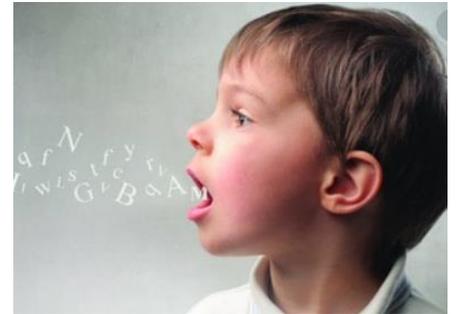




# huish HEADSTART

## English Language A-level



Welcome to our little booklet to get you thinking about your advanced level English language studies at Huish.

### INTRODUCTION

English Language A-level is very different from GCSE. The big thing that all our students tell us when they get to Huish is that English Language is pretty much a different subject. So, we asked some of our current students what advice they would give themselves as they started Huish. Here's what they said...

## L – A Yr2 Student

*English Language became my favourite subject by the end of the course after all my hard work meant I finally could start achieving top grades. Ofc I also think the environment of the classroom with academic discussions alongside a lot of laughs contributed to enjoying the subject. The right balance for sure! We really get into the theoretical detail of the language at A-level. The amount of work needed to do well came as a bit of a shock at first but I think having then done that it paid off. I liked how we went through each 'language level' one at a time in the first term – looking at things like pragmatics and discourse was very new, so it was great to do it in detail but not too much to overwhelm us. I think I should have done more alongside class work and realised sooner that the '5 a week' [that's 5 hours per subject per week outside the time in class] was important in order to boost my end grade. I was to do the course all over again, I would use the online resources [the course has a Moodle VLE site] much more, completed the work books [each unit has a booklet to accompany it] earlier on, and pushed myself to work with higher achieving students whether that would be completing questions or revising topics.*

[Huish Note: this student is set to get a top grade but struggled to get to grips with how different English Language A-level was from GCSE English]

## R – A Yr2 Student

*I liked the width of the course. A-Level English Language is not constrained in its content by the specification, or by the exam questions. The new areas of language change, child language etc were very different from GCSE. The way we look at texts and data allows for individual interpretation and we are able to write an entirely unique answer so long as we can back-up points we make. GCSE English Language for me seemed more about the text in the moment, with little knowledge of the language that came before it or what might come next. A-Level English Language is more about life: history, development, beliefs and people and your knowledge grows with every interaction you have. Looking back, I'd get into a real range of language resources earlier - podcasts, magazines, radio programmes, youtube channels, Twitter accounts. I think one of the things I have really got from the course is the ability to conduct independent research, both in terms of coursework and topical language issues. I have found you can't rote or stock learn English like you can some other subjects.*

[Huish Note: R had a tough time at school with illness but is now on course for the highest grades at Huish and is looking forward to studying at Oxford University]

## M – A Yr1 student

*What I enjoy most about the A-level content and style of exam is that it enables you to write freely and lets you express your own thoughts about texts and concepts. I was pleasantly surprised at how theoretical and almost philosophical the linguistic [theory of language] content can be at times. I struggled at the beginning of the course with the concept of 'language levels' as they are embedded in everything that is spoken and written yet I had never heard of them before! So yes putting the time in right from the start is always a good idea to get familiar with a very new approach to the study of language. Theories, concepts and real life applications [applied linguistics], even looking at older language texts [we go back to 1600] are a large part of this course that I didn't expect and these things turned out to be a large (and fascinating) part of the course.*

## What are the main differences you'll discover with English Language A-level?

We're interested in **varieties** of the English language: slang, dialects, child language, occupational language and much more – you get a taster of the kinds of variety from the first few minutes of Susie (Countdown) Dent's talk to Google employees on this video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIp44 LC0-Y>

You'll find we look in greater depth than GCSE and at a **wider range** of language data: transcripts of real speech, social networking language, new words, accents, the language of power in contracts, speeches, journalists' articles and more.

## So what is NOT on the course?

It is not a creative writing course. We do a bit of journalistic writing where we train you to write blogs, editorials and podcasts but we do not write short stories. We don't really look at literary texts (novels, poems, short stories) so if those are your thing you'd be better going for English Literature A-level.

## Part A – Language under the Microscope

One of the units we cover is all about really looking at the detail of the grammar, word choices and sentence structures in an unseen piece of writing. We have selected a text which gives you some idea of the kinds of very different texts you may face on this course.

