A Level English Language

Transition Pack

➲ INSTRUCTIONS

In this pack, you'll find a range of resources and activities designed to help prepare you for the first few weeks of the A level English Language course. You need to bring your completed workpack with you to your first English Language lesson. ALL TASKS MUST BE COMPLETED.

Task 1: A Day in the Language Life

In your pack, you'll find an article from *eMagazine* titled 'Here's me on a Wednesday' by Michael Rosen. In it, he outlines the ways in which he uses language in a typical day.

After reading the article, write an account of a typical day in your own life in which you focuson the various ways in which *you* use language. You should write around 500 words.
Remember the level of detail Rosen has written in, and ensure you include examples of your language to demonstrate how you use it.

Task 2: Articles on Language and Technology

This pack includes three articles (from Buzzfeed, Oxford Royale Academy and The Guardian) about the impact of technology such as the internet and social media on the English Language. When you start your studies after the summer, we will be considering other technological and social influences on language so these articles provide a good introduction to contextual and historical changes.

You should read both articles carefully, **highlighting** the key points, before doing the following:

- Write a 10 bullet-point summary of each article, considering what each writer thinks of the impact of technology on language, and how they use language to communicate their contrasting opinions. Don't forget to use quotations to back up your assertions.

- Write an essay expressing your views in response to the question: **Language and Technology: Evolution or Decay?**

- You should make reference to the arguments put forward in these articles. Use quotations from the articles and explain what they mean (your bullet point summary should be useful here)

  - **You should aim to write about 750 words (a bit more if needed, but no less)**

  - **There should be an introductory paragraph, a main argument and a conclusion**

  - **Your opinion needs to be clear – we are interested in YOUR ideas. What do you think has been the impact of the internet/social media/technology on English? Think about your own experiences too.**

  - **This should be word processed. Font size 12. Your name in the Header and Page numbers in the Footer.**

  - **Proofread thoroughly – errors will not be impressive or taken lightly at this level.**

Don't forget to bring your completed workpack (including the essay) to your *first* English Language lesson.

If you have any questions, or need help, don't hesitate to contact Miss Bent by email.

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P.S Why not follow our English Blog, where you'll find a range of resources, including this pack. **https://englishatwmat.wordpress.com**

Here's me on a Wednesday...

A day in the (language) life of Michael Rosen.

Michael Rosen takes us on a journey through the typical forms of language he uses and experiences on a daily basis.

People often talk about 'the language' or 'the English language' as if it's like a statue, a fixed, single lump of a thing that you can walk round and examine. A quick look at how you or I talk and write reminds us that language isn't like this at all. I've been thinking about how I use language in any given day, or even hour, and it reminds me of just how different and diverse my language activities are across time.

Here's me on a Wednesday.

The cab

I get up and creep about the house really early not talking to anyone because I have to get a cab. This means checking what is known in the entertainment business as a 'call sheet'. This is like a timetable, with people's telephone numbers on it. It also has the code I have to use to get my tickets out of a machine on Paddington station. So this is a mix of names, numbers, times and codes. There's nothing there to do with emotions and feelings, nothing to do with ideas. Every letter and number has to be exactly right or I will turn up at the wrong place or at the wrong time, or press the wrong buttons on a machine. If any of that happens, the work of a whole day will go wrong and the radio programme I'm supposed to make, won't get made.

The cab arrives and very soon I'm having a conversation with the cabby. He's a Greek Cypriot about the same age as me (that's nearly 60), and we're soon talking about our adult sons. He tells me a story about how his son moved out but he, the cabby, comes home one night and his wife is ironing some shirts. He asks whose shirts they are and she says they belong to their son. He tells me he couldn't believe it. 'He's nearly thirty, he's moved out and she's ironing his shirts!' He tells me he rang his son, got him over, bundled the shirts into a suitcase and told him to get out. I tell a story about my son living in what used to be my office at the end of our garden. I notice that we're using the same patterns of speech. Every story we tell each other seems to be about proving things: that our sons are having a really cushy time and we're suckers to be helping them. Our expressions are very similar, same little asides, like 'I don't believe it!' and 'phah!' This is a conversation that seems to be about confirming our own separate world pictures. It's affirming our roles as male guardians and providers but there is an underlying anxiety. Have we been over-indulgent? Our stories are ways of exploring this without actually saying that that's what we're doing.

