



Pearson
Edexcel

A level English Language

Glossary of Terms





The following is a glossary of some of the terms used in the [Guide to Language Levels and Frameworks](#) available on the qualification website.

AO1 requires students to use relevant terminology accurately as part of their responses and this guide is aimed at supporting the revision of key terms.

Phonetics and Phonology

It is useful for students to have a confident working knowledge of the key terms surrounding phonetics and the production of speech sounds as it can be useful to discuss accent, identity, child language acquisition and orthographic features.

Term	Definition
articulation	refers to the movement of the speech organs to produce sounds required for speech. Place of articulation refers to position of the speech organs used to make a sound and manner of articulation refers to how that sound is made. When describing articulation, it is syntactically typical to mention the place of articulation before the manner, for example an alveolar plosive.
voicing	certain speech sounds are made by drawing together the vocal cords so that they vibrate whereas others are made when the vocal cords are spread apart allowing air through. The former is classed as voiced and the latter is classed as voiceless. For example, the phoneme /d/ is a voiced alveolar plosive and the phoneme /t/ is an unvoiced alveolar plosive.
plosive	refers to consonant sounds made by a complete closure of the airway followed by a quick release of air. It is one of the more common manners of articulation for English and includes phonemes such as /d/, /t/, /p/ and /b/.
fricative	refers to consonant sounds made by the passing of air, often replicating hissing sounds e.g. /f/, /z/, /s/ and /v/.
accent	refers to the distinctive features of pronunciation that often mark an individual's regional, personal or social identity.
received pronunciation	is an accent of English that is typically associated with prestige and high social status. It is not a geographically based accent and is frequently abbreviated to RP.
th-fronting	refers to the substitution of the phonemes /ð/ or /θ/ for a labio-dental phoneme such as /f/ or /v/. For example, if a speaker pronounces with as /wɪv/ then they are using th-fronting.



Term	Definition
th-stopping	refers to the substitution of the phonemes /ð/ or /θ/ for a plosive phoneme, typically /t/ or /d/. For example, if a speaker pronounces that as /dæt/ then they are using th-stopping.
yod-dropping	the elision of the /j/ phoneme from certain words, typically as a feature of accent. For example, if a speaker pronounces the word tune as /tu:n/ then they are demonstrating yod-dropping.
minimal pair/set	these are words that are identical except for one phoneme occurring in the same place. This altered phoneme changes the meaning of the word. For example, /sɪt/, /bɪt/ and /fɪt/ are all part of the same minimal set. We use them to show which phonemes are distinctive or contrastive in a language.
homophones	refers to words that have the same pronunciation but different spelling and meaning. For example, grate and great. It is worth being aware that accent can affect homophones.
homographs	refers to words that have the same spelling but are pronounced differently and have a different meaning. For example, the word bow pronounced /bəʊ/ or /bəʊ/ depending on the meaning.
glottal stop	a sound that is produced by the release of air at the glottis after being stopped by tightly closed vocal cords. It is represented by the symbol /ʔ/ and is most typically used in place of the /t/ phoneme. However, the glottal stop is used in place of a number of phonemes in different regional varieties. Be aware that the glottal stop is not strictly speaking a phoneme as it does not form a minimal pair. For example, /bɪt/ and /bɪʔ/ are not different words.
schwa	is the unstressed vowel sound represented by the symbol /ə/.
assimilation	in phonology, assimilation refers to the way in which sounds can change to be closer to neighbouring sounds. For example, in rapid speech the word handbag is often pronounced as /hæmbæg/ as both /m/ and /b/ have the same place of articulation.
rhotic	is used to describe accents that audibly pronounce the /r/ after vowel sounds such as many West Country varieties. Accents that do not pronounce this phoneme are classed as non-rhotic .



Lexis

Term	Definition
derivation	the process of creating new words by using affixes. Also known as affixation , this is a very common way of creating new words.
etymology	the study of the origins of words. It is an interesting area of study as it can reveal aspects of cultural and social ideology that people may not have explored. For example, the original meaning of the word 'villain' simply meant someone who was low born, revealing how attitudes towards the poor and class have affected the way the word is used today.
neologism	refers to a newly created or coined word or expression.
sociolect	the language used by a specific social group that helps distinguish that group from another.
idiolect	the distinctive language used by a specific individual.
slang	words and phrases associated with informal speech.
jargon	typically refers to the language used by different occupational groups that serves to exclude members outside of that group. For example, legal jargon is used to make it difficult for those outside of the legal profession to understand it easily.
register	refers to the way language is defined according to its use. For example, texts produced for highly formal occasions will adopt a formal register in order to match the communicative situation. Register may also be used to describe the varieties used for specific purposes, activities, trades or professions. For example, the jargon used by computer coding can be classed as a register.



