STRUCTURE DETECTIVES

Y9 English – Student Lesson

Dystopian Fiction + AQA Paper 1 Question 3 (Structure)

WELCOME – READ THIS FIRST

This is your lesson booklet for today's online English lesson. You do not need to have been in school recently to follow it.

Look for the coloured boxes – they tell you exactly what to do:

Green = what YOU do now **Yellow** = important idea **Blue** = information **Purple** = model answers / what good looks like

1. Today's Goal

By the end of this lesson you will be able to explain how a writer uses **structure** (the order of ideas and the way focus moves) to interest a reader – the skill tested in Paper 1 Question 3.

How long?	About 50–60 minutes
The text	Opening of The Weathermonger by Peter Dickinson (a dystopian story)
What you need	This booklet (or the shared screen) · Chat box · Somewhere to type notes

2. Key Words – Keep These Handy

You do not need to memorise these all at once. We will use them in the activities.

Word	Simple meaning
Narrative hook	The opening that grabs your attention so you want to keep reading.
First-person narrative	The story is told using "I". You see events through one character's eyes.
Shift of focus	The writer moves your attention from one thing to another.
Simple sentence	One clear idea. Often used for speed, shock or clarity.
Complex sentence	More than one idea joined together. Can slow the pace or add detail.
Pivotal moment	A turning point. After this, the story's direction or our understanding changes.
Climax	The highest point of tension or the biggest change in the extract.
Freytag's triangle	A simple shape that shows how stories rise in tension and then fall.

3. Starter – Structure Speed Round (5–7 minutes)

WHAT YOU DO

Answer the three questions below. Type your answers in the chat when the teacher shows each one. First clear, correct answer each time earns a Detective Point.

	Question
Q1	What is a narrative hook? Give one short example from any story you know (or invent one).

Q2	Simple sentences vs complex sentences: which would you use to make a reader feel sudden panic? Why?
Q3	A writer suddenly moves from a character's private thoughts to a huge angry crowd. What effect is the writer trying to create?

MODEL ANSWERS (teacher will share after)

Q1: A narrative hook is an opening that grabs the reader's attention so they want to keep reading. Example: "He woke up and realised he was lying on a rock in the sea, with a hostile crowd watching him drown."

Q2: Simple sentences. They are short and sharp, so they can create a sudden, shocked feeling – like quick cuts in a film.

Q3: The shift of focus makes the danger feel bigger and more real. The reader moves from private confusion to public threat, which raises tension.

4. Episode 1 – Why That Word? (Hot Seat Game) (8–10 minutes)

WHAT YOU DO

One student sits in the Hot Seat. Everyone else describes a structural feature WITHOUT saying the actual word. You must also explain WHY the feature is effective at engaging the reader.

Possible words the Hot Seat student might have:

Obfuscation · First-person narrative · Shift of focus · Simple sentences · Narrative hook · Complex sentences

MODEL EXPLANATIONS (if you get stuck)

Narrative hook: "This is the opening that grabs your attention so you want to keep reading. It is effective because it creates curiosity or shock right at the start."

Shift of focus: "This is when the writer moves your attention from one thing to another. It is effective because it can suddenly make the danger feel bigger."

Obfuscation: "This is when the writer deliberately keeps something unclear or hidden. It is effective because you feel as confused as the character and want answers."

5. Episode 2 – Live Read + Turning-Point Hunt (12–15 minutes)

IMPORTANT IDEA – PIVOTAL MOMENT

A pivotal moment (or turning point) is a key event or realisation that changes the direction of the story, raises the stakes, or changes what the reader understands.

WHAT YOU DO WHILE WE READ

1. Follow the extract on the shared screen (or below).

2. Note any moments that feel like turning points.

3. Write a short reason why each one is a turning point. Keep notes short – chat or paper is fine.

The Extract – Opening of The Weathermonger (Peter Dickinson)

He woke up suddenly, as if from a deep sleep full of unrecoverable dreams. He was very uncomfortable. The light was too bright… something sharp and hard jutting into one of his shoulder blades. His head hurt too.

