

What, Through, Effect and Meaning

Before we begin to look at the different types of text that you could encounter in your commentary, let's discuss some of the fundamentals of the analysis of literature. The point we are about to make is actually rather important, because the following approach can be used not only for the oral commentary, but also for both the written commentary and essay writing. If you stick to this simple idea, elaborate well and in sufficient detail, plan out your argument, main body and conclusion, then it is unlikely that you will go wrong (unless you have not read the books or never attended English class!). In any case, it is a simple way of remembering what needs to be done for the oral commentary and you can prepare thoroughly during your 20 minutes' preparation time if you stick to this system.

Ready for the idea? Here goes:



Does it look a bit strange? Or perhaps incomplete? Well it is, but before we go into more detail, remember those four words **WHAT**, **THROUGH**, **EFFECT** and **MEANING**. Try to remember the arrow between the **WHAT** and the **EFFECT** and **MEANING** too.

These should be the questions in the back of your mind at all times, whether you are preparing to discuss a text in the oral commentary, answer questions on one of the remaining Part 2 works at HL, writing a commentary or composing an essay:

1. What is/are the text(s) saying?
2. Through which techniques?
3. What effect does this create in the reader? How does it contribute to the meaning of the work?

Now for a bit more explanation:

WHAT ...	THROUGH ...	EFFECT ...	MEANING ...
Is the poem saying?	Which techniques, type of language, structure, style and shape?	On the reader?	How does this contribute to the overall meaning?
Is the extract saying?	Which themes?	On you?	What meaning do you make of the text through this reading experience?
Is the author saying?	Which characters? Which events?	Emotionally? Sensorially?	What meaning is the author trying to present?

WHAT

For an IOC, the **WHAT** will mean what is the extract or poem saying about the human condition or the world, and what is it saying about a particular theme or idea? The text might be, superficially, about watermelons or fish or a forest, but there is a second, deeper meaning: your job is to decide what exactly this second meaning is. The **WHAT** will become your **argument**.

Care is needed here. Students often want to invent a second meaning even when there may not actually be one. The poem may just be about watermelons or a forest. You certainly need to establish the literal meaning of a work before you start talking about the abstract meaning, so be careful to take things one step at a time.

For an HL student entering into a larger discussion about one of the remaining Part 2 works studied, the **WHAT** will mean what does the novel or play, or the poems, short stories or essays, say about the question you are answering? Does the work concur with the question or does it disagree? If you are looking at a collection of short texts in your answer (for instance, poems, essays or short stories), perhaps one text agrees with the question while the other does not. If you have a question asking you to comment on what the work you

have read has told you about a theme (such as death, love, religion, power, peace, freedom, entrapment, fate and so on), then your **WHAT** will, very simply, be your response to this question.

THROUGH

THROUGH is the main part of your IOC (but don't forget that it can work for other responses to the text, such as essays and written commentaries too!). Your **WHAT** needs to be translated by something and this is why the verb **THROUGH** is helpful.

In many ways **THROUGH** is dealing with Criterion B, the author's choices of language, structure, technique, style and shape. For an IOC, some of the key techniques that will always be there – whether you are in the HL doing a poem or the SL looking at an extract or poem – are the following:

The main techniques and structural devices for an IOC

- Symbols
- Tone
- Atmosphere (or mood)
- Metaphor
- Punctuation (some will know it as syntax)
- Imagery
- Narrative structure

This is not an exhaustive list, but a fall-back safety-check if your mind goes blank; there are other features to consider such as contrast, narrative perspective, pace, literal/figurative language and so on. If we put the bulleted list together in an acronym we get **STAMPIN** (think of the word stamping, but without the final 'g'). Ready to do some stampin'?

Whether you are giving a line-by-line or thematic account in your commentary, this framework allows you to focus on some of the essential stylistic choices that the author has made. It may be that in the end you only focus on some of these literary features, since the others will come up in the extract or poem that are not listed here. As you work your way through the commentary, it is important to look for techniques that you might not have considered before. Each reading of a piece of literature can yield something new and interesting to the searching, creative mind.

If you are using a thematic structure to frame your commentary, then you could start your planning by thinking in terms of the points you would make. In each of these points you could look at examples of the chosen **STAMPIN** technique to say how the text makes its point and what the effect of the technique is on the reader.

It may be that there will be other techniques (such as the use of sound – known as prosody, and shape – also known as graphology) that are more appropriate for the poem or extract you are looking at. If so, do not forget to include an analysis of these techniques in your commentary.

Certain techniques are specific to the genre in question, and in the Literature course it is always good to show understanding and awareness of the literary conventions of a genre. The table below outlines just a few to consider:

Literary conventions: techniques specific to genres for consideration

General: Metaphor, Symbol, Characterization, Tone, Structure, Atmosphere, Imagery

Poetry	Fiction	Theatre	Prose other than fiction
Rhyme	Narrative technique	Stage directions	Intended audience or readership
Rhythm	Plot	Akoustikon	Register
Prosody (sound)	Time structure	Opsis	Rhetorical figures
Graphology (shape)	Foreshadowing	Audience	

EXERCISE 4

Using the above table for reference, and choosing one genre, see if you can devise your own acronym to help you remember which elements to look at in your IOC.

The language of the IOC

In the assessment criteria for both HL and SL, five points go to the type of language that you use and the way that you construct your ideas stylistically.

- How clear, varied and accurate is the language?

This descriptor for style reminds us that the language of the IOC must be clear and accurate. Knowing which terms to use and how to capture the meaning of a sentence or line with precision is a skill that can be practised and enhanced by extensive reading of quality literature, as well as through active response to teacher feedback on assignments and oral participation in the classroom. Precise, clear and accurate language will be incisive (saying something), economical (to the point and not unnecessarily wordy) and exact in the way that it phrases an idea or point.

- How appropriate is the choice of register and style? ('Register' refers, in this context, to the student's use of elements such as vocabulary, tone, sentence structure and terminology appropriate to the commentary.)

For more detail on register and what it entails, look up the section on register in Chapter 4. To be clear, the register of the IOC is formal. Your **vocabulary** should be far-reaching, literary and of a high standard, while the **tone** of your commentary should be controlled and appropriate to the task (sober and formal with moments of elevation if necessary).

The **sentence structure** of your IOC will inform the listener as to the degree of your comfort with the language and your ability to engage with higher-order thinking skills and material for study. It is usually best to opt for short sentences, and it is vital to think carefully before using any idiom, as errors in this category, whilst tolerable, can interfere with the clarity of your overall expression. **Terminology** refers to the use of the technical language you employ to describe literary features and techniques. Make sure that you are sure of the meaning of key technical terms in literary analysis, and that you use them with accuracy.