VCE English Units 1&2 Complete Study Guide

Complete study guide · Units 1&2 · English and EAL · AceGuides

This guide follows the VCAA *VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Study Design* (the "2024 study design"). Units 1 and 2 of this study design have been accredited from 1 January 2023, and Units 3 and 4 from 1 January 2024; it is the study design in force for 2026, and at the time of writing (October 2026) the VCAA had not announced a replacement. It covers every key knowledge and key skill dot point for Unit 1 (Reading and exploring texts; Crafting texts) and Unit 2 (Reading and exploring texts; Exploring argument).

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About this guide

Who this guide is for

This guide is for Year 11 students (and keen Year 10 students) studying VCE English or EAL Units 1 and 2 in Victoria. It explains what the study design asks you to know and do, shows you how to do it with original model paragraphs and pieces, and gives you practice questions with full marking guides. EAL students follow the same areas of study; where the EAL outcomes or tasks differ, this guide points it out.

How Units 1 and 2 work

In Units 1 and 2, all assessment is **school-based**. The VCAA does not set an exam, and your school decides how to grade you. To pass a unit you need an **S (Satisfactory)** for each outcome, which your teacher decides from the work you complete. Your grades in Units 1 and 2 are not reported to the VCAA and do not count directly towards your ATAR, but the skills are exactly the ones assessed in Units 3 and 4, so Year 11 is your rehearsal.

Unit	Area of Study	Outcome (in plain English)	Typical assessment task
Unit 1	AoS1 Reading and exploring texts	Make personal connections with a text and explore its vocabulary, structures, language features and ideas	A personal response to a set text
Unit 1	AoS2 Crafting texts	Write your own effective, cohesive texts for a specific context, audience and purpose, and explain your choices	Two student-created texts plus a description of your writing processes
Unit 2	AoS1 Reading and exploring texts	Analyse how vocabulary, structures, language features and ideas in a text construct meaning	An analytical response (text response essay) to a set text
Unit 2	AoS2 Exploring	Analyse persuasive	Annotated persuasive

	argument	texts on a contemporary issue, and present your own point of view orally	texts, an analysis of argument and language, and an oral point of view presentation

Exam tip: Many schools run an end-of-year Year 11 English exam modelled on the Year 12 exam (three sections: analytical response, creating a text, analysing argument). Ask your teacher early whether your school does this, and use the practice exam in this guide to prepare.

Rules about texts you should know

- Over Units 1 and 2 you study at least five set texts (including mentor texts).
- The text you study in Unit 1 AoS1 must be a **different text type** from the one in Unit 2 AoS1. For example, if Unit 1 is a novel, Unit 2 might be a play, film or collection of short stories.
- Unit 1 AoS2 uses at least **three mentor texts** studied in depth. Mentor texts can be short stories, speeches or monologues, essays, podcasts, poems or songs, feature articles or blog series, memoirs and biography.
- EAL students may study extracts of the set texts for the two Reading and exploring texts outcomes.

What VCE English looks like in Year 12

Knowing where you are heading helps you practise the right skills now. In Units 3 and 4, School-assessed Coursework (SACs) for Unit 3 and Unit 4 each count for 25% of your study score, and the end-of-year exam counts for 50%. The exam is 3 hours plus 15 minutes reading time, with three equally weighted sections: Section A (analytical response to a text), Section B (creating a text, linked to the Framework of Ideas) and Section C (analysing argument). Every section of this guide builds one of those skills.

How to use this guide

1. Read the section for the area of study you are doing in class now. Highlight the bolded definitions.
2. Study the model paragraphs and pieces. Notice the "moves" they make, then copy the moves, not the words.
3. Do the "Check your understanding" questions at the end of each section under timed conditions, then mark yourself using the Worked solutions.
4. Before an assessment, revise from the One-page summary and Glossary.
5. In the last few weeks of the year, sit the Practice exam in one go (3 hours 15 minutes).

A ten-week revision plan

Use this plan before your end-of-year exam, or adapt it for a single SAC.