The station

Then I get to Paddington, we tell each other to have a good day with a kind of ironic laugh, as if it's not possible to have a good day. I tap in the code, get my tickets, and read the tickets and signs very closely to make sure I get on the right train. Back with that detailed accurate read language again.

The train

On the train, I do the crossword and check over my script. I try to do what's known as a cryptic crossword. This is, in a way, similar to the accurate language of timetables, except that everything is in a code that I have to unlock. This is language as a game. Here's a clue: 'Day empty after born in want (5)'. I figure out that the whole word means something to do with 'want'; 'day empty' is a coded way of saying that I have totake the 'a' out of 'day' leaving me 'd,y'; as it says 'after' this means it comes at the end of the word leaving

me three letters to mean 'born'. When a woman changes her name if she gets married, people write, 'MrsJones, née Smith', 'née' means 'born' in French. Put 'née' before 'dy' and you have 'needy' which means something to do with 'want'. An utterly useless game, that keeps me amused for an hour or so. It involvesworking out synonyms, playing around with letters, reading off hints and double meanings. It is 'metalinguistic' – in other words it involves a lot of language about language, just as this article does.

The script

Then I look at the script I'll be reading today. This is full of jargon and in-group language. Things like, 'WOM6', meaning Word of Mouth (that's the programme I present, and it's the sixth one in a series of 8). It talks of 'items' – which to listeners means five or six conversations on a topic. It says 'clip' meaning a recording of music or speech that will come before or after I've said something. It says, 'IN', 'OUT', and 'DUR'. But there's nothing next to these words. 'IN' will be the person's opening words, 'OUT' will be their last words and 'DUR' is how long the whole clip will last. It stands for 'Duration'. Lower down it says, 'WOMBAC UPDATE'. This means that we're going to have an 'item' on our competition which is about inventing your own acronyms and the competition is called Word Of Mouth Brilliant Acronyms Competition. So, here is language in highly functional mode, working with almost its own dialect to fit the job I do. Most jobs are like this.

I start to scribble all over the bits of paper, coming up with ideas for me to say. I'm revising, re-jigging and editing. There are also some questions that I'm going to be asking a famous etymologist (someone who knows about the origins of words): why we say envy is green, cowardice is yellow, unhappiness is blue. I start thinking about the questions. I'm using language to plan.

Announcements

Then, it's out of the train at Bristol (after listening to the various announcements about 'tea, coffee, light refreshments and snacks, apologies for the late arrival of this train'). I've had a think about announcements and why the people saying them often develop a strange sing-song way of delivering them, and why the job descriptions of the people have changed: 'This is your conductor speaking...'; 'My name's Doreen and I'm your buffet supervisor for today...'. I think about how often in a week people ask me how I describe my job and I have to ask people I'm interviewing 'how they would like to be described.' It seems to be very important this matter of naming and defining who we are.

The team

Once I arrive at Bristol and meet up with the team of people working on Word of Mouth, we begin with a bit of mild joshing. Stuff about football, weather, cabs, TV last night. It's all a general feely-feely time, reminding each other that we have common territory and that we have to work together for the next eight hours, hopefully without tearing each other to pieces. I say that I've listened to a CD that one of the researchers has made and I liked it. (I did.) I'm 'stroking' him, as one sociologist put it. He says thanks andthat 'strokes' me back.

I've got an interview to do with a reviewer. It's about the language he uses when he's writing reviews in the Times Literary Supplement. I ask one of the researchers if she's got some questions for me to ask. She says that they're the same as the ones I asked the other reviewer. I have forgotten to bring them with me. I apologise. She says it's OK. I sense that they think I'm a bit of a klutz that (a) I still need them to give me questions – why can't he work out his own questions?! and (b) I've forgotten to bring the ones they've already given me twice! I think about why I need questions. It isn't because I can't work out questions for myself, but making a programme means that the questions have to fit into the overall pattern of the programme. Asking questions is not like a real conversation. They are a means to an end: to get an 'item'

right. Producers and researchers have a better sense of this end, the item, than me. I relegate myself to being a servant to the system. It's better that way.

