

GCSE

English

Reading Skills 1

Reading

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Introduction

Comprehension is the absorption and understanding of a written text, and the more you read, the better you'll get at understanding what writers mean. If you get into the habit of regularly reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts, both in print and online, your reading, writing and perceptive skills will all benefit.

The ability of a reader to comprehend a text comes from a combination of their fundamental literacy skills (physically reading the words), their vocabulary (knowing what each word means), and their grasp of inference (seeing what the overall message is).

In your exams, you will be asked to read many different documents and respond to a variety of questions. All of your answers will, therefore, be reliant on you being able to pull out the necessary nuggets of information with which you will be able to justify your arguments. To that end, the purpose of this module is to assist you with regard to locating, identifying and retrieving information from within written texts.

In general, the types of questions that you will likely encounter include the following, all of which will be addressed in this and other bksb reading modules:

Information Retrieval	Locate information to make lists, explain why something is (or is not) the case, what evidence does the writer use, summarising, etc.
Viewpoint	Locate information to determine a writer's attitudes, opinions, etc.
Purpose	Locate information to identify what the purpose of a text is.
Explanatory	Locate information (including references) to justify how a writer persuades, encourages or interests an audience, how s/he justifies an argument, how s/he uses structure, style, etc.
Multiple Texts	Locate information in two or more texts in order to compare and contrast them, explain why something is (or is not) the case, advise a reader about a course of action, etc.
Active	Locate information to justify a course of action and/or give advice.

One tip that can help you improve your reading and understanding is to keep a scrapbook of examples that you've found intriguing and practise your skills on them. For example, once you've completed this resource, read an interesting text and use your improved skills to identify its type (some people call this *genre* or *form*), along with its purpose, audience, and main features.

Skimming, Scanning and Detailed Reading

Skimming

Skimming is a way of reading a text quickly to get the gist of it, but it isn't a substitute for close reading. You might use it before you read in detail, or to review or revise something you've already read. To gain a quick general idea of a text:

- Skim read the title and headings.
- Read the opening paragraph, which should give you an idea of what's to come.
- Read the topic sentence (often the first) of each paragraph.
- Try running your finger down the centre of the page so you move down through the text quickly, rather than reading across every line in detail.
- Skip over any unnecessary information such as asides, examples or parenthetical (bracketed) information.
- Don't feel you have to read every word in every sentence.
- Read the concluding paragraph which could summarise some or all of the text.

Scanning



Scanning is a technique for finding the specific information you need from a text without reading it all in detail. To scan for information, you should be aware of the text as a whole:

- Be aware of the overall structure of the text. How has the writer organised it?
- Use helpful clues like headings, subheadings, emboldened or italic text, bullet points, numbering, images or symbols.
- Look out for keywords.
- Look for expressions used by the writer as signposts, such as, 'There are three important things to remember...' or 'First...secondly...finally.'

It's a good idea to underline or highlight information as you find it.

You will need to practise both skimming and scanning in order to be successful. If you aren't a regular reader you might find them difficult at first, but do persevere. They're worth it!

Now it's your turn.

Skim read the passage below to get a general impression of what it's about and then answer the questions that follow. Time yourself – how long does it take you to spot the main points?

1. What is the article about?

2. Identify the form.

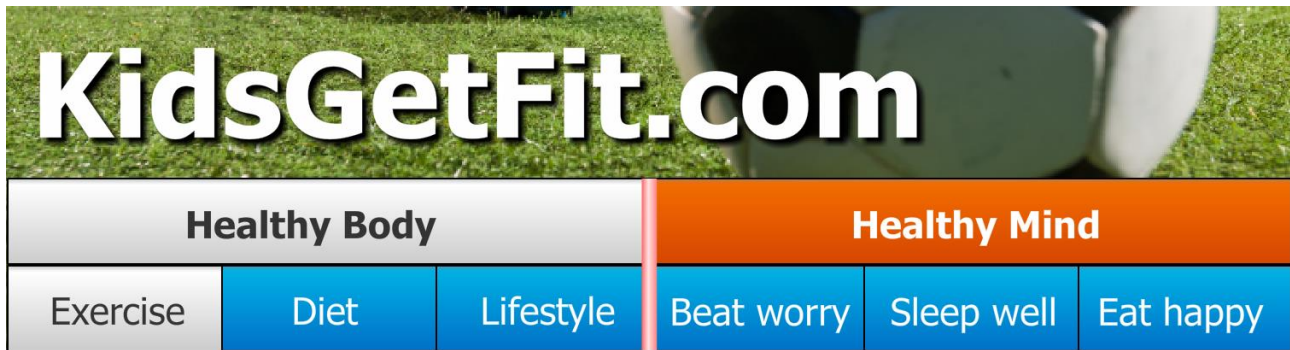
3. What is the purpose of the text?

