

## Framing an overall response

- 1 Why, where and when are you reading this text? (Purpose and context of reading)

For instance, did you choose it yourself or was it chosen for you? In what kind of course or programme, with what stated or implicit aims?

- 2 What, basically, is the text about? (Identifying subject matters)

Attempt a couple of summaries of what the text seems to be about: one in a phrase or two; the other in a paraphrase of around thirty words. In each case consider what aspects of the text you have emphasised and which you have marginalised or excluded completely. Go on to compare your summaries with other people's.

- 3 What kind(s) of text is it? (Medium, genre and function)

- ◆ *medium*: does it appear to be primarily for oral delivery or silent reading? public or private? formal or informal? What traces of this are there in the text?
- ◆ *genre*: what other texts does it most remind you of? Is there a mixture of types?
- ◆ *function*: what seem to be the chief purposes of this text – to inform, persuade, amuse, stir up, calm down, make think, make feel, answer questions, pose problems? For instance, is the text instrumental and directed towards an activity beyond itself (e.g., an advert or recipe)? Or does it appear to offer itself as an object of interest in its own right (e.g., a poem, a joke)?

- 4 Who is talking with whom within and around the text? How do *you* respond? (Addresser–addressee relations; dialogue and monologue)

Notice that studying texts involves a variety of people speaking and spoken to (addressers and addressees) and therefore a variety of one-, two- or many-way conversations (monologues and dialogues).

- ◆ 'External' conversations include teacher and learner, and learner and learner; also writer and reader.
- ◆ 'Internal' conversations include those between characters or figures within the text, as well as the 'voice' or 'persona' of any narrator.

As a result, every reading of a text, however simple, is in some sense many-voiced. One of those voices – for you the most immediate and important – is yours.

- 5 What overall version or vision of experience does the text appear to offer? Are you persuaded or happy to share it? ('World-view' and value)

That last general question is a reminder to stand back and weigh the overall effect and value of the text. What view of life does it offer? Is it helpful?

## Analysing in detail

Here is a checklist to help turn the above general response into a fairly comprehensive analysis. It is organised in terms of *word choice*, *word combination*, *sound-patterning and visual presentation*, and *textuality – text, context, intertextuality*. To begin with, it can be a good idea to analyse a text by moving systematically through each of these categories in turn. Once you have got used to the terms and categories, you may move fairly freely from one to another, depending on the nature of the text and the purpose of your analysis. The main thing is to keep relating specific textual details to larger critical frameworks.

The present method and checklist will not tell you what to think about and how to value a particular text. But they will help you frame a response which is both searching and critical. Notice that each of the questions below is followed by some counter- and alternative questions. These are reminders to read creatively as well as critically: to gauge what *is* in a particular text by bracing it against what is *not* – but perhaps might have been. Treat these as invitations to rewrite, too, if you wish. (Technical grammatical and linguistic terms are glossed in Part Six.)

### Word choice

*What sorts of vocabulary are being used? (What others might have been used?)*

How far are the words:

short or long; monosyllabic or polysyllabic (see syllable)?

simple or complex?

concrete or abstract; particular or general?

common and everyday, or from a specific area of use (religion, technology, etc.)?

literal or figurative; plain or metaphorical?

context-sensitive (e.g., the pronouns ‘I’, ‘she’, etc., and words such as ‘here’ and ‘now’)

– or relatively context-free?

heavily adjectival and adverbial – or mainly nouns and verbs?

Experiment by substituting, adding or deleting words.

### Word combination

*What are the main ways in which the words are grouped or organised? (How else might they have been structured and to what alternative effects?)*

How far are there:

familiar collocations (recognisable word-clusters) – or is much of it strikingly new?

speeches quoted directly or indirectly, freely or precisely?

speech moves, turns and exchanges with specific structures (see speech acts)?

long or short sentences – and how many words on average?