

Deconstructing an
Essay Question




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Introduction

Deconstructing an essay question is an important skill that you will need to master as secondary school students. It ensures that you understand all parts of the question and the analysis you will need to undertake in order to answer it effectively.

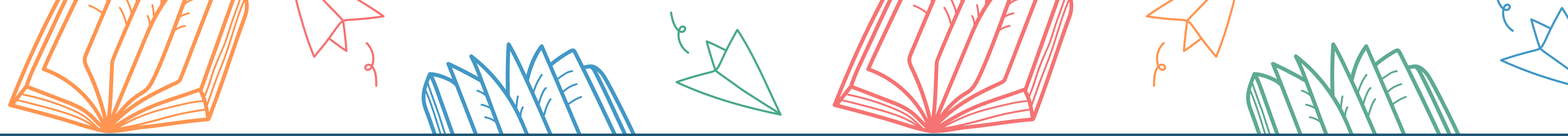
Deconstructing an essay question should be the first step in planning your response. There are four main types of words you will need to consider. These are:

Command Words

Concept Words

Condition Words

Critical Words



Command Words

Command words are the verbs that provide the instruction as to what kind of skill you need to apply in the question. Different command words have different meanings.

These terms are important to know because they determine the type of response you need to provide.

Examples of Command Words

Analyse

Identify components and consider the relationship between them

Discuss

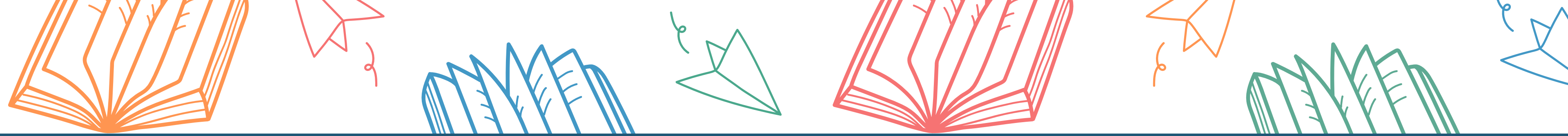
Identify issues and provide points for and/or against

Explain

Make the relationships between things evident and provide the 'why' and/or the 'how'

Explore

Investigate, search for or evaluate



Concept Words

These are the terms that refer to specific concepts from the syllabus that will be examined in the question. These are a very important part of the question so you should familiarise yourself with the glossary in the syllabus.

You must directly address these terms. They will influence your choice of text and shape the content of your response.

Examples of Concept Words

Representation

The way people, events, issues or subjects are presented in a text.

Perspective

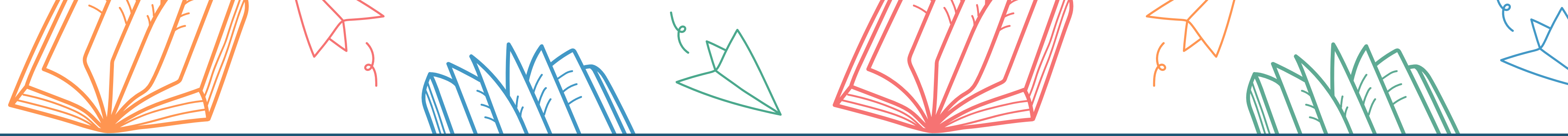
A position from which things may be viewed or considered.

Context

The environment in which a text is responded to or created.

Attitude

An outlook or a specific feeling about something.



Condition Words

These are the words that refer to the conditions, parameters or constraints placed on you that will influence the way you respond to the question. These parameters must be followed.

They may dictate things such as a specific text type or a specific number of texts that you need to discuss.

Examples of Condition Words

with reference to two
texts

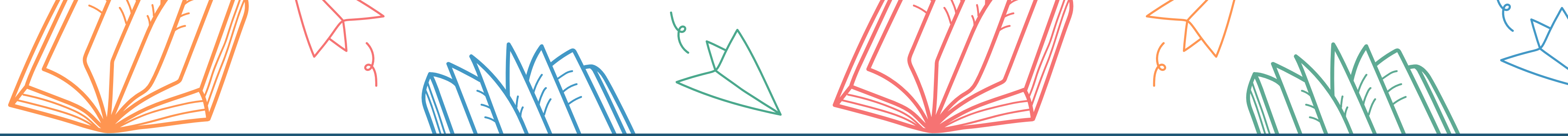
and / or

a visual text

texts of different
modes

a studied text

texts of the same
genre



Critical Words

This type of word helps to refine your response and add nuance. They are often overlooked by students so they distinguish stronger students from weaker ones.

