Preparation for the examinations

The second method is often better, because it lets you get on with your argument while at the same time demonstrating that you know the text well. Practise this method of quoting and you will soon find that you become adept at it.

Reference

Equally effective, though, can be reference — especially when you are writing about a novel. Reference is when you show awareness of an event, a character, a place, etc., by referring to it with knowledge rather than using the exact words written by the author.

If we continue to use the lines above from ‘Strange Meeting’ as an example, if you were to refer to them you would write something like:

Owen’s use of the language of dreams immediately establishes that this is more than a realistic portrayal of battle.

Reference has particular value when you are dealing with novels, where direct quotation can be difficult, even in an open-book exam.

To summarize, here is a list of points to bear in mind when you are using quotation and reference:

- You should support your arguments with frequent and relevant textual evidence.
- Quotations should be brief.
- Quotations should be accurate.
- The best quotations are embedded in your own sentences.
- Reference to the text can also help to give evidence, and close references can often work better than quotations.
- Quotations and references should never stand alone — they should be used to support particular points that you are want to make.

And finally...

It is common among students to talk about dreading exams, but this can sometimes be overplayed. Exams are a fact of the system we are all in, so we might as well make the most of them.

If you are well prepared, the exams should be seen — in part anyway — as a chance to show what you know. And the nature of English Literature as a subject also means that you should find some space in your head to think in the exam itself.

It is never really appropriate to say ‘good luck’ to someone before an exam, because exams are not about luck. They are about being well prepared in advance, and thoughtful on the day itself.

Glossary

Agitprop. An art form with an explicitly political massage.

Antagonist. The most notable character who opposes the protagonist (hero) of a narrative. Often the antagonist is the villain who wants to harm the hero/heroine or prevent him/her from achieving their goals.

Asyndetic listing. This involves omitting any conjunctions (such as ‘and’) from a list.

Ballade. A long poem that tells a story, and usually has a fast pace, with repetition a common feature.

Ballad. A French form that was popular in the 14th and 15th centuries. It usually opens with an address to the poet’s prince, and it uses eight-line stanzas (rhyming abababcc). The last line of the first stanza recurs as a refrain in the last line of the subsequent stanzas. A ballade ends with an envoi — a kind of postscript, which begins with an address to the poet’s prince and is a quatrains (rhymed abab).

Bibliography. The full list of books, articles, films and stage productions that you consulted during the writing of an essay.

Bildungroman. A novel that deals with one person’s formative years and moral or spiritual development (a German critical term).

Blazon. A poetic listing of a loved one’s beautiful qualities.

Byronic hero. An emotionally complex, mysterious and tormented male character, who is arrogant, cynical and contemptuous of normal society, but, despite such anti-heroic qualities, manages to be alluring to some of the other characters and many readers.

Caesura. A break within a line of verse, often indicated by a punctuation mark.

Compare / Contrast. When we connect texts, the words ‘compare’ and ‘contrast’ often appear together, so it is important to remember that they have significantly different meanings.

Comparison, as used here and more widely in academic contexts, involves finding aspects of similarity in texts. Contrast, on the other hand, involves finding aspects of difference.

Conceit. An arresting or elaborate comparison that brings together two (typically dissimilar) elements in an unusual way. Such comparisons, while at first seemingly far-fetched, often prove to be apt.

Confessional. Confessional writing is deeply personal and intimate in its details.

Contexts of production and reception. Contexts are all of the various circumstances that can be taken into account when reading a text (concerns with, text means something that has literally been written together).

Contexts of production are the various circumstances that can be considered as relevant at the time the text was written and first published / first performed.

Contexts of reception are the various circumstances that can be considered as relevant at the time the text is being read or watched, which might be many years later (in the case of World War I, maybe a century later).

Counter-cultural. A counter culture is one whose beliefs and behaviour differ considerably from the mainstream views held at the time.

Coupé. Two lines with the same metre that also rhyme.

Cultural capital. A term coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which describes your social assets, your personal stake in society other than your finances.

Dénouement. This refers to ordinary people.

Diachronic study. A study that considers texts through a wide time period.

Dialect. As used here, it refers to the speech of a particular area.

Dysphemism. The opposite of euphemism — where the grim reality is foregrounded, or exaggerated, rather than politely avoided. Heroic war literature and propaganda often use euphemism; writers try to shock readers about the brutal truth.

Dystopian. The opposite of Utopian — a (usually) invented society in which people are disjointed and unhappy.

End-stopped. When a line of verse ends with a punctuation mark.

Enjambment. Used in poetry to describe the continuation of a sentence or a clause beyond the end of a line and on to the next one.

Existentialism. A philosophy that stresses individual action and responsibility. This broad term emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and is often associated with feelings of disorientation and confusion in the face of a world that seems to be meaningless and absurd.

Extended metaphor. A metaphor which is carried beyond a single comparison of two elements and is developed further.

Free indirect speech. This refers to speech that is embedded in a narrative, so it is unattributed (free) and a report of the speech rather than the actual words (indirect).

Free indirect thought. This is a narrative technique where a character’s thought processes form part of the narrative, but are not attributed to him or her.

Free verse. Poetry that conforms to no regular metre or rhyme scheme.

Genre. A way of categorizing texts.

Genres can be arranged around ways of writing (such as poetry/drama/prose), around content (such as crime, politics) or around purpose (such as satire) and so on. In a more general sense, genre involves grouping texts by type — and so connecting texts. There are many ways of grouping literary texts. They can be grouped in many ways through their connections with other texts, with which they have things in common. In most cases, generic groupings are not fixed, so thinking about genre involves connecting with other texts.