4. Who is the intended audience?

Now try scanning the text to find the following information:

5. What are the advantages of walking?

6. What does the writer suggest you could wear and take with you when walking?



Start Walking Today!

Walking is a great way to stay healthy and feel good.

It's fun, easy and convenient. It doesn't matter how fit you are – you can start at your own pace. You don't have to buy specialist equipment either; all you need to begin are some comfortable shoes that support your feet and don't chafe. You don't even need to plan ahead – you could go out right now! Furthermore, it's cheap. There's no expensive gym subscription, no fees for classes and no need to travel to a distant venue. You might even save money on bus or taxi fares for short journeys.

Walking for just thirty minutes a day will be good for your body and mind. Keep it up and you'll soon have:

- Stronger muscles
- Healthier bones and joints
- Lower blood pressure
- Less bad cholesterol
- Less stress
- Better sleep

What's not to like?

Start your walk slowly to warm up. You should aim to have a raised heart rate and be perspiring a little, but you should still be able to talk. Slow down towards the end of your walk and do a few gentle stretches afterwards as part of your cool down.

Maintain your new habit by making your walks varied and interesting. Change your route and the time you set out. Find new places to walk, such as trails in the country or in parks. Do some online research – there are lots of websites that will provide inspiration. You or someone you know might find the UK website *Walks with Wheelchairs* helpful. You could even join a walking group like the *Ramblers Association*, or sign up for a sponsored walk to support a charity.

For longer walks you might want to consider taking water, a spare top and something healthy to eat. In good weather you could also add sunscreen and a sun-hat, or substitute them for a breathable waterproof jacket when it's less clement. As a treat, you could even splash out on a pair of walking shoes or boots.

So why are you sitting in front of this screen? A healthier, happier, more attractive you is waiting. Stride out alone or with friends. Take the dog or even a neighbour's. Whether you're going to hike, promenade, wander, stroll or roam, put your best foot forward and start walking!

Detailed Reading



When reading a document for specific information, ideas or main points, the third useful reading method is detailed reading. Put simply, this is where you read and understand every word in a text in order to make sure you do not miss any inferences.

Detailed reading allows you to pick out a wide range of information that you might otherwise miss. For example, if you carefully read a text you may realise that certain information is implied, rather than being directly stated. Likewise, you may notice disclaimers, additional information, sarcasm, irony, dates and other particulars that would not have been as apparent if you'd only given it a cursory once over. Lastly, you may also notice how information is presented in a particular way to suit its purpose, e.g.

The hotel is situated conveniently close to the motorway, so within moments of checking out you can be on the road again, driving to your next meeting or on your way home, happy you chose to spend the night at Presidential Inns.

This short text *implies* two pieces of important information as regards the hotel:

- First, by saying that the hotel is, 'conveniently close to the motorway,' a reader may infer that it might be noisy, especially at night.
- Secondly, the text shows us who the hotel is marketing itself to, as it expects its customers to be 'driving to [their] next meeting or on [their] way home.' This implies that the hotel expects its customers to be travelling business people. It is unlikely then to be a suitable hotel for a family vacation.

Main Points



Some examination questions ask for simple retrieval from a source, e.g. 'List four facts about the red deer.' For higher value questions, though, you will need to read in greater depth.

One such example is when you are required to find the main points and/or paraphrase a writer's meaning (from the Greek '*para*', meaning *to resemble*, and '*phrase*', meaning *a sequence of words*).

In order to find the main point(s) being made by a writer, you should:

1. Skim read the text and make sure that you understand the gist;
2. Re-read the text carefully and identify the main points within each paragraph.
3. Group or rank these points in order to discover which are relevant and, of those, which are the most/least important.