The studio

I get into the studio and there's a lot of technical stuff about 'lines to London', 'faders', 'howl round', 'echo','compression', 'popping' and then we get through to the man I'm interviewing. Without really thinking about it, I do some feely-feely stuff with him about how he is, what he's been doing, how he got into the studio. I tell him that I read the journal that he writes for (true), and ask him about someone who writes ratty, fuddy-duddy articles. He explains to me that it's really a sort of joke. He isn't really like that. I say thatI didn't realise that. All this has achieved a couple of things: we've worked out if he sounds OK for the microphones, the studio manager has 'balanced' us, and the interviewee has got into his stride. He's on home ground and he's just proved that he knows something that I don't. Everyone feels good. More stroking.

The interview

In the interview, I have to remember to wait for him to finish speaking (which we don't do in real life) because listeners find it very hard to listen to two people speaking at the same time. I have to remember to stick to the questions and not go off on tangents because this makes life hard for the producer who is going to 'cut' the interview later. And I have to remember not to 'upstage' the interviewee. The programme is not about me, it's about language and people want to listen to what the experts and contributors have to say. I'm monitoring my use of language. I'm trying to be informal, encouraging. I'm also thinking of ways that will link my next question into what he's saying so that it won't simply sound like question, answer, question, answer. In other words, I'm 'producing' myself even as we're talking.

The script

Then, it's off to work on the script. More editing. A bit of researching. I have to look up a quote. Did Shakespeare really write 'green-eyed monster'? I google it. I've internalised a whole set of procedures that enable me to do this in several seconds: things like interpreting which keys to press, which menus and boxes to click on, how to use shortcuts, how to use cut and paste and the like. In other words I've developed a language-use where I don't have to think about the 'how' any more than I have to think about where to put my tongue when I say the letter 't'.

In the afternoon, I have to perform the script. This involves turning written language into a kind of spoken language. But it isn't speech – more like a speech. Prepared spoken language. If it's too formal, listeners complain. If it's too informal, they complain. I knock out some of the long sentences full of 'which' and 'who' and make them shorter beginning with 'it' and 'she'. I start to read. The producer tells me that it's coming out too sing-song. I go back, re-do it, listening to myself as I do. I'm altering the cadences of what I'm saying, as if I'm changing the tune. I put in little asides and hmmm's to suggest that I'm thinking about what I'm saying, as I'm saying it.

It all goes fine. A lot of stroking goes on. Lots of 'great', 'see you soon', 'it's been good', 'nice programme' – that sort of thing. We know we do it, but we all need it. After all, doing radio is strange. It's like talking a lot to no-one. You talk into a silence. There are none of the usual feedbacks and face-to-face help that we give each other in real life. So we do it in the studio instead.

The train (again)

On the train back, I do some translating from German. I only speak a bit of German. I use a dictionary. I'm making decisions about whether 'schlafen bei dir' means 'sleep with you' meaning 'have sex' without saying

it, or, literally ‘sleep alongside you’, or, as the dictionary says, ‘spend the night at your house’. Languages match up but don’t match up. If I say, ‘spend the night with you’, I lose the sense of sleeping, but if I say, ‘sleep’ it will sound like sex. What did the German author intend? A bit of both. How do I convey that? I’m trying to create a sense of something here. Using words to paint pictures, to denote and connote, to indicate and suggest, to reveal and invoke...I drift off wondering if dreams have words, images or both...

Michael Rosen

This article first appeared in emagazine 30.

7 Impacts Social Media Has On Our Language Skills

'Shakespeare went to a lot of trouble for our language, and now you've knocked away half of the consonants' With all of the new technology emerging in the 21st century to keep us all connected, we must acknowledge all of the side effects such modernity has upon the use of the english language and the way it is used.

