

GCSE



**Chief Examiner's and  
Principal Moderator Report  
English Language**

Summer Series 2023





## Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2023 series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk).



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# GCSE English Language

## Chief Examiner's Report

### Subject Overview

In the Summer 2023 series the candidates successfully managed the tasks in both GEN11 and GEN41 units. There was evidence of sound preparation for the requirements within these examination papers as demonstrated by many candidates' approaches in answering the questions and responding to the stimuli throughout the papers. Purposeful use of past papers, mark schemes and Specimen Assessment Materials (SAMs) has been made to help prepare candidates. There were fewer candidates who seemed unfamiliar with the requirements of specific tasks in comparison with the November series.

Pleasingly only a tiny proportion of candidates did not manage to finish the papers; possibly because of mismanaging time in Section A. Many candidates chose to include (but not necessarily use) additional pages, often resulting in repetition and crucially a loss of focus within the response. Examiners will award the higher Competence Levels for accurate and concise responses across all sections of the papers – answers need not be extensive. Where additional pages have been included these should be clearly labelled to allow linking to the appropriate question.

As documented previously, candidates who evidenced their planning for Task 1, in both units, produced more coherent pieces of writing – the fifteen minutes for thinking and planning is definitely time well spent.

Legibility remains a problem for examiners who found it difficult, on occasions, to decipher candidates' responses. It is worth reminding candidates of the importance of clear handwriting.

Where candidates have used a scribe, it is a requirement that a scribe cover sheet is completed by the centre and submitted with the script, and this will include a clear indication of the option which accurately reflects how the approved application for a scribe was used. An increasing number of candidates accessed a word processor and similarly the centre must specify, through the scribe sheet, whether the spell check and grammar check were disabled or not. If this is not indicated, from the outset, the marking process will be delayed as the centre will need to be contacted to confirm the relevant scribe option. Please note that only one option per candidate should be selected. Since spelling, punctuation and grammar are discretely assessed in Section A of GCSE English Language (Units 1 and 4) through Assessment Objective 4 (iii), the inclusion of a spelling list, applicable to some other GCSE subjects, is not acceptable for GCSE English Language.

Please see the CCEA Circular S/IF/36/19 (issued in May 2019 to all centres) for further clarification.

Examiners reported that the stimuli in both units were accessible and enabled candidates of all abilities to respond appropriately. As noted in former reports, the skills of understanding, analysing, and evaluating the writer's craft are areas where candidates would benefit from additional focus during their preparation period for this examination.

# Assessment Unit 1      Writing for Purpose and Audience and Reading to Access Non- Fiction and Media Texts

## Overview

The Examining Team felt that this paper provided all candidates with an opportunity to showcase their knowledge, understanding and skills and there was clear indication from many examiners that there had been effective planning for, and teaching of, the specification. The scripts further confirmed evidence that these were fair and accessible papers enabling candidates of a wide range of abilities.

The writing task facilitated a range of varied and engaging responses. Most were able to write persuasively and articulate their views with confidence and enthusiasm.

The reading materials in Section B were also facilitative for the entire ability range. The Examining Team would welcome increased demonstration of analysis and evaluation in Task 2.

Overall, it is important to remind candidates to read the questions carefully. In Unit 1 time management seemed less problematic than in previous series.

## Section A                      Writing for Purpose and Audience

### Task 1

On the topic of part-time jobs, the Examining Team read some well-reasoned and consistent responses, where convincing views were offered, allowing candidates to confidently demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Examiners reported that many candidates wrote insightfully, incorporating current issues such as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the importance of helping to support their families and ensuring a work/school/social life balance.

Generally, candidates handled this task well, aware of the use of effective paragraphing and produced a well-structured speech which recognised and adhered to the specified form, audience and purpose, and the Assessment Objective.

It is worth reminding candidates to take the time to properly read (and even re-read) what is being asked in the question — a small number read teenagers as teachers. Whilst there was no penalty applied to such responses it may have caused anxiety to these candidates, after the examination, when they realised their misreading.

There were very few candidates who elected to write on a completely unrelated subject, and only a minority strayed off topic, further reinforcing the sense that this was an accessible topic for the candidates.

