the significance and influence of a range of contexts, often by exploring connections across texts. We must always be informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods. It is not a question of a form, format or genre being more or less serious or superficial than another. We should approach texts in the same manner to begin with: seek to evaluate them through how the language functions.

Blog

Defining the genre

The term blog derives from 'web log', which started out as online journals on personal websites. Blogs are sometimes personal in nature and frequently updated. Intended for publication by their very nature, they are also by definition interactive. This gives us an idea of their purpose and in many ways could be said to detract from them being defined as personal, as these types of blogs share the author's thoughts, views and comments on a particular subject. As well as this, there is a sense of community in how blogs are written, as they can be shared or linked to and from other blogs and websites. The authors of blogs (bloggers) occupy an online space (the bloggersphere), and may contribute to other blogs, either in the form of comments, or via comments boxes, thus adding another dimension to this idea of sharing and communicating about a variety of subjects. Blogs can also be made up of a series of posts – for example along a particular theme or a series of events – and then collected under the banner of a blog or indeed bloggersphere.

Blogs therefore are multi-purpose as they cater to multiple intended audiences that also interact with one another, whether they be other bloggers or just those making passing comments.

Blogs themselves are often transitory and short lived – or at least are seen in this way. However, many blogs persist by being continually updated and so can form a history of previous blogs which are then archived but still made available. In other words, despite being seen as temporary, blogs become in some senses an online anthology. This is even more the case when we consider blogs that are linked to wider publications, for example newspapers/journalistic writings/magazines in print where the bloggers explore and extend commentary on articles within the printed publication. Where these articles are in fact online versions of the printed version, which then are linked to the type of blogs we are considering here, they are also likely be archived or saved perhaps in other formats. The point here is that blogs as individual texts may still be considered transitory, but conceived as a genre, they form part of this advanced age.

Blogs can be spontaneous – or appear to be spontaneous – or be well planned, crafted and redrafted but they are often (almost always) characterised by spoken language features (see Defining the genre for digital texts).

Typical generic conventions

There are many conventions in a blog that we might deem common to other forms. We can argue that there is no set form to a blog, but we can identify common features.

- A series of entries following a journal or diary-like structure, related by subject matter or topics in posts and sometimes organised by date.
- Often short in length, and structured through short paragraphs which may give a sense of being fast moving.
- The posts might be linked to each other thematically or be independent in subject matter and style.
- The inclusion of visuals and use of other media, which may affect language choice.
- Often characterised by an informal register and spoken language features. However this also depends on the context and, as in the example of blogs linked to newspaper articles or news websites, are likely to have a mixed register, moving between formal and informal structures.
- Links to other media, other blogs, and other websites. These could also be seen as part of the overall text in the way that the author or authors choose to associate with, and so provide linkage to, other sources that may support its purpose.

- Direct address to the audience(s), including other bloggers or those who have posted responses.
- **Self-referential** nature ('In my last blog…') and use of personal pronouns (I, me).
- Individual blogs often use self-contained text. In other words, they may function as a short essay upon a theme, much like newspaper articles.
- Spoken language features (other than those mention under digital texts) might include: changes in tone and register through the use of **colloquial language**; social media slang, or '**webspeak**', that shares connections with language used in text messaging, e.g. emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms. These may contribute to the sense of spontaneity but could also be a technique of **crafting** – the author shaping meaning and attempting to further engage with the audience.

Points to consider

Are blogs, on the whole, too personal or subjective to be seen as trustworthy examples of language and/or literature?

Blogs differ from other genres to such an extent in purpose, context and personae presented that they are, in fact, stand-alone. Would you agree?

Consider any modern famous film franchise – for example the *The Hunger Games* series of films. Fansites, blogs written in the bloggersphere, and related websites linked to the franchise are often written by, or in collusion with, the marketing department behind the production of the films. Should we interpret these in the same way as we do blogs written, say, by a news journalist on a recent election?

Consider the interplay of other genres, such as vlogging (video blogging) and print books. For example, the recent career of internet personality Zoe Sugg (aka 'Zoella') – who posts on beauty, fashion and lifestyle – we see an example of many related genre forms. Her printed book *Girl Online* (2014) is said to be semi-autobiographical as well as partly ghost written.

