

Learning English

English is the love of language, in all its variety and rich possibilities.

Language is the way that we communicate, create and share emotions, express our desires and speak our dreams.

Spoken English has its own dynamics: like music, it has pitch, volume, pace and intonation. Compared to written English, there are also differences in rhythm, sentence-length, word choice (diction), imagery and grammatical structures. Spoken English tends to be more casual; a kind of verbal shorthand.

In this digital age, admittedly, written English has come to closely imitate speech. Instant Messaging pares communication to the bone. We are living in a world That demands instantaneous gratification.

However, **Written English** has vast natural resources that can be mined for their wealth. These resources include structure, punctuation, diction and imagery.

Structure: simply means shape.

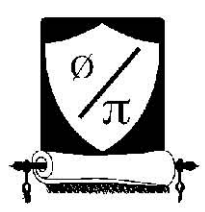
Writers give shape to sentences, paragraphs, chapters and whole books. As in geometry, a good shape has a practical purpose.

Punctuation adjusts the tone, colour and volume, until the feeling comes into perfect focus.

Diction, or word-choice

Dictionaries are powerful allies, and good writers use a mini-library of them.

Dictionaries access the meaning of words, called their denotation. But meaning also encompasses connotation, (emotional meanings), etymology (derivation), synonyms and antonyms, metaphorical meanings and level of usage (slang/colloquial versus formal). Pronunciation and parts of speech are also the business of dictionaries.



Imagery is a multi-faceted term, referring to the images' conveyed by the text. Imagery suggests leaps of the imagination; descriptive devices the author conjures up, to paint a picture in words. Simile, metaphor and personification are the most common.

The term 'imagery' is also used to refer to which of our senses is evoked by the author's description. Since sight and hearing are the two dominant human senses, visual and auditory imagery occur most commonly. Less common are tactile (touch), kinesthetic (movement) and gustatory (taste) imagery.

What is Competence in English?

Effective Speech

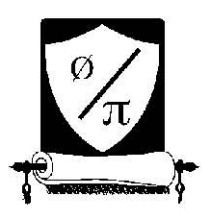
The human voice is a musical instrument. Most people play this instrument very poorly, releasing little of its potential power and beauty.

Competence in voice-production, like competence in music, demands mastery of pitch, volume, pace, intonation ("tune") and emotional colour.

Creative Writing

Ian Mundie, in his poem 'This Land', describes the extremes of the Australian landscape. But the poem is also a metaphorical description of the power of words:

"Give my words sun and rain,
desert and heat and mist,
Spring flowers and dusty sky,
song birds and harsh cries,
strength and austerity."



Literary Critics

A piece of literature (novel, drama or poem) is a work of art, a creation of the imagination, as is a painting or a sculpture. It becomes an aesthetic experience, an experience engaging our intellect and our emotions.

Let us take, as an example, Picasso's painting Guernica, famous for its depiction of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

When we engage with this painting we experience not just the Spanish Civil War, but also a powerful mix of emotions. The **themes are universal** : unspeakable suffering, grief and loss, chaos and insanity sustained by humanity in every war.

When we discuss a painting, we employ the **specialised language** of art criticism.

We speak of composition, colour, tone, and perspective.

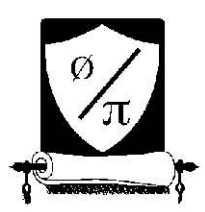
We also recognise that the artist has a *signature style*, a uniquely-recognisable language of composition, colour, tone, perspective. There is no mistaking a Picasso for a Rembrandt.

These three principles of art criticism can just as easily be applied to literary appreciation.

Let us take as our example the famous American novel, To Kill a Mocking bird by Harper Lee. Set in the deep south, it is the story of the legal defence of a Negro, wrongly accused of murdering a white man.

The themes are universal in their significance

- the evils perpetrated by racial prejudice in a community. Its effects on perpetrators as well as victims
- society's underdogs : lonely, sad individuals as targets of prejudice
- the powerlessness of society's victims
- the nature of human suffering



- integrity mad the legal profession
- empathy enriches us
- fighting for justice : the power of one
- the dignity of every human being

We use the language of literary criticism

Structure, diction sound - effects, characterisation movement/rhythm and imagery.

The imagery in this novel is particularly significant:

“It’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.

Mocking birds don’t do one thing

but make music for us to enjoy.”

The mocking bird becomes a poignant symbol throughout the novel. It comes to represent all of those ‘loners’ in the novel - the poor, the sad, the eccentric or the coloured - those whom society persecutes simply because they are mocking birds : the music they give is, simply, their brave humanity.

The novelist has a signature style, as recognisable as an artist’s or a composer’s.

*As a competent literary critic, we will **hear** the writer’s voice. By analysing the language and structure of the novel, we will appreciate how powerful is the medium for the message (themes).*

In short.....

In English, the medium is the message style is substance!