Buzzfeed, 2015

1. Humans are creating a new language

Many social media sites have a character or word limit, and this may cause users to need to concentrate their ideas. This usually results in a type of grammar violation called 'textspeak'. This shorthand is a way of communicating online that sometimes involves new dialect and abbreviations.

An example of this is the use of the abbreviation 'LOL'. Instead of meaning "Laugh Out Loud" as it was created to mean, it has turned into what is called a "pragmatic particle" this is a word or a phrase that is not directly linked to the context of the conversation but is a mood/tone tool. It gives the listener or receiver an indication of how the author is feeling.

2. The use of punctuation has become superfluous

The use of the period or full-stop has taken on a new meaning. Instead of indicating the end of an idea or thought the period is used to indicate aggression, intense excitement or anger.

When a person ends a sentence in textspeak with a period they are usually showing that they are not happy and slightly frustrated. When a period is used very frequently, especially in cases that involve separating each word with a period, it is intended to be very dramatic and controls the way the way readers interpret the idea as people will tend to pause at every period.

3. We are becoming more concise with our ideas

Another side effect of social media word limits is the development of our ability to be more direct.

The skill of small talk is no longer valued, and a new way of writing that is more concise and straight forward is pushing its way through. This leads to the development of short punchy or dramatic sentences. This is also due to the use of written and video blogs as authors are aware that they only have a few moments to get the audience's attention before they move along.

4. We are losing the ability to separate textspeak from Proper Grammar

Many times regular social media users can be caught using Textspeak in less appropriate settings.

We often forget that some circumstances require us to communicate with others using more formal language or simply proper grammar. Many people abbreviate their words and do not correctly punctuate or capitalise their words out of habit.

5. Limited communication is leading to Miscommunication

The evolution of the use of language has caused a reduction in the vast variety of language that was used only about a decade ago.

Many people who are avid social media users are less inclined to read or write for pleasure on a regular basis; this means that many people are not giving themselves the opportunity to expand their vocabulary. The level of a person's vocabulary skills is often used as a judge of intelligence for external parties. If a person communicates in the same way repeatedly by using vocabulary that is below the level that is expected of them or for the occasion, they can appear to be less intelligent or as if they are not truly interested. The lack of variety in a person's vocabulary can reduce their ability to get their ideas across in the most efficient way possible.

6. Hiding behind screens can make face-to-face communication difficult

Social media has the ability to make us less social.

Many people are less able to express themselves through face to face communication because they have become accustomed to the use of emoticons and slang as a means of getting across their point. Some people use social media to avoid direct contact. The use of social media as a primary means for communication has resulted in the loss of of adequate conversation and listening skills. Little to no practice with articulating language and tolerance of conversation discomfort can lead to the lack of ability to read body language, social cues and empathy skills.

7. Social media is being used to make confrontation easier.

People will turn to social media as an alternative to face-to-face confrontation, making it easier for them to block out negative responses.

This gives people the illusion that they have the ability to deal with an issue they may have with another person without giving real consideration for the other person's emotions. This can create relationship gaps. Without being empathetic of other people in a conversation people can create the wrong image of themselves and become more detached from others

4 Ways the Internet has changed the English Language

Go back ten years and you would have found endless hand-wringing articles about how our use of the internet, MSN messenger and texting was ruining everyone's vocabulary and we would soon be able to speak in nothing but grunts and emojis.

Oxford Royal Academy, 2021

While these dire predictions had some, slim basis in fact (you've probably heard someone say "lol" aloud in place of actually laughing), for the most part they've failed to come true. Looking at the big picture, global literacy rates continue to rise. It's tricky to see whether literacy rates might correlate with internet use; internet use is usually higher in wealthier countries, and wealthier countries usually have higher literacy rates.

Yes, you'll encounter many more error-ridden articles online than you'd be likely to in print media. But on the other hand, you encounter many more articles online full stop, from a vastly more diverse range of people who in many cases, had they lived a hundred years ago, would never have learned to write at all, let alone being able to write, publish and have their thoughts read by hundreds or thousands – misplaced commas and all.

