

L'ESAME DI STATO

Strategie e suggerimenti per la prova scritta

(a cura di Silvia Minardi)

PROVA SCRITTA (Prova 1)

- **Part 1: Comprehension and interpretation**
Question A (Testo letterario), Question B (Testo non letterario)
- **Part 2: Written production**
Task A (Agree/Disagree essay), Task B (Narrative text)

PROVA 1

PART 1: Comprehension and interpretation

Question A and Question B

In the exam you are asked different types of questions on two different texts to check your abilities to understand, analyse and interpret meanings. The texts are:

- 1) a literary passage of about 700 words (Question A)
- 2) a non-literary excerpt of about 300 words (Question B)

Different types of questions can be asked.

General reading strategies

a) Generate questions

When you read the text for the second, third ... time you should ask yourself questions about what you've read. You could jot down questions after each paragraph about anything that strikes you. Asking questions will improve your understanding of the text and will help you recognise statements that may appear confusing.

b) Read the questions

Questions can be of different types. For each question you will be trained to understand **what** is being asked and **how** to find and express the answer.

LITERARY TEXTS

A narrative text has a **plot**, a sequence of events that unfolds from beginning to end. Narrative strategies are used to make the story more vivid. Writers usually add **movement** to the story by describing characters doing things and moving from place to place. **Descriptions** with details appealing to the five senses are used to help the reader see and experience the **characters**, the **setting** and the **action**.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Read the text once from beginning to end without worrying too much if you don't understand all the words and details it contains. While reading the text for the first time

- briefly summarise the plot in one or two sentences
- underline the details which you think help you understand the characters, the setting and the action.

In the passage that follows Marlow meets Kurtz.

Question A

“Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared, as though they had come up from the ground. They waded waist-deep in the grass, in a compact body, bearing an improvised stretcher in their midst. Instantly, in the emptiness of the landscape, a cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land; and, as if by enchantment, streams of human beings – of naked human beings – with spears in their hands, with bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest. The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive immobility.

5 “‘Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for,’ said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped, too, halfway to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. ‘Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,’ I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonouring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz – Kurtz – that means short in German – don’t it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly. The stretcher shook as the bearers staggered

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20 forward again, and almost at the same time I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement of retreat, as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration.

25 “Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms – two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine – the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins – just a room for a bed place and a camp-stool or two, you know. We had brought his belated correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

30 “He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, ‘I am glad.’ Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him – factitious no doubt – to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.”

[700 words]

J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Part III

Specific reading strategies

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Dealing with comprehension questions

Comprehension questions can be of two types, i.e. main idea questions and “right there” questions.

Main idea questions

What is the passage **mostly** about? What’s **the big idea**?

How do I answer? Good readers usually look for **details** (such as groups of words, phrases or sentences) in the text to help them find the main idea.

To find the main idea ask this **question**: what aspect(s) or idea(s) about the “who” or “what” is the narrator concerned with?

Right there questions

This type of question asks about something that can be found **explicitly** in the text.

How do I answer? Go back to the text and find it but don’t guess.

Possible clues:

- the answer is **one sentence** of the text;
- the question and answer usually have the same **wording**.

When writing down your answer remember that

- answers are usually short-phrase responses;
- there’s usually only one right answer.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Dealing with multiple choice questions

- Always look at every single option before you decide.
- Cross out those that are definitely wrong.
- Don't choose your final answer until you have read all the options.

Question 1. What is the passage about?

- The meeting with Kurtz, who is carried on a stretcher.
- The effects of the exploitation of European colonial powers in Africa.
- The passage contains the description of Kurtz's fortune, his power and his family.
- The reader is given a detailed account of the moment when Kurtz died.

Question 2. How does Kurtz appear to Marlow?

- Still a powerful man in spite of his poverty.
- As a cruel European colonizer.
- As an almost dying man.
- Ill at ease and restless.

Question 3. What information is given about Kurtz?

This is a **main idea question**. Find out **who** and **what** the narrator is mainly concerned with. Underline words and expressions used to describe Kurtz in Marlow's words (physical appearance, clothes and weapons, voice, psychological features).

[Complete the answer with your own words.]

When Marlow first sees Kurtz coming out of his hut on a stretcher, the latter appears
Marlow describes him with the constant imagery of

[Add further details.]

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Question 4. What marks Kurtz's appearance?

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Question 5. Who is with Kurtz when Marlow first sees him?

This is a **right there question**. Find the point where Kurtz first appears in the text, underline the sentence and rewrite it in your own words.

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Question 6. What does Kurtz say to Marlow when he meets him?

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TIPS and STRATEGIES

Dealing with analysis and interpretation questions

Analysis and interpretation questions ask you to infer meanings from the information given.