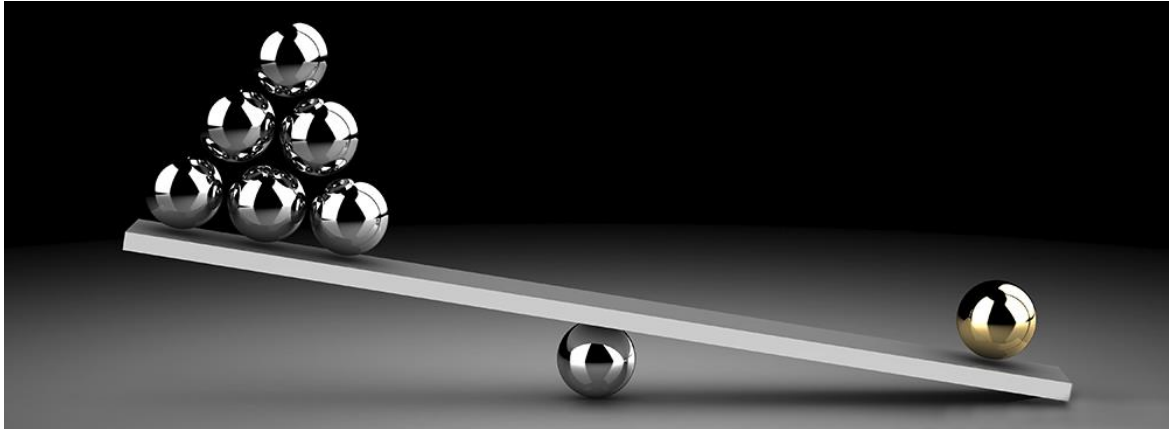
Another, arguably quicker, method is to look initially and specifically at the title and the opening and closing paragraphs in order to give yourself a good indication of the writer's argument(s). The downside to this is that by omitting to review the body text, you risk not getting the full picture; so beware of relying on this shortcut when trying to ascertain exactly what argument(s) an author is making.

Exam Tips

In an examination, a combination of stress and the need for speed can combine to make you a careless reader. Take care not to throw marks away!

When you begin to answer questions, read them carefully and underline or highlight all the keywords. Then re-read the relevant parts of the source in detail. Skimming and scanning are not substitutes for close attention, so don't miss something vital by neglecting to spend a few extra seconds on your reading.

Paraphrasing



In your exams, you may be asked to summarise differences or compare passages from one or multiple source documents, e.g. from two different newspaper articles.

In order to become better at answering such questions, it can prove useful to produce paraphrased summaries (brief statements of the main points) of sample documents. Whilst you will not need to do exactly this in your exams, doing so in practice will prove to you and your tutor that you have successfully read a variety of texts and been able to reduce them to their essentials.

The most fundamental aspect of summarising, therefore, is to determine what crucial information to keep in, and what superfluous (unwanted) material to leave out.

Consequently, summaries must:

- be brief – aim for half the word count or less of the original text;
- be structured using complete sentences, correct grammar, correct punctuation and appropriate paragraphs;
- contain **ALL** the important points from the source texts;
- be organised so that related points are brought together;
- and be in **YOUR OWN** words.

A summary is **NOT** a collection of directly copied quotes or paraphrases of the provided source materials.

A checklist of suggested techniques can help you when summarising pieces of text:

- Identify what the focus of the question is. This will direct you towards which points you need to put into your summary.
- Read the source text(s) at least twice. Check any words or information you do not understand by using a dictionary.
- Highlight/identify the key ideas/sentences in the source text(s) and perhaps list them in note form.
- Rephrase these into your own words, being as concise as you can without losing the essential meaning of the original text. Remember: when it comes to paraphrasing, less really is more.

On the next page there are a few simplified examples that demonstrate how summarising works.

Example 1

Source (31 words)

I walked into the workshop and saw, lying on the bench in front of me, a large quantity of drills, saws, hammers, nails... indeed, all the accoutrements of the carpenter's trade.

Key Points	Summary (11 Words)
Walked into workshop. Saw tools on bench.	Entering the workshop, I saw many carpentry tools on the bench.

Example 2

Source (34 words)

"Good morning sir," the young administrator said to her boss, the company's Managing Director. "Here are the files and statistics you asked for last night about the firm which is merging with our company."

Key Points	Summary (14 Words)
Administrator greets boss. Hands over requested information about merger.	The administrator greeted the Managing Director and submitted the requested information concerning the merger.