**Text A** is one side of a download on caring for guinea pigs, from PetPortal.org an animal care website.

### THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR GUINEA PIGS

Guinea pigs are social animals and should not be kept on their own. It is recommended to keep guinea pigs in pairs or small groups of the same sex.

Guinea pigs originate from Peru where they roam the countryside in family groups, usually comprised of one male with a group of females and their young.

Pet guinea pigs can be kept indoors or in an outside hutch. Although they are naturally nervous creatures, they soon become used to gentle handling.



#### HOUSING

Guinea pigs should be provided with as large a cage as possible. A hutch for outdoors should be sturdy and water-proof. It should be raised off the floor by about 25 cm and placed in a sheltered position or inside a shed. Guinea pigs must be protected from inclement weather as well as strong sunlight. A hutch cover, blanket or piece of old carpet will often offer added protection on cold nights.

If you decide to keep your guinea pigs indoors, then a cage similar, but much larger than those used for hamsters, is suitable. These should be placed in a cool room out of direct sunlight and draughts.

All guinea pigs benefit from access to a covered pen or run in the garden. Avoid using pesticides nearby and ensure that the enclosure is secure enough to keep the guinea pig in as well as other animals out. An outdoor run should be moved regularly to allow for a fresh supply of grass.

A hutch or cage should have a layer of shavings on the floor with plenty of hay for bedding. Hay can also be provided to eat from a hay rack if available. You should also provide wooden toys, tubes, plastic ball balls and huts in their cage to break boredom.

Hygiene is extremely important especially in the summer. If not kept clean the hutch or cage will attract flies. As a general rule, cages should be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week. A good quality, pet-friendly disinfectant should be used and all the bedding and shavings replaced with a fresh supply.



#### GENERAL CARE

Grooming your guinea pigs helps to keep them healthy while also allows you to bond with your pet. How you groom your pet will depend on whether your guinea pig is short or long-haired. A long-haired guinea pig will need grooming with suitable coat care equipment, which your pet shop will be able to advise on. Short-haired guinea pigs will also benefit from regular brushing.

Your guinea pigs' nails will require regular clipping, which you will need special small animal nail clippers for. Your pet shop or vet will be able to advise or do this for you if you do not feel comfortable.

Guinea pigs are prey animals so they hide their symptoms as much as possible when ill, if you are concerned about your guinea pigs' health or behaviour, contact your vet as soon as possible.

#### CHOOSING YOUR GUINEA PIG

There are three basic types of guinea pig – smooth-haired, coated and long-haired. The smooth-haired types include Sells and Marked and Ticked, the coated types include Abyssinians, Rex's, Teddies, Crested and long-haired types include Peruvians, Alpacos and Shelties.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Guinea pigs originate from Peru where they roam the countryside in family groups!

Whichever type you choose, your guinea pigs should be at least six weeks old when you buy them.

**A healthy guinea pig should be:**

- Bright and alert
- Have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth and nose
- Have a clean anal area
- Have a glossy coat with no bald patches and not have sores on the skin
- Should move around the cage easily
- Should feel well covered and not bony



You can start by annotating this text for any 'language features' you notice. Try to split up your comments into those about word choices (eg what would you say about 'prey animals?') and then move on to comments about the ways sentences are constructed.

See how many of the following language features you can identify in the text:

Jargon	Lexical field of biology	Second person pronouns	Imperative mood	Non-standard grammar
Declarative mood	Pre-modification	Modal verbs	Present tense	Capitalisation

We also look out into how English works in the wider world. English is one of a number of **international languages**.

Watch this video about the future of languages: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUU8pLEk6nk>

## PART B – Topical Language Issues

Another key part of this course is that section which considers ‘**topical language issues**’. There are almost as many different topical issues as there are words in the English language, so we only have space to explore a few here.

Why not have a chat to others in your family and friends about how you and they feel on the following issues?

- i) Which accents do you like/dislike and why?
- ii) Does spelling matter?
- iii) Do you think women and men use language the same way?
- iv) One day Brits and Americans might not be able to understand each other.

In this part of the course, you will be trained to write in a range of journalistic forms: blogs, podcasts, editorials. Watch a few minutes of the following TED talk from leading English language professor, David Crystal <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVqcoB798Is> and then have a think about how you would write a script for a podcast talk on the following topic: ‘The English language acts differently when it goes online’.

