

DECODING THE QUESTIONS

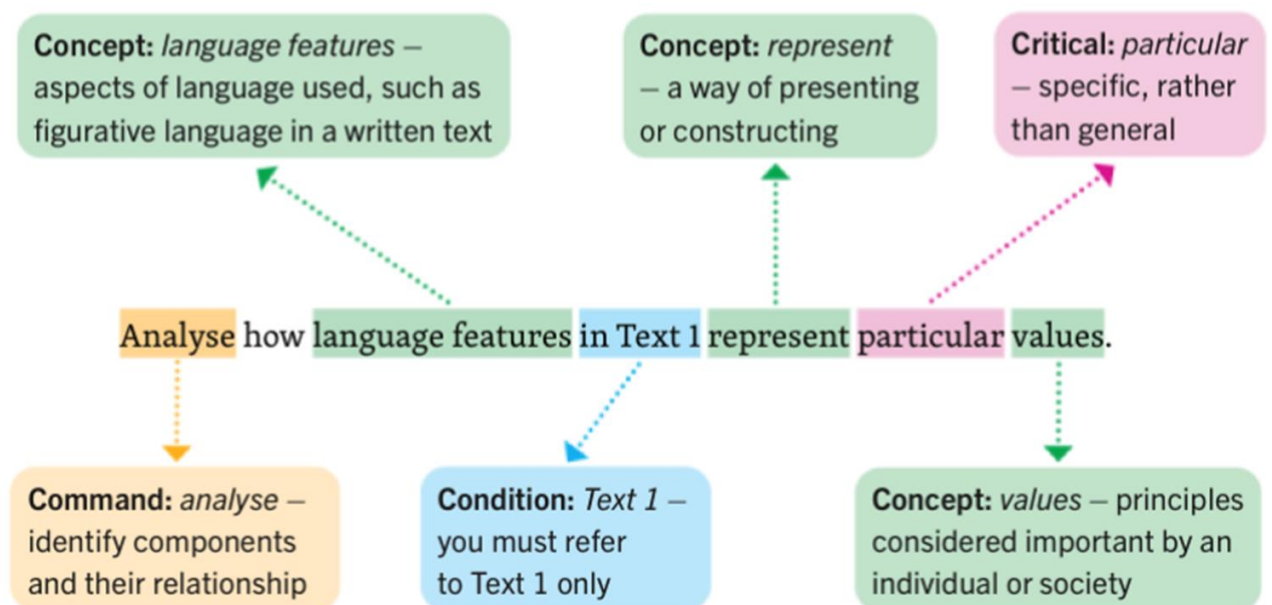
In order to successfully address a question and develop a well-structured, relevant response to it, you first need to spend time decoding and unpacking its key components. As part of your exam preparation, you should regularly practise this decoding process because it will encourage you to think critically about the questions and help to prevent any misunderstanding or misreading of them. Successful decoding of examination questions is the first step to producing high-quality responses. The table below highlights the key components – or the main word types – you should search for when deconstructing the questions in the exam.

Command words	These are the instructional terms that indicate the type of argument or response you need to write. For example, the term 'discuss' requires you to examine various aspects of a topic and provide supporting points, whereas the term 'evaluate' requires you to provide a critical judgement or appraisal.
Concept words	These refer to the important syllabus concepts that you are required to address. You need to demonstrate a deep understanding of these syllabus concepts, with reference to both your studied texts and unseen texts, as well as applying them practically through writing your own texts.
Condition words	These outline the parameters of your response, such as guiding you to apply a question to 'at least one studied text' or 'texts from the same genre'. Take careful note of condition words. Overlooking them can negatively affect your response.
Critical words	These are clarifying additional terms that make the questions more specific and nuanced, allowing markers to differentiate between candidate responses. Examples include qualifying words such as a 'particular' audience or a 'controversial' idea.

Sample decoded question

Observe these worked examples, which highlight how you might decode the different types of questions in the Comprehending, Responding or Composing sections of the exam.

Sample Section One question: Comprehending




Command words

Command words are often used at the start of questions to provide a clear directive about the specific skill you need to demonstrate in your answer. To decode questions properly, you will need to understand how the command words differ from each other, sometimes very subtly. A glossary that contains these terms is available at https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/348549/Glossary-of-key-words-used-in-the-formulation-of-questions.pdf. The table below summarises some common command words that you may encounter in English examination questions.