Effective use of well-selected vocabulary was noted by many examiners, although a few commented on the numbers struggling with basic spelling and punctuation. This was particularly evident where candidates were word-processing their writing – in too many instances there were entire pages with no punctuation and in these cases the candidates were severely disadvantaging themselves.

In most answers there was some evidence of logical development and candidates integrated incisive conclusions. As one candidate observed “but what if I told you there are some things you could do to make your CV dazzle like no others a university has seen. No, it does not mean endless hours of study or arduous volunteering tasks. No — it does not involve meticulous planning or 5000-word essay-writing skills. All that is needed is a positive



attitude, an enthusiastic work ethic and a National Insurance number.”

## **Section B                      Reading Non-Fiction and Media Texts**

### **Task 2**

The extract based on an online article about happiness proved uplifting for many candidates – the vast majority noted the use of the rule of three in “it’s a matter of public health, national well-being, and global economics” to emphasise to the reader that we all have a role to play in being happy. Similarly, the use of a simile: “Disappointments... gnaw at our worries like gnats” was picked up by most candidates. Many chose to comment on the writer’s use of statistics in this extract – in fact the writer ingeniously referenced “statistics” and “recent studies” in broad terms, to add authority, but did not make use of statistics as there was no inclusion or analysis of numerical data and certainly no empirical data.

The Examining Team felt it was evident that candidates have been well practised in attempting similar reading activities in preparation for the examination series. Examiners noted that there were some particularly impressive responses, characterised by their refined analysis and clarity of evaluation. Pleasingly, fewer candidates attempted to write persuasively and voice their own opinion on happiness, perhaps more cognisant that Section B assesses their reading skills.

As noted previously, the Competence Level strand relating to reading and understanding the text and selecting appropriate material tends to be where candidates perform best. Most could identify relevant material and support this with an attempt to offer valid remarks.

Overall, candidates relied too much on general comments, such as ‘...engages the reader’ and ‘...makes you want to read on’ thereby curbing the quality of the interpretation. Centres may consider that it is worth reinforcing that access to the higher Competence Levels will be limited without evidence of analysis and evaluation.

### **Task 3**

In this part of the article, the writer was considering how to be happier in life.

Candidates were asked, in their own words, to write down two benefits of being happier – some misread the question as two ways to be happier. Centres are reminded that this task does not necessarily require candidates to provide a summary, but rather the task demands that they extract relevant information.

Most candidates were well prepared for this task and were able to find a benefit from at least one paragraph, then explain this in their own words and select two relevant pieces of evidence.

Candidates fared less well in Task 3(c) in comparison to Task 3(a), often repeating the same benefit or bringing their own prior knowledge about happiness. These extracts have been carefully selected with an optimum word count and it is vital that candidates base any responses only on the information found within the text. Centres should remind candidates of the importance of reading the question carefully and that for Tasks 3(b) and 3(d) direct and unabridged quotations from the text are the most accessible way to present their supporting evidence. ‘In your own words’ is only relevant for Tasks 3(a) and 3(c) and where there is no attempt to explain or use their own words, there will not be access to the higher marks.

## Task 4

This task was managed successfully, with examiners reporting that the advertisement enabled most candidates to provide appropriate responses about the persuasive language employed. The candidates were clear about the writer’s intentions and were able to make effective and purposeful comments on why the ‘Wild Atlantic Sand-Free Beach Towel’ would make an excellent beach accessory. Some were also able to attempt analysis and began to evaluate the effect on the reader. The use of hyperbole and sibilance by the author were popular choices for discussion, with most candidates identifying with the relatability of the irritation of sand everywhere. Alliteration was also a popular technique widely commented upon; however, candidates should be careful to determine that this was a deliberate or conspicuous choice made by the author and not simply two words, coincidentally starting with the same consonant sound. A small number picked up on the pun “Make your trip to the beach smoother – in multiple ways” in the final paragraph.

Pleasingly there were fewer occasions where candidates recounted the information and failed to discuss language use. Nevertheless, the previous advice still holds good. Candidates should be encouraged to select relevant textual material, and then to consider what the writer was attempting to do with this and comment on its overall success. This will help ensure there is at least purposeful interrogation of the language.

