

Introduction

The oral exam is divided into two main parts. At first you are given a text or an image to discuss. After that, it is your time to give a report on your experience as an intern ("alternanza scuola lavoro").

Part 1: Discuss a literary passage

1. Coketown [...] was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.

It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled.

It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. [...]

2. You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there – as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done – they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamented examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed edifice with a square steeple over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

[428 words]

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

STEP 1

You can start your presentation by saying the passage is taken from *Hard Times*, a novel written by Charles Dickens. Then briefly introduce the passage by giving a short explanation of its main features.

Procedure

1. First make a basic observation about the text or passage.
 - State **what kind of text** you are analysing.
2. Then illustrate the passage using the following elements:
 - Discuss **what happens** in the passage and why it is significant to the work as a whole.
 - Consider **what is said**, the imagery and the ideas expressed.
 - Assess **how it is said**, considering how the word choice, the ordering of ideas, sentence structure, etc., contribute to the meaning of the passage.
 - Explain **what it means**, referring your analysis of the passage back to the significance of the text as a whole.

Task

Use the procedure given and prepare a short oral presentation to introduce the text.

STEP 2

A step-by-step guide to reading a text

You can read a literary passage at different levels which correspond to different levels of complexity:

Level 1	First you pay especially close attention to the linguistic elements of the text , such as aspects of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. This level of reading is descriptive .	Next you take account at a deeper level of what the words mean – that is, what meanings they denote and connote. At this level we need to understand what the words are telling us – both at a surface and maybe at an implicit level. This level of reading is cognitive .
Level 2	You note the possible relationships between words within the text. This level of reading is analytic.	
Level 3	You note the relationship of any elements of the text to things outside it . These might be other pieces of writing by the same author, or other writings of the same type by different writers. They might be items of social or cultural history, or even other academic disciplines which might seem relevant. This level of reading is interpretive.	

You can use the literary text you are given to illustrate different points:

1. the author: when analysing a text you can use it to illustrate the key aspects of an author's style or production;
2. the work from which the passage is taken: the text you are given can be used to discuss some of the most important characteristics of the main work to which it belongs;
3. the most important themes of the work and how they are related to the time when it was written;
4. aspects of the period of time when the work was first published;
5. the genre to which it belongs.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Any literary analysis relies on evidence from the text itself. A helpful strategy to follow is to always link your claims to solid textual evidence.

2.1 THE AUTHOR

When using a text to deal with a writer the points you could mention are:

- a. the main facts in his/her life;
- b. some information about his/her family and education (background information);
- c. the most important works he/she wrote;
- d. the most important themes in his/her works;
- e. how the text you have been assigned illustrates aspects of the writer's production or of the writer's style.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Only mention facts and information about a writer's life which are relevant to the text you are given.

Task

Give a short presentation of Charles Dickens:

- a. First create a mental timeline of events for Charles Dickens. Then illustrate personal and professional events which are relevant to understanding the passage "Coketown" from *Hard Times*.
- b. Provide a list of some of his most important works: assess the importance of *Hard Times* in Dickens' production.
- c. Describe the most important characteristics of Dickens' style. Refer to the passage from *Hard Times* as often as you can. You should consider Dickens' use of symbolism in the description of Coketown.

A writer's style

A writer's style is usually created by a certain number of features:

- choice of vocabulary;
- use of imagery and metaphors;
- shifts in tone and register;
- use of irony and humour.

2.2 THE NOVEL

A passage can be used to illustrate the most important characteristics of the work from which it is taken.

Procedure

The following is a basic procedure that can be followed for most works:

- title, author, year of publication;
- genre;
- the setting (where and when does the story take place? If it is not set in the present, say when ... Is the setting important to the story?);
- the main characters (describe them, comment on their personality, behaviour, relationships and how they change);
- the plot (summarise what happens; do not mention every detail);
- Main themes.

Task

"Coketown" is from the novel *Hard Times*. Go through the passage and your own personal notes and illustrate the following points:

date of publication

setting

main characters

themes

Task

Choose a passage from a different author and use it to illustrate the work it is taken from. Use the procedure given.

2.3 THE THEME(S)

A theme is what we can learn from a story. Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. They are usually summarised as abstract concepts such as – marriage, education, justice, ...

An **author does not tell readers what the theme of the story is**. Identifying the theme of a story requires you to make an inference.

Task

Choose the best answer:

"Coketown" is about:

- industrialism and its effects on human life;
- the development of industrial towns in England;
- the growing gap between the rich and the poor;
- pollution.

Now go back to the text, find images or words and phrases which help you justify your choice.

2.4. A PERIOD OF TIME, THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

When analysing a passage you should consider how the **historical context** may have influenced the wider meaning of the work as a whole.