'Social media has hijacked the original intentions behind the concept of a blog. With the rise of open forums along particular themes or interest groups (e.g. mumsnet), we now see the popularity of blogs and bloggers as serious agents of social change as much as social commentators.' Debate this assertion with a partner or in a small group, with one side in agreement and the other in disagreement.

'Blogs are unchecked, invalid public comment posing as a type of journalism.' Discuss.

Podcast

Defining the genre

As the Text Glossary in the anthology reflects, 'A podcast is an audio or video programme which is formatted to be played on a portable media player…[it] is very much a horizontal media form: producers are consumers and consumers can become producers and engage in conversations with each other.'

For a short definition, the clue is in the **etymology** (the merging of broadcast and iPod). If we take this further, we are already in the area of discussing related genres or subgenres. In many ways the birth of the podcast is reflected in the blend of technology and the prevalence of informal speech structures in social media, as well as the ability and desire to share experiences, emotions, etc, and indeed software and media files in the use of download sites.

With the advent of social media and the general public's ability to produce and broadcast their own work, the podcast can be defined as a completely new genre. There are many such platforms, but YouTube's rise and development to the status of a household brand now epitomises what in the past was catered for by controlled outlets such as public access TV or cable networks or even pirate radio stations. Podcasts themselves stem from the rise of music sharing, or channels to receive (e.g. MP3 files) 'shows' or to receive 'verbal' blogs. They now have developed to cater for a variety of other media, such as video clips or other visuals and full-length episodes with audiovisuals. The point here is the fast development of the form.

Typical generic conventions

It could be argued that there aren't any typical generic conventions in the podcast genre. The example of the podcast that we see in the anthology is an edited transcript of a spoken, documentary-like discussion. With this example in mind we could say that some typical generic features of these kinds of podcasts reflect genre conventions of transcripts. The edited nature of the text here is revealed with the framing text or introductory paragraph and with the removal of prosodic spoken features (e.g. sighs, non-verbal utterances, etc). So, we as consumers of the printed version of a podcast receive and perhaps interpret the text differently from the way we would if we were listening to it.

However, we can reflect on typical generic features of other broadcast media – for example radio or TV documentaries delivered by one or more presenters – approaching the text in similar ways, deconstructing the language and literary frameworks and features in these forms.

- Spoken language features typical to spontaneous speech. However, most podcasts are prepared and drafted before recording in much the same way a radio broadcast might be.

- **Informal register**, varieties in tone and intonation, and possible interruptions.

- **Framing devices**: for example an introductory exchange about the subject matter that may be summarised or referred to in the concluding section.

- Use of **rhetorical devices**: to engage and sustain listener's attention including the use of humour, argument or debate, as well as description appealing to the senses, or varying speeds in delivery to indicate excitement.

- Exchanges between the participants: how these might function as a dialogue and/or as an interview.

- Transactional, referential language use, including turn-taking.

- Use of question types (interrogative, rhetorical, tag) and **adjacency pairing**, as well as the use of questions to dominate or control the discussion.

- Use of **elliptical phrasing** for shorthand and/or effect.

- Semantic fields which are subject-specific and relate to the themes.

Points to consider

Have another look at the Text Glossary definition given above. What is meant by a 'horizontal media form'? What other media could be described in this way?

Does the podcast in the *Voices* anthology contain more generic features typical of an interview, or perhaps as a separate genre defined as a prepared conversation?

Is it unfair to apply spoken language frameworks when discussing this text? This is a transcript, so should we not listen to the podcast to see how the tone of the text version compares to the original? Would this provide a much greater insight into the language features and how they function within this genre? Does the podcast genre itself not deserve its own definition as a separate genre?

Podcasts are often used in educational (see the British Council's 'Learn English' podcast series) or promotional contexts and use peer review in support of a product or a cause. We could argue that, when used in these contexts, podcasts serve very different purposes, and very different audiences. Are these podcasts a subgenre of the podcast or just different types?

