



## **Welcome to A Level English Language at Comberton Sixth Form!**

Pre-entry Preparation and Recommendations



Is this language?

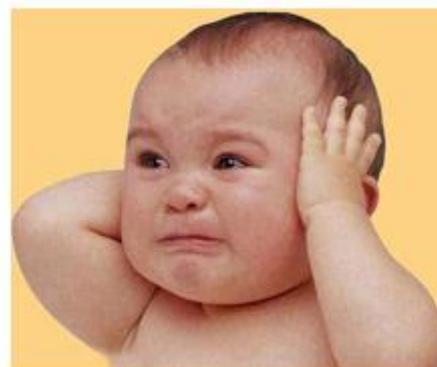
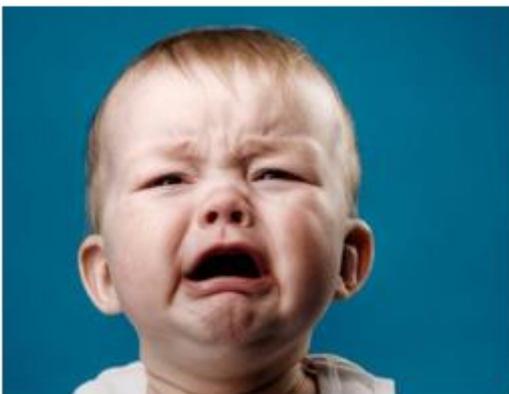


Or this a language?



N.B. This is the waggle dance. More info available here! [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waggle\\_dance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waggle_dance)

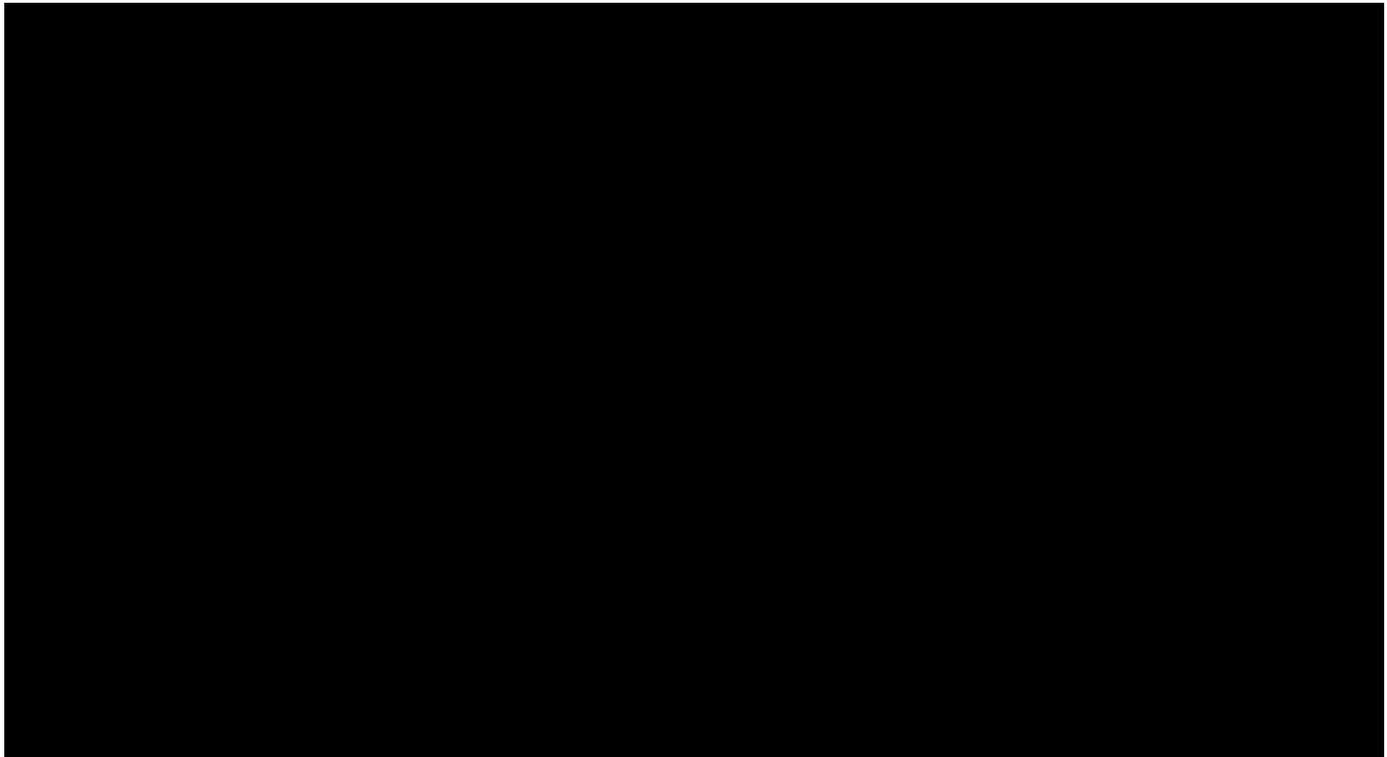
The same question but with different pictures.