Semantics

Term	Definition
hypernym	refers to a word with a broad coverage of meaning. For example, tree can refer to oaks, beeches, willows etc. Also called the superordinate .
hyponym	refers to the more specific elements 'under' a hypernym. For example, if the hypernym was red, then crimson, scarlet and vermilion would be hyponyms.
homonym	refers to a word that has the same form but two different meanings. For example, the word reserved can mean someone who is shy as well as the act of holding a room, table or place for someone.
synonym	refers to a word with a similar meaning as another. For example, huge and massive are considered synonyms of big.
antonym	refers to a word with the opposite meaning to another. For example, hot is an antonym of cold.
metonym	refers to the use of an attribute to refer to the thing or concept. For example, if a newspaper reported, 'The word from Number 10 is...' they are using the address of the Prime Minister as a metonym for the government.
types of semantic change	<p>when you study language variation over time, you will study a number of different ways that meanings shift due to the way people choose to use language. Some of the examples you will study include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• amelioration – where the meaning of a word becomes more positive over time. For example, cool simply referred to a temperature but now is seen as a positive adjective describing something that is on trend or good• pejoration – where the meaning of a word becomes less positive over time. For example, the word villain simply referred to someone of low class and lived in the country, drawn from a synonym for villager. However, over time the word has become associated with evil and cruel actions• broadening or expansion – where the original meaning of a word expands to encompass more ideas. For example, the word holiday is derived from holy day, a time when people would stop work and observe religious practices. It has broadened to refer to any break from work or other occupation• narrowing or specialisation – where the original meaning of a word was much broader but has become more precise over time. For example, the word deer is derived from an Old English word



Term	Definition
	<p>that simply meant small creatures. It has narrowed to refer to a specific type of creature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• bleaching or weakening – where the original power or load of a word becomes reduced over time. For example, the emotive power behind the word dead has been weakened by it becoming an intensifier e.g. dead tired, dead boring.
connotation	refers to the associated meanings of a word that go beyond their literal definition. For example, using the word swarm to describe the movements of people conveys negative connotations because it is associated with insects and pests.
collocation	refers to two or more words that typically go together as a set phrase. For example, bread and butter, tea and biscuits, pay attention.



Grammar: Morphology

Term	Definition
morpheme	refers to the smallest unit of meaning. For example, in the word 'helped', both 'help' and 'ed' convey meaning and therefore both elements are morphemes. In this case, the morpheme help can convey meaning on its own, meaning it is a free morpheme whereas the morpheme 'ed', while conveying that the action is in the past, needs to attach to another morpheme to make sense, making it a bound morpheme . There are two types of bound morpheme: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inflectional morpheme – refers to the bound morphemes that indicate a shift in grammatical tense e.g. plurals and tense markers• derivational morpheme – refers to the bound morphemes that change a word's class or meaning e.g. suffixes such as -ful, -less, -able.
root or stem	refers to the main word that others are built from using prefixes and suffixes.
affix	refers to a bound morpheme that can be attached to existing words to create new ones.
prefix	refers to an affix that is placed at the beginning of a root word. For example, dis-, un-, anti-.
suffix	refers to an affix that is placed at the end of a root word. For example, -ity, -ment, -tion.
plurality	refers to when there is more than one of something, usually indicated by the addition of an inflectional morpheme e.g. on regular nouns -s or -es is used to show plurality.
regular	refers to words, typically nouns and verbs, which follow typical patterns grammatically. For example, to play is an example of a regular verb as it uses typical suffixes to indicate tense e.g. -ed, -ing, -s.
irregular	refers to words, typically nouns and verbs, which do not follow typical patterns grammatically. For example, the plural of mouse is mice making mouse an irregular noun.
tense	refers to the changes in the structure of a verb that indicates the timescale. For example, the word 'helped' indicates that the action has already happened, making it past tense.



Term	Definition
Person	refers to the distinction between the speaker (first person), the addressee (second person) and others (third person). Person is reflected in the personal pronouns and verb forms and can also indicate singular or plural. For example, by writing 'We helped', the pronoun 'we' is the first person plural form indicating that although the writer was personally involved in an action, they were not alone.