## Task 5

This task has been designed to ensure accessibility and most candidates responded successfully, commenting on the girl/towel and the contrasting colours. Some candidates were unsure of the specific hue of the towel, and some identified it as a flag – there were no penalties for this. GCSE English Language does not test such observational skills – examiners were more interested to see what conclusion the candidates drew in relation to the impact of the identified colour on the reader, as per Assessment Objective 3(iii).

Candidates should be reminded that they need to be specific with the presentational device selected – simply using the terms ‘colour’ or ‘image’ is not creditworthy (a specific image identified, e.g., of the girl, the beach, the sky, etc. is valid).

On occasions the explanations did not focus sufficiently on the effect on the reader and were more related to a general overview of what the feature might suggest. Repeating that this towel was suitable for people who enjoy water sports was not deemed to be acceptable as this statement already formed part of the stem of the question.

Candidates who attempted analysis of multiple features, for example, the image of the girl, the beach and the sky were restricted about what could be said about any specific aspect – examiners will only credit the best explanation offered for one example.

As has been stated previously, candidates should make judicious choices in Task 5. For example, in this series the choice of a barely visible image of a few houses in the background was certainly self-limiting. Candidates should consider if they will be able to provide meaningful comments about the feature they have selected and, for better marks, explain the effect this had on the reader.

# Principal Moderator's Report

## Assessment Unit 2 Speaking & Listening

### Overview

In this series, the Moderation Team reported that the range of formative assessment tasks undertaken in centres differed widely. In the best cases, moderators noted an excellent variety, arising naturally from the work undertaken during the GCSE course, thus allowing candidates to develop their skills and explore new ideas. At the other end of the scale, it was disappointing to see that there was a limited range of opportunities with all candidates appearing to have been assessed on the same three tasks. This approach is not reflective of the weighting for this Unit and is undoubtedly detrimental to the progress of the pupils concerned. Explanations for this were provided in some instances by the lead teacher on the front page of the EAD63(b) form (Moderation Record Sheet). A more natural group dynamic and interactive ease was noted among those candidates who had completed a greater number and a wider variety of tasks.

Candidate absence and the necessity for a reserve candidate to be used during the Visiting Moderation continued to cause some problems on the day of moderation. Centres are advised to apply the formula for the selection of candidates and select the reserve(s) at this initial stage, including any potential reserve candidates in any preparation work. This will ensure that they can participate fully in the moderated task should absence require their replacement of the original candidate(s). Moderators reported that in some cases late and unprepared replacements did negatively affect group dynamics and performance, resulting in Levels not being achieved during the moderation exercise. It is also necessary to have the Candidate Record Sheets for the reserve candidate readily available for the moderator.

It is pleasing to report that there continues to be a strong emphasis on Speaking and Listening in many schools, producing excellent group dynamics and practice in this area. However, some groups exhibited symptoms of anxious over-preparation and, as a result, did not perform to the best of their ability. Preparing candidates can be a delicate balance. Over-preparation can be stultifying and a rehearsed discussion generally fulfils only the lower level criteria. The Moderating Team advise that candidates should:

- engage with some advance research on the topic selected;
- understand that the discussion should last 20 minutes (and it is the role of the chairperson to both begin and conclude the discussion);
- be made aware that moderation is part of a formal process requiring appropriate conduct;
- be given constructive advice and guidance from the teacher when selecting an appropriate task for moderation.

In addition, the role of the Chairperson should be carefully explained. The Chairperson needs to contribute to the discussion, as well as facilitate the discussion.

Feedback from some moderators indicated that there was some confusion with Task 2 – Planning a podcast on 'The Best Ways to Survive Teenage Years'. Some groups created a scripted role play response rather than engaging in a discussion. It should be noted that generally one of the five tasks available for moderation will require candidates to present the opinions of a suggested person – however, this does not invite a dramatic presentation of the role. For Task 2 this series, the approach of taking on the persona of radio presenters and producers was misguided.

Overall, the Assessment Criteria had been applied fairly and accurately with the majority of marks being in line with the CCEA standard. Where there was a disparity in marks, this was often the result of ineffective Internal Standardisation. Resources to support robust Internal Standardisation are available on the CCEA website. The recurring area where disparities were identified, continues to be the distinction between Levels 3 and 4 with some centres awarding Level 4 marks despite a lack of questioning, challenge and development of ideas. Similarly, between Levels 4 and 5 with some centres awarding Level 5 marks where there was no evidence in moderation of an assured and confident use of language, presentation of detailed and complex ideas which are sustained and developed while initiating, shaping, interrogating and challenging.