The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun 'language' /'lɑŋgwɪdʒ/ as:

1. the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.  
"a study of the way children learn language"
  - a non-verbal method of expression or communication.  
"body language"
2. a system of communication used by a particular country or community.  
"the book was translated into twenty-five languages"  
the phraseology and vocabulary of a particular profession, domain, or group.  
"legal language"

Please watch the video below, courtesy and copyright of Dr. Phillip Seargeant of the Open University. What do we talk about when we talk about language?



<https://youtu.be/LwG9SNeCof8>

'Language is a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.'

Edward Sapir. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. 1921.

Do you think this definition goes far enough? What else do we communicate or do we do through language? (I'll give you a clue: are we *always* honest?!)

*'Some people have a prescriptive view of how language should be used'* (From The OU video)

Prescriptive (adjective): relating to the imposition or enforcement of a rule or method.

"these guidelines are intended to be prescriptive"

A prescribed view on language use is partly why we have dictionaries: to make sure that meanings are widely understood, and spelling doesn't vary according to where you are from or what accent you have. However, it's also wrapped up in notions about how people should speak, the way young people should be taught to speak, and whether technology is making people less literate, amongst others.

To understand these arguments, you first need to understand what is meant by 'Standard English' (S.E.) and Received Pronunciation (R.P.)

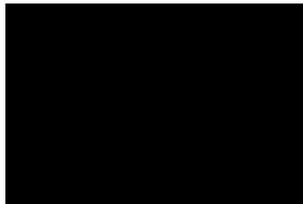
Standard English (noun)

In England and Wales, the term Standard English identifies British English, the Received Pronunciation accent, and the grammar and vocabulary of written United Kingdom Standard English (UKSE). In Scotland, the variety is Scottish Standard English; in the United States, the General American variety is thought of as the spoken standard; and in Australia, the standard English is General Australian. Standard English is generally associated with good education and prestige but it is not inherently superior to other English dialects used by an English speaking society.

Received Pronunciation (noun)

The standard form of British English pronunciation, based on educated speech in southern England, widely accepted as a standard elsewhere.

Listen to what RP sounds like here:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8uW15pmF68>

Which people or type of people do you associate with R.P.?

Do you think that there is a correct and prescribed way of talking? Or does it depend on who you are talking to and in which context?

When you write exams or submit work for school, you use standard English (S.E.). Do you write the same when you are texting, Whatsapping, and or Instagramming?

# Received pronunciation may be dying out – but its passing is long overdue

The lingua franca of the 'establishment' is now only spoken by a tiny fraction of the population – although the RP tinges of my own accent often proved beneficial

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lingua franca (noun): a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/shortcuts/2018/may/22/received-pronunciation-may-be-dying-out-but-its-passing-is-long-overdue>

People often talk about the English language as if it is a thing to keep pretty – a petticoat that might be sullied by the spread of glottal stops, text-speak or slang. The latest to weigh in is the writer and critic Jonathan Meades, in his column (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5756245/Queens-English-tool-social-mobility.html>). Meades argues that the accent RP – also known as the Queen's English or BBC English – should be regarded as “a sort of glue, a force for uniting the country” and “celebrated as a tool of social mobility”.

The term RP has murky origins, but it is regarded as the accent of those with power, influence, money and a fine education – and was adopted as a standard by the [BBC](#) in 1922. Today, it is used by 2% of the population.

