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# ENGLISH

## MODULE B:

### NOTES



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## Module B: Critical Study of Texts Notes

Before we can even begin to talk about the prescribed text we have to understand what we're looking for in a Module B study. The relevant bits of the module with key words bolded are:

This module requires students to explore and evaluate a specific text and its **reception in a range of contexts**. It develops students' understanding of questions of **textual integrity**.

Students explore the ideas expressed in the text through analysing its construction, content and language. They examine **how particular features of the text contribute to textual integrity**. They research **others' perspectives of the text and test these against their own** understanding and interpretations of the text. Students discuss and evaluate the ways in which the set work has been **read, received and valued in historical and other contexts**. They extrapolate from this study of a particular text to explore questions of textual integrity and significance.

From the looks of it there's a lot there that's important. But really, it's only two things:

- i. Textual integrity, and
- ii. Reception.

The entire module can be fit underneath those two headings. Let's explore them in more detail.

### Textual Integrity

Textual integrity is a deceptively simple idea that only becomes complicated when applied to complicated texts. At some point in the module you'll begin to doubt everything you thought you knew about 'textual integrity' but you'll be able to get over this if you keep firmly in mind the basics and proceed through it step by step.

**First, the Board of Studies gives us the definition of textual integrity** as "the unity of a text; its coherent use of form and language to produce an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value".

So what does this mean? We know from the module outline that we're interested in "construction, content and language". This is your usual English stuff: techniques, structure, narrative voice, motifs, etc. Usually in English we simply ask "how do all those things create meaning?" For example we might recognise that a poet uses the motif of flowers. We might also know the flower is a symbol for a lost lover. We thus infer that the poet uses the recurring motif of flowers to signal that he or she is still hung up on this lost lover.

But when discussing textual integrity, **there's a second step: is this integrated? Is it unified? Is it coherent? Does it succeed in expressing its meaning and values?**

In English we usually stop after step one. We see how the composer is creating meaning and call it a day. In Module B we want to go one step further. We don't just want to describe *just* what the composer is doing; we also want to make a value judgment on whether or not it is *effective*. This is what makes Module B tough – everyone will be able to describe the techniques, but only the successful students will be able to judge if the composer did it well.

### **But isn't doing something well subjective? Isn't it a matter of opinion?**

No, not in Module B. Why? Because Module B gives us a criteria to test it by. What is this criteria? We've already mentioned it – the unity, coherence and integration of the text.

Do all the different aspects of the text work together? Do they all fit? *Or*, do they contradict? Has the composer undermined him or herself by a poor use of language choice? If things fit together, there is a strong sense of textual integrity. If they don't, it is weak.

### **Let me give you some examples.**

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus wants his audience to trust him when he says he's protecting their freedom. But how does he start his speech? "**Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause, and be silent**". His opening *tells* them what to do – hear me! Be silent! He says he's protecting their freedom, but as he says it he's telling them exactly what to do. He's contradicting himself. His intentions say one thing but his language another. It is *poor textual integrity*.

Or take a real life example. In year 12 a girl in my grade posted up a Facebook status asking people to motivate her to study for trials. I thought I'd give it a shot. We had a friendly rivalry so I thought I'd motivate her with some reverse psychology. I commented words to the effect "give up! You'll never beat me anyway!" Believe me when I say I had good intentions – I wanted her to read that and think "what!? Who does he think he is – I'll show him!" However, it only made her feel worse. The language I used – irony, high modality – achieved the opposite of what I intended. Again, *poor textual integrity*.

So what's good textual integrity? Well, the Board of Studies wouldn't set a bad prescribed text so you'll likely find yourself celebrating your text more than you will criticising it.

**So to summarise**, textual integrity is whether all the different parts of the text work together in order to effectively communicate its desired values or meaning.

### Reception

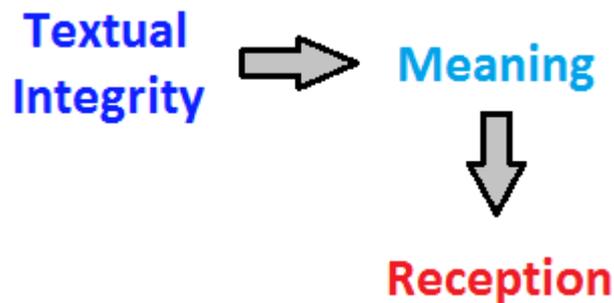
After understanding textual integrity this follows on fairly logically. After you've looked at the text and assessed its coherence you'll want to ask how people have received it. Has it inspired change? Does it still hold value today? Does it challenge your ideas about certain things?

The only other thing you really need to know about reception and how it makes Module B unique is it's not just about other people. It is also about *you*. Questions may directly ask how your thoughts and ideas have been challenged by the text. You thus need to be able to engage with the text and present a personal opinion, maybe even using 'I' and 'my' in your essays. Of course not all questions will ask this of you, but some might.

Reception can really throw a curveball into the Module B questions. Some past trial papers have asked students to write three or four *reflections* rather than an essay. The module suggests you can be asked to compare and contrast your own views with the text with the views of others. Teachers in the past have also taught students not only to incorporate their own views but the views of a 'class forum' they had at school.

## A Summary

A useful way to structure your essays or preparation for the module is via this flowchart:



Essentially; how does the language, content and construction of the text ('textual integrity') construct a particular 'meaning', and how has that been received?

So an example would be:

Brutus wishes to convince his audience that he is committed to protecting their freedom. He does this by imploring them to “be silent” and to “hear [him] for [his] cause”. However, these are both imperatives. Thus even though he says he acts for their freedom the irony in his word choice undermines his message. For this reason his audience finds him unconvincing and so do I. Rather than convincing me of his noble personality Brutus reminds me to always be vigilant about a politician’s words.

Now anyone who has studied *Julius Caesar* knows Brutus’ character is a little more complicated than that but for the purposes of explaining Module B it’ll do. Nowhere does it say the words ‘textual integrity’ but it clearly has all three steps: analysing Brutus’ language, making a judgment on how effectively it conveys his meaning (or values), and exploring how I, and others, have received it.

If you do that, you’ll succeed in Module B.