On a positive note, moderators remain impressed by the commitment of both teachers and pupils to the development of skills in speaking and listening. The following observations are worthy of note:

“Most of the candidates in the centres I visited clearly relished the opportunity to discuss and debate in a formal context, exploring the issues of their chosen topic with enthusiasm, maturity, insight and open-mindedness.”

“I listened to some very high ability candidates, who really got to grips with complex issues, demonstrating ambitious vocabulary and the ability to discuss topical subjects in depth.”

## Assessment Unit 3      Studying Spoken and Written Language

### Overview

The members of the CCEA English Language Moderation Team agreed that, with some exceptions, most centres set suitable task titles, complied with instructions on annotation (contained in Appendix 5 of the GCSE English Language Specification) and accurately assessed the work of their candidates. Almost all task titles were appropriately theme-related and clearly satisfied the CCEA rubric requirements. Moreover, candidates in many centres benefitted from the provision of appropriate support structures, generally in the form of a series of assessment-criterion-referenced bullet points. Stimulus material, for both Task 1 and Task 2, was carefully selected to match the interests and abilities of most candidates. Teachers in most centres interpreted and applied the CCEA Assessment Criteria accurately across the two tasks and across the mark range in their centre. It was obvious that robust and effective Internal Standardisation had been carried out in most centres.

### Administration Procedures

As in recent years, administration in most centres was excellent and proved to be very helpful to the moderation process.

Following the Summer 2023 series, centres are reminded that:

- Sample folders should be placed in rank order with the summative mark recorded on the outside of each folder.
- Each candidate’s work should be placed in an individual folder.
- The Competence Level for each strand as well as the mark awarded must be recorded in the correct order on each response.
- Every page of each candidate’s Controlled Assessment should be clearly identified with the Centre Number and Candidate Number.
- The stimulus material for Task 1, and any photocopied material for Task 2, must be included for each candidate within the sample. These documents form part of the candidate’s Controlled Assessment folder.

## Task 1                      The Study of Spoken Language

To satisfy the CCEA rubric requirements for Task 1, candidates must respond to ‘real spoken language’ texts, that is, texts which involve real people (living or dead) in real situations. Teachers in almost all centres took great care to select appropriate Political Speeches as their spoken language texts. There was a wide and varied range of spoken texts including those delivered by: Bill Clinton, George Bush, Barack Obama, Martin Luther King, Winston Churchill, Martin McGuinness, Greta Thunberg, Boris Johnson, Leo Varadkar, Donald Trump, David Attenborough and Julia Gillard. It was also pleasing to see a lot of new and topical material and the enthusiasm evident in the responses of many candidates. Sir Keir Starmer’s political apology was a successful and fresh exploration of the Political Speeches theme. Most centres had made a conscious effort to ensure that the spoken language texts chosen were relevant and engaging for their candidates. However, a few centres could have been more judicious in their selection. The stimulus materials worked well when there was a range of linguistic and delivery techniques for candidates to explain, analyse and evaluate. At the upper end of performance, candidates showed the ability to analyse and evaluate the language, linguistic techniques, and delivery techniques of both speakers. However, it was clear from some responses that a proportion of candidates were more familiar with discussion of linguistic techniques than delivery techniques.

Whilst candidates are not required to compare and contrast, teachers in most centres appropriately based the task title on two texts with clear links between the speeches in terms of context, purpose, audience, language, rhetorical devices, and delivery style. Many candidates showed awareness of how and why language was influenced by context, purpose, and audience. In a significant number of centres, teachers set task titles based upon a short and carefully chosen extract from each of the two texts, appropriate for the sixty-minute time limit. This approach was beneficial to candidates of different levels of ability as it enabled them to focus on specific and relevant details of language, linguistic techniques, and delivery techniques.

