

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module A: Genre

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the conventions of the genre and the ideas and values associated with the genre
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 1: Life Writing

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Life Writing, composers not only interrogate the representation of lives but also experiment with textual forms and features in response to different contexts.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

There were a number of strong responses by candidates who established clear connections between the texts in the genre and displayed knowledge of the experimentation with form undertaken by authors working within it. In particular, Modjeska's *Orchard* featured prominently among better responses, often in relation to the notion of interrogation.

In weaker responses, candidates tended to recount the events of the lives being represented with little consideration of context, limited textual reference, and little or no evaluation of the statement in relation to the text.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts in any genre arise from specific social and cultural conditions and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In stronger responses, candidates established clear connections between genre, texts and the social and cultural conditions from which the texts arose. They asserted and sustained a coherent and sophisticated thesis about the nature of the genre and the place of the texts within their respective contexts.

In weaker responses, candidates tended to focus only on the composers' purposes in writing/composing without consideration of the wider social and cultural concerns inherent in the texts. Candidates' engagement with the question was often restricted to an exploration or description of personal context.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of fact and fiction in Life Writing.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

The better responses demonstrated a very high level of understanding of the theories to support exploration of the interplay of 'fact and fiction'. The most insightful responses tended to focus on literary theory and demonstrated a clear exposition of the conventions of the genre. Candidates should ensure they can demonstrate thorough understanding of the relevance of a literary theory to the specific genre.

Some weaker responses demonstrated some uncertainty regarding references to theory and some limitations of textual reference to support analysis of the interplay of fact and fiction.

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Module A: Genre

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the conventions of the genre and the ideas and values associated with the genre
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 2: Crime Writing

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Crime Writing, composers not only scrutinise justice but also experiment with textual forms and features in response to different contexts.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Many candidates struggled to answer the question in its entirety. In better responses, candidates used original texts and did not become overly focused on one aspect of the question. In some sophisticated responses, candidates, often in reference to *The Real Inspector Hound*, rejected the statement as a contextual concern, which led to a sophisticated evaluation.

In weaker responses, candidates used an overly formulaic approach and showed little understanding of the variations available in modern crime writing. Instead, they over-used authors such as Agatha Christie with little understanding of their contexts and limited evaluation of the ways in which their texts scrutinise justice.

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Significant texts in any genre arise from specific social and cultural conditions and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In stronger responses, candidates demonstrated a deep understanding of the genre as an ongoing reflection of society and its relationship with those who transgress its laws. They made connections between their texts and the genre as a whole, rather than the more formulaic treatment of texts in isolation.

In weaker responses, candidates demonstrated limited engagement with the terms of the question and instead offered a survey through the genre's history.

Candidates are encouraged to read and view widely in the genre in order to deepen their understanding of the diversity of crime writing.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of the traditional and the innovative in Crime Writing.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In the most sophisticated responses, candidates demonstrated their understanding that the origins of the genre involve innovation. They then successfully explored the interplay of innovation and tradition in terms of conservation of the integrity and familiarity of the genre to responders. They also showed how innovation can be achieved both at levels of content and form by composers.

Less insightful responses relied on the history of the genre, the contemporary contexts of crime or omitted a sound link to the values of the genre and neglected the audience expectations to see justice served. The choice of related texts could reflect a wider variety of crime writing and writers. Weaker responses relied on identifying film techniques without linking the concept of how we 'see' crime in film to an exploration of how we 'look' at crime writing as an interplay of innovation and tradition.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module A: Genre

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the conventions of the genre and the ideas and values associated with the genre
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 3: Science Fiction

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Science Fiction, composers not only challenge traditional perspectives on humanity but also experiment with textual forms and features in response to different contexts.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Many candidates engaged strongly with the contextual concerns of their often well-chosen and original texts. In better responses, candidates displayed significant insight into the ways that composers challenged traditional perspectives on humanity and the contextual reasons for doing so. They also engaged with notions of form and feature in a sophisticated way, particularly when utilising Kubrik's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

In weaker responses, candidates focused heavily on conventions of the genre without connection to the statement given in the question. Candidates often gave a recount of the history of science fiction.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts in any genre arise from specific social and cultural conditions and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In stronger responses, candidates engaged with the key terms of the question in sophisticated ways and sustained insightful lines of argument about humanity's relationships with technology. Text choices tended to be broad and eclectic.