The idea that an accent should facilitate or hinder a person's success is, of course, distasteful, but entirely true: the powerful elite will recoil from those who sound different from them; those who sound different to the powerful feel out of place and unwelcome.

My own accent is slightly confusing. People are frequently surprised to learn that I come from Lancashire and went to my local comprehensive – save for the flat vowels of, say, “bath” and “laugh”, I don't have much northerness. Often, people assume that I deliberately modified my accent when I went to Oxford, joined the Guardian or started presenting for the BBC, but these people were never party to my school years, where I was teased mercilessly for sounding “posh” and like a “snob”.

The truth is a little plainer: my mum was the esteemed winner of the elocution prize at her school in Wigan in the 1960s and when my brother and I were growing up she continually corrected our speech, spurred, I imagine, by the fear that unless we spoke “properly” we wouldn't go anywhere.

The world has changed since then, and it's a world I like better. The voices we hear on the radio and TV and in positions of power are slowly shifting and this gladdens me. I would be lying if I said that the RP tinges of my accent have not helped me move through the world, but also I know that my shades of Lancastrian have helped, too – at times, each has given me something to push against; at others, it is my support.

Perhaps these days we are seeing not so much a decline in RP as a growing accent fluidity. True social mobility should allow us to move in all directions; to know and welcome all people, to speak and listen to everyone. Surely that, Mr Meades, should be our glue; our force for uniting the country?

1. Do you agree with Jonathan Meades that RP should be 'celebrated as a tool of social mobility' when only 2% of the population speak it? (Social mobility refers to the shift in an individual's social status from one status to another.)
2. Do you agree with the idea that an accent can [...] facilitate(s) or hinder(s) a person's success? Why? Why not?

So how and why are people 'prejudiced against by their use of language?'

Please read the excerpt from the article below and answer the questions.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-43667635>

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Newsbeat

## Northern and Midlands trainee teachers 'told to change their accents'

By Will Chalk & Imran Rahman-Jones  
Newsbeat reporters

6 April 2018

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What's the right way to pronounce "grass"? It's the never-ending debate you have with your mates from other parts of the country.

But Dr Alex Baratta, a linguist from the University of Manchester, says that trainee teachers with northern or Midlands accents are being told to change their accents and "adopt southern pronunciation".

"I think it touches on classism, frankly," says Dr Baratta

English teacher Beth, who's from Wigan, told Newsbeat she was told to watch her accent "a couple of times" as a trainee.

"I do feel sometimes that people assume that you're less educated, or that you're not the best teacher just because you speak a little bit more broad."

Dr Alex adds: "To say that there's a standard accent today in Britain I think would go against the trend for equality and diversity. In truth, there is no standard accent. Everybody can speak standard English and have any accent whatsoever."

Beth thinks that her accent actually helps her teaching because "the students find me more approachable and want to speak to me, rather than shy away".

1. Why, in your opinion, are some teachers being told this?
2. What does it say about the way regional accents are viewed by some authority figures?
3. On the basis of this article, which accents would you say are regarded as less prestigious?  
Why do you think this is? What perceptions are there of those who have less prestigious accents?

[Home](#) > News

## Drill rapper banned from using drug dealing slang words in music videos posted on social media



Save 2

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/10/20/drill-rapper-banned-using-drug-dealing-slang-words-music-videos/>