Command	What you need to do
Account for	Provide reasons or justifications
Analyse	Identify the components; explain their relationship, function and effects
Compare	Identify points of similarity and difference
Create	Make, craft or compose
Discuss	Examine the various aspects; provide supporting points
Evaluate	Critically appraise or provide a judgement
Explain	Identify the why and/or how of something through a focus on cause and effect
Explore	Thoroughly investigate or search for
Identify	Recognise and label or name specifically

Comprehending Practice

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- Although it is highly likely that the specific texts in the exam will be unfamiliar, you will still be able to draw on your prior experience of other texts that belong to a similar form, genre, context etc. The exam texts may use language, structural, generic or stylistic features that you *do* recognise.
 - Try to use personal pronouns such as 'I' or 'me' in your analysis if the question invites you to. Questions in past exams have required an explanation of how a text may engage 'you' or how 'your' response or interpretation has been shaped.
 - The texts will probably be multilayered and nuanced in their ideas; there are likely to be many possible 'correct' answers to each question.
 - You are likely to feel a little pressured by time constraints in this section. But remember that each analysis in this section needs to be concise, at only 200–300 words. For most students, this equates to just over a page of writing.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS IN SECTION ONE

Section One requires you to provide very close analysis of the unseen texts. The Comprehending questions can be quite short, assessing your understanding of just one or two key syllabus concepts. An understanding of the relationship *between* the concepts may be of critical importance to answering a question properly. The questions typically start with a command word, such as 'analyse' or 'explain', followed by 'how', indicating that answers should be firmly grounded in analysis that explains the workings of the text. The questions might be quite 'open' in nature, allowing you to discuss your personal interpretation of a text and to select whatever features you like to support it. Or they might be more 'closed', with condition or critical words directing you to focus on a specific idea or one aspect of construction, for instance.

Example Comprehending question

Explain how Text 1 **is constructed to communicate an idea about youth in Australia.**

The most important considerations for the types of questions in this section are:

- understanding that, because of their brevity, *all* the words they contain are important
- being able to identify the specific syllabus concepts being assessed
- recognising the relationship *between* the syllabus concepts being assessed.

The types of questions included in this section may require you to:

- deconstruct the text carefully at the word or micro level, much like examining it through the lens of a magnifying glass
- direct your attention away from what you may *want* to analyse, through the specificity of the wording
- compare and/or contrast two of the unseen texts
- reflect on your response/s to a text
- justify your interpretation/s of a text
- demonstrate an understanding of visual and written language features

- recognise subtleties, nuanced meanings and juxtaposition within the texts
- select appropriate quotes and textual evidence in order to support your argument
- use metalanguage appropriate to the form and mode of the text.

TOP TIPS FOR SECTION ONE

The following tips offer advice for achieving success in Section One.

- Use the 10-minute reading time to establish an overall sense of the texts. Then, in the working time, devote 20 minutes to each question. Read the question first, then the contextual information provided, then the text. The contextual information often provides vital clues about the text, allowing you to develop helpful expectations of its subject matter, conventions or techniques.
- Deconstruct the questions carefully. Identify the command, concept, condition and critical words. Identify the relationship between any syllabus concepts.
- Plan! This process is critical in terms of focusing your thoughts and providing you with a clear framework. A plan only needs to be brief. In this section it might consist of a few dot points around or above the question itself.
- Start with a clear thesis that engages specifically with *all* aspects of the question. No general statements should be provided in this section; get straight to the point! You can reiterate the thesis at the end of your response with a sentence that relates back to the question, using different words or syntax.
- Annotate the texts, focusing *only* on what is important to answering the question. Avoid simply highlighting the text. Rather, label, number or colour-code parts of the text that could be used as textual evidence.
- Embed quotes and evidence smoothly, and do not plagiarise the writer's work. Quotes should be short; sometimes paraphrasing is just as effective.
- Comprehending responses don't need to resemble 'mini-essays'. The questions usually lend themselves to short answers of one to three paragraphs – only use a paragraph break if shifting focus significantly. A separate introduction and conclusion are unnecessary.