Consider, again, the interplay of other genres, where digital forms are collected or repackaged into book form. Are these texts subgenres of the podcast? Should we consider works like this as a development of language and communication through new genres or as purely commercial ventures? Do these texts successfully reach an even wider audience than the originally intended one? See http://www.tweetbookz.com/ or http://twournal.com/ in which Twitter users create collections of books from tweets.

Interview

Defining the genre

We may define the interview as 'a conversation conducted by an interviewer such as a TV reporter, chat show host, prospective employer or police/court official in which facts or statements are elicited from another', but once again an understanding and engagement with the purpose, context and audience as well as the use of language all serve to subtly redefine the interview as a concept.

The two interviews in the *Voices* anthology are linked not just in format (televised, recorded) but also in purpose: to present the interviewee in a certain light, give air to thoughts/opinions, and perhaps even to offer opportunities to explain and defend their actions. They can, however, be contrasted in their specific contexts: one is recorded in front of a live audience; the other not. We may also question the purposes behind the interview taking place.

We can assume interviews of one sort or another have been around for centuries. Some of the earliest recorded interviews are in the form of a series of photos with short subtitles from the late 19th century, which are still in existence today. The interviews in the anthology are edited transcripts of recorded and edited broadcasts. We are most interested in how the language functions, of course, and so we can analyse, explain and understand the many levels of meaning inherent within these two pieces. For this reason, however, we still need to understand them in the wider context of how they themselves both represent and spread across other genres and subgenres, such as television broadcast and transcript.

Typical generic conventions

Typical generic conventions of interviews include the following.

- A range of question and answer structures, including a variety of question types, e.g. tag, rhetorical (perhaps to frame the answer in a particular way), open questions, extended, etc).

- Linked statements, and linking questions, for example when the interviewer returns to a previous subject, or probes further.

- Adjacency pairs – as distinct from question and answer structure – and so responded to in terms of (perhaps even to form) discourse markers within the conversation.

- Varying register and levels of formality, for example, in the level of respect shown for the interviewee or their position in society.

- An introduction and conclusion to the interview: including verbal and other framing devices to the main body of the interview. We can consider here how the whole text functions as a line of argument or to present something or somebody in a certain way.

- Spontaneous/semi-spontaneous language features, e.g. repetition, interruptions or overlapping, false starts, pauses, repairs, and so on.

- Rhetorical devices to engage with the audience, often to establish or develop rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, including the use of humour.

Points to consider

If interviews in fact span across many different types of genres and in varying degrees, could we consider interviews as just structured recorded conversations?

Is the interview a 'super genre', in that it contains a range of genre conventions that depend fully on context and purpose? Read through the definition of public speaking in

the Text Glossary of the anthology, especially: '[p]ublic speaking is the process of delivering a speech in a structured way intended to inform, influence or motivate...' Is this equally applicable to the genre of an interview?

Is the only real difference between interviews and public speaking in the use of an interlocutor?

Radio Drama/Screenplay

Defining the genre

'Drama ...comes to life when it is interpreted in the performance of actors, who adopt the roles of the characters and speak the dialogue, along with appropriate actions, all of which have usually been invented for them...'

Adapted From: A Dictionary of Literary Terms, *Martin Gray (1984)*

The quote above is useful as a very general definition, arguably because it only makes passing reference to stage directions. When considering radio drama and screenplays the language used is shaped in essence by the need to communicate with multiple audiences, and so functions within these contexts. A radio drama or screenplay format speaks to the performers as much as it does the sound technicians, camera teams, and others. In other words, these two different forms are subgenres of perhaps wider examples of drama that we usually associate with theatre performances. This, of course, brings us back to considerations of audience, as well as to context and purpose. The intended audience for radio dramas and screenplays could be similar, but the use of settings and visuals and/or sound (e.g. use of audio effects to create mood) all form part of the overall language of the piece, and as such may be vastly different between examples.

Further contrasts may be drawn also in our idea of the intended or expected audience and in their (or our) very presence. Therefore, the clearest distinction here between live theatre and radio drama and screenplays is of course that the latter are recorded and edited.