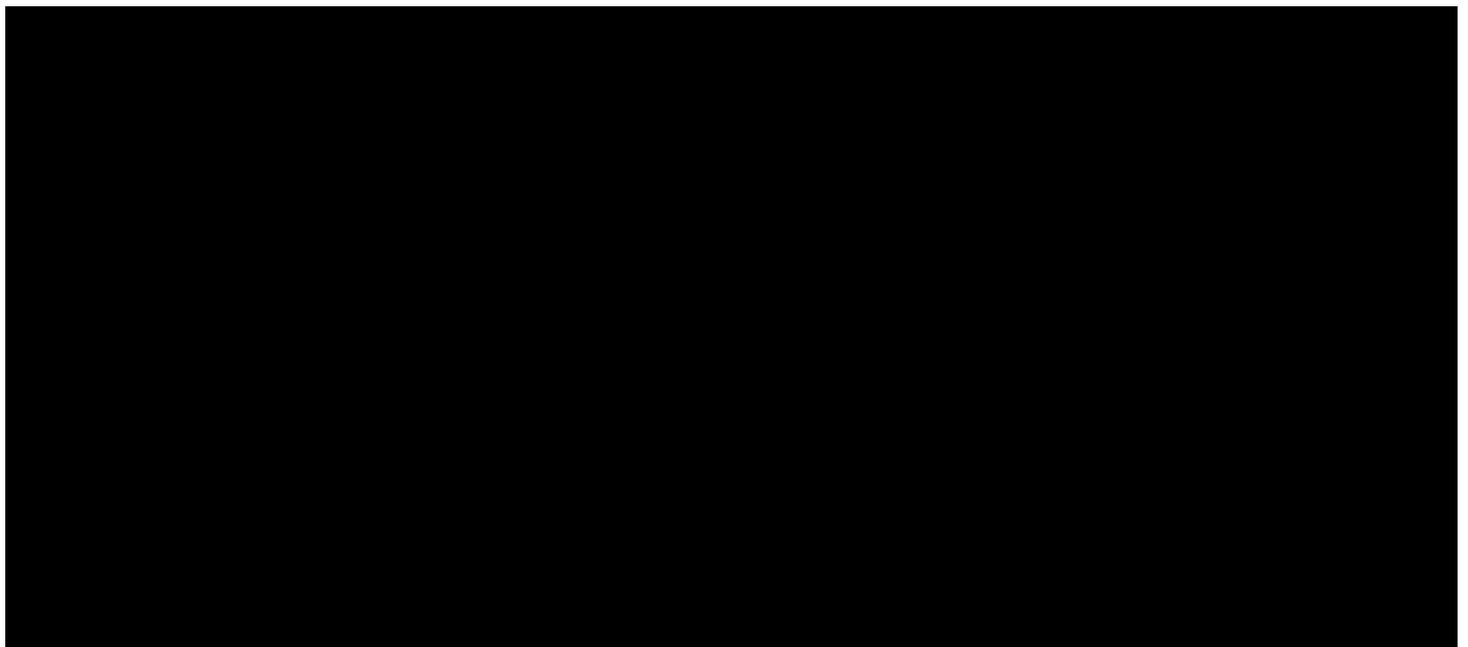
A drill rapper has been banned from using specific slang words in music videos in what is believed to be the first case of its kind.

Ervine Kimpalu, who goes by the artist name Rico Racks, was issued with a special five year Criminal Behaviour Order when he appeared at Blackfriars Crown Court on Friday preventing him from referring to several drug-related words in his online rap videos.

The Order bars 20-year-old Racks from saying the words bandoe, trapping, Booj, connect, shotting, whipping and Kitty - all colloquial terms associated with dealing drugs [which he was prosecuted for].

Racks, of Kings Cross, central London, features in several music videos posted on social media in which he is said to glamourise drug dealing.

1. If someone is banned from using words connoting criminal activity, will that stop the criminal activity?
2. Watch the video below.



<https://www.channel4.com/news/what-do-drill-musicians-make-of-mps-violent-rhetoric-watch-the-music-video>

[Please look at the questions on the next page!]

Drillminister says:

'Many of the lyrics are direct quotes from MPs. The track Brexit highlights double standards, and how language can be considered offensive depending upon who's using it'.

Having watched the video, how far do you agree with this statement? Make some notes as to why, why not, or maybe a combination of the two.

Do you think that society is more willing to accept violent, racist, and prejudiced language from politicians rather than from young working-class men? Again, make some notes on your thinking as to why this might be. What might accent have to do with it?

Now let's go back in time...[continues on next page!]



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s>

Please watch this potted – and selected – view of the evolution of English.

(optional reading here! <https://theconversation.com/a-history-of-english-in-five-words-54864>)

From looking at English in Anglo Saxon times to now, and through other eras, how much would you suggest that English has changed?

The influence of the Vikings, William the Conqueror, and the expansion of the British Empire suggest that invasion – of different kinds – were a key factor in English changing and evolving.

What role did science, innovation, and technology play in changing English?

From these headlines, would you suggest that texting as a means of communication is seen as a positive or a negative?