Week	Focus	Tasks
1	Set text 1 (Unit 1)	Reread key chapters; build a quote bank of 20 short quotes sorted by idea
2	Set text 2 (Unit 2)	Same as week 1; add a context and values summary
3	Analytical paragraphs	Write three TEEL paragraphs on different topics; get feedback
4	Full essays	One timed essay (60 minutes) on each set text
5	Mentor texts	Reread your three mentor texts; list ten techniques worth borrowing
6	Crafting	Write one 800-word piece in 60 minutes; write a 300-word commentary
7	Argument analysis	Annotate two opinion pieces; write one timed analysis
8	Argument analysis	Analyse a piece with a visual; practise comparing two texts
9	Practice exam	Sit the full Practice exam in this guide under exam conditions
10	Fix weaknesses	Mark your exam with the Worked solutions; redo the weakest section

Contents

1. Unit 1 AoS1: Reading and exploring texts (personal and analytical response)
2. Unit 1 AoS2: Crafting texts (mentor texts, effective writing and the commentary)
3. Unit 2 AoS1: Reading and exploring texts (analytical text response)
4. Unit 2 AoS2: Exploring argument (analysing persuasion and the oral point of view)
5. Discussion, debate and Standard Australian English
6. Exam technique
7. Practice exam
8. Worked solutions
9. Glossary
10. One-page summary

1. Unit 1 AoS1: Reading and exploring texts

Outcome 1 (English): make personal connections with, and explore the vocabulary, text structures, language features and ideas in, a text. **EAL:** make personal connections with, and identify selected vocabulary, text structures, language features and ideas in, a text.

In this area of study you read one set text closely, connect it with your own life and world, and start shaping those connections into formal writing. The focus is on **character, setting, plot, point of view and voice**, and on how the author's choices build meaning.

1.1 Inferential reading and viewing strategies

Literal reading is understanding what happens: who did what, where and when. **Inferential reading** is working out what the text suggests but does not state directly: motives, attitudes, values, and the author's view. Every mark-earning sentence in VCE English is inferential.

Think of it as moving up three levels:

Level	Question you ask	Example (from an imagined novel)
Literal	What happens?	Mara leaves her father's birthday dinner early.
Inferential	What does it suggest about the character or situation?	Mara feels unable to perform happiness in front of a father who dismisses her ambitions.
Interpretive (idea level)	What does it suggest about people or the world?	The text suggests that family loyalty can become a cage when it demands silence.

Strategies that train inferential reading:

- **Read with a question.** Before each chapter or scene, write one question ("Why does the narrator never name the town?") and look for clues.
- **Notice patterns.** Repeated images, colours, objects, settings or phrases are rarely accidental. Track them in a table with page numbers.
- **Notice gaps and silences.** What a character avoids saying is often more revealing than what they say.
- **Notice shifts.** Changes in setting, tense, narrator, sentence length or mood usually mark a change in meaning.

- **Ask "why this, why here?"** For any detail, ask why the author put it in this position. Openings, endings and turning points carry extra weight.
- **Use the "so what?" test.** After every observation, ask "so what does that reveal?" until you reach an idea.

For films and other visual texts, inferential viewing means reading **camera shots and angles, lighting, colour, sound, music, editing and mise-en-scène** (everything placed in the frame) in the same way you read words.

Common mistake: Retelling the plot and calling it analysis. If a sentence would still be true in a plot summary on a website, it is not analysis. Add what it suggests, and why the author wants us to notice it.

1.2 Ideas, concerns and tensions

The study design uses three related words. Learn the difference:

- An **idea** is a concept or understanding the text explores, such as belonging, power, grief, justice or identity.
- A **concern** is an idea the author seems worried about or invested in; it points to the author's perspective. ("The author is concerned that ambition, unchecked, erodes compassion.")
- A **tension** is a conflict or pull between two forces, values or ideas that the text does not fully resolve: freedom versus security, individual versus community, truth versus kindness.

Tensions are especially useful because they let you write sophisticated, balanced interpretations. Instead of "the text is about loyalty", write "the text explores the tension between loyalty to family and loyalty to one's own conscience, suggesting that the two cannot always be reconciled."

Exam tip: Turn ideas into **views**. "Loneliness" is a topic. "The text suggests loneliness is less about being alone than about being unseen" is a view you can argue. Examiners reward views.

1.3 Character, setting, plot, point of view and voice

These are the building blocks of narrative. The key is to treat each as a **construction**: something the author made on purpose.

Element	Definition	Questions to ask

Character	A person (or figure) the author constructs to embody values, conflicts and change	How do they change? What do they want? Who do they contrast with? What do they represent?
Setting	Time, place and social environment of the story	How does the place reflect or shape the characters? Does it change? Is it symbolic?
Plot	The selection and sequence of events	What is the turning point? Is the order chronological? How does the ending reframe the beginning?
Point of view	Whose perspective we experience events through (first person, third person limited, omniscient, multiple narrators)	Can we trust the narrator? What can they not see? Whose voice is missing?
Voice	The distinctive personality of the narration: its tone, vocabulary, rhythm and attitude	Is the voice formal, wry, raw, detached? How does it make us feel about events?