Example 3

Source (59 words)

During the first half of this year trading conditions have been very good. Of our four sectors, three have reported improved efficiency savings of up to 15%, with sales increases taking our turnover to £3.2 million. However, many managers have reported that they are cautious with regard to future projections, this level of growth is likely to soon fall.

Key Points	Summary (21 Words)
First half year good. Increased turnover. Doubtful future will be same.	Savings and sales are up in the majority of our sectors this year, but managers are concerned these trends won't continue.

Tips

- Remember that all your summaries must be concise, condensed and focussed.
- Do not include facts or descriptions that will take you away from the main point. Ask yourself: *If I leave this out, will it alter the message?*
- If several sentences/paragraphs seem to have similar themes, you can omit the duplicates from your summary.
- Your opinions and ideas should not appear in your summary. Nor should you add additional detail or make unsubstantiated claims. Use only the material and ideas provided.
- Make full use of your vocabulary when summarising, but be conscious of why you are making a summary and who/what it is for.
- Also do not be afraid to reorder the points if you feel it would make for a better summary, and/or create more than one draft which you pare down to a final version.
- When making your notes, use questioning words such as *What, When, Why, Who, Where* and *How* to help you identify the key topic points.
- In general, you can leave out repeated arguments or details, plus overly detailed information, e.g. statistics.
- Lastly, when summarising long pieces of text, it is often a good idea to use headings to group your ideas together.

Now it's your turn.

Paraphrase the text below so that it is reduced to fewer than 80 words. Enter your text in the input box below the article.

Tortoise Tilly Takes a Trip

Katy Evans was mystified when she couldn't find her pet tortoise, but luckily she didn't have to wait too long.

After being missing from her home for four days, Tilly the tortoise was found wandering around the local supermarket.

Mandy, who works at the store, said, "At first, I thought it was one of the toys from the toy aisle, so I had a big shock when I went to pick it up."

Tilly went missing from the Driden area – 3 miles away from the supermarket – and her owner, Katy (aged 8), had lost all hope of finding her. "I had looked everywhere and I was really upset because I got her for my birthday."

Katy's mother saw a picture of Tilly in the supermarket window and immediately went to claim her. "I was so relieved – Katy has been heartbroken. I just don't understand how she could have got that far without anyone noticing her."

Dave Hope, a zoologist from Ranmar Zoo, said, "It would have been quite an experience for Tilly. She could have walked that distance easily in a day, so who knows what she's been up to the rest of the time?"

Tilly is now glad to be reunited with Katy, who gave her pet an extra large bowl of lettuce and broccoli and a mixed fruit salad for dessert.

Your turn again.

Read the text below – an extract from a travel guide, then, as before, try and paraphrase so that it is reduced to fewer than 80 words.



Scarborough is a great place to go, whether it's for a short break or a nice, long holiday. It has an abundance of B&Bs, hotels and self-catering facilities in both the North and South Bays.

There are also plenty of sights and attractions for all the family. Standing guard between the two bays is the grand Scarborough Castle. It has had a long and turbulent history because of its prime location on the headland. The castle is great value for money and offers stunning views of the coast.

Scarborough also boasts Europe's largest open-air theatre, where you can see many spectacular performances which are a must, particularly in the long, summer evenings. The theatre has a rich history; past shows include Carmen and West Side Story, where 8,000 spectators from all over Yorkshire would flock to fill the amphitheatre. The theatre closed in the late 80s but was reopened by the Queen in 2010 after major refurbishment. It now hosts modern acts such as Olly Murs and Leona Lewis.

Other attractions at Scarborough include: the Sea Life Centre, which holds an array of marine wildlife; the Rotunda Museum, with its local history and geology; Peasholm Park, which holds many events throughout the year; and Scarborough Art Gallery, which houses many local artists' work and their fascinating depictions of nature and the sea.

Nor will you ever be short of a bite to eat in Scarborough either – there are plenty of quality restaurants to cater for all tastes, many of them serving up the local catch of the day.

Tone



Tone describes the attitudes or feelings that writers or narrators express towards the audience of their writings. Different parts of writing can help to create tone, e.g. sentence lengths, literary techniques, choices of vocabulary, etc.

In your exams, you may need to be able to identify a writer's tone and explain how it has been created; alternatively, you may equally need to create an appropriate tone in your own narrative writing.

There are as many variations of tone as there are emotions. For example, a writer's tone could be bitter, condescending, friendly, humorous, ironic, light, mocking, neutral, nostalgic, passionate, playful, sad, sarcastic, satirical, sentimental, and so on.