He found barnacles on a rock. He was lying on a rock in the sea. He reached for a smooth round object that should have been hanging round his neck — it was gone.

A girl (Sally) tells him "They took it." He is on a tiny rock in Weymouth Bay. A fully-dressed, hostile crowd is watching them. "They're waiting for us to drown. When the tide comes in."

Geoffrey tries to walk ashore. Men with spears stop him. One man deliberately wounds him. The crowd cheers. He returns to the rock, defeated. Sally explains they are to be drowned as witches because Geoffrey was caught repairing machinery. The tide is rising. Geoffrey realises he has lost five years of memory.

He wishes for a thick sea fog. The fog appears — his power as weathermonger still works. Under the cover of the fog they escape by swimming to a dinghy.

(Your teacher will use a full licensed extract in the live lesson. This summary shows the main structural arc.)

Pause & Predict – when the teacher stops, type ONE short prediction in the chat:

Stop	Prediction prompt
1	After "They're waiting for us to drown" → What do you think happens next?
2	After the spear wound and the cheering crowd → How could they possibly escape?
3	Just before the fog appears → What structural move is the writer about to make?

6. Episode 3 – Build Freytag's Triangle (10–12 minutes)

WHAT YOU DO

Discuss the questions below (in a breakout room or with the whole class). Then look at the triangle model.

1. Where is the strongest pivotal moment in the extract and why?
2. What structural feature creates the climax and helps the reader understand the shift in focus?

Freytag's Triangle – Visual Model

Think of a story like a hill. Tension goes up, reaches a peak, then comes down.

	CLIMAX		
Rising Action	↑ **tension** ↑	**Falling Action**	
EXPOSITION (start)			**Resolution** begins

How this extract fits the triangle:

Stage	What happens in this extract
Exposition (start)	Geoffrey wakes up confused on a rock. We are disoriented with him. This is the narrative hook.
Rising Action	Sally appears → hostile crowd → failed escape → spear wound → rising tide → witchcraft accusation. Danger grows.
CLIMAX / Pivotal Moment	He creates the fog. Focus shifts from the external threat to his hidden power. Everything changes.
Falling Action begins	They escape under the fog. Tension starts to release as they move towards safety.

7. Episode 4 – Director's Commentary (Write) (12–15 minutes)

WHAT YOU DO

Write a short answer to the exam-style question below. Use the Freytag triangle as your plan. Think of yourself as a film director explaining the camera moves.

THE QUESTION

How has the writer structured this extract to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

• what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning

• how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops

• any other structural features that interest you.

Planning grid – use this before you write

Part of the extract	What to write about
Beginning (Exposition)	What does the writer focus on first? What is the effect on the reader?
Middle (Rising Action)	How and why does the focus change? What tension is being built?
Climax / Pivotal Moment	Which structural feature creates the biggest shift? Why does it grip the reader?
Other features	Sentence length, first-person, obfuscation, delayed information…

Useful film-director phrases you can copy:

• "The writer opens with a tight close-up on…"

• "Then the focus shifts / cuts to…"

• "This change in focus makes the reader feel…"

• "At the climax the writer suddenly…"

8. Model Answer – What a Strong Response Looks Like

HIGH-LEVEL MODEL ANSWER (Paper 1 Question 3 style)

At the beginning of the extract the writer focuses our attention tightly on Geoffrey's physical discomfort and confusion. We share his disorientation through first-person narrative and a series of short, simple sentences ("He was very uncomfortable… His head hurt too"). This narrative hook immediately interests the reader because we feel the same uncertainty as the character and want to know where he is and what has happened.

As the extract develops, the writer shifts the focus outwards. We move from Geoffrey's private pain to the discovery of Sally, then to the hostile crowd on the shore and the rising tide. Each shift raises the stakes: the danger is no longer just physical discomfort but public hostility and the threat of drowning. This rising action keeps the reader engaged because the threat keeps growing and we are forced to ask how the characters can possibly escape.

The climax and strongest pivotal moment comes when Geoffrey creates the fog. Here the focus shifts again – this time from external threat to his hidden power as weathermonger. The structural feature that creates this climax is the sudden change in focus combined with the delayed revelation of his ability. It fully engages the reader because it transforms the situation: the weather itself becomes the weapon, and what seemed inevitable (drowning) is suddenly reversible. The tension that has been building is released as the escape begins under cover of the fog.

