# Standards and Testing Agency

# Commentaries

The following 4 pieces provide evidence for the statement *managing shifts between levels of formality through selecting vocabulary precisely and by manipulating grammatical structures*.

**2. Pig Palaver!!! (newspaper report)**

Commentary:

* An appropriately formal style is used to present the more serious business of the impending trial. This is achieved through the use of agentless passives (*were taken into court; It was later discovered that; will either be set free or taken to jail; are being held in court*) and the perfect form of verbs, sometimes combined with a modal verb (*claim to have had their …houses blown down by Mr Wolf*; *claimed to have had chronic asthma; could not have vandalised*)*.*
* Appropriately formal vocabulary choices reflect the subject matter (*Citizens of Leicestershire; committing murder; malevolent; surreptitiously attempting; oblivious to the fact that; plea for mercy).* In contrast, witness comments (typically incorporating characters from other traditional tales such as Goldilocks and Little Red Riding Hood) use contracted forms (*wouldn’t; hadn’t; C’mon; doin’ nothin’*), non-Standard English (*wasn’t doin’ nothin’*), and diminutives (*Wolfy*), adding an element of humour through the unlikely characterisation of these familiar ‘heroines’.
* Occasional, but controlled, glimpses of informality, such as the question directed at the reader in the opening paragraph (*were they really to blame?);* and use of the present tense to describe past events (the historic present) to introduce the pigs’ side of the story *(the pigs’ version of events goes like this:*) hint at the humorous intention that underpins the whole report.

**3. Billy’s Story (extended narrative with inserts)**

Commentary:

* This intricately structured story consists of an enveloping narrative set in the present day, and a flashback narrative set during World War 1. The piece as a whole is interspersed with letters and diary entries, which both initiate and support the flashback narrative. Although the piece comprises a number of different texts, each is integrated into the main narrative. This creates cohesion and demonstrates the writer’s ability to manage shifts in levels of formality appropriate to the period, the narrative voice, and to purpose and audience.
* The present day narrative, which opens and concludes the short story, uses an appropriate level of informality: sentence fragments (*Almost*), contracted forms (*This can’t have been open for decades; I’ll pass them down!)*, a discourse marker, an ‘imprecise’ verb and a demonstrative pronoun *(Well, let’s get you an ice pack and start decorating this Christmas tree!), which* convincingly recreate spoken language in the easy dialogue between the narrator (Christine) and her grandpa.
* The short diary extract that triggers the flashback signals a shift in time through the more formal ‘Mother’, in contrast with the less formal ‘Grandpa’ and ‘Nan’ of the present day narrative. Elsewhere, the informality appropriate to a diary entry (*I feel just awful; our Billy; go and ‘do their bit’)* is interspersed with vocabulary choices appropriate to the WW1 period (*enlist; chores).*
* The dramatic transition to the flashback narrative is introduced (as is the present-day narrative) by dialogue. The cheery banter between Billy and the young recruits typically deploys non-standard and informal vocabulary (*Race yer up, Billy; You may not wanna do that; You alright, mate?),* which is juxtaposed later on with the more formal language of the captain (*Stand at ease. Attention!*)
* The level of formality in Billy’s letters shifts according to his mood and circumstances. The letter on page 4, written while he is still at training camp, is relatively informal. It is upbeat and light-hearted as he reassures his mother and sister of his wellbeing (*Bet you are surprised; the huts are cosy enough; new pair of boots which fit just fine; Likely to be going to France soon; I am all trained up; don’t go blaming yourself; Hoping that you’ve forgiven me).* His final letter, written before he goes ‘over the top’, is more sombre in tone and this is generally reflected in the more formal vocabulary and grammatical structures used: *I so admire your knit work; I hope that you are well; I do not wish for you to mourn for me; it was not due to her that I am here; it may possibly be my final words; You will always be in my heart).*
* The diary entry set alongside the final letter deploys a more informal style as befitting its purpose and audience: *can’t believe it; Damn this war! Beat the Fritz. Yeah right! Genius! Well, on that joyful note…)* in contrast with the more euphemistic language he reserves for his mother and sister in his letter (*Germans have been lively; The hot sector; an unearthly fate).*

**6. The Creation of the Chelegonaffe (narrative)**

Commentary:

* The immediacy of the opening dialogue plunges the reader directly into the midst of the villagers’ plight, effectively replicating everyday speech through the use of contracted forms and repetition. The opening narrative comment (*That’s Old Bess… they’re a nightmare, those wolves*) maintains a degree of informality, albeit juxtaposed with an element of semi-formality (*must have been taken*) hinting at the gravity of the situation. The confiding voice of the narrator, who goes on to introduce himself as the village doctor, invites the reader not only to share the village’s dilemma, but also to trust that the narrator may have a solution to it. The transition to a more formal style (*sheep have been taken; the village is in uproar; the hunting dogs are tiring early; starting to feel despair*) resonates with the narrator’s education and status in the village, in contrast with the distraught villagers and the other two men, Sammy and Bob.
* Precise selection of evocative vocabulary (*a guardian that will protect the village; the sound of two pairs of footsteps echoing off the track; a disgusting stench*) and use of more formal grammatical structures *(to a visitor this village would appear normal, but to me it is full of despair; out of the depths of the cauldron, rose the strange creature*) evoke an unfamiliar setting, seemingly distant both in terms of time and place, which is reinforced throughout the narrative.
* As the preparations for the doctor’s plan are made, informal dialogue once more imitates the patterns of speech and creates a sense of urgency with its use of ellipsis, sentence fragments and discourse markers *(Hey, Sammy, Bob, you there?”…“Will it work?” “I think so.”... “OK…what time?” “Eleven.”).* In contrast, the repetitive structure of the chant, suggesting a tone of solemn concentration, uses a more formal style, as does the doctor’s greeting of the Chelegonaffe where his language reflects the more antiquated mood established earlier *(“Go, protect our village, our herds and our flocks; become our guardian, mighty Chelegonaffe”).* These more formal grammatical structures and almost biblical vocabulary are entirely appropriate to this story of a mythical creature, created to save the village and its livestock.

**7. Beecher Woods (promotional leaflet)**

Commentary:

* Formal and informal vocabulary and grammatical structures combine to appeal to different audiences: individuals seeking a new challenge; groups in need of team-building skills; and families simply looking for a fun-filled day out.
* The opening section uses a highly informal style, addressing the reader directly. The use of the second person ‘you’, the repetitive use of rhetorical questions, and the peremptory *Well stop right there!* all but demand that the reader take notice.
* The next section, *Brazil Breakout*, shifts to a slightly more formal style as the challenges of the first activity are described (*physical and mental skills are required; bravery is also needed as some fears may be conquered*)*.* This is juxtaposed with the more informal vocabulary and structures of the second paragraph (*If you love a challenge – however difficult – then you will most certainly love the ‘low ropes’ that are dotted around the forest; willingness to keep going; of course, when you arrive)* to provide reassurance and encouragement for potential participants.
* Levels of formality continue to shift, managing the provision of detailed information with the continuing need for both reassurance and enticement. More formal structures, using passives and modals (…*whilst being given instructions by the staff;* *you are provided with a life-jacket which will keep you afloat should you fall in; An element of trust is involved with this activity; must make sure there is no slack on the rope)* are integrated with less formal vocabulary (*dotted around the border; this is a must!),* adverbs that modify and soften (*a little less adventurous; quite amusing; delightfully rewarding*), idiomatic usage (*it goes without saying)* and parenthetical asides (*an adventurous [and wet] day on the water*).
* The leaflet concludes with an appropriately informal appeal to the reader (*if you love…then I think you can…for yourself – don’t you?).*

In the following 3 pieces, vocabulary and grammatical structures are sustained and adapted to reflect the level of formality appropriate to purpose and audience. They do not, however, provide evidence for the statement *managing shifts between levels of formality through selecting vocabulary precisely and by manipulating grammatical structures*.

**1. Palm Oil (formal letter)**

Commentary:

* The letter maintains an appropriately formal style throughout. The second person, direct address to the recipient is appropriate to the letter form, and the integrated question and answer format does not undermine the formality of the vocabulary and grammatical structures that are effectively deployed throughout (*as the demand grows bigger the oil producers need to have access to more land, for their plantations to grow and flourish; The orangutans rely on the rainforest… orangutans are becoming increasingly rare; I suggest that you advertise these problems; make a concious effort to recognise the relevant issues surrounding the farming of palm oil).*

**4. The Pie (short first person narrative)**

Commentary:

* This short narrative establishes and maintains an appropriately informal style throughout, with vocabulary choices in keeping with the character and situation of the young first person Victorian narrator (*the last shilling we’ve got; If looks could kill, I’d be dead right now; the words are stuck in my throat)*. The use of the present tense, with simple present and present progressive forms, and non-finite (-ing) verbs, conveys urgency and immediacy in this brief but pacy narrative.

**5. London Trip (information leaflet)**

Commentary:

* An informal style, appropriate to the intended audience, is used from the start, with questions (including an elliptical question) that directly address the reader and acknowledge their anxieties (*Are you nervous about the London trip next year? Don’t want to get lost?*). There is a hint of greater formality in the next sentence with the agentless passive (*Any questions… will be answered in this brochure*), but the idiomatic *playing on your mind* and the use of informal vocabulary and structures (*school trip* *that you’ll go on; bother Hilltop!)* are not indicative of a managed shift. The central section of the leaflet provides information about London’s attractions whilst continuing to entice and reassure the reader (*This heart-stopping café will take the wind out of your sails; …sticky chocolate sauce drizzled on it. Lovely!)* The greater formality of the passives (*Any money you bring can be spent on…but it was agreed by Year 6…)* and the impersonal construction(*it was better to bring your own!)* is somewhat undermined by the use of an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. The leaflet concludes with a ‘true or false’ section, which maintains the light-hearted and informal tone of the piece (*Take selfies with no teacher in! Go and marvel at the attractions!).*