Tone can be created by a writer's choice of words (diction), imagery, sound, sentence construction, punctuation and structure. The sections on the **effects of language, inference**, and **identifying a writer's thoughts and feelings** all have links with the topic of tone.

The choice of tone also depends on the audience and purpose of the writing. For instance, you might choose a **passionate** tone in order to **persuade**, a **friendly** tone to **advise**, or a **neutral and objective** tone in order to **inform**, as shown in the examples below:

Can we stand by and watch bulldozers rip out the heart of ancient Padley Wood? Can we bear to see precious habitat destroyed and our beloved wildlife lost forever? This irreplaceable resource is about to be obliterated merely for the sake of yet another soulless industrial estate.

Join the campaign now!

Here, the writer creates a passionate and emotional tone by directly addressing the reader and using both rhetorical questions and emotive language such as: rip out the heart, precious, beloved, obliterated and soulless.

It's a great idea to take your children to a local wildlife group. They'll enjoy activities like arts and crafts, bug hunting and pond dipping. If you make sure they're sensibly dressed for the weather and have the right footwear, they'll be comfortable and safe. Fresh air and nature are good for kids, and they'll have a chance to make friends and have lots of fun. Why not give it a try? Who knows – you might enjoy it, too!

Here, the writer adopts a friendly, informal tone. Again, the reader is directly addressed, with contractions (it's, they'll) and colloquial words (kids) adding to the informality. This makes the writing sound like a relaxed conversation. The choice of words (diction) is likewise reassuring, inviting and positive (great idea, enjoy, comfortable, safe, fun).

Padley Wood is a five square mile area of mixed, broad-leaf woodland lying between the towns of Weston and Earnthwaite. It has been managed for a thousand years, and, as a result, has developed rich flora and fauna. Part of it is recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI).

In this extract, the tone is neutral and objective. It is factual, descriptive and unemotional. There is some specialised vocabulary, e.g. broad-leaf woodland, flora and fauna and 'Site of Special Scientific Importance', which, while not difficult for the general reader to understand, collectively gives an impression of expertise and professionalism.

"Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge. I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants and have glutted myself with their shrieks and misery."

In this extract from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the tone reveals the monster's pain and anguish at his treatment and predicament. In reading it, the sense of being in a one-on-one conversation, with the monster pouring out his heartfelt emotions, lets the reader sense his frustration. One can easily share his anger and imagine him raising his fists and shouting to the heavens in rage.

Now it's your turn.

Look at the following examples of writing, each of which is about *birthday presents*.

Below is a list of five types of tone. See if you can identify which is demonstrated in each sentence and how it has been created.

- **angry**
- **ironic**
- **nostalgic and sentimental**
- **patronising and judgemental**
- **neutral or objective**

1. *Socks!* How creative and original of my Aunt Maud to find another pair exactly like the ones she has sent every year for the last ten years – even down to the size!

2. The giving of gifts on the anniversary of a person's birth is a widespread tradition.

3. Never, ever buy your children's friends those neon-coloured plastic toys one finds in third-rate supermarkets. Nothing could make a worse impression. No-one with taste or standing in the community will invite your child to a birthday party ever again.

4. After all the trouble I had taken to find her that rare and exquisite leather-bound volume, what did she buy for me? A paltry, piffling paperback!

5. It was only a jar of dolly mixtures. But with its pastel-coloured, confetti-like sweets and its tiny, jewel-like jellies, it transported me back to my childhood. I was five years old again, lying on the daisy-starred lawn in the warmth of a vanished summer's day. It was the most remarkable present I could have been given.

Cohesion

A text that is *cohesive* is one that has been put together well, with its paragraphs and sentences linked in ways that make them clearly related. When it comes to ensuring that your own texts possess adequate *cohesion*, there are several techniques that can prove useful.

Linking Words or Phrases

Discourse is a synonym for written or spoken communication, and the use of *discursive markers* that signal to your reader the direction of your thinking is one crucial method you need to master.

It might help to think of these words and phrases (also known as *transitions* or *discourse markers*) as signposts, as they enable the reader to not only understand how your sentences relate to each other, but they also give clues as to what has gone before and what is to come. As a simple example, if you see the discursive marker *however*, you know that a contrasting idea is to follow the one you have just read.

