

# The Standard Grade course

## What does Standard Grade English involve?

Standard Grade is a two-year English course that is spread over third and fourth year of your Secondary schooling, and results in a Credit, General, or a Foundation award. If your interests lie in achieving a Credit award to see you through to your Higher course next year, then this is exactly the book for you!

### The importance of literature and developing language skills

What really matters about Standard Grade is the course itself: the literature that you will study and the language skills you will practise. You will need to know about the three genres of English literature – drama, prose and poetry. You will need to know how to approach the various texts that you will be presented with, and how to write a critical essay on those texts; you need to know and practise how to compose an essay on a given subject; you must be able to read accurately and with understanding a piece of moderately difficult prose, such as the kind you will come across in the Close Reading paper.

### It is all about developing skills!

You can see right away that the course is very much skills based. That's the nature of English: in a very real sense, there isn't really any content to the subject, not in the way that maths or physics or digital literacy or business management all have contents. English is about reading and writing and talking, which are all skills. But in another sense, of course, English has the greatest and widest content of all subjects since it comprises Chaucer's 14th Century tales to modern day literature and anything else spoken and written that you can think of!

## The assessment of language skills

As far as Standard Grade is concerned, though, we will concentrate on the skills. You may well ask: how, then, are these skills to be assessed? The answer is quite complex. There are three aspects to the assessment of the various skills developed throughout your Standard Grade course:

- ▶ A **folio** of Coursework internally produced and externally assessed, submitted in the year of the examination:
- ▶ An **external examination** in Close Reading and Writing
- ▶ An **internal assessment** of Talk.

The **Folio** must be submitted to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) by 31 March on the year of the examination. It comprises:

- ▶ 3 critical essays (literature), from more than one genre; and
- ▶ 2 writing pieces: one transactional (discursive / argumentative) essay, and one personal / creative essay.

The **examination** comprises:

- ▶ writing paper, 1 hour 15 mins, variety of topics. Candidates must produce an essay on one – can be transactional / reflective / creative
- ▶ two close reading papers, 50 mins each – in your case a general paper and a credit paper

**Talk** is assessed internally by your teacher.

## How this book will help you

What matters most, however, is the course that you are undertaking, and this book will take you through the course, helping you along the way. It is important throughout your Standard Grade course that you develop your reading, writing, and talking skills. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that these skills are not only related, they affect each other in a circular way. You become involved in an upward spiral: as you develop reading skills you become critically aware of techniques used by authors, techniques which you then adopt in your own writing thus improving your writing skills, all of which, in turn, sharpen your reading skills and so on...

It's the same with listening and talk. As you develop skills as a listener, you improve your own talk skills, which help make you aware of higher level listening skills and so on...

It all becomes a cycle of continuing development and skills improvement.

[Insert illustration depicting spiral described above involving each stage and a big brain at the top <http://img.photobucket.com/albums/v417/HiddenOceans/Anne%20Stuff%20UpwardSpiral.gif>]

## The skills that you need to develop

You will learn what is meant by the theme of a novel or play or poem. You will study the techniques by which authors portray or present their themes – techniques such as structure, setting, characterisation, symbolism. You will also learn about the importance of time in literature: the use of time as a structural device, the time when a book is written, the time period in which it is set, the timescale over which it is written. You will also be introduced to what are called 'figures of speech', terms such as metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, climax. In poetry, you'll learn about rhyme and rhythm, enjambement and the caesura. Sometimes these figures of speech are also known as literary devices. They are certainly part of the critical terminology that you will use in your critical essays that you will write concerning the literature that you study.

But before we go any further, let's clear up a confusion. The term 'reading' is used in Standard Grade to mean both Close Reading and literature. In this book we will avoid using the term 'reading' unless when referring specifically to Standard Grade documents. Otherwise we will use the terms literature and Close Reading.

