

Helpful reminders for students before completing Oral Commentaries

- When discussing a poem, context involves making specific references to other poems by the same poet which, for example, feature similar stylistic features. Students should not discuss general information such as biographical details which do not have direct relevance, but rather may analyse the extent to which aspects of the poem are or are not typical of the other poems studied by the student.
- When analysing prose, drama and excerpts from longer poems, context may involve many elements such as what happens or is described before and after the extract, the importance of the excerpt to the whole work, and specific examples of aspects which are similar to or contrast with other examples in the work. Again, the student must maintain a narrow focus, and not discuss related but not directly relevant information.
- In the student's introduction it is usually helpful to summarize concisely the extract in terms of its literal meaning before citing any symbolic or figurative levels of interpretation. If, for example, a poem describes an actual situation, the candidate usually benefits from first discussing how this description is developed, before asserting that actually an analogy is being created. Textual evidence should be provided to support the assertion that each literal aspect has a deeper meaning.
- Students need to discuss the details of the extract, including analysing how literary techniques create meaning. It is not sufficient merely to label what devices can be identified. Students should demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of the text by citing short quotations, indicating the relevant line number/s and discussing the effects of aspects such as connotations, figurative language, irony, auditory effects, narrative voice, and structure. Students should be aware of how stylistic features create tone, and that this may change during the extract. It is helpful for students to demonstrate an awareness of the genre and apparent purpose of the work from which the extract is taken. Thus, when discussing excerpts from Shakespearean plays it is important that students acknowledge that, for example, an exclamation mark in the script indicates that the line would be performed with a strong voice which portrays a certain emotion.
- While it is acceptable to work through an extract from the first to the last line, generally students earn higher marks for Criterion C if they organize their commentaries around points about such aspects as characterization, setting and/or themes. It is important that students do not make assertions, but rather integrate precise analysed textual evidence to support their ideas.
- Students should speak using a formal register, and thus should avoid colloquial expressions. While it is very helpful to label literary devices correctly, if a student is uncertain about the correct term to use, it is better to explain the function of a technique in an example without labelling the device, rather than incorrectly identifying the technique. Likewise, students should use words of which they confidently know the meanings, rather than attempting to use what they perceive to be sophisticated language, which can result in inaccurate vocabulary being utilized.

Practising Oral Commentaries

Even if a student performs poorly in his/her final Oral Commentary or Presentation, a second attempt may not be made. Therefore, it is important that students are as well prepared as possible for these assessment tasks. Once the students have carefully read and studied the literary works in and beyond class, it is helpful for them to complete practice tasks.

For example, in **preparation for the Oral Presentation**, students can be given two poems which are not part of the course. They can be asked to prepare both an oral exposé and a creative response. In small groups they can share their presentations. The students can self-evaluate, using feedback from the group, so they become familiar with how the marking criteria are applied to different types of responses.

In **preparation for the Oral Commentary**, students need to study the assigned texts very carefully. They can practise speaking about extracts from the texts for which they will be responsible. However, it can be useful for students to use excerpts from their own creative writing. Such an exercise can increase the creative component of the course, if this has appeal to students and teachers. Furthermore, students have insight into their own work, while the literature of a stranger may initially seem rather challenging. Of course in order to become comfortable with work that is not their own, students can prepare oral commentaries about extracts from the creative writing of their classmates. While eventually students must learn to plan and speak independently, at first during class students may feel more comfortable to deconstruct extracts in pairs.

The IB does not expect students to follow any particular procedure during the 20 minutes of preparation time nor any particular structure during the 15 minutes of delivering the Oral Commentary. The following exercise only provides an example of one of many methods that can work for some students who appreciate being given scaffolding. For this practice exercise a student's short story is used, but with an actual Oral Commentary all texts must be taken from Part 2 of the relevant *Prescribed Book List* © International Baccalaureate Organization.