Candidates are encouraged to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the science fiction genre and its connections with contemporary contexts.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of technology and morality in Science Fiction.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

HSC Marking Centre Comments

The most sophisticated responses offered analysis of the genre and sound knowledge of the context of each text used to explore the interplay of 'technology and morality'. The strongest responses explored the way the contexts of composers determine the values of the genre and argued effectively the moral issues arising from the circumstances of the imagined world.

Weaker responses sometimes confused humanity with morality and relied on description of the technology rather than building an insightful thesis about the imagined technology.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of how particular ways of thinking have shaped and are reflected in texts
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 1: After the Bomb

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In *After the Bomb*, composers not only critique personal and political values but also manipulate textual forms and features in response to their times.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses balanced an argument about the personal and political values present in the texts used and how the concerns of the era shaped the forms and features of those texts. Candidates used self-selected texts to demonstrate the quality of understanding of these concerns, especially if those texts clearly were a sophisticated response to the times.

Mid-range responses in this elective focused on a discussion of the historical concerns of the period, and candidates included little discussion on the effect of the period on the shaping of textual features.

In weaker responses, candidates recounted the concerns of the era with superficial references to texts.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts in any period arise from particular ways of thinking and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Stronger responses demonstrated understanding of the key terms relating to the elective. In these responses, candidates recognised the impact of the concerns of the period upon the creation of texts, identifying common threads running through the texts chosen. These candidates often synthesised references to appropriate theorists of the period. They also addressed the question of relevance successfully, discussing enduring values that have continued beyond and/or throughout the period. They also chose appropriate related texts that assisted their argument, relating in different ways with the prescribed texts, in terms of concept, context and language use.

Unfortunately, some responses exhibited the tendency to discuss the historical perspectives of the texts rather than the ability of the composers of the texts to convey those perspectives with a variety of techniques. This approach sometimes led to the selection of texts of own choosing that related well on an historical basis but did not yield sufficient textual analysis.

In weaker responses, candidates resorted to contextual descriptions and generalised recount, often not linked to the question or effectively substantiated with textual analysis. These candidates often addressed the concept of enduring relevance in a perfunctory manner, drawing parallels between the period and contemporary society in terms of generalities, such as the continuing presence of war and existential doubt.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of the personal and the political in After the Bomb.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Stronger responses successfully explored the relationship between the political and the personal, displaying a capacity to adapt their argument appropriately for different texts while framing their argument with an effective over-arching thesis. They recognised the political complexity and scope of the period, acknowledging a diversity of personal responses. Candidates synthesised references to appropriate theorists and personalities of the period.

Unfortunately, some candidates, who had composed responses featuring a solid expository framework and strong contextual analysis, did not provide detailed, supporting textual analysis and technique identification.

Weaker responses resorted to contextual descriptions and generalised recount that was not linked to the question or effectively substantiated with textual analysis. These responses also tended to only address one key term or addressed one term in a perfunctory manner.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of how particular ways of thinking have shaped and are reflected in texts
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 2: Romanticism

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Romanticism, composers not only transform human experience through imagination but also manipulate textual forms and features in response to their times.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses balanced an argument about the transformation of human experience through imagination and how the concerns of the era shaped the language used in the texts. In these responses, candidates also provided clear comments on the relationship between the concerns of the late 18th century through to the mid-19th century with the texts, often discussing previous eras or contemporary social movements as a point of comparison or a medium through which paradigms could be discussed. These responses also contained well-chosen self-selected texts that could be compared effectively with the prescribed texts.