But this book will also teach you a lot of things you need to know about language. You will find out about sentence structure, lists, climactic sentences, link sentences, word choice, punctuation. You will learn to recognise all the various question types in the Close Reading, such that you will be able to answer all the questions in the examination itself.

### Look out for

You cannot tackle enough literature! It will develop your vocabulary immensely and give you confidence to approach most types of tasks and questions

continued

## The skills that you need to develop – continued

You will learn about various writing skills, such as how to write various kinds of essays: discursive, argumentative, personal / reflective one, and how to compose a short story. Most importantly, you will learn how to introduce and structure your essays, including the critical essays that you produce for the folio. By the time you have studied this book, you will be able to write coherently and cohesively – with an introduction, a conclusion, and in paragraphs that are effectively linked. You will also be shown how to draft and redraft your writing in order to improve its quality.

Finally, this book will help you develop your talk skills. It is worth always bearing in mind

that one third of your final grade is awarded for your performance in Talk – and that grade is assessed and awarded by your teacher. Talk involves your performance in groups and your performance solo. But don't worry: the consolation is that there is much you can do to improve your Talk skills, and that in turn will have quite an influence on your final overall grade.

But what is also important about this book is that not only will it help you prepare for and do well in Standard Grade, it will also help lay down the skills you need next year to do well in Higher English.

And that has to be to your considerable advantage given that there is so little time in Fifth Year to prepare fully for Higher.

## Let's quickly recap ...

Now you know:

- what Standard Grade involves;
- how this book will help you prepare for the assessments;
- how this book will help you attain a Credit award;
- how this book will also help you develop skills necessary for Higher.

## The Close Reading paper

## Questions about the meaning of words

These questions are very easy to spot. You are usually asked to give the meaning of a word and say how the context helped you arrive at it. The context is invariably the sentence within which the word appears or the surrounding sentences – just use your common sense.

This kind of question crops up at Higher as well. What matters is being able to relate the context to the meaning.

## Look out for

For questions about the meanings of words, be sure to show how the context helped you arrive at the meaning if you are asked.

## Credit question 1

An example will make things clearer. The following is from a Credit paper:

- 1 The building nowadays known as Maes Howe is a Neolithic chambered cairn, a tomb where, 5000 years ago, they interred the bones of the dead. In its long, long existence it has been more forgotten about than known, but in our era it is open to the public, with tickets and guides and explanatory booklets. It stands, a mere grassy hump in a field, in the central plain of Mainland Orkney. There is a startling collection of other Neolithic sites nearby.

The question asked candidates to give the meaning of 'interred', and to ask how the context made the meaning clear.

*Since it says that the place was a 'tomb' in which they 'interred' the 'bones of the dead', then 'interred' must mean buried – you can then say that the words 'interred' and 'bones of the dead' suggest that 'interred' must mean 'buried' – that way you have shown how the context makes the meaning clear.*

## Credit question 2

Sometimes, you are simply asked for the meaning of a given word without having to refer to the context, though invariably the context will make the meaning clear.

For example, read the following paragraph:

- 2 To reach Maes Howe I took the road that passes over a thin isthmus between two lochs. On the west side is a huge brooding stone circle, the Ring of Brodgar. On the east, like three elegant women conversing at a cocktail party, are the Standing Stones of Stenness. The purpose of these may be mysterious, but a short seven miles away is the Neolithic village called Skara Brae. There is preserved a huddle of roofless huts, dug half underground into a midden and sand dune. There, you can marvel at the domestic normality, that late Stone Age people had beds and cupboards and neighbours and beads. You can feel both their presence, their day-to-day lives, and their utter absence. It's a good place to go. It re-calibrates your sense of time.

*The passage does say 'I took the road that passes over a thin isthmus between two lochs', therefore the phrase 'between two lochs' makes clear that an isthmus must be land that has water on each side. The answer is (b), and all you had to do was place a tick in the appropriate box!*

The question was to define the word 'isthmus' and candidates were given 4 options – (a) an area of land, (b) a strip of land with water on each side, (c) stretch of moorland, (d) bridge connecting two islands.