Analysis and interpretation questions

Analysis is the process of

- breaking down a topic/concept/group of facts into components or categories
- looking for relationships between them
- understanding how each component contributes to the whole picture
- drawing conclusions about their significance

(interpretation)

How do I answer? Like a detective look for **clues** in the text which are usually in the words, phrases, expressions and figures of speech.

Question 7. "A cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land" (lines 3-4). What idea is conveyed through the simile?

When interpreting a literary text you can easily find questions asking you to analyse figures of speech such as **similes** and **metaphors**. Generally speaking, similes and metaphors draw comparisons, i.e. they create imagery in the reader's mind.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Analyzing similes and metaphors

- Identify the two - usually unlike - things being compared. Use a monolingual dictionary if you don't know the meaning of the words used in the comparison
 "a cry" is compared to "a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land"
- Explain the significance of the comparison: how does this comparison make the idea of the text clearer?

The simile compares the cry to a short arrow flying to the heart of the land. Marlow has reached the heart of darkness, he has reached Kurtz and the cry accompanies this experience.

Question 8. Who narrates the story?

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TIPS and STRATEGIES

Analysing the narrator

To find out about the narrator, you should consider the following points. An author creates a person to tell the story, and this person is the narrator. First, check and see what kind of personal pronouns are used to tell the story. **A first-person narrator** uses the pronoun "I" to tell the story, and can be either a major or minor character. That narrator is usually a character in the story, who interacts with other characters; we see those interactions through the narrator's eyes, and we can't know anything the narrator doesn't know. **A second-person narrator** uses the pronoun "you". **A third-person narrator** uses the pronoun "he" or "she" and does not take part in the story. Moving beyond the personal characteristics of the narrator,

think about how to gauge her/his role as the teller of the tale. Is the narrator **reliable** or **unreliable**? Is the narrator telling you everything s/he knows? What limits does the narrator have, in terms of what s/he can perceive? Once you've figured out who is telling the story, think about **why** s/he is telling it. Is this a confession? A moralistic lesson? Remember, you're not focusing here on why the author wrote the story, but why this fictional narrator is choosing to tell it.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Analyzing Imagery

- First identify **what type of image you are observing**: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, kinetic, etc.
- Don't just say the image creates a strong picture in the reader's mind. Instead, **analyse why** the author uses that image, **what effect it creates**, why creating an image is effective.

Question 9. What idea of Kurtz is conveyed through the description given by Marlow? Justify your answer by quoting from the text.

[Complete the answer with your own words.]

The description Marlow gives of Kurtz connects the latter with the idea of which is rendered through

Question 10. What does the name of Kurtz suggest about this man?

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NON-LITERARY TEXTS

Question B

A matter of manners

Even in a world of casual business attire, etiquette guidelines that many of us would dismiss as irrelevant behavioural artefacts still matter a lot. “If you don’t know the rules, you’re thought of as someone who is not impressive,” says Catherine Phillips, who runs the London Etiquette School “and if you’re not impressive, forget about being put forward for promotion.” The lesson to take is clear to everyone: in business a simple etiquette blunder can translate into a lost deal.

5 The origins of the term etiquette are French. It means “small label” and derives from those tiny cards which were written with instructions for how newcomers to the French court should behave in order to avoid a faux pas in the royal presence.

10 Robert Deisenhofer, director of bilateral affairs at the German Chambers of Commerce, recalls a dinner between German and French teams who had both attended workshops on etiquette before the meeting. The Germans refused to discuss business before coffee, having been instructed to do so. The French did their best to accommodate what they had been told was the German preference for concluding business before coffee. With both sides operating at well-mannered cross-purposes, the affair was so awkward the deal nearly died. “Problems can arise when you try to accommodate the other person too much,” warns Deisenhofer. But even worse than over-accommodating is probably lack of appreciation of the importance of cultural differences.

15 Technology poses challenges, too. While email is acceptable for casual correspondence, experts agree that it is not appropriate to use it for formal invitations or condolence messages. “New technologies make us rude, because it takes time to figure out the socially accepted ways to use them,” says Peter Gaglio, a director at California’s Tech Institute.

[294 words]

Specific reading strategies

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Dealing with open-ended comprehension questions

Comprehension questions can be of three types:

- literal
- inferential
- evaluative

Literal questions

What? You are required to locate the information which is **directly stated in the text**.

How do I answer? Read the passage again and find the information.

When answering try to use your own words as much as possible.

Inferential questions

What? The information is **indirectly stated or implied** and usually requires other information. You need to

- make deductions
- read between the lines
- refer to information which may not be in the text.

How do I answer? Use clues from the text along with what you also know about the topic.

When reading the question look carefully for key-words.