Mid-range responses often contained detailed references to textual features, but these candidates included little discussion on the relationship of textual features to paradigms, or presented opaque arguments. Responses were often weakened by poorly chosen self-selected texts that dealt primarily with concerns of the Victorian era or 20th-century romanticism, which placed the response at odds with the parameters set in the rubric of the elective.

In weaker responses, candidates retold the concerns of the era with references to texts that featured superficial textual analysis, or recounted the events of the text with little reference to social movements and concerns.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts in any period arise from particular ways of thinking and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses contained explicit references to the ways of thinking in the body of a strong argument that was supported with detailed and insightful textual analysis. They also expressed a clear knowledge of different parts of the Romantic period of the late 18th to mid 19th century, making pertinent references to appropriate thinkers and critics. They also provided a discussion of the enduring relevance of the values expressed in the texts. These responses often centred around two premises – one being the significance of the relationship between Romantic paradigms with those from the period before; the other dealt with the significance of the relationship between the Romantic paradigms and the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. Many of these responses also included appropriate use of 20th century texts that substantially related to the paradigms of the rubric-defined Romantic period.

Many candidates provided a detailed literary analysis without establishing a strong link to the ways of thinking related to the historical period. Some responses were marred by references to late 19th century and 20th century texts that did not substantially relate to the period defined in the elective rubric, despite identifying some relevant values. Teachers and students are reminded that suitable related texts should be from or about the time frame specified in the elective rubric. Some candidates that used artworks and music from the period tended to be descriptive and referred to techniques without apt connection to the ways of thinking and to the prescribed texts. Another feature of these less sophisticated responses was the tendency to discuss a narrow range of text types, specifically poems, which at times made for narrowly focused and repetitive responses, limiting the opportunity to display a broad understanding of the representation of the ways of thinking.

In some weaker responses, candidates lapsed into narratives that employed key terms in a superficial manner, failing to address the question in a meaningful way. There was a tendency to also choose quotations from texts that dealt more with plot recount rather than adding to the argument. These responses also often addressed the concept of enduring relevance in a superficial fashion, identifying vague similarities between the values of the Romantic period and contemporary society.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of imagination and the human experience in Romanticism.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

The better responses interwove explicit references to the ways of thinking in the body of a strong argument that was supported with detailed and insightful textual analysis. They also expressed a clear knowledge of the different strands of Romanticism, making pertinent references to appropriate thinkers and critics. Many of these responses also included appropriate usage of 20th century texts with substantial components related to the Romantic period and focused on the Romantic context of representation in their analysis.

Some candidates provided a detailed literary analysis without a strong link to the ways of thinking. Some candidates marred their responses with references to 20th century texts that did not relate to the period defined in the elective rubric, despite the implication of some relevant values. Please note that suitable related texts should be *from* or *about* the time frame specified in the rubric. Some weaker responses lapsed into narratives that employed key terms in a superficial manner, failing to address the question in a meaningful way.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of how particular ways of thinking have shaped and are reflected in texts
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 3: Navigating the Global

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In *Navigating the Global*, composers not only confront the dilemmas of globalisation but also manipulate textual forms and features in response to their times.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses in this elective balanced the complex dilemmas present in the globalised world represented in texts and an analysis of how the times shaped the textual features of the texts. These responses often presented a balanced vision of the blurred lines between the local and global contexts, integrating key terms and concepts present in the era to the discussion. Some of these responses contained an apt, clear integration of ideas of key theorists on the concerns and language of the era, such as Baudrillard, Jameson and Fukuyama, in discussing the paradigms.

Weaker responses tended to contain a discussion on the concerns of the era, which overpowered the essay and resulted in less textual analysis than was required. These candidates tended to explain the concepts of the era, sometimes recounting theories or providing textual detail that did not have strongly built links to the paradigms.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts in any period arise from particular ways of thinking and possess an enduring relevance.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In better responses, candidates incorporated a balanced vision of the relationship between the local and global, suggesting an awareness of blurred boundaries and the complexity of local/global values. Such candidates threaded references to appropriate theorists throughout well-substantiated arguments that engaged fully with the concept of significance and relevance in terms of enduring values being explored through the texts.