## PART C – Comparing and Contrasting Texts

This course considers spoken and written data equally. You will be trained to annotated and consider the similarities and differences between written and spoken texts and to think about the issues each raise.

The following text is taken from a recent exam paper and we are using this to show you what a **transcript** looks like and how, when annotated, it is possible to notice how speech can be very different from writing.

### **Text B**

This text is a short extract of real speech, transcribed and set as data for students to annotate and write about.

<p><b>Key</b></p> <p>(.) micropause (1.0) pause in seconds <u>underlining</u> particular emphasis of a word [ overlapping speech :: elongation of a word</p> <p>Some words have been spelled to reflect their pronunciation.</p> <p><b>Text A</b></p> <p><b>Helen:</b> lots of people are just (.) er (.) just unaware of how <u>little</u> woodland there is left in this country (0.5) very little compared [ to</p> <p><b>Alan:</b> [ really</p> <p><b>Helen:</b> [ yes (.) oh yes (.) compared to other countries a huge amount of our woodland is gone (1.0) only about ten percent of the UK is covered by woodland compared to an average of <u>over forty percent</u> in other European countries</p> <p><b>Alan:</b> wo::w (.) that's a <u>massive</u> difference</p>
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- 1) Look at the ways a transcript looks different – list them
- 2) Which words are emphasised in this extract and why do you think they are said that way?
- 3) If you were recorded talking about something you feel strongly about, how do you think your language would be different from ‘normal’?

## Text C

The following text is taken from an exam paper to show how spoken language and written language about the same topic (in this case – woodlands) can both differ and show similarities.

### Ash tree ban may be too late to avert 'UK tragedy', says expert

Move to halt ash tree imports from Europe as experts claim 30% of UK's wooded landscape is at risk from fatal fungus

A ban on imports of ash trees from Europe may not be enough to stop an epidemic of a deadly disease wiping out most of the species' 80m trees in the UK, the government has been warned.

The president of the Country Land and Business Association, Harry Cotterell, said one of the best-loved features of the British landscape faces devastation due to the spread of the fungus *chalara fraxinea* into the wild, eight months after it was first discovered in the UK.

Cotterell said the UK faced a "national tragedy" as ash trees make up 15%-30% of the wooded landscape, across woodlands, hedgerows and parks.

What are the major differences (and similarities) in the way trees are presented and discussed in both extracts?

Looking ahead to work which we do in Year 2, we thought you'd like a flavour, once again, of how different English Language A-level is from GCSE. Here we introduce you to the different units which we cover in the second year.

English language A-level is more **technical** than GCSE and it goes into **new areas**. You'll enjoy the course if you are interested in language (making links with other subjects such as Psychology, Sociology, History, Business, Politics etc). For a slightly different view on language see the first 4 minutes of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9shPouRWCs>

## PART 2A – Child Language Acquisition.

### SECTION A – Child language acquisition

#### Text A

**Text A** is a transcript from a private data source. Beth (aged three and five months) and Tom (aged four and two months) are playing in the back of the car, and are talking with their mother.

**Beth:** my car's driving down the road (*makes sound of a car*)

**Tom:** [indistinct]

**Beth:** I can do whatever I want to do (2.0) bang bang bang bang it's landed under your leg bang bang bang bang and my t/w/actor [tractor]

**Mother:** your tractor

**Tom:** drive it out

**Beth:** bash splash it's all in water (.) it's a b/æ/th [bath]

It's a small extract but what this shows is how differently children can speak from adults – it's really a different variety of language and we are really interested in looking at a wide range of language varieties, you even get to choose a variety of language yourself for your own course work element.

**THINK POINT:** In which ways is the speech of the two children in the extract different from typical adult speech?

We'd encourage you to look online for some video clips of young children (between 2-4 years) talking to adults or to each other – you'll soon start to notice a number of different language features.

## PART 2C – Language Change

### SECTION C – Language change

#### Text C

**Text C** is an extract from the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868), made between representatives of the American government and leaders of different groups of Sioux Native American Indians about land ownership.

Lieutenant General William T. Sherman, General William S. Harney, General Alfred H. Terry, General O. O. Augur, J. B. Henderson, Nathaniel G. Taylor, John G. Sanborn, and Samuel F. Tappan, duly appointed commissioners on the part of the United States, and the different bands of the Sioux Nation of Indians, by their chiefs and headmen, whose names are hereto subscribed, they being duly authorized to act in the premises.

