

## SAMPLE EXAM RESPONSES

The sample exam responses in this section cover four main forms of texts: novel, poetry, short story and drama. Pay special attention to the annotation boxes and paragraph commentaries: these show you how the responses are constructed and draw your attention to the essential features of a successful exam response.

### Writing on a novel



**A detailed exam answer on a novel will show the significance of language, images, dialogue, setting and characterisation within passages and an awareness of how these contribute towards meaning in the novel as a whole.**

#### Sample response on Austen's *Persuasion*

The sample response on the following pages is based on three passages from *Persuasion*:

- pp.33–4, from 'So far all was perfectly right' to 'might yet be made observant by it'
- pp.76–7, from 'Other opportunities of making her observations' to 'Charles Hayter was wise'
- pp.166–7, from 'Lady Dalrymple's carriage' to 'Anne is too delicate for them'.

(Page numbers are from the 2003 Penguin Classics edition.)

**WWW**

Go to [www.insightpublications.com.au](http://www.insightpublications.com.au) for a sample exam response on Austen's *Emma*, as well as an analysis of three passages from *Sense and Sensibility* and a sample response on them.

This is a good example of a response where the analysis begins immediately with a passage. Begins analysis of Passage 1 and connects to the wider text by using a description of Anne from the beginning of the text.

Develops the idea of narrative voice which will thread through the whole discussion and link the three passages and the wider text. In this paragraph the writer shows how the narrative voice in the text allows the reader greater insight than the characters.

Paragraph 2 provides a good context for the rest of the analysis.

Links to previous paragraph to analyse the contrast between the superficial and the real.

The fact of Anne Elliot's being held in so little regard by her own family is a surprise that 'burst' upon Lady Russell (Passage 1), however the reader is aware that this underestimation is all too commonplace; Anne is, after all, 'only Anne' to her family and acquaintances. Even Lady Russell does not fully comprehend the depth of Anne's understanding. The narrative voice of the first passage belongs indirectly to Anne, so the shock that troubles Lady Russell, who esteems Anne's sense and intelligence, has less effect on the reader who, knowing all that Anne has endured and seeing all that she sees, has become 'hardened to such affronts'.

Austen allows us, through the device of the shared narrative voice, to become more sensible of the deeper danger that Mrs Clay presents; Lady Russell 'wondered, grieved, and feared' at the slight on her friend's behalf, but Lady Russell only reacts to the hierarchical impropriety of the choice of Mrs Clay over Anne. Austen acknowledges Lady Russell's shock as proper, but even Lady Russell is not equal to understanding, as Anne does, the avidity behind Mrs Clay's 'assiduous pleasing manners', and the threat that she presents to the good name of her family. Throughout the three passages Austen uses the confluence of the narrative voice of the protagonist and the author, and an ironic and marginal perspective to draw the reader's attention to the contrast between the superficial observation of manners and the 'delicacy' and accuracy of Anne's perceptions.

Sir Walter Elliot's horror at Mrs Clay's 'projecting tooth' is thought by Elizabeth to be enough insurance against any impropriety, but Austen invites her readers to share Anne's bemusement at the simplicity of that judgement. Indeed, Elizabeth is such a mirror of her father's shallowness that Austen has her repeat Sir Walter's superficial judgements almost verbatim: 'That tooth of her's! and those freckles!' The ironic humour in the description of Mrs Clay's freckled and dental 'disfigurements' is heightened by the source of these critiques – characters who are so vain and shallow themselves that they cannot see beyond the skin-deep. Against the superficiality of their judgements Anne's greater understanding is again highlighted; she must make the dangers of Mrs Clay 'perceptible' to her sister. Austen's choice of the word 'perceptible' marks the division between the two minds of the sisters. Sir Walter and Elizabeth's inability to 'see', to 'perceive', is a constant theme in *Persuasion*: Sir Walter's mirror-filled bedroom is an ironic comment on his lack of self-awareness; Elizabeth's friendship with Mrs Clay is a fabrication; father and daughter are both unaware that good manners, if 'assiduous', are not sincere.

While Anne is fearful of the dangers of an 'assiduous' Mrs Clay in their midst, Elizabeth is blind to her guile, and Anne only despondently attempts to alert her, to 'make it perceptible to her sister', because she knows that she cannot hope for more understanding beyond a 'perception'. Elizabeth secures her position

Confident integration of quotations into the sentences.