Mid-range responses often featured discussion of the ways of thinking, displaying a detailed understanding of the paradigms. However, this discussion was often supported by textual analysis that did not feature the requisite detail or level of language evaluation. Responses in this range also contained discussions of globalisation and global thought, but such discussion did not always relate well to the question.

In weaker responses, candidates followed the pattern of recount, especially in relation to filmic texts. These candidates generally presented simplistic notions about the ways of thinking. They also addressed the concept of relevance in a perfunctory way, citing the popularity of a text or the use of related material that was contemporary but not sophisticated in construction or conceptual content.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of choice and circumstance in Navigating the Global.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses incorporated a balanced vision of the relationship between the local and global, suggesting an awareness of blurred global boundaries, along with the complexity of local/global values. These responses threaded references to appropriate theorists throughout well-substantiated arguments that engaged fully with the concept of the interplay between choice and circumstance.

Mid-range responses resorted to textual reference that was largely paraphrased, limiting their capacity to present a convincing and well-supported argument, or selected texts that, in their analysis, suggested only a tenuous relationship with the ways of thinking.

Weaker responses followed the pattern of recount, especially in relation to filmic texts, representing simplistic notions about the ways of thinking.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module C: Language and Values

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the ways in which language shapes and reflects culture and values
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 1: Textual Dynamics

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Textual Dynamics, composers play with textual forms and features in order to transform ideas, experience and the act of reading.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

It is essential that a distinction be made between the study of *Textual Dynamics* and the previous elective, *Postmodernism*. There were a number of candidates who focused their attention on examining texts through what was identified as postmodern theory.

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a clear, fluent and sophisticated control of language. Their understanding of the module and the elective was demonstrated through thorough, well-integrated and adeptly expressed responses. The choice of self-selected texts demonstrated a wide range of approaches; of particular strength was the exploration of the dynamic relationships between texts, and how (sometimes seemingly disparate) texts can converse with one another. There was detailed exploration and analysis of how texts manipulate language to shape and reflect 'profound ideas' about culture and values.

In weaker responses, candidates provided analysis that lacked depth and tended to focus on a recount of textual detail. In many of these responses, candidates included a discussion of several relevant theorists that failed to properly integrate their understanding of this into existing textual analysis.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts manipulate language in dynamic ways to explore profound ideas about culture and values.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

In strong responses, candidates demonstrated a clear, fluent and sophisticated control of language. Their understanding of the module and the elective was demonstrated through thorough, well-integrated and adeptly expressed responses. The choice of self-selected texts demonstrated a wide range of approaches; of particular strength was the exploration of the dynamic relationships between texts, and how (sometimes seemingly disparate) texts can converse with one another. There was detailed exploration and analysis of how texts manipulate language to shape and reflect ‘profound ideas’ about culture and values.

Weaker responses lacked analytical depth and tended to focus on the recount of textual detail. Many of these responses included a discussion of several relevant theorists that failed to properly integrate this type of understanding into existing textual analysis. Candidates should be encouraged to range widely in their choice of what parts of the prescribed texts they choose to analyse.

It is essential that a distinction be made between the study of *Textual Dynamics* and the previous elective *Postmodernism*. There were a number of candidates who focused their attention on examining texts through what was identified as Postmodern theory.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of insight and transformation in Textual Dynamics.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Better responses were characterised by astute selection and use of texts of own choosing. Most candidates also focused on both key terms in a balanced way.

Weaker responses often struggled to show the interplay between insight and transformation.

Previous HSC Exam Essay Questions

Module C: Language and Values

In your answers you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the ways in which language shapes and reflects culture and values
- sustain an extended composition appropriate to the question, demonstrating control in the use of language

Elective 2: Language and Gender

2011 HSC Exam Question:

In Language and Gender, composers play with textual forms and features in order to investigate, challenge and construct aspects of identity.