Characterisation is the set of methods used to build a character: description, dialogue, actions, other characters' reactions, internal thoughts, and (in film and drama) costume, performance and staging.

An **unreliable narrator** is one whose account we have reason to doubt because of bias, limited knowledge, self-deception or deliberate deceit. When you spot one, the gap between what the narrator says and what we can infer becomes a source of meaning.

> **Common mistake:** Writing about characters as if they were real people ("Mara should have just told her dad"). Write about them as constructions: "Through Mara's silence, the author exposes how..."

1.4 Vocabulary, text structures and language features

These three terms come straight from the study design and appear in every outcome. You need precise **metalanguage** (words for talking about language) for each.

Vocabulary is word choice. Look at connotations (the feelings and associations a word carries), register (formal or informal), and semantic fields (clusters of related words, such as a field of war imagery in a story about a family argument).

Text structures are the ways information, ideas and events are organised: chapters, sections, scenes, acts, chronology, flashbacks, frame narratives, multiple narrators, parallel storylines, openings, climaxes and endings.

Language features are specific choices at sentence and phrase level that create meaning.

Feature	What it is	Typical effect
Imagery	Language that appeals to the senses	Makes a scene vivid; can carry mood or symbolism
Metaphor / simile	Comparison without / with "like" or "as"	Reveals how a character sees the world; links ideas
Personification	Giving human qualities to non-human things	Makes setting feel alive, hostile or sympathetic
Symbol / motif	An object or image standing for an idea; a symbol that recurs	Develops an idea across the whole text
Irony	A gap between what is said or expected and what is true	Exposes hypocrisy, fate or a character's blindness
Foreshadowing	Hints of later events	Builds tension; creates a sense of inevitability
Juxtaposition	Placing contrasting things side by side	Highlights difference, often in values
Dialogue	Characters' spoken words	Reveals relationships, power and subtext
Sentence length and syntax	Short, long, fragmented or complex sentences	Controls pace and emotional intensity
Tone	The attitude conveyed by the narration	Shapes how we judge events and characters
Pathetic fallacy	Weather or setting that mirrors emotion	Reinforces mood; can be ironic

For films: shot types (close-up, long shot), camera angle (high angle can diminish a character, low angle can empower), lighting (high-key, low-key), colour palette, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, editing pace and cross-cutting.

Exam tip: Never just name a technique. Use the formula **technique + example + effect + link to idea**. "The repeated image of the locked gate (technique and example) suggests Mara's sense of entrapment (effect), reinforcing the author's concern that family duty can become a prison (idea)."

1.5 Personal and analytical writing in response to a text

Unit 1 asks for **personal** and **analytical** writing. A personal response is still an analytical piece of writing; it just lets you use your own experience as a lens.

A **personal response** (the main Unit 1 task) connects your experiences, values and observations of the world with the text's ideas, and uses those connections to explain how the text creates meaning. It may use "I". It must still refer closely to the text with evidence and metalanguage.

An **analytical response** argues a view about the text in formal essay form, usually in third person, using evidence to show how the author constructs meaning.

How to make a personal connection that earns marks:

1. Identify an idea, concern or tension in the text.
2. Connect it to something real: your experience, your family or community, something you have observed, another text, or a current issue. Keep the connection brief and specific.
3. Turn back to the text: explain how the connection deepened your understanding of how the author constructs the idea.
4. Support with evidence and analysis of vocabulary, structure or language features.

The connection is a **door into the text, not a detour away from it**. A good balance is roughly one-quarter personal reflection to three-quarters close discussion of the text.

Common mistake: Writing a personal story with a few quotes attached. A personal response is marked on how well you explore the *text*. If a paragraph could be read without knowing the book, it has drifted.

1.6 Model personal response paragraph

The paragraph below responds to an original short story, "Low Tide", written for this guide. In the story, fifteen-year-old Ellie spends the summer after her grandmother's death clearing out the old woman's beach house with her mother, who refuses to talk about the loss. Short extracts are quoted.

Topic: "'Low Tide' shows that grief is often expressed through objects rather than words." Write a personal response.

End of free sample

This is 10 of 55 pages.

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