Awareness of the ways readers are positioned by Austen's construction of narrative voice.

in the readers' minds as impervious to sense and feeling as she defends Mrs Clay 'warmly' and wrongly.

Anne is again positioned as the wise, and perhaps powerless, observer of the foibles of those around her in Passage 2 where Anne is surrounded by speculation about who Captain Wentworth will marry. While this speculation is painful to Anne, she is still able to join with Austen's astute yet humorous narrative voice in observing the follies of her company. While the Musgrove sisters think they are in love with Captain Wentworth, Elizabeth knows that 'it was not love'. She fine tunes her observations even further to name precisely the kind of flurry of emotion the Musgroves are experiencing: 'a little fever of admiration'. In that phrase Austen confirms for the reader that Anne's marginalised position has been useful: her understanding sharpened; her wit working not only on love and its vagaries, but on the ability to discern artificiality from truth, what is mercurial from what is lasting.

This passage also gives the reader an insight into the closeness between the point of view of Austen's character Anne, and the novel's narrative voice: 'Anne longed for the power of representing to them all what they were about, and of pointing out some of the evils they were exposing themselves to.' This is surely a privilege that only an author can have, and Anne retreats, once more, into her position as listener and observer to excuse Captain Wentworth as 'not in the least aware' of the pain that he was causing the Musgrove sisters. Austen uses repetition to force the reader to carefully consider why Captain Wentworth is blameless in his involvement with the sisters: 'There was no triumph, no pitiful triumph in his manner.' This is quickly followed by another repetition: 'He was only wrong in accepting the attentions – (for accepting must be the word) of two young women at once.'

Anne's cool, but not disinterested, observations spring from her long experience of being forced to withdraw from an engagement which she wanted, and her consignment to the borders of the drawing room and the least desirable position on the walking track. It is from these edges, however, that Anne has built her understanding of the foibles of society. The present 'little fevers' and dalliances seem more like a board game, one that Anne and Austen had seen in play many times. Anne observes Charles Hayter engage in a 'short struggle' then 'quit the field', and Anne's knowledge of how superficial attractions tend to play themselves out mean that she 'could only feel that Charles Hayter was wise'.

Anne is not always an audience to the players in the novel, however, and the reader is given the opportunity in Passage 3 to see Anne as the subject of the public gaze in Bath, and to find

Provides a strong link to the last passage. Builds on the idea of a shared narrative voice as the source of the guiding point of view in *Persuasion*.

Makes reference to the passage to link to the wider ideas in the text. Shows Austen's support of Anne's better judgement.

Draws the analysis together with reference to the wider text, and presents an interpretation of the text as a whole.

Fluently connects a brief discussion of Passage 3 to the rest of the analysis.

approval there. Elizabeth thinks so little of Anne and so much of herself that she once again sacrifices Anne's precedence in Lady Dalrymple's carriage. Austen turns a sardonic gaze on the self-important Elizabeth who ensures that 'the little crowd' in the shop are jostled into 'a bustle, and a talking' when Lady Dalrymple's carriage calls to collect her. Significantly, Anne is not part of the public acclamation of status and privilege that needed to be enacted in the shop. However, Austen allows Anne to come under public scrutiny, and to win praise for her true worth. The observer becomes the observed and the readers confirmed in their judgement of Anne's superiority to her self-absorbed family when the ladies in Wentworth's party observe, 'It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister.' Austen calls on us to acknowledge and accept the more powerful judgement that it is Anne's acuity and sensibility that sets her apart: 'Anne is too delicate for them.'

(1133 words)

Reinforces the idea of Austen's irony at work. This is a major feature of Austen's writing and the student makes a number of references to irony in conjunction with discussion of the narrative voice.

## Assessor comments

(Refer to the exam criteria as published by the VCAA and reproduced in the table on pp.201–2; key terms from the criteria appear in *italics* below.)

This reading of the three passages presents a *relevant and plausible* view of the text by integrating a close reading of the passages with an understanding of the wider text at a number of points in the analysis. It presents a perceptive and complex view of the text that is supported by detailed *analysis and close reading of textual details* in the set passages.

The writer closely engages with narrative techniques to demonstrate how the reader's sympathies are directed in the text. The response displays a highly developed awareness of how *key passages* in the text and *features of the text*, such as irony, narrative voice, setting and point of view, contribute to the interpretation of the passages and the text as a whole. The piece shows a subtle and insightful understanding of how *views and values* are presented in *Persuasion*. This fluent, highly *expressive* response picks up some of the voice of the novel, and would score in the A to A+ mark range.