While a judicious sprinkling of these terms can be effective, their *over-use* can make your writing feel stilted. Straightforward conjunctions like *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor* and *yet* can therefore be equally effective, providing that you vary your constructions so that not all your sentences are simple ones.

Several more examples include:

To do with time/sequencing:	before, when, previously, meanwhile, subsequently, the aforementioned, first, secondly, finally, in conclusion, to begin with, primarily
To give a reason:	since, because, consequently
To give a purpose:	in order to, therefore, as a result
To contrast ideas:	however, although, alternatively, conversely, nevertheless, in spite of, mind you, still, yet
To add ideas:	in addition, furthermore, moreover, in the same way, by the same token, likewise, for instance/example, therefore
To show similarity:	equally, similarly, in the same vein/way/manner
To show attitude:	actually, clearly, frankly, honestly, naturally, obviously, predictably, sadly, (un)surprisingly, (un)fortunately
To counter an argument:	although, on the other hand, insofar, on the contrary, as a matter of fact,
To conclude:	naturally, we can conclude, in conclusion, therefore, consequently, finally
To concede a point:	in spite of, despite that, regardless, heedless, even though, although
To generalise:	in general, typically, ordinarily, normally, broadly speaking, in many/most/all cases, on the whole

(As a point of note, when it comes to sequencing arguments, you can choose to use just the adjectives (first, second, third), just the adverbs (firstly, secondly, thirdly), or opt for the traditional convention of beginning with the word **first**, followed then by **secondly**, **thirdly**, and so on.)

By using discursive markers appropriately in speech or text, you can therefore create interesting paragraphs, e.g.



**TB or
2TB...
That is the
question!**

I was thinking of buying a standard terabyte hard drive which I'd seen on offer at £80. **However**, I then found the same one discounted to £75 on another website. **That said**, a single terabyte isn't *that* big these days, so in the long-run I might be better off opting for a two terabyte drive. **Since** I saw both of them, though, a friend has recommended that I get a solid state drive which, with no moving parts, is incredibly fast in comparison with older models. **Furthermore**, I have a £25 gift card for my local computer store which expires in under a month, so I might have to just pick from what they have on offer if I don't want it to waste.

Related Words

A word that means the same thing as another is known as a *synonym*. A word that is close to the meaning of another is known as a *partial synonym*.

Examples

Synonyms: A die could be biased or unfair. The meaning is the same.

Partial Synonyms: Forest and wood are similar to one another, but not exactly the same.

The latter are often used so that a writer can avoid repeating the same words too often, e.g.

- **Robin Hood** threaded his way through the forest. **The outlaw** moved quietly, as he knew the sheriff's men were close.
- Most people enjoy indulgent **desserts**. My own fondness for **puddings** has been my undoing.
- Celebrity **singers** are gathering for a charity concert. It's the biggest collection of **artists** since the late 1990s.

Pronouns

These perform an identical role to synonyms in that they refer to back to something without the use of repetition which would otherwise make your writing stale.

- I enjoy visiting **York**. **It** has lots of interesting shops, museums and restaurants.
- **Mary** is very talented. **She** is a first rate scientist and mathematician.
- **Ronny** and **Jai** are great team-mates. **They** play badminton together.
- I own that car. It is **mine**.

The Repetition of Ideas or Key Words

This can give a pattern to your writing and reinforce your message, provided you use them sparingly. Here is a famous example from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:



Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Coherence

The flip-side of cohesion is coherence. A text is *coherent* if it makes sense overall; it's that simple. Coherence is about ordering sentences and paragraphs in a logical way so that they are collectively meaningful and meet both the writer's intended purposes and the needs of the audience. Note that in extreme cases texts can be cohesive without being coherent, or vice versa.

Example

Jason went to the toy shop yesterday. My favourite plaything when I was a child was my toy train. I hate travelling by rail because the trains are always late. However, I like travelling with my brother. Sarah's brother is a great bloke. He is very smart and has just gone to Gray's University. It only opened five years ago, but since then it has enjoyed great success. I would like to be successful in my own business.

This text has *cohesion* because it features the following:

- connectives that show how one sentence links to the previous one, e.g. *however*;
- the repeated use of related terms and partial synonyms, e.g. *toy shop*, *plaything* and *toy train*;
- appropriate pronouns that avoid the need for outright repetition, e.g. *it*, *he*;
- and words that refer back to ideas already given, e.g. *since*.