Yet the internet has wrought significant changes on our use of the English language – most of them neither good nor bad, merely different, as every major new technology also has its impact. In this article, we look at some of the key ways that the internet has changed the way we speak and write, both online and offline.

1. We've added thousands of words of new vocabulary

Looking at early internet vocabulary provides a fascinating insight into how quickly new words can be picked up and then abandoned. Many of these terms that sprung up and then disappeared less than ten years later have simply become outdated.

For instance, there's the weird telegraphese of internet and text acronyms and abbreviations. Do you recognise or understand any of these: 4COL, AYSOS, GHM, N2MJCHBU, RAEBNC, SWIS or WACI? It's the kind of thing that you might be pushed to write if each text costs you 30p to send, or you don't want to take up too much space on a tiny mobile phone screen. But now you would just write it out: for crying out loud; are you stupid or something?; god help me; not too much just chilling how about you?; read and enjoyed but no comment; see what I'm saying; what a cool idea. Faced with a list of incomprehensible abbreviations like the one above, it's easy to see why some people feared that human literacy was doomed and we were returning to a world of inarticulate pictograms. But as the technology improved and abbreviations began to impede communication rather than facilitate it, we abandoned the acronyms. TYL. (Thank you Lord – or text you later, depending on context).

The forward march of technology has pushed out other terms as well. We don't talk about being "stuck in blue bar land"; Internet Explorer and its blue loading bar has been consigned to the dustbin of failed browser history. Similarly, being a "bandwidth hog" is no longer the problem it once was. The diversification of the internet killed off a few more words: feel the disdain of the nerd in terms like "meatspace" and "dead tree edition", that couldn't endure once the internet was just as likely to be used by someone's grandma as any l33t h4xx0rz (that's "elite hackers", for anyone who doesn't speak early-90s nerd slang).

Where old internet slang has fallen out of favour, new slang has appeared. If you're reading this in 2016, you probably know most of the terms on this list: YOLO (the internet abbreviation is not completely dead!), rickrolling, basic, throwing shade, I can't even, bae, fleek, hashtag, salty, catfish, selfie. But if it's 2030 and this article is still online, you might want to google the concept of "rickrolling" and feel amazed at the kind of things your parents found amusing.

It's important to remember that a lot of internet vocabulary belongs to the category of slang or jargon; it

serves a particular purpose within an in-group, like professional slang. Hand-wringing articles appear when people from outside that in-group try to understand it, but that was never the purpose for which that vocabulary developed.

2. We're getting to grips with dialects we otherwise wouldn't have encountered

We've written before about how much the English language is changing, and one of the key drivers of that change is the number of people who speak English as a second, third or even fourth language. English has about 400 million native speakers, but vastly more non-native speakers – perhaps as many as two billion, depending on how loosely you want to define being an English speaker. It's a harder question than you might realise: how fluent does someone have to be to count as an English speaker? Do they need to be able to string together a few sentences, or hold a decent conversation? Do dialects and creoles count? What if they are speaking something that is essentially English, but that very few native English speakers can understand? These questions ultimately extend beyond language, and start to raise political questions as well; the use of language by one speaker might be considered as an error, while another speaker might be considered to be using a dialect.

The internet means that English speakers of whichever background are encountering more varieties of English than they might ever have before. Take someone in Liverpool, who a hundred years ago might have heard Liverpudlian dialects and standard English, and nothing else. But online, that person today might encounter varieties of English from all across the world. Taking a look through Buzzfeed, for instance, might throw up some articles from Buzzfeed India in which you'll encounter words like "funner"; incorrect in standard English, but fine in Indian English.

Another dialect that you might encounter online is African-American Vernacular English (usually shortened to AAVE). A lot of the internet buzzwords of 2016 derive directly from AAVE. Here's a short list: lit (e.g. "the party is lit" – it's great), bae (boyfriend/girlfriend etc.), woke (aware of political realities), on fleek (flawlessly styled), shade (specifically "throwing shade" – delivering a put-down, usually to someone who deserves it), squad (your friends), realness (as the word implies, being authentic), slay (to succeed in something really difficult) and basic (enjoying unsophisticated things).