## Now try this

## Credit question 3

Read carefully the following paragraph from a Credit paper:

10 When the London dodo died, the animal was stuffed and sold to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Taxidermy not being what it is today, over the next few decades the dodo slowly rotted until it was thrown out in 1755. All, that is, except the moth-eaten head and one leg.

Explain how the context helps you to understand the meaning of the word 'taxidermy' in Paragraph 10.

## Less frequently asked questions

## Questions about sentence structure

Although questions about sentence structure are not asked every year, nevertheless they form part of what is known as questions about language – and such questions are very frequently asked at Higher. You therefore have to know and understand all about sentence structure.

We have already looked at sentence structure in Chapter Three, but here we will examine specific questions asked about sentence structure in Close Reading.

## Sentence Structure – when it is useful to know about adverbs

In Chapter Three we looked carefully at adverbs and their function – let's now apply that knowledge.

## Credit question 4

Read the following passage carefully:

7 A lot has been learned about the nature of cosmic collisions and this new knowledge has given a remarkable twist too the story of our origins. We now recognise that comet and asteroid impacts may be the most important driving force behind evolutionary change on the planet. Originally, such objects smashed into one another to build the earth 450 million years ago. After that, further comet impacts brought the water of our oceans and the organic molecules needed for life. Ever since then, impacts have continued to punctuate the story of evolution. On many occasions, comets slammed into the earth with such violence that they nearly precipitated the extinction of all life. In the aftermath of each new catastrophe, new species emerged to take the place of those that had been wiped out.

*Think carefully about how the writer uses adverbs of time at the beginning of several of his sentences: Originally, After that, Ever since then, On many occasions, In the aftermath of each catastrophe. By placing these adverbs of time at the beginning of each sentence, the author draws attention to the stages by which this earth and life on it were formed.*

A good language question for the above passage would be:

*How does the sentence structure in this paragraph draw attention to the writer's ideas?*

Let's do the detailed analysis. The first two sentences make clear that he is talking about the ways in which asteroid impacts over time had been the major force behind evolutionary change on this planet. That is the theme of the paragraph. Now examine carefully the remaining sentences: as we said, each begins with an adverb or an adverbial phrase: **Originally, After that, Ever since then, On many occasions, In the aftermath of each catastrophe**. Of course they are all adverbs, and adverbs of time at that, but note that each marks a stage in a progressing timeline. And the use of the adverbs, especially at the beginning of each sentence, supports and emphasises his argument about the contribution through time of asteroid impacts to evolutionary progress. It's the positioning of the adverbs that draws attention to their meaning.

But let's take each adverb and adverbial phrase in turn and examine the contribution to the argument:

- **Originally**: adverb of time establishing the beginning of the process
- **After**: adverb of time denoting next stage in the process and modifying that, a demonstrative adjective referring to the original impacts
- **Ever since then**: adverbial phrase of time, where ever is an intensifier drawing attention to the importance of what happened after that point in time
- **On many occasions**: this time there is a prepositional phrase acting as an adverbial phrase of time and number, where **many** intensifies and draws attention to the number of occasions when asteroid impacts have taken place
- **In the aftermath of each catastrophe**: this is another prepositional phrase acting as an adverb – **in the aftermath of** – drawing attention to the results of the impacts, followed by **each catastrophe** where **each** is an intensifier, stressing the significance of every single catastrophic asteroid occurrence.

## Sentence Structure – when it is useful to know about adjuncts and prepositions

Many adjuncts begin with a preposition: out, beyond, from, onto. Indeed, as you are by now aware, most of them form what we call prepositional phrases – such as beyond the sunset, in the morning, on the motorway, under the table, in the car. So now you know to look out for such phrases and if they are at the beginning of a sentence the chances are that attention is being drawn to them.