Overall, the writer structures the extract like a film sequence: close-up on confusion, widening shot of danger, then a dramatic cut to power and escape. This controlled movement of focus is what interests the reader and makes the dystopian world feel both threatening and full of unexpected possibility.

Why this model answer works:

Feature of the answer	Why it scores well
Covers beginning → middle → end	Shows understanding of the whole extract, not just one moment.
Names structural features	Uses terms such as narrative hook, first-person, shift of focus, rising action, climax, pivotal moment.
Explains effect on the reader	Every feature is linked to how it makes the reader feel or what it makes the reader want to know.
Uses the triangle shape	The answer is ordered like Freytag's triangle, so it feels clear and logical.
Film language	"Close-up… widening shot… dramatic cut" makes the structural analysis vivid and precise.

9. Weaker vs Stronger – What to Aim For

Weaker response (needs improvement)	Stronger response (what we want)
"The writer starts with Geoffrey waking up. Then there is a girl and a crowd. Then he makes fog and they escape. This is interesting."	"At the beginning the writer focuses tightly on Geoffrey's confusion through first-person and short sentences. This narrative hook interests the reader because we share his uncertainty."
Problem: retells the plot. No structural features named. No effect on the reader explained.	Strength: names features (first-person, short sentences, narrative hook) and explains the effect on the reader.

10. Teacher Feedback – What Good Feedback Looks Like

When you share your answer, the teacher (and peers) will use feedback like the examples below. This helps you know what to improve next time.

EXAMPLE 1 – Strong answer

Student wrote: "The climax is when Geoffrey creates the fog. The focus shifts from the crowd to his power. This engages the reader because the danger suddenly becomes escapable."

Teacher feedback: Excellent. You have clearly identified the pivotal moment and the shift of focus, and you have explained the effect on the reader. To push even higher, you could briefly link this climax back to the rising tension that came before it.

EXAMPLE 2 – Developing answer

Student wrote: "The writer starts with Geoffrey on a rock and then there is a crowd and then fog. It is structured to be interesting."

Teacher feedback: You have noticed the main events in order – that is a good start. Next step: name at least one structural feature (for example "narrative hook" or "shift of focus") and explain how it makes the reader feel or what it makes the reader want to know. Try using one of the film-director phrases.

EXAMPLE 3 – Peer feedback (two stars and a wish)

★ Star 1: You correctly spotted the fog as the pivotal moment.

★ Star 2: You used the phrase "shift of focus" accurately.

Wish: Add one sentence that explains the effect on the reader – for example "This makes the reader feel relief and hope because escape is now possible."

Success criteria the teacher will look for:

- Structural features are named (not just the story events)
- Effect on the reader is explained
- Answer moves through beginning → development → climax
- Clear, specific language (not vague comments like “it is interesting”)

11. Plenary – Share & Peer Assess (5–7 minutes)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Listen to 2–3 students share their answers.

2. Ask yourself: Did the Freytag triangle help make the answer clear?

3. Give two stars and one wish focused on structural features and their effect on the reader.

4. Exit ticket: In the chat, write ONE sentence – “One structural feature from today and the special effect it created.”

12. If You Need Extra Support or Challenge

Level	What to do
If you need support	Use the planning grid. Copy the film-director sentence starters. Look at the model answer and try to write one similar sentence of your own.
Core task	Complete the triangle plan and write one clear paragraph using film language.
Challenge	Show how several structural features work together at the climax. Link to dystopian ideas (control, fear of knowledge, being treated as “other”).

13. Quick Checklist – Have I Done These?

- ■ Joined the starter and tried at least one answer in the chat
- ■ Taken part in (or listened carefully to) the Hot Seat game
- ■ Noted at least one turning point during the reading
- ■ Understood the four parts of Freytag’s triangle
- ■ Written a short response using the planning grid
- ■ Looked at the model answer and the feedback examples
- ■ Sent my exit ticket sentence in the chat