Some of these words have entered if not standard English, then the slang of standard English speakers, through other forms of popular culture; for instance, Beyoncé's 'Formation' is in considerable part responsible for non-AAVE speakers using "slay". But many of these words have appeared through their usage on the internet by AAVE speakers, where they have been borrowed by people who may otherwise have had no experience of AAVE. In particular, people who are effectively bilingual in AAVE and standard English might borrow AAVE vocabulary if it seems to fit their meaning better when speaking standard English. Standard English has always been inclined to borrow from other languages and dialects, and their use on the internet makes the whole process quicker and easier.

3. We're creating brand-new dialects for online communities

For people who are not routinely on Tumblr, having a quick browse of it can be profoundly confusing. Of all online communities, Tumblr is possibly the one that has gone furthest towards having its own dialect that is incomprehensible to outsiders. There are even online guides into "how to speak Tumblr". Here's a Tumblr paragraph:

I CANT EVEN what is this life ruiner. having ALL THE FEELS akdfhakdghoghsgds what is air

Or in other words, the writer is extremely excited by someone. What's fascinating about this is that none of the phrases above are borrowed from other dialects, except perhaps the keyboard smash – akdfhakdghoghsgds – but that can denote anger elsewhere, while on Tumblr it usually means wild, flailing excitement. Some of the terms might have come from pre-Tumblr online communities (especially LiveJournal) but what you can effectively see is the migration of a single online tribe, from a variety of forums to LiveJournal to Tumblr, taking their language with them and adapting it along the way.

Tumblr's dialect is among the most distinctive, but it's not the only online dialect. There's the snippy, to-the-point use of language on Twitter, where users have honed the art of getting to the point in 140 characters. Reddit also has its own vocabulary, though there much of it is borrowed from previous forums, and it shows: the use of abbreviations still thrives on Reddit despite being gone from most of the rest of the internet, as its users tell each other TL;DR (too long; didn't read), TIL (today I learned), FTFY (fixed that for you) and all the other forum-specific terms of cross-posting, upvoting, downvoting and so on and so forth.
Of course, not all of these users stick solely to one community. While there are differences of demographics (for instance, Tumblr is female-dominated, while more men use Reddit), there is considerable overlap between members of different communities, and that means that there are a good few people out there who are effectively bilingual in different online dialects: switching effortlessly from Tumblrese to Reddit-speak as required. This means that the people on Tumblr who write as if they don't entirely understand how the shift key works and the people who Reddit who think it's still 1996 can presumably also switch into standard English without borrowing anything from their online usage of language unless it feels appropriate. In other words, standard English ends up not damaged, but where need be, enhanced.

4. We're learning new grammar rather than losing our ability to speak English

How do cats and dogs speak? If you ask a toddler, you'll probably get a conventional answer along the lines of "cats go miaow, dogs go woof" or something similar. If, however, you ask an internet user, you'll naturally know that cats (or at least lolcatz) are "in ur article and speakz lyk dis". And you'll know that dogs (or at least doge), as we've discussed before, speak "much words, very English, so article. Wow."
The thing about writing these so that they sound 'correct' within the rules of the meme is that it takes a reasonably advanced knowledge of English spelling and grammar. Both are deliberately incorrect along different lines, and you can't be deliberately incorrect unless you already know what the correct formulation is.

Lolcatz use old-school internet abbreviations and misspellings such as "ur" for "your", replace "s" with "z" and confuse the third-person singular with the first-person singular (so "I has" not the correct "I have). Doge, on the other hand, take adjectives and adverbs and get them the wrong way around. "Much" is a measure of uncountable quantity ("too much milk") that in writing doge is used as a measure of countable quantities ("much words", which should correctly be "many words").
What's fascinating about this is that the difference between countable and uncountable nouns is a famously tricky aspect of the English language. Very few supermarket checkouts, for instance, are labelled correctly as "five items or fewer" (because the items are clearly countable, and fewer refers to countable quantities) but instead as "five items or less" (which is as incorrect as saying "much items"; it's using an uncountable term for a countable quantity). In other words, in order to construct a doge meme, you have to understand English at a higher level than many native speakers have achieved, even if you don't realise that's what you're doing.