Evaluative questions

What? You are expected to **formulate a response** based on an **opinion**.

How do I answer? You should ask yourself “what is meant by what is being said?”

Always give reasons for your answers by using evidence from the text.

Read the questions and classify them in literal, inferential and evaluative questions.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Start from literal questions, then do inferential questions and leave evaluative questions until the end.

1. What is the origin of the term “etiquette”?
2. Explain the relation between manners and culture.
3. What do experts say email should not be used for?
4. Why does Peter Gaglio suggest new technologies make us rude?
5. How would you define the tone of the article?

Literal questions

Question 1. What is the origin of the term "etiquette"?

[Complete the answer with the information given in the text.]

The term "etiquette" means in French and refers to when

Question 3. What do experts say email should not be used for?

.....

Inferential questions

Question 2. Explain the relation between manners and culture.

TIPS and STRATEGIES
 "Culture" is the key-word here.

[Complete the answer]

The same behaviour can

Question 4. Why does Peter Gaglio suggest new technologies make us rude?

According to Peter Gaglio

Evaluative questions

Question 5. How would you define the tone of the article?

TIPS and STRATEGIES
 "Tone" is the author's attitude toward his subject. It is usually implied and you can define it by judging how the author treats his subject. For this reason word choice plays a major part in the tone of a piece. An important aspect to consider is the mood, i.e. ask yourself how the language makes you feel as a reader. Remember: always provide examples from the text to support your answer.

[Complete the answer]

Even though there might be people who consider manners something belonging to the past the author of the article seems to imply that "manners" and "etiquette" are For that reason, he provides which can apply to different situations and be useful to different kinds of people. The overall tone of the article is

PART 2: Written production

TASK A

"The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do." (Steve Jobs). Discuss the quotation in a 300-word essay. Support your ideas by referring to your reading and your personal experience.

An agree/disagree essay

Carefully read the question and, before starting to write, work on the following:

- 1 decide on your point of view: it's not just a matter of saying you agree or disagree. You need to say **how much** you agree or disagree with the idea;
- 2 make your point of view clear in the introduction and conclusion;
- 3 decide how to use your body paragraphs - you can do this in different ways.

Model 1

If **you agree**, you could try this model:

- a. **I agree because** [one reason the idea is right]
 - a. **I agree because** [another reason the idea is right]
- or of course, if **you disagree**
- b. **I disagree because** [one reason why the idea is wrong]
 - b. **I disagree because** [another reason why the idea is wrong]

TIPS and STRATEGIES
 If this is the approach you choose, make sure - before starting to write - that you can write **2 complete paragraphs** (with reasons and examples). In fact this approach sometimes goes wrong because the two reasons are too similar and the essay looks repetitive.

Model 2

If **you strongly agree or disagree** you can follow this approach:

- a. Explain why the idea is right/wrong [give reasons and examples]
- b. Explain why the other option is worse/better [give reasons and examples]

This model contains a slight variation of model 1. The main difference is that you look at both sides of the argument.

Model 3

If **you have a weaker opinion**, use the following model:

- a. Explain that there are some good points [give reasons and examples]
- b. Explain that there are some problems too [give reasons and examples]

This approach can of course go wrong too – often because the point of view is unclear. To get it right make sure that your overall opinion is clear in the introduction and that you start each paragraph with a clear sentence making it obvious that you are either going to write about reasons why you agree or disagree.

TASK B

Write a 300-word short story which starts with the phrase “Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared.”

Writing a narrative text

If you tell a story you provide information about something that happened in the past. In order to help the reader understand, you need to link facts and ideas together. One of the most important ways to link ideas is to sequence them.

Sequencing refers to the order in which events happened. These are some of the most common ways to sequence in writing:

- **Beginning your story**
Begin your story with these expressions:
 - *Firstly,*

- *First of all,*
 - *To start off with,*
 - *Initially,*
- Don't forget to use a comma after the introductory phrase.

- **Continuing the story**
You can continue the story with these expressions, or use a time clause beginning with *as soon as*, or *after*, etc. When using a time clause, use the past simple after the time expression.
 - *Then,*
 - *After that,*
 - *Next,*
 - *As soon as / When + full clause,*
 - *... but then*
 - *Immediately,*
- **Interruptions and adding new elements to the story**
The following expressions can be used to add suspense to your story:
 - *Suddenly,*
 - *Unexpectedly,*
- **Writing about events occurring at the same time**
Using the following forms requires an independent clause to complete your sentence:
 - *While/As + full clause*
 - *During + noun (noun clause)*
- **Ending the story**
Mark the end of your story with these phrases:
 - *Finally,*
 - *In the end,*
 - *Eventually,*
 - *Lastly,*

Now have a try with one of the questions given in the sample test.