

Structural techniques

(Using examples from GCSE set texts)

ASYNDETIC LISTING

- **Meaning:** Items listed without use of a conjunction, instead using punctuation.
- **Effect:** Asyndetic listing is used to increase the pace of a text through the way the listed items quickly accumulate. This is used in place of syndetic listing, which maintains a steady narrative pace.

Example:

*In 'Macbeth', Malcolm uses **asyndetic listing** to emphasis the multitudinous nature of Macbeth's negative qualities; "I grant him bloody, luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin that has a name".*

CONCLUSION

- **Meaning:** A paragraph or section of a formal text used to wrap up an argument and present a final judgement.
- **Effect:** Conclusions are used to summarise the points of a persuasive text. They remind the reader of the arguments made throughout the text, and finish with a final judgement. They are key to a successful persuasive text.

Example:

*In 'An Inspector Calls', Inspector Goole finishes his interview with a long, **concluding monologue** in which he warns the Birling family of the dangers of their outlook on the lower classes.*

CYCLICAL STRUCTURE

- **Meaning:** When a text begins and ends in the same place with the same idea or theme.
- **Effect:** A cyclical structure forces a reader to consider what has happened over the course of the text, and how it has changed the characters or the outcome.

Example:

*The plot of 'An Inspector Calls' is **cyclical**; an inspector calls at the beginning of the text, and after Inspector Goole has questioned the family and left again, a real inspector calls to interrogate the family.*

DIALOGUE

- **Meaning:** Speech or conversation between characters in a text. It can also be used to display a character's internal thoughts.
- **Effect:** Dialogue is used to drive the plot of a text, while helping readers become acquainted with the characters. It is often responsible for progressing the storyline, while simultaneously helping readers become more emotionally invested in the characters

Example:

*In 'Jane Eyre', internal **dialogue** is used to help readers understand her thought processes and feelings, helping them build on their connection with her character.*

FOCUS

- **Meaning:** What the writer focuses their writing on as the text progresses. Focus can shift through the text and as different characters or themes gain importance. Focus shifts can be done subtly, or through changing the point of view of the writer.
- **Effect:** Focus makes clear the more important characters and themes in a text, and focus shifts are key for progressing the narrative of a text. Shifting the narrative allows readers to become acquainted with different characters or themes, increasing their emotional engagement in the text.

Example:

In 'Frankenstein', Shelley uses different points of view (POV) to help readers get to know the characters in the text. The novel begins from Captain Walton's POV, as he writes letters to his sister. The POV then switches to Victor Frankenstein, allowing readers to become acquainted with his character.

ENDINGS

- **Meaning:** The conclusion of a text.
- **Effect:** The effect varies based on how an ending is written. If it is written as a cliff-hanger in anticipation of another text to follow, it leaves the reader excited for more. If the ending is neat and tidy, it leaves the reader with a sense of satisfaction.

Example:

*The **ending** of 'Macbeth' neatly wraps up the play, with Macduff presenting Macbeth's head to Malcolm. Macbeth has died, and has answered for all of the sins he committed over the course of the play.*

HEADINGS & SUBHEADINGS

- **Meaning:** Titles used to create sections in a piece of text.
- **Effect:** Headings and subheadings are used to break up a longer piece of text, and to give it some direction. It splits the text into manageable chunks, making it easier for readers to read and understand.

Example:

Texts like 'Jane Eyre', 'Frankenstein', and 'Lord of the Flies' are broken up into chunks through use of chapter headings. These help break up the text, and in 'Frankenstein', they're used to separate different points of view.

INTRODUCTION

- **Meaning:** The beginning section of a formal text which explains the purpose of the text as well as introducing the arguments that will be made.
- **Effect:** Introductions are useful for the way they inform your audience about the text they are about to read. They often give a vague outline of the text, so the reader knows exactly what to expect.

Example:

While none of the AQA set texts have formal introductions so to speak, many of them make use of the main components of an introduction, using the first chapter to introduce key themes that will be explored throughout. For example, in 'Pride and Prejudice', the opening chapter introduces key themes of marriage, love, and courtship in Mrs Bennet's excitement surrounding Mr Bingley moving in nearby.

NARRATIVE PACE

- **Meaning:** The speed at which a text progresses and the story is told. This isn't necessarily the same as the speed with which the story itself takes place.
- **Effect:** Pacing is used to alter the tone and mood of a story, and it allows readers to more deeply understand characters and their personalities. More important scenes tend to unfold slower, allowing the writer to add more detail, and the reader to become more fully immersed in the storyline.

Example:

In chapter 8 of 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' there is a notable change in narrative pace. The tone of the story becomes quite desperate as Utterson gets no closer to solving the mystery.

ORDER OF EVENTS

- **Meaning:** The order in which the events of a text take place. This can be chronological, or it can include flashbacks or flash forwards. Temporal references (references to time) are particularly significant in establishing an order of events.
- **Effect:** The order of events helps to introduce and prioritise key ideas and events. For example, if a text were to open with a flash forward, the reader would plainly understand that this event is the reason why the text was written.

Example:

*In 'A Christmas Carol', the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future interrupt a standard **chronological order**. By taking Scrooge backwards and forwards in time, the ghosts highlight these periods as key events in Scrooge's life, helping readers understand the importance of Scrooge changing his ways.*

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

- **Meaning:** A question asked by the writer which does not have, and isn't expected to have, a direct answer.
- **Effect:** Rhetorical questions are used to subtly influence the reader. They help persuade them of the argument at hand. They are not meant to be answered, rather they are intended to prompt deeper thought in the reader.

Example:

When Macbeth hears the witches' prophecy he asks himself "What's the boy Malcolm? Was he not born of woman?". His thoughts mirror the questions of the audience, and encourage the readers to more deeply examine the meaning of the witches' prophecy.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

- **Meaning:** The way in which words and punctuation are arranged in a sentence. The length of a sentence is also an important component of sentence structure.
- **Effect:** Shorter sentences make arguments explicitly clear to the reader, helping them to understand the point at hand, while longer sentences can become confusing and overwhelming. A sentence with lots of punctuation can come across frustrating, which can help a writer further develop a tone in their writing.

Example:

*In 'An Inspector Calls', **sentence structure** is used to show the growth in Sheila's character over the course of the text. At the beginning, she uses lots of simple sentences, like "I'm sorry Daddy actually I was listening", to imply a lack of depth in her character. By the end of the play though, this changes, and she speaks for longer, with a mix of sentence length to imply a change in her character; "Yes, of course it is. That's what I meant when I talked about building up a wall that's sure to be knocked flat."*

TRICOLON

- **Meaning:** The technical term for 'rule of three', when a writer lists three words, phrases, or ideas in quick succession.
- **Effect:** A tricolon increases the impact of a writer's statement by creating a clear rhythm to a sentence.

Example:

*In 'Romeo and Juliet', Tybalt uses **tricolon** when he said "I hate the word [peace], as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee". **Tricolon** is used here to emphasise Tybalt's aggressive, hateful nature.*