Radio dramas and screenplays could be divided into separate genres, but we should also acknowledge that they overlap with each other. Radio drama may translate easily in some examples (budgets aside) to screenplays, but it is crucial to remember radio drama's central essence is in the use of language to convey the plot, themes, characters and so on. The point being screenplays rely on visuals to convey the power of the script itself, whereas radio drama can only use audio: the sound, cadence and emphasis of the actor's delivery of the script, combined with sound effects to support the development of the plot (for example).

Typical generic conventions

Radio drama

- Language appropriate to the audience, e.g. daytime radio or post '**watershed**'.

- Language choices to create and sustain drama, tension, excitement, etc.

- Narrative framing devices, for example the use of direct speech and/or reported speech in flashbacks.

- Layout conventions, i.e. the graphology of the text and its multiple audiences, with indications for sound effects, stage directions, actors cues, etc.

- Use of voice: the actor's delivery, e.g. accent, intonation, cadence, and other phonological devices.

- Use of music: for example to indicate mood, change of scenery and other settings, or to open or close individual scenes or the play.

- Use of sound effects or **aural signposting**, e.g. F/X (typing) for setting the opening of a scene and as transition points, including fades in and out.

- Use of titles and credits.

Screenplay

Screenplays differ to radio drama in key respects. However, as shown in the use of linguistic and literary frameworks, we should evaluate the effect and influence of contextual considerations. Here, the generic conventions directly impact on the use of language. In other words like the **meta-language** of film, the screenplay communicates beyond the actor's script to multiple audiences such as the camera crew, sound engineers, director, etc.

- A visual or 'fact based' description of the action. In other words the writer indicates what they want the camera to see and so addresses multiple audiences such as the viewer, the performer, the technicians at the same time.

- Use of **sluglines** – e.g. to describe location whether interior or exterior, night or day and so on – usually in capital letters.

- Use of dialogue and monologue.

- Use of stage directions.

- Characters' names in capital letters and placed centrally in the script to denote actors' cues, or to indicate the start of dialogue

Points to consider

Is it easier to transform interviews or the podcast in the *Voices* anthology into a screenplay or radio drama? Is it because they use dialogue and spoken language features?

The texts in this genre are the only ones in the anthology that can be truly described as fiction, but are grouped here under the wider heading of non-literary texts. What is a 'non-literary text'? Why are radio drama and screenplay listed here?

Consider how non-fiction texts could be successfully transformed into fictionalised radio dramas or screenplays. What are the key conventions needed to achieve this?

Reportage

Defining the genre

The word reportage is often said to derive from French, from the action of reporting or 'carrying back'. As a result, reportage can be (and often is) used to describe the general reporting of news, to encompass a factual and/or primarily journalistic presentation, usually of an event. We often think of reportage as a report given to us or presented through an observer's point of view and in a particular style. As a technique, reportage is therefore a (re)presentation of a story or event given in a particular way.

The origin of the word reportage and its associated meanings also tell us something about defining the genre. It thus shares similarities with the **montage** form. A montage can be a film or series of photos that relate to a significant event or story, which is presented as a succession of photos, often with subtitles to accompany the images. This type of montage has its roots in photo journalism – telling a story through images as captured by the individual observer. The underlying point is that when we consider texts that come under this genre heading, yet again context, purpose and audience tell us much about the literary and linguistic choices made by the author.

We can consider texts from the reportage genre, whether they be online, in print, or in broadcast forms, as having been given to us, the audience, as firsthand accounts. Thus in a sense they share similarities with articles, especially when they provide informative or current-affair commentary. However, reportage is often presented and supported with the opinions and impressions of the reporter, and blended with the use of facts.

Typical generic conventions

- Headlines, other headings and subheadings, often provided with a snap shot or summary of the story.

- Use of the **first person**, also an inclusive use of 'we'.

- Changes in register: from formal to less formal, but dependent on context. For example, the text of the reportage may be written and then delivered by telephone, to be reproduced as an article.

- Use of varied sentence length and types to maintain interest and engage the reader.

- Evidence of **editing**, for example the inclusion of facts and explanations.

- Evidence of **drafting** and redrafting.

- Use of facts and statistics, figures, tables and a **chronological structuring**, for example of a timeline of events, or built into the structure of the text.

