

VCE

ENGLISH

LANGUAGE

Exam Guide

by Kirsten Fox



insight

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First published by Insight Publications Pty Ltd 2005/2005, reprinted 2007, 2009
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Series Editor: Iris Breuer
Design: Graphic Partners
Set in 12/14 Times New Roman by SPG
Printed by Metro Digital Print

Disclaimer: To the teacher and student

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National Library of Australian Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Fox, Kirsten.
VCE English language.
For senior secondary school students.
ISBN 1 920693 94 7.
1. English language - Rhetoric - Textbooks. 2. Report writing - Textbooks. 3. Victorian Certificate of Education examination. I. Title.

808.042

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the English Language students I have taught at Mac.Robertson Girls' High School from 2000–2004 for their commitment and input to the subject; they have greatly assisted in my own appreciation of the course and inspired me with their passion, humour and intellect. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the students who kindly allowed me to use their essays in this guide. Without their consent this guide would not have been possible. Thank you to:

Clare Boreham, Philippa Brant, Zuzia Graszkiwicz, Annie Guo, Alice Kwong, Stephanie Ong, Luisa Russo, Wansaja Wettasinghe, Clara Yap.

I would also like to thank Sue Knopfmacher, my English Language colleague at Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, for her support and enthusiasm for this subject since our 'baptism of fire' in 2000, and Debbie de Laps from VATE, for her perseverance in promoting this often overlooked English option.

I thank Julie Reid for kindly allowing me to use her transcripts in this guide.

Finally, I would like to thank the publishers, Iris Breuer and Cathi Lewis, and all the team at Insight Publications.
Kirsten Fox

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Introduction

This guide is designed to help you practise short-answer questions and essay writing for the English Language exam. If you do not practise exam-style questions or write practice essays over the course of the year, you may encounter great difficulties and anxiety when you come to write under stressful exam conditions. Regular practice will allow you to develop your exam skills over the course of the year, and this guide should enable you to do just that; cramming just prior to the exam is no way to prepare.

STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

The guide is divided into three sections, just like the exam paper. Section 1 deals with Unit 4, Area of Study 1: Spoken language. It contains various transcripts with accompanying questions for you to answer. Section 2 deals with Unit 4, Area of Study 2: Written language. It includes a range of different written texts with accompanying questions. Section 3 of the guide is the most comprehensive and deals with the essay question (Unit 3). This is the most important part of the exam paper, as the one question is worth 40% of the exam mark.

PREPARING FOR THE ESSAY

The most effective way to prepare for this essay question is to start writing essays as early as possible. You will be able to use this part of the guide first, as you will no doubt start with Unit 3 of the course. Use this guide to familiarise yourself with the overarching themes of the course, then practise the steps outlined on pp. 74–5 for planning and responding to essay questions. The guide contains sample student essays which have been annotated by an exam assessor so that you can see what constitutes a really good essay response – and what to avoid. There are also some practice essay topics for you to try. These are grouped under themes on pp. 111–14, so that you can cover a range of essay questions.

You will also need to practice answering short-answer questions on speaking and writing once you have covered these areas of study in Unit 4. You must be aware at all times of time limits and mark allocation.

Writing essays and responding to questions at school and at home is vastly different from writing under exam conditions, so take heed of the advice given in the exam tips section at the end of the book and don't forget – practise as much as you can.

EXAM FORMAT

End-of-year examination

The duration of the exam is two hours, plus 15 minutes of reading time. The exam assesses levels of performance on outcomes from both Units 3 and 4 and is divided into three parts:

- a section on spoken text/s (Unit 4 Area of Study 1) – short-answer questions.
- a section on written text/s (Unit 4 Area of Study 2) – short-answer questions.
- an expository essay (choice of questions relating mainly to Unit 3, although Unit 4 is also assessable here).

The exam is worth 100 marks in total.

Before the exam

Draw up an exam timetable to get a clear idea of how to allocate your reading and writing time. Writing time should be linked to the marks a section is worth. There are 100 marks to be gained and 120 minutes of writing time, so a rough guide is to spend approximately one minute per mark. Here is a suggested timetable.

Exam value	Your English Language exam is worth 50% of your final Study score.	
	Total marks: 100	
Duration	Reading time: 15 minutes	
	Writing time: 120 minutes (2 hours)	
Section	Value	Time
1 Short-answer questions on either speaking or writing	40 marks	40–45 minutes
2 Short-answer questions on either writing or speaking	20 marks	20–25 minutes
3 Essay	40 marks	45–50 minutes

Later in this guide you will find advice on how to tackle the exam itself, but now that you have a clear idea of what is expected of you in the exam, you should revise the various outcomes in Units 3 and 4 and gain plenty of practice in answering exam-type questions and writing sample essays.

Section 1

Spoken Language

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

This area of study will be assessed in either Section 1 or 2 of the exam paper. You will be given one or two transcripts of spoken texts to analyse and asked to answer short-answer questions. Space will be provided in the booklet for your responses.