Task titles were generally assessment-criterion-referenced which helped candidates to focus on the demands of the task whilst working under the controlled conditions. As assessment is competence-based, it is important that candidates are explicitly taught how to explain, analyse, and evaluate language choice and effect, linguistic techniques and their effects, and delivery techniques and effects. There was evidence that delivery techniques had been marginalised or overlooked by some candidates, and this may be a helpful area for centres to focus on as they prepare their candidates for future series. Once again, centres are reminded that references to body language and facial expressions cannot be credited in Task 1. In instances where the centre has rewarded comments about body language and/or facial expressions, the potential for the moderator’s marks to differ from the centre’s marks is increased and may result in a negative adjustment to the marks that have been submitted.

The majority of teachers applied the Assessment Criteria accurately. Where leniency was identified, this tended to be at the top end of achievement. For example, in order to award responses with CL555, there must be evidence of evaluation of the impact on the audience. In some centres, references to the audience being inspired or a particular technique being effective were inappropriately interpreted as evaluation and rewarded by the centre accordingly. The advice from the Senior Moderating Team is that candidates should be taught at as early a stage as possible, the differences between explanation, analysis, and evaluation. A clearer understanding of these terms would assist candidates during their independent preparation for the write-up stage.

In a few centres, there was evidence of an overly led teacher approach to Task 1. In some teaching groups or centres, this resulted in the production of formulaic responses. In such cases, candidates used the same paragraph-by-paragraph structure and selected the same textual details and quotations to support or introduce very similar points.



Less successful responses were characterised by a tendency to retell the story, or the offering of a sequence of quotations without engaging with the relevance of the quotation.

Again, those centres which had included assessment-criterion-referenced support structures in their task titles provided their candidates with a much clearer focus.

In a few centres there was evidence of an overly led teacher approach to Task 2. In some teaching groups or centres, this resulted in the production of formulaic responses. In such cases, many candidates used the same paragraph-by-paragraph structure and selected the same textual details and quotations to support or introduce very similar points. Please note that this approach can have serious consequences. At Competence Level 4, candidates are expected to offer: 'good understanding demonstrated through purposeful comments'; 'a sustained interpretation of writer's technique with analysis of their intended effects' and 'purposefully selected material to develop a coherent response'. At Competence Level 5 candidates are expected to demonstrate: 'excellent understanding through perceptive comments'; 'confident and perceptive interpretation of key elements of writer's techniques with evaluation of the impact on the reader' and 'illustrative material effectively and skilfully selected to support a confident, sustained response.' As with Task 1 above, in order to satisfy these Assessment Criteria, candidates should be enabled to build an individual and critical response. It is therefore essential that they independently select and examine appropriate textual details of their own choice. In cases where candidates require additional assistance from the teacher, this should be recorded on the work, and the final mark amended accordingly to reflect the degree of teacher involvement.

Many centres which used poetry, short stories or extracts from longer texts, included copies of the stimulus material for Task 2 for each of the sampled candidates. However, many centres erroneously included one example of a clean copy of the photocopied material rather than those used by the candidates during the final write-up. Centres are again reminded that it is a requirement to forward to CCEA all photocopied materials that each candidate identified by the sample has access to during the timed assessment. However, in cases where a full text is used as the stimulus, and candidates are not permitted to write on these during their assessment, there is no requirement to forward these to CCEA.

The CCEA Unit 3 Clarification Document, available on the GCSE English Language section of the CCEA website, includes contextualised examples of responses for Task 2 across all five Competence Levels.

The annual Autumn Agreement Trial should prove useful to teachers as they deliver this Unit to future students. Exemplar responses from this Summer 2023 series will be included. In order to maximize the benefit of the Agreement Trial materials, teachers are encouraged to record the permission of each candidate in the submitted sample for use at future Agreement Trials. Without the written consent of the candidate, their work produced for GEN31 cannot be shared.

Overall, the senior members of the CCEA GCSE English Language Moderation Team were impressed with the range and standard of work produced by candidates of different levels of ability in centres across Northern Ireland. The candidates had obviously worked extremely hard and clearly benefitted from the expertise of their teachers. Most task titles were clearly defined, enabling and appropriate and many teachers interpreted and applied the CCEA Assessment Criteria accurately. Furthermore, in many cases, there was clear evidence of effective Internal Standardisation, resulting in candidates being awarded the appropriate Unit 3 mark.