- An overall linear structure, perhaps with a framing of the text leading to a short introduction, and then development and a conclusion.

- Use of **discourse markers** to add to the overall cohesion of the text, but also to mark development or indicate other points or issues outside of the text, or the development of an argument/agenda setting.

- Use of figurative language and/or highly descriptive terms as well as use of metaphor and simile.

- Use of rhetorical devices, rhetorical questions.

Points to consider

How does reportage act both as a genre in itself and as a subgenre of newspaper, TV, broadcasts and online journalism?

What are the main differences we can attribute to (for example) a feature article written by a famous journalist, or perhaps by a political commentator, and a piece of reportage? Could they be considered the same genre?

Is reportage considered less 'serious' as a form of investigative journalism?

How can reportage texts be adapted as blogs or even as individual podcasts? If we understand a transcript of a **vlog** as an example of the form, can we more easily regard this as a piece of reportage?

Could we consider all journalism as extended reportage? In other words can we take a traditional printed newspaper (any broadsheet) as just a collected anthology of reportage? Consider the role of the editors and the firsthand account generic convention and the possible use of direct address to the reader.

Review

Defining the genre

A review is defined as a critical appraisal or formal assessment of something, and used for, or intended, for a specific purpose. Reviews are often highly subjective evaluations of a publication, performance or perhaps a product, service, or event.

Often a sense (or assumption of) shared knowledge will permeate a review. In almost any form, reviews engage with the audience through their treatment of the subject matter as a marker of authority. Many authors of reviews will also allow for sections of the audience that have an interest in the subject (for example of a novel or film) but who have not necessarily read the book or seen the film. '**Spoiler alerts**' (a warning of a coming revelation for those who wish to know about the item being reviewed without having the plot *spoiled* for them) are a specific feature of the genre. In this way, the author communicates with the audience to show their level of knowledge of the subject, as well as using it as a discourse marker within the flow of the text.

We need to return to context to engage fully with the texts, and as usual must consider them alongside purpose and audience. Reviews published online as a blog entry, perhaps, or linked to a comments sections (often film reviews) on official and unofficial websites, might at first adhere to those forms and their genre conventions (i.e. the blog's or webpage's textual indications of genre), but the review as a distinct text will still retain its own identity – and thus generic conventions – even when seemingly absorbed into the whole.

Another example of this idea might be where reviews form a separate section on an online version of a printed newspaper. The review will often have its own section or subsection (i.e. within a 'weekend' or arts and culture tab) as it would in the printed format, but as a webpage is also likely to have areas for the public to make further comment or share their views. The point here is that the review is still a review, but in these forms it becomes a multimodal text, and as such extends into a discussion or further development of points whilst still retaining its original identity. We may argue that this is equally true of other texts when adapted for social media or for viewing on the internet, but with this genre, we could say that the author's evaluation or opinions as expressed in the text keep the form preserved and undiluted.

Reviews may come in many shapes and guises. Compare, for example, a tabloid's TV listings pages that offer short, snapshots of a programme (sometimes as a 'pick of the week'-type feature) with a ballet performance review in a broadsheet. However, all reviews are characterised by a central, subjective viewpoint that is presented using an engaging style of language.

Typical generic conventions

As with all genres, we can begin to deconstruct the text by careful examination and reflection of the linguistic and literary features. Typical generic conventions for reviews include:

- Title/headings/subheadings, often with a by-line that may include a short summary of the review.

- Use of quotation or graphological highlighting of parts of the review and/or the work being reviewed.

- A clear structure: often linear with an introduction, development and summary.

- Sometimes a **précis** of the plot or an outline of the main structure of the work which may be included in the body of the review.

- **Intertextual** (i.e. of a novel) references, for example links to other works by the same author/writer and how this piece being reviewed might relate to them.

- Biographical information about the writer/author, sometimes as background to the review and/or the work being reviewed, or in general references made throughout the piece.

- Use of quotation from the work, often embedded within the language of the review and/or as separate sections, sometimes with quotations from other writers or other reviews on which to develop the argument or to support the points made.

- A mixture of registers – sometimes formal, sometimes informal, depending on the context of the publication, intended audience, and that in some ways might mirror the register of the text being reviewed.