Although essay questions are designed to test specific skills and concepts from the syllabus, they also need to differentiate between students and one of the ways they do this is through the critical words in the question.

Examples of Critical Words

a '**central**' idea

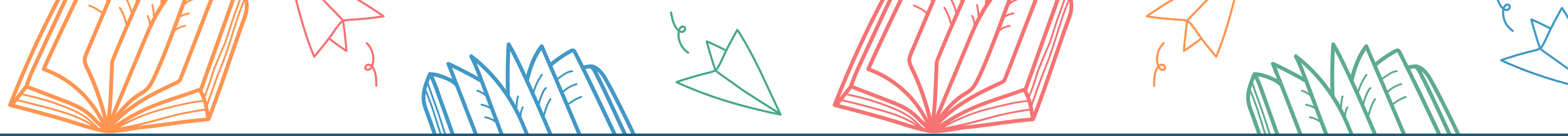
a '**controversial**'
issue

how an author
'**manipulates**'
conventions or
techniques

how a text
'**encourages**
reflection' upon the
human experience

how an audience is
affected on an
'**intellectual**' and
'**emotional**' level

a '**main**' character



Time to Practice

Your task is to choose an essay question from the following sample questions, identify the four main types of words, provide definitions for each word then create a brainstorm to plan how you will address these directly through analysis of your studied text.

Sample Questions

1

Discuss how point of view or perspective has shaped your response to an issue in a text you have studied.

2

Examine how the perspective offered in a studied text is shaped by its production context.

3

Analyse how a written or visual text you have studied offers particular representations of individuals or groups.

4

Explore how the author of a text you have studied has used textual conventions to encourage you to reflect on societal attitudes or values.

Identify Types of Words

**Command
Words**

**Concept
Words**

**Condition
Words**

**Critical
Words**

For Example:

Explore how **language features** **communicate particular ideas** **in at least one text** you have **studied**.

Define Each Word

explore

investigate, search for or evaluate

language features

the features of language that support meaning

ideas

understandings, thoughts, notions, opinions, views or beliefs

at least one

can discuss one text or multiple texts

studied

must be texts studied in English class, not read for pleasure

communicates

pass on information or meaning to the reader

particular

specific and detailed, not general

Create a Brainstorm

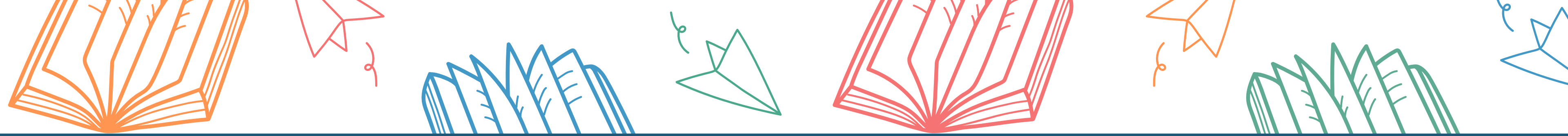
- how do they do this?
- are they effective?
- what examples can I provide?

- descriptive language
- figurative language - simile and metaphor
- lexical choice and connotation
- hyperbole

- title
- author
- date of publication
- relevant context

Explore how language features communicate particular ideas in at least one text you have studied.

- coming of age often involves losing ones innocence in order to gain a more complex understanding of the world.
- it takes courage to stand up and be different in a closed, insular country community.
- leaving ones toxic biological family can be a necessary decision to preserve an individual's wellbeing.



To Sum Up

As post-secondary school students, it is your job to demonstrate your understanding of a studied text in relation to a set question in order to achieve success in essay writing. Spending the time deconstructing a question before you plan or write will help you ensure that your analysis is focused and relevant, enabling you to maximize your chances of getting top scores. Good luck!