Grammar: Syntax

Term	Definition
dialect	where accent looks at the distinctive pronunciation features of speakers, dialect looks at the distinctive grammar, syntax and vocabulary that marks a speaker's regional, personal or social identity.
subject	refers to the noun phrase or pronoun which is the actor of the verb within a clause. For example, in the sentence, 'The wind howled all night,' the wind is the subject.
object	refers to the noun phrase or pronoun which is governed or affected by the verb within a clause. There are three types of object in English: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• direct object – when the object is directly affected by the verb. For example, 'The cat caught <u>the fish</u>'• indirect object – when the object receives the action of a verb. For example, 'She gave <u>me</u> a new book'• object of preposition – when the noun or noun phrase is governed by or linked with a preposition. For example, 'They walked to the shop <u>in silence</u>'.
predicate	the part of the sentence which contains the verb and offers information about the subject. For example, in the sentence 'I moved quietly,' moved quietly is the predicate.
phrase	refers to a group of words that function as a single syntactical unit. For example, in the sentence, 'The grey cat sat on the mat,' the phrase 'The grey cat' acts as a single unit. Phrases are identified by their main head word: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• noun phrase – a phrase where the head word is a noun, usually structured as determiner + noun e.g. The dog• modified noun phrase – a noun phrase which includes an adjective e.g. The huge dog• adjective phrase – usually structured as adverb + adjective e.g. very loud• adverbial phrase – usually structured as two or more adverbs e.g. quite smoothly• verb phrase – usually structured as an auxiliary verb and a main verb e.g. must leave, has left. Verb phrases can also act as adverbs or adjectives e.g. <u>Running as fast as I could</u>, I left the house.



Term	Definition
Clause	refers to a group of words that is structurally larger than a phrase and typically contains a finite verb. Clauses can be described as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• main or independent clause – a clause which is made up of a subject and a predicate and expresses a complete concept. For example, 'We walked home,' where 'we' is the subject and 'walked home' is the predicate• subordinate or dependent clause – a clause which depends on the main clause to make sense. For example, '<u>If I get out early</u>, I will wait in the common room'• co-ordinate clause – a main clause which is preceded by a co-ordinating conjunction connecting it to another main clause. For example, 'He was angry <u>and he was tired</u>'.
sentence	refers to a set of words typically containing a subject and a predicate, which conveys either a statement, question, command or exclamation.
co-ordination	the linking of lexical items/ideas that are equally important. For example, 'Rocky ran and jumped over the hedge.' In this sentence, both actions have equal status within the sentence.
subordination	the linking of lexical items/ideas that do not hold equal importance. For example, 'After the oppressive heat of the day, the cool evening was a welcome relief.' In this sentence, the main clause has the higher level of grammatical status.
modification	the process of using linguistic elements to specify or qualify the nature or features of another. For example, using adjectives or adverbs to modify nouns or verbs.
declarative	a sentence type which acts as a statement. For example, 'I had seven minutes to get to work.'
interrogative	a sentence type which acts as a question. For example, 'What are you doing?'
imperative	a sentence type which acts as a directive e.g. commanding, warning, pleading or requesting. For example, 'Don't go.' Other sentence types can function as an imperative despite having different structures e.g. 'Would you shut the door quietly'.
exclamatory	a sentence type which conveys strong emotion and ends with an exclamation mark. For example, 'What an incredible display of skill!'
active voice	refers to the grammatical structure of a sentence where the subject is the actor of a sentence. Typically, sentences in the active voice follow a subject-predicator-object pattern. For example, 'The wrong person answered the phone call.'



Term	Definition
passive voice	refers to the grammatical structure of a sentence where the subject and object change positions to change the focus of the sentence. For example, 'The call was answered by the wrong person.'
modals	auxiliary verbs which denote possibility, necessity or obligation. The main modal verbs are: can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might, must, ought.
deixis	lexical items that rely on context to convey meaning. For example, in the sentence 'You know he did it again,' context is required to be able to understand both who 'he' is and what he has done.



Discourse

Term	Definition
mode	the term used to denote the medium of the language being explored, for example spoken or written. It can also be used to denote the format. For example, newspaper or TV script
linearity	refers to the linear or structure of a text – typically a text written in chronological order.
narrative	a spoken or written account of events which are connected.
cohesion	refers to the way links and connections are used to unite elements of a discourse or text.
coherence	refers to the way elements of a text or discourse combine to allow it to make semantic sense.
exchange structure	refers to the way certain interactions follow key exchange patterns to act as a single unit. For example, the Initiation – Response – Feedback structure is an expected pattern of discourse whereby the teacher asks a question, the student gives a response, and the teacher then gives feedback. The structure acts as a single unit of communication.
adjacency pair	refers to a unit of conversation where each participant takes a turn and the two elements are functionally related. For example, both speakers say hello to each other, or one speaker asks a question and the other responds.
overlap	refers to the simultaneous talk of two or more participants in a conversation.
topic shifts	refers to the linguistic techniques used by a speaker to change the subject of conversation. For example, 'That reminds me...' acts as a shift to a new topic.
framing moves	refers to linguistic patterns that are employed to highlight key segments of a discourse or text. For example, during a phone call one speaker may use a phrase like, 'It's been lovely to speak to you,' as a way of framing the close of the conversation.
non-fluency	refers to features such as fillers and false starts that prevent the discourse from being completely fluent.
pseudo-speech	refers to language that appears to have meaning but is actually not in the main lexicon of the language. For example, 'My head feels a bit <u>woodeny</u> today.'
genre convention	refers to recurring elements within a genre or form. For example, the use of a happy ending is a genre convention of fairy tales.