## Chief Examiner's Report

### Assessment Unit 4      Personal or Creative Writing and Reading Literary and Non-Fiction Texts

#### Overview

The Examining Team felt that this paper provided all candidates with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills and there was wide-ranging evidence of effective preparation and teaching.

Confirmation from the scripts indicated that this was a fair and successful paper, and examiners reported that the tasks and stimuli were accessible and enabled candidates of differing abilities to respond appropriately.

The writing task facilitated a range of varied and engaging responses. It was noted by several examiners that both writing tasks enabled candidates to write in a personal and creative way, and to do so using a range of engaging techniques.

The reading materials in Section B were also facilitative for the entire ability range. The Examining Team would welcome increased demonstration of how the writer's craft is employed, and the subsequent intended effect on the reader – particularly in Tasks 3 and 4.

As noted in the Overview for Unit 1, the skills of understanding, analysing, and evaluating the writer's craft are areas where candidates would benefit from further focus during preparation for this examination.

On the whole, candidates used their time well and centres should continue to remind candidates of the importance of planning and time management.

#### Section A                      Personal or Creative Writing

##### Task 1

From the vast range of candidates sitting this examination there appeared to be an even split in the choice between the Personal Writing option and the Creative Writing option. This was incredibly encouraging to see.

Candidates who chose the Personal Writing option were able to illustrate the meaningful role that music plays in many of the candidates' lives. This was evidenced by several stunning responses on an eclectic range of songs across an astounding breadth of genres and time.

One examiner noted, "Initially I was concerned that the personal writing task could possibly be challenging for lower ability candidates — however, I underestimated how passionately teenagers feel about music." With another examiner noting: "It was interesting as an examiner to get an insight into what candidates are listening to and the profound impact music has upon their lives."

Several examiners admitted to having an updated and diverse playlist after assessing the responses!

Responses to the Creative Writing option were equally impressive and compelling, with many candidates utilising the 'positivity' of the image to create moving and engaging narratives. The Examining Team had the pleasure of reading many excellent responses.



As in Unit 1, candidates handled this task well, and produced a well-structured article or entry for a creative writing competition which recognised and adhered to the specified form, audience and purpose, and the Assessment Objective.

Successful responses to Task 1 were written in a lively way that showed an effective grasp of the appropriate register, together with the ability to engage well with the intended audience. However, in several cases, accurate deployment of paragraphing was lacking; this is an important skill and is an area that teachers may wish to focus on across the ability range.

## **Section B                      Reading Literary and Non-Fiction Texts**

### **Task 2**

The stimulus material about the protagonists being trapped enabled many well-developed responses. As with previous papers, most were able to make different inferences about characters' descriptions and feelings, as well as interpreting the wide range of linguistic techniques apparent in both extracts. Successful candidates were more analytical in discussing specific language effects attributed to the correct techniques. However, the point made in previous reports must be made again: there were too many instances where candidates simply identified techniques rather than referencing the writer's intention in the texts.

Examiners reported that in a concerning number of scripts candidates wrote about the italicised introductions that preface the extracts. It is important that centres remind candidates that when these are provided (as was the case in the Specimen Assessment Materials) they are present to set the context and should not be referenced in the response. In this series candidates were not penalised for referencing the introduction, but writers' craft could not be credited as these introductions were not part of the authors' texts. There was also a degree of misinterpretation of techniques evident with an increasing number of candidates using abbreviated terms for linguistic techniques and ellipses for truncated textual examples. Centres should discourage candidates from adopting this approach.

### **Task 3**

The issue of fast fashion was certainly relatable to many candidates; however, they should be reminded that any former knowledge or views they may have on the subject should be set aside as they are required to respond to the specific stimulus provided.

### **Task 4**

This task was well received by candidates and most responses elicited a wide range of appropriately selected material and understanding of the writer's intentions. Rather worryingly though, a significant proportion of the candidature did not mention any of the linguistic techniques employed by the writer, meaning that subsequent opportunities to analyse and discuss the effects of techniques were also lost.

There was also evidence that some candidates misread the question and focused on the negatives of the passage as opposed to the positives as the question required. Those candidates who did engage with the writer's craft occasionally made inaccurate claims about the writer's intentions and the effect of these techniques.

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