In order to prepare yourself for this section of the paper, you will need to revise the key knowledge and skills outlined in the Study Design. Here is an outline of the main points:

Range of kinds of spoken English

- Spontaneous v. scripted
- Monologues and dialogues
- Narratives, speeches, conversations (face-to-face or telephone), interviews, unscripted commentary on television or radio.

Functions of spoken language

- Many types of communication, including phatic, transactional, persuasive and expressive.

Nature of spoken language

- Transient, time-bound, usually interactive;
- Distinctive features include prosodic features (stress, pitch, intonation, volume, tempo), paralinguistic features (facial expressions, body gestures, eye contact, voice quality, laughter), ‘non-fluency features’ (such as false starts, repairs, hesitations, filled pauses, pauses and repetition), adjacency pairs, overlaps, discourse particles, interrogative tags, openings and closings, formulaic utterances;
- Differs from written language in lexicon, syntax and grammar.

Conversational strategies

- Topic management; turn-taking (taking, holding and relinquishing the floor); minimal responses (backchanneling).

Co-operative principles of conversation

- Grice’s maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, manner (co-operative principles);
- Collaboration and support of other speakers.

Relationships between participants

- How does the dialogue reflect the relationships between interlocutors? Consider lexicon, conversational strategies, co-operative principles and so on.

Transcript conventions

- Familiarise yourself with different transcription conventions (refer to past papers) and be able to analyse texts accordingly, using the appropriate metalanguage.

SAMPLE TEXTS AND QUESTIONS ON SPOKEN LANGUAGE

The following sample texts and questions will enable you to practise your knowledge of spoken language. However, this is not an exhaustive list of possibilities. You should also practise using past exam papers, your SAC on this outcome and sample questions in English Language textbooks.

The following transcripts each have questions totalling 20 marks, with the exception of texts 2 and 3, which can be taken as paired texts to total 40 marks.

Text 1: Conversation

The following transcript is an extract of a conversation between two women, Diane (D) and Elizabeth (E).

Transcript key

.	final intonation	,	continuing intonation
?	questioning/appealing intonation	--	truncated intonation unit
-	truncated word	..	very short pause
*_	onset and duration of simultaneous speech	@	laughter

- 1 D: Oh by the way,
2 did Jane ever find out about that person.
3 Remember when we went on the picnic?
4 ..And she was tryin' to find out who that person was,
5 and she was asking us all?
6 E: ..Oooh?
7 Now what,
8 yeah,
9 I can vaguely,
10 think.
11 *What was it--
12 D: We were going to look up in a book or something.
13 E: Oh,
14 E: Sir Charles Hotham.
15 D: Yeah.
16 E: Was it.
17 Um,
18 yeah well I've,
19 followed it up.
20 And,
21 ..um,
22 yes.
23 He was,
24 Governor General,
25 for a little while.
26 But he wasn't,
27 any big,
28 ..big famous person.
29 D: *Hm.
30 E: In fact he was,
31 he died?
32 He was only out here,
33 ..two years or something before he *died.
34 D: Hm.
35 E: And um,
36 one of my tennis friends has got,
37 an encyclopaedia at home.

38 'N' she read up on him,
 39 'n' she said,
 40 it sounded like he was a real poonsy fellow.
 41 D: Aw *really?
 42 E: And,
 43 and they got rid of 'im out of England,
 44 to to,
 45 get rid of 'im,
 46 'n' put 'im to Australia,
 47 *as our,
 48 D: Oh ho ho.
 49 E: Governor-General.
 50 But his wife was very popular.
 51 And um,
 52 there was one incident,
 53 they were walking through the mud and and the wife just,
 54 ya know,
 55 picked up her long dresses 'n',
 56 sort've,
 57 tiptoed *through the mud,
 58 D: Kept going @@
 59 E: whereas he wouldn't.
 60 D: Oh,
 61 *true?
 62 E: And um,
 63 ya know,
 64 he was just,
 65 poonsy.
 66 D: Hmm.
 67 E: @@@
 68 D: Sure sounds like it.
 69 E: Yeah-no,
 70 they really loved the wife,
 71 apparently.
 72 *She was popular.
 73 D: So it must,
 74 so something was dedicated to 'im?
 75 E: Oh it was dedicated,
 76 um,
 77 the medal said um,
 78 or the token said,
 79 in commemoration of the landing.
 80 It was landing.
 81 *That word that we couldn't read,
 82 D: Oh it was landing.
 83 E: was landing.
 84 Of Sir Charles Hotham,
 85 June,
 86 1853.

Text 1 questions

Question 1

What is the function of this dialogue?

(1 mark)

Question 2

How does E maintain control of the floor in this dialogue? Refer to line numbers in your answer.

(2 marks)

Question 3

Although E is the dominant speaker in this conversation, there is evidence to suggest that this is a collaborative dialogue. Comment on two conversational features/strategies which illustrate this.

(3 marks)

Question 4

Explain the discourse function of each of the following discourse markers:

- Oh by the way* (line 1)
- yeah well* (line 18)
- ya know* (line 54)
- Yeah-no* (line 69)

(4 marks)

Question 5

Identify two different types of non-fluency features and give an example of each.