Pragmatics

Term	Definition
context	refers to the circumstances in which speech or writing take place that can potentially impact on the language used. Contextual elements include social, cultural, personal, technological and physical factors.
context dependency	refers to the need for participants to be aware of the context of production in order to be able to understand the full meaning of a text or discourse. For example, if someone uses a deictic expression in their speech.
sense	refers to the semantic meaning of a lexical item. In words that have a number of different meanings, the sense of the word is identified by the way it links to the words around it. For example, the word 'fire' has many different meanings and identifying the intended meaning requires knowledge of how it is being used in a sentence.
semantic role	refers to the relationship between the verbs and noun phrases of a sentence. These roles can be further defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● agent – looking at the performer of an action within a sentence. For example, 'Louise ran home'● force – looking at the performance of an action but where the instigation is not voluntarily or consciously performed. 'It rained'● causative – looking at a natural force which has brought about a change. For example, 'The drought destroyed the crops'● possessor – looking at the ownership of something. For example, 'The back of <u>Luke's chair</u> broke in two'● recipient – looking at who or what receives something. For example, 'She gave the form <u>to her teacher</u>'.
Grice's maxims	refers to the unspoken rules which allow a conversation to operate successfully. These maxims work on the assumption that all participants want to co-operate with one another. The four maxims are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● the maxim of quality – where a speaker is truthful and honest● the maxim of quantity – where a speaker provides sufficient information and detail but no more or less● the maxim of manner – where a speaker tries to be clear and orderly in what they are saying and avoids ambiguity● the maxim of relevance – where a speaker tries to ensure their contributions are pertinent and relevant to the rest of the conversation.



Term	Definition
	<p>However, speakers frequently and deliberately flout these maxims and still have successful conversations, often by creating implicature which the other participants understand.</p> <p>For example: A: Are you going to the party tonight? B: I've got to be at work by 6am for a meeting.</p> <p>Speaker B has openly flouted the maxim of relevance deliberately creating an implicature, which speaker A fully understands – B will not be coming to the party as they have to get up early.</p>
implicature	<p>refers to the implied meaning of a statement. Unlike entailment, if A is true, B does not always have to be true. For example, in the statement, 'I was late for work because I lost my cat,' the listener assumes that you were looking for your cat that day.</p> <p>However, it could be that your cat is usually the thing which wakes you up and because you lost them three days ago, you overslept. Implicature can also be employed by speakers who expect their audience to understand the meaning behind the statement rather than take it at its literal value. For example, if someone asks, 'Can you tell me the time?' you know they are not asking about your skills but asking for the time.</p>
entailment	<p>refers to the need to draw conclusions from a particular word or phrase. Typically, an entailment operates that if A is true then B must also be true. For example, in the statement, 'The Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated,' we must draw the conclusion that the Archduke died.</p>
presupposition	<p>refers to the assumed knowledge or truth of a statement. For example, in the question, 'Are you a vegetarian now?' there is a presupposition that you once ate meat.</p>



Term	Definition
politeness	refers to the ways in which language is used to show consideration of an interlocutor's thoughts and feelings, and to create and maintain positive relationships. Features include markers such as 'please' or 'thank you' as well as techniques such as avoiding giving blunt commands.
irony	refers to a way of writing or speaking whereby what is meant is the opposite of what appears to be stated. For example, if someone says, 'No, don't get off the sofa and help me,' it is likely they are being ironic and expect help.
phatic talk	refers to language used to establish or develop social contact. For example, greetings and comments about the weather are typical examples of phatic talk.
convergence/divergence	refers to aspects of Accommodation Theory , whereby speakers adjust their language in relation to the people they are interacting with. To achieve convergence , accents and dialects move closer, reducing the differences between them. In divergence , the differences between accents and dialects become more pronounced.

Graphology

Term	Definition
grapheme	refers to the smallest unit of a written language that conveys meaning and/or function. For example, letters, numbers and punctuation marks are all examples of graphemes.
typeface	refers to the design of type used. For example, Times New Roman or Calibri are examples of typeface.
font	refers to the style of a typeface. For example, bold and italic are types of font.
white space	refers to the use of space around words and images on a page.
logo	refers to the graphic mark or symbol used to identify and promote recognition of an individual, company or organisation.