- An attempt (perhaps revealed in the tone) to appear objective, which may serve to mask the subjective viewpoint that is actually being conveyed.

- Asides or other techniques which support the sense of the author of the review as taking an observer's stance.

- Use of language and literary features that will engage the audience, e.g. humour, narrative elements, and in-jokes or other examples of shared knowledge with the expected audience.

- Other rhetorical features to engage the audience, such as a sarcastic tone, rhetorical questions, paraphrasing or mirroring language of the reviewed work.

- Commentary on the structure of the work, use of language, economical structures and pre- and post-modified noun phrases.

- Use of descriptive language and adjectival sentence structuring.

- Clear paragraphing, with engaging opening and closing paragraphs.

Points to consider

Reviews share similar features in structure, layout and authorial stance. How close as genres could you consider reviews to be, in reference to reportage, or feature articles? Does this make it easier to transform a review into, for example, a feature article? Why?

What are the main differences or similarities with online reviews and a blog on a similar subject? Consider aspects of spoken language features, for example.

If a review is written about a service or product that relates to travel, for example about a package holiday, could we consider this a travelogue?

Consider writing a short review of the podcast in the *Voices* anthology in an online format. Is your text likely to be **multi-modal**? To what extent might it be a cross-genre piece? What genres might it be crossing over?

Speech

Defining the genre

As a genre, speeches can come from a wide variety of sources and may be in almost any number of formats. Again we refer to context, purpose and audience to define more thoroughly what we might consider 'speech' as a genre to be. As English Language and Literature students, most, if not all, speeches we consider will be ones which are planned, carefully crafted, and have been drafted and redrafted by any number of writers including the speech maker. Also, speakers may adapt the text originally written for them for their own purposes or methods of delivery, or indeed *ad lib* or change tone and register to suit their own purposes as well as audience response.

Although we should always focus our attention on the text of the speech before us, it is important to remember how the speech might sound as delivered. The speaker's intonation, speed of delivery, tone of voice, and stresses on particular words or phrases may well change depending on the audience, but these cues are almost always contained in the language of the speech itself. We can glean the rhythm of the delivery and the speaker's cadence from the rhythm of the text, sentence structures and overall flow of the argument.

We should always reflect on the possible agendas that led to the speech being made in the first place. The intended audiences may vary significantly between types of speeches but essentially speeches are always written and delivered in a structured way in order to fulfil their main function: to persuade, or inform, or influence, or entertain. A combination of these functions is equally possible, and that again returns us to considering context. The layout of the written text will often reflect the purpose, and the language choices made are permeated by the very direction of the argument. As an illustration of this, a speech made by a prime minister who has just resigned will have a completely different set of contextual factors in play in and around the text than, a speech given by a prime minister who has just won a difficult election. This may be obvious, but hopefully does help to prompt thought and discussion on the idea of public speaking as a genre and so directly links to the speech as a distinct form.

Typical generic conventions

Generic conventions may vary between different types of speeches (e.g. motivational, persuasive, etc) in consideration of context, wider contexts (see below) and especially purpose. Key indicators might be:

- Use of **rhetorical devices** including questions, rhetorical questions, questions to emphasise or to underline a point.

- Use of **figurative language**, metaphor, simile to engage the audience, explain or enhance points, or to entertain or provide imagery.

- Use of **synecdoche** and use of extended or 'dense' metaphor for effect.

- Clear overall structure, including an introduction, development, conclusion or summation.

- Use of **repetition** to emphasise or refer back to a previous point.

- Emotional and/or emotive language.

- Changes in syntactical structures, use of **tripling**, **reverse syntax** – often to extend or develop a line of argument.

- Changes in use of address (pronouns) to promote inclusivity, for example shifts in use of 'I-we-us-you'.

- Changes in tone and register between formal and informal structures to engage with the audience.

- Use of linear and non-linear structures, for example **digression** or use of **anecdote** to develop the line of argument in an oblique or less obvious way.

- Varying length of sentence structure, and use of re-phrasing to engage with different sections of the audience.

- Use of **discourse markers** to develop the line of argument, including verbal signposting to return to or emphasise points, or to bring sections to an end.