However, as a whole text it is very disjointed and really doesn't make much sense. The text is therefore cohesive but not coherent, and in order for a piece of writing to fully succeed, it must achieve both of these aspects.

Now read the piece of text below.

He gave me a red rose. The scarlet petals were beautiful. I felt overwhelmed. Love. How wonderful.

This text (arguably) has *coherence* because we can understand what it is saying, but it undeniably lacks many features of **cohesion** that would add to its overall aesthetic and make it flow much more smoothly. Adding some of these would undoubtedly help a reader to understand what the writer intended, e.g.

He gave me a beautiful red rose. I felt overwhelmed by the gift, since the scarlet petals symbolised the beauty of love. How wonderful it was.

The whole point of learning about cohesion and coherence is that it would be beneficial to keep them in mind during the construction of longer texts such as essays. When producing a first draft for example, even when using a list or other device to help structure your ideas, you can easily make mistakes that impair its cohesion and diminish its coherence. The quality of your final draft is what truly matters, though, so when re-reading your work in order to proof it, try and consciously put yourself in the shoes of someone encountering it for the first time. If you do that, it can be far easier to see instances of incohesion and incoherence that might otherwise slip through.

True or False



It is highly likely that a small but significant part of your exam will demand that you answer a series of true or false questions. These are quite straightforward in that you merely have to determine whether each of the statements is accurate or not. Being able to do so confidently, though, requires you to thoroughly understand the source material, and that is only possible if you possess good comprehension skills.

To that end, take a look at the text on the next page, read it in detail, and then answer the questions that follow.

Now it's your turn.

From the following statements, **circle** the **four** which are **true**.

<p>The majority of young women suffer negative feelings related to their appearance.</p>	<p>Social media exerts an undue influence on young people, mainly women.</p>	<p>Snakes, tigers, bridges and electricity have all caused the deaths of selfie-takers.</p>	<p>Professor Bostock refuses to perform cosmetic surgery on people who attend his dental practice.</p>	<p>All selfies are taken close to the photograph's subject.</p>	<p><i>Selfie-mania</i> diagnoses have more than doubled in the last 12 months.</p>
				<p>One effect of the quotes within the article is to reassure the reader.</p>	<p><i>Selfie-mania</i> affects more women than men.</p>



Me, Myself and I

In classical Greek mythology, Narcissus became so obsessed with his handsome reflection that he stared at it until he died. These days, thanks to the ubiquity of smartphones, multiple modern-day narcissists have managed to bring about their equally untimely ends whilst taking selfies for social media.

From getting bitten by poisonous snakes to falling from bridges to getting electrocuted on train lines, selfie-taking can be a dangerous business. Due to safety fears, the State of New York even had to legislate to ban so-called *tiger* selfies in which people (mainly young men) were snapping themselves beside big cats in order to appear more adventurous to potential dates.

Besides the physical jeopardy, though, scientists now suggest that selfies can also be far more of a mental health risk than anyone previously thought. Just-released figures for obsessive compulsive diagnoses have shown a 212% year-on-year increase in *selfie-mania*, with doctors reporting that the relentless pursuit of newer, better, funnier, and more attractive self-images is pushing ever more people (mainly young women) into spirals of depression due to the perceived failure to achieve perfection.

Now dentists are likewise calling for the government to take action, as they come literally face-to-face with a tidal wave of people wanting to correct supposedly *horsey* teeth, almost all of whom are unaware that what they are actually concerned about is nothing but a camera-induced effect.

Prof. Victor Bostock, a practising dentist and director-general of the British Dental College, estimates that he has to dissuade over a dozen people each week from expensive, potentially risky, and completely unnecessary cosmetic surgery.

'As all selfies are taken within six feet, and most within two-and-a-half feet, the focal length of each camera's lens often produces a bulbous distortion to the resulting images,' he says. 'This can enlarge the centre and warp the edges – almost as if the picture were being wrapped onto a sphere. As people's faces and teeth will, of course, be centre-stage, they may consequently appear to protrude more and look larger than in reality.'

Therefore, instead of fretting about your looks and suffering the pain and discomfort of needless dental corrections, Prof. Bostock recommends a much simpler course of action: 'Before even approaching a dentist, look online for selfie-taking tips. The odds are that there's nothing wrong with how you look; you just need to take a better photo. Now say *cheese!*'