When people are bilingual – especially when they speak the standard variation of a language and then a dialect, creole or a language that is seen as inferior – there have long been concerns that the second language or dialect needs to be suppressed, or they'll never learn the first one properly. Much the same instinct can be seen with the concerns about what the internet is doing to the English language; what if a generation grow up able only to speak lolcat, and not to read Shakespeare?! But a couple of decades of widespread internet access have demonstrated that internet dialects operate much like any other dialect: speakers learn to switch confidently and accurately between the two, borrowing words from one to the other as seems appropriate, to the lexical enhancement of both. The internet has changed the English language considerably; long may it continue.

How the internet changed the way we write – and what to do about it

The usual evolution of English has been accelerated online, leading to a less formal – but arguably more expressive – language than the one we use IRL. So use those emojis wisely …

The Guardian, 2017

English has always evolved – that's what it means to be a living language – and now the internet plays a pivotal role in driving this evolution. It's where we talk most freely and naturally, and where we generally pay little heed to whether or not our grammar is "correct".

Should we be concerned that, as a consequence, English is deteriorating? Is it changing at such a fast pace that older generations can't keep up? Not quite. At a talk in 2013, linguist David Crystal, author of Internet Linguistics, said: "The vast majority of English is exactly the same today as it was 20 years ago." And his collected data indicated that even e-communication isn't wildly different: "Ninety per cent or so of the language you use in a text is standard English, or at least your local dialect."

It's why we can still read an 18th-century transcript of a speech George Washington gave to his troops and understand it in its entirety, and why grandparents don't need a translator when sending an email to their grandchildren.

However, the way we communicate – the punctuation (or lack thereof), the syntax, the abbreviations we use – is dependent on context and the medium with which we are communicating. We don't need to reconcile the casual way we talk in a text or on social media with, say, the way we string together sentences in a piece of journalism, because they're different animals.

On Twitter, new-fangled uses of punctuation open doors to more nuanced casual expression

On Twitter, emojis and new-fangled uses of punctuation, for instance, open doors to more nuanced casual expression. For example, the ~quirky tilde pair~ or full. stops. in. between. words. for. emphasis. While you are unlikely to find a breezy caption written in all lowercase and without punctuation in the New York Times, you may well find one in a humorous post published on BuzzFeed.

As the author of the BuzzFeed Style Guide, I crafted a set of guidelines that were flexible and applicable to hard news stories as well as the more lighthearted posts our platform publishes, such as comical lists and takes on celebrity goings-on, as well as to our social media posts. For instance, I decided, along with my team of copy editors, to include a rule that we should put emojis outside end punctuation not inside, because the consensus was that it simply looks cleaner to end a sentence as you normally would and then use an emoji. Our style guide also has comprehensive sections on how to write appropriately about serious topics, such as sexual assault and suicide.

Language shifts and proliferates due to chance and external factors, such as the influence the internet has on slang and commonplace abbreviations. (I believe that "due to" and "because of" can be used interchangeably, because it's the way we use those phrases in speech; using one rather than the other has no impact on clarity.) So while some of Strunk and White's famous grammar and usage rules – for example, avoiding the passive voice, never ending a sentence with a preposition – are no longer valuable, it doesn't mean we're putting clarity at stake. Sure, there's no need to hyphenate a modifying phrase that includes an adverb – as in, for example, "a successfully executed plan" – because adverbs by definition modify the words they precede, but putting a hyphen after "successfully" would be no cause for alarm. It's still a perfectly understandable expression.

Writers and editors, after consulting their house style guide, should rely on their own judgment when faced with a grammar conundrum. Prescriptivism has the potential to make a piece of writing seem dated or stodgy. That doesn't mean we need to pepper our prose with emojis or every slang word of the moment. It means that by observing the way we're using words and applying those observations methodically, we increase our chances of connecting with our readers – prepositions at the end of sentences and all. Descriptivism FTW!