- **Rhetorical devices**, such as the use of humour or other emotions, to show the speaker's engagement with the subject and audience, and to prompt similar engagement from the audience.

Points to consider

Context, context, context: speeches depend heavily on the contexts in which they were written and delivered. In other words, famous speeches such as the ones in the *Voices* anthology have become famous because of who was delivering them and when and why and where. Historical speeches when labelled as such immediately give us a point of reference in that they have survived beyond the initial presentation and as a result have developed a life and even meaning beyond what was originally intended. We could call this effect '**resonance**'. If we are introduced to the text of the speech by a framing device such as 'historical' or a 'famous historical speech' then we are in many ways being asked to interpret it in a certain way.

To put it another way, we can reflect on the impact of the speech from its original inception, delivery and then subsequent reading of it. This brings us to the ideas behind multiple audiences, as well as how we interpret and engage with the speech that may be different to, or enhanced significantly from, its original context.

Do we interpret the JFK speech in the anthology through a lens that is focused on the speech maker rather than the language of the speech itself?

Do we make assumptions about the causes, successes or failures of the Iraq wars which may cloud our judgement of the Collins speech, and thus colour our reception of it, beyond the inherent meaning of the language that was used?

Is the concept of the audience more relevant to the genre of speech than any other?

Travelogue

Defining the genre

A travelogue can be described as a very broad genre form, but shares across its different types a key characteristic: use of language that conveys an unmistakable sense of place. If we think about the central purpose of the travelogue, then we begin to see that unlike articles, blogs, vlogs, etc, all travelogues have one central theme: to convey the writer's feelings or impressions of a place.

If we refer to context and audience when deconstructing a travelogue, then we are also drawn to the purpose and provenance of the text – perhaps more so than with any other genre. In other words, we might assume that all travelogues are intended for publication or are at least written for a personal audience, in that the author is sharing their impressions of a place. Although a famous writer's travelogue may originally be formed as a travel diary (which may or may not have been intended for publication or even reading by others), for a travelogue definition we can assume that there is an intended or expected audience beyond that of the writer themselves. Travelogues differ from personal diaries or other singular forms in that again we return to the concept of a sense of a place/time/setting.

Typical generic conventions

- A **narrative** and/or a linear structure set out in clear paragraphing.

- Reflection on and discussion of travel as a concept, i.e. broadening our horizons/knowledge of the world, different cultures, places.

- A **reflective** tone, or possibly a use of the present tense with pauses for reflection to give a sense of 'as it happens'.

- Commentary on the methods of travel, and reflection on the ideas behind travel to include revelations or commentary on self (and others') perceptions, and similarities and differences in societies.

- **Semantic** fields of travel – including the use of foreign names and places, reported speech given in other languages.

- Use of **comparative language**, i.e. drawing comparisons and contrasts by setting more familiar places against less familiar ones, usually in reference to the writer's own background, nationality and/or culture.

- Use of **intercultural referencing** – similar to points of comparison above; reflecting on similarities and differences of the writer's culture and the one they are travelling through.

- Use of evocative language to convey the 'sights, sounds and smells' of a particular location or locations, and the use of language that appeals to the senses

- Use of highly descriptive language, extended use of adjectival structures, use of simile and metaphor.

- Language used to engage the reader, including use of humour, **rhetorical devices** and direct address.

Points to consider

Travel writing and travelogues are often considered to be the same thing. What differences might there be between labelling a text as travel writing instead of a travelogue?

Is reportage, when describing places, actually the same genre?

Is defining travelogue as a distinct genre actually false? Can we in fact define travelogues as a subgenre of almost all the other genres in the *Voices* anthology and that they only differ in form or context?

Is it easier to transform a travelogue into an article, a review or a blog? Why?

We might think of travelogue as a non-literary form. Are there any examples of fictional travelogues that you can think of? Examples might include discussion on works such as *Gulliver's Travels* or *Around the World in Eighty Days* or perhaps even science fiction novels. Do these feature similar genre conventions as non-fiction pieces? Do they have the same effects?

Are travelogues more about the traveller than the places they describe?

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