#### *Article I.*

From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall for ever cease. The government of the United States desires peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians desire peace, and they now pledge their honor to maintain it.

If bad men among the whites, or among other people subject to the authority of the United States, shall commit any wrong upon the person or property of the Indians, the United States will, upon proof made to the agent, and forwarded to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington city, proceed at once to cause the offender to be arrested and punished according to the laws of the United States, and also reimburse the injured person for the loss sustained.

In many ways the most challenging part of the A-level is the unit which looks at **language change** from 1600 to the present day. Above we have included a small section of one of the most recent exam texts. It is challenging because it is a legal document (an international treaty) as well as being over 150 years old and about a topic you may never have considered before – the treatment of indigenous Americans.

Keeping in mind this is a very specific form of text, have a go at annotating for language features. Remember that legal texts often operate in very different ways to other forms of writing – and think about why that might be?

For a sense of how the course looks at Language Change, take a look at the first 5 minutes of this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFkNed4gsRU> Remember that we will have around 4 hours per week of class time plus additional support plus we recommend around 5 hours per week of independent study – so don't be intimidated by the depth or complexity of issues raised in this booklet – we will take it gradually across two years!

## LANGUAGE QUIZ

We do NOT expect you to know the answers to these quiz questions, but you might have fun discussing them with someone or looking them up. We can talk about the answers when we see you at College!

1. What is special about words such as *biro*, *google* and *hoover*?
2. Roughly how many words do you think are in the English language?
3. What is the plural form of *fish*, *ox*, *octopus* and *data*?
4. Why do you think a young child might say *swimmed* (instead of *swam*) and *thinked* (instead of *thought*)?
5. What's the difference between a *book* and a *booklet*? What's the difference between a *host* and a *hostess*?
6. What's the difference between *anti-* and *ante-* ?
7. What is special about: *see / sea*; *heard / herd*; *their / they're / there*?
8. If you were a Roman, what would '*decimate*' mean? And what does it mean in modern English?
9. How many different spellings of the curry '*korma*' are there?
10. Until 1917, what was the British royal family's last name (surname) and why do you think they changed it?

## Some last thoughts

What makes English Language A-level different, at Huish?

We have a very experienced team in the English Department who have taught their subjects for a long time and many are Examiners or researchers in their own right. [Marcus Barrett](#) and [Thom Haines](#) both run twitter accounts dedicated to English language news and students who take a note of the linguistic stories posted there will learn a lot.

English Language at Huish offers you the chance to work with [Somerset Heritage Centre](#) who have a massive stock of documents from 700AD through to almost anything and everything to do with Somerset you could imagine. We work closely with them in looking at language change. We have had many top-mark language investigations from students who have worked on royal documents, old wills, law reports, old school and village records, even the world's first (unsuccessful) fundraiser for a steam-powered aeroplane (1800s) to name but a few.

We have a close link to outside groups like Winchester University based charity [The English Project](#), which holds talks and events to explore and discuss the developing English language across the world; we often work with the [Oxford English Dictionary \(OED\)](#) and past students have even managed to get new versions of words listed in the OED.

One thing we are particularly proud of is our long-running **mentoring project** which gets Yr2 students to work with Yr1 students in their English language studies - informal support from someone who just went through exactly the same thing. It's part of our Huish ethos of supporting each other and enjoying the learning process together.

## Further Reading

If you are interested to explore some more aspects of the English language before you come to Huish, we suggest trying to find some inexpensive copies of some of the following. Even if you can get hold of the books below, pretty much anything on English language by these writers will be helpful to you – you should also try typing their names into YouTube as they have both written a lot and given many public talks.

You will have access to an excellent Learning Centre (library) at Huish in which we pride ourselves at having the latest books on language and linguistics and often copies of books up to university level (eg on gender and language etc) and a wide stock of books which includes multiple copies of the OCR textbook. So there is no need to buy anything but we do understand that some students like to have their own copy.

*Cambridge Encyclopedia of the The English Language*, **David Crystal**

*The Language Report*, **Susie Dent** (5 different editions available – all good)

**The recommended textbook for this course is:**

*English Language*, **OCR textbook**