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**On the 20th anniversary of the first mobile phone text message... How texting made history but ruined our language - and plenty of marriages!**

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## **I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language**

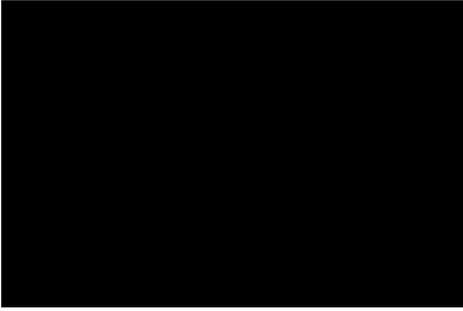
By JOHN HUMPHRYS  
Last updated at 07:29 24 September 2007

### **OMG! How textspeak 'seriously harms teenagers' ability to develop language and grammar skills'**

- Experts say textspeak could harm teenagers' ability to develop grammar skills
  - One study showed examples of texts sent by young people without any grammar
  - One 13-year-old's message read: 'OMG ikr', meaning 'Oh my God, I know right'
  - A 21-year-old's message to a friend said: 'Yo dude r u still coming to party Friday'
-

However, linguists do not agree with non-linguists on this issue. Or, indeed, on many language issues...

Following on from a history of the English language, here is a TEDtalk from my favourite linguists, John McWhorter, on texting and what it actually is.



[https://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_txtng\\_is\\_killing\\_language\\_jk?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk?language=en)

What point is McWhorter making about texting?

How does the metaphor of the 24 hour clock separate speech from writing?

What does McWhorter say are the advantages of writing?

Why is casual speech different?

Why do people – non-linguists! – think that texting is destroying language?

Do you think textspeak (the writing style across electronic media) is evidence of language decline or evolution? Or both?

If you have made it this far, well done! I hope to see you in September for more of the same, but different, in our journey through language and linguistics! Here are some additional resources that you might be interested in:

The Oxford English Dictionary maintains an excellent blog on contemporary issues in the English language:

<https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com>

This is a brilliant article by McWhorter on the difference between a language and a dialect:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/difference-between-language-dialect/424704/>

He also hosts a podcast: <https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley>

The Conversation is an excellent source of information about the world. It's written by academics but not in an academic style. Here is a list of its articles on linguistics: <https://theconversation.com/uk/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=Linguistics>

Ian McMillan hosts *The Verb* on Radio 3, which takes a more philosophical look at issues in language and literature. Click on a title that interests you!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tnsf/episodes/player>

The children's author Michael Rosen hosts *Word of Mouth* on Radio 4. Take a look at the episodes that sound interesting and give them a listen!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qtzn/episodes/player>

Stuff to read regularly, follow on Twitter (or the social media platform of your choosing), and / or listen to:

All of the major newspapers: The Sun, The Mirror, The Daily Mail, The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Financial Times.

Institutions and publications: The BBC, ITV, Channel 4 News, BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post, and The Economist.

Twitter feeds: <https://twitter.com/wordspinster> (you'll be hearing a lot from her in sociolinguistics. Do read her blog:

<https://debuk.wordpress.com/>)

<https://twitter.com/EngLangBlog> (run by the chief examiner...follow it for advice)

<https://twitter.com/GretchenAMcC> (wrote the bestselling *Because Internet* about language and the internet).

<https://twitter.com/lynneguist> (researches and wrote the bestselling *The Prodigal Tongue* about the complicated relationship between British and American English – guess what, linguists don't see American English as a problem!)

<https://allthingslinguistic.com/post/128804221240/20-linguistics-blogs-that-i-recommend-following> Here's a list of some other stuff!

Books:

*The Little Book of Language* by David Crystal (Quite simply the Godfather of English language knowledge – very entertaining and accessible, as all of his books are)

*What Language Is: (And What It Isn't and What It Could Be)* by John McWhorter. Again, entertaining and interesting.

*You Are What You Speak:* by Lane Greene. Very interesting dissection of many of the myths that surround language, perpetuated usually by those who do not study language.

These should be enough to get you started, but please never be afraid to ask for a recommendation! Again, please feel free to contact me on [scox@combertonvc.org](mailto:scox@combertonvc.org)

Have a lovely summer and I look forward to meeting you in September.