Evaluate this statement with reference to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2011 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Some candidates focused on the gender component of *Language and Gender* and failed to discuss, and hence demonstrate understanding of, the crucial role that language plays. In many instances, candidates in this elective focused on gender as a theme of their prescribed and self-selected texts, rather than providing a concentrated analysis and exploration of how language can be used to ‘construct, perform or conceal masculine or feminine aspects of identity and their associated values ...’ (*Stage 6 English Prescriptions 2009–2012*, p 35). Candidates are reminded that this elective requires them to engage in a close analysis/discussion of verbal and written language, rather than in an examination of the language of actions.

A sophisticated understanding of the performative nature of gender, together with an integrated relevant theoretical discussion and the close analysis of language forms and features, was a highlight of better responses.

2010 HSC Exam Question:

Significant texts manipulate language in dynamic ways to explore profound ideas about culture and values.

Write an essay in which you explore the extent to which this is true of the texts you have studied in your elective.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2010 HSC Marking Centre Comments

A sophisticated understanding of the performative nature of gender, with an integration of relevant theoretical discussion, and the close analysis of language forms and features, was a highlight of the better responses. The ability to write with fluency and clarity is not to be underestimated at the Extension 1 level.

Some candidates focused on the gender component of *Language and Gender* and failed to discuss, and hence demonstrate understanding, of the crucial role that language plays. In many instances, candidates in this elective focused on gender as a theme of their prescribed and self-selected texts, rather than a concentrated analysis and exploration of how language can be used to ‘construct, perform or conceal masculine or feminine aspects of identity and their associated values ...’ (*Prescriptions 2009–2012*, p. 35). Students are reminded that this elective requires them to engage with a close analysis/discussion of verbal and written language, rather than an examination of the language of actions.

2009 HSC Exam Question:

Write an essay in which you explore the interplay of identity and concealment in *Language and Gender*.

In your response, refer to TWO prescribed texts AND texts of your own choosing.

2009 HSC Marking Centre Comments

Stronger responses reflected a keen understanding of this elective and demonstrated this understanding through a genuine engagement with the question.

Some responses focused on the gender component of *Language and Gender* and failed to discuss, and hence demonstrate understanding of, the crucial role that language plays.

A Glossary of Key Words

Account:	Account for: state reasons for, report on. Give an account of: narrate a series of events or transactions
Analyse:	Identify components and the relationship between them; draw out and relate implications
Apply:	Use, utilise, employ in a particular situation
Appreciate:	Make a judgement about the value of
Assess:	Make a judgement of value, quality, outcomes, results or size
Calculate:	Ascertain/determine from given facts, figures or information
Clarify:	Make clear or plain
Classify:	Arrange or include in classes/categories
Compare:	Show how things are similar or different
Construct:	Make; build; put together items or arguments
Contrast:	Show how things are different or opposite
Critically (analyse/evaluate):	Add a degree or level of accuracy depth, knowledge and understanding, logic, questioning, reflection and quality to (analyse/evaluate)
Deduce:	Draw conclusions
Define:	State meaning and identify essential qualities
Demonstrate:	Show by example
Describe:	Provide characteristics and features
Discuss:	Identify issues and provide points for and/or against
Distinguish:	Recognise or note/indicate as being distinct or different from; to note differences between
Evaluate:	Make a judgement based on criteria; determine the value of
Examine:	Inquire into

Explain:	Relate cause and effect; make the relationships between things evident; provide why and/or how
Extract:	Choose relevant and/or appropriate details
Extrapolate:	Infer from what is known
Identify:	Recognise and name
Interpret:	Draw meaning from
Investigate:	Plan, inquire into and draw conclusions about
Justify:	Support an argument or conclusion
Outline:	Sketch in general terms; indicate the main features of
Predict:	Suggest what may happen based on available information
Propose:	Put forward (for example a point of view, idea, argument, and suggestion) for consideration or action
Recall:	Present remembered ideas, facts or experiences
Recommend:	Provide reasons in favour
Recount:	Retell a series of events
Summarise:	Express, concisely, the relevant details
Synthesise:	Putting together various elements to make a whole