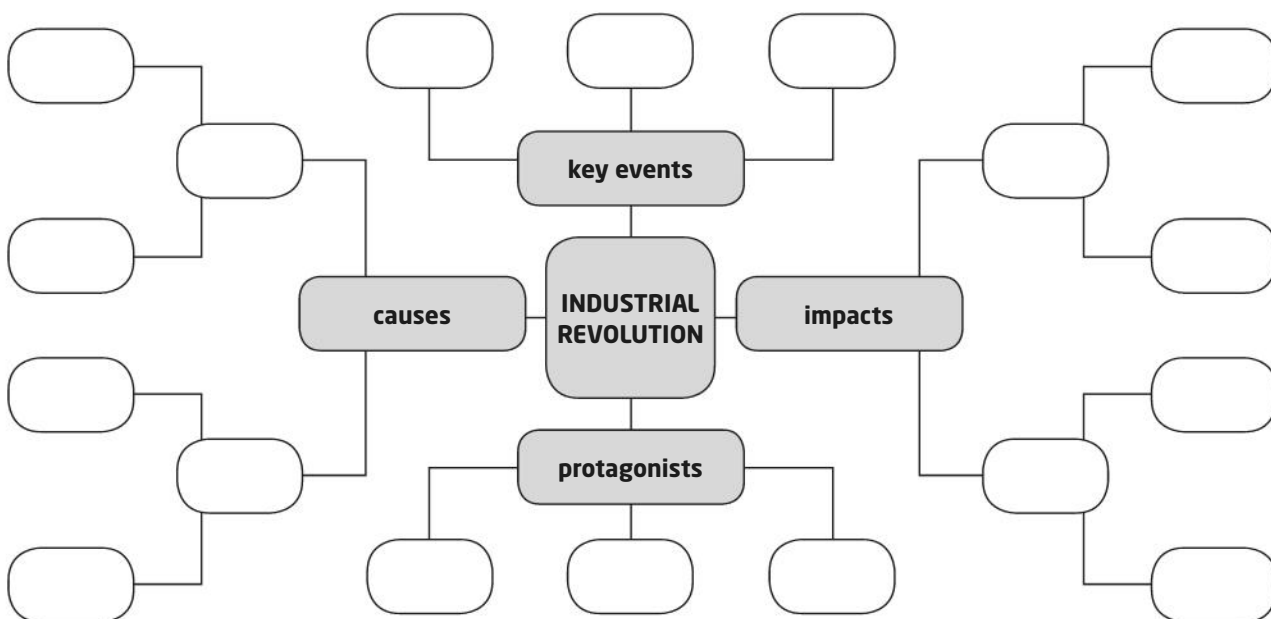
Task

What impact did the Industrial Revolution have on Coketown?

TIPS and STRATEGIES

You should review general historical time period/developments before the exam!

A **diagram** or **map** may help you to remember or conceptualise the "geography" of events. When building the mind map of an event like the Industrial Revolution you should include four main points: causes, key events, protagonists, impacts.



FINAL TIPS

- 1 Read the title and any historical background before starting.
- 2 Read the text all the way through once. This reading is simply for the general **understanding** of the passage, so read it fluidly and quickly.
Do not stop at challenging words or phrases.
- 3 For this first reading, you want a basic understanding.
What is the setting? Who's narrating? What's the basic theme expressed? General mood/tone words? Any interesting/ bizarre characters? Which literary elements jump out at you?
- 4 Now, read the passage a second time, this time with greater scrutiny. Keep literary elements in mind. In prose, the elements to watch out for are.
 - imagery;
 - symbols;
 - figurative language (e.g. hyperbole, metaphor, simile...);
 - setting: *How is the setting portrayed? What type of mood does the description of the setting evoke? What types of words and images are used to establish setting?*
 - narration: *Who is narrating the story? Does the narrator's perspective influence the reader's interpretation of events? Is the narration omniscient? limited omniscient? first, second, third person?*
 - the overall style of the writing. *Does the author use colloquialisms, or is the writing formal? Is there a particular dialect used to enhance characterisation or setting description? Is the writing informal? Is there a difference between the literal meaning of the words on the page, and the implied or actual meaning?*
 - Do situations turn out differently than we and most people would expect?
 - Theme, mood and tone
"the overall meaning is conveyed/captured/demonstrated by the theme of..."
Theme, mood and tone do not stand alone, but rather, are built through the combined effects of other literary elements.

Part 2: Oral presentation of a report

In the second part of the exam you are asked to report on your experience as an intern ("alternanza scuola lavoro"). As an intern you may have written a report on your experience. If you haven't, this is the first thing you need to do.

1. Writing your report

A report: what for?

It gives you a chance to:

- report on the content and value of your work experience;
- reflect on the work you have done in both a personal and professional manner.

A report: how?

Think of your report as:

- a formal academic assignment;
- a personal opportunity to use and enhance your communication skills.

A report: what kind of information?

Three main topics should be included in your report:

- information about **your employer**: describe the position you held, give an overview of the employing organisation's size, structure; finally, detail how the position you held fit into the overall company organisation;

TIPS and STRATEGIES

You can use the employing organisation's literature or website directly to help you generate ideas and find information, but avoid simple cut-and-paste composing.

- information about **your duties**: you should outline your specific responsibilities. It's a good idea to provide specific information about your daily routine responsibilities and activities. If necessary, detail documents, reports, or presentations that you were required to complete. If that is the case, describe any project you were involved in;
- your evaluation of the work experience**: it is important to reflect on the contributions that the work experience made to your personal and educational development, goals, and growth.

2. Presenting your report

In the oral presentation of your experience as an intern, you need to:

- make the topic clear to your audience;
- identify the main sections of your talk;
- link in your ideas and information so that the presentation flows.

Remember: you are not presenting the report; you're creating a presentation based on the report.

Before starting carefully consider the questions:

- What is the main message you want to convey about your experience as an intern?
- How can this message be conveyed in a clear and interesting way?

TIPS and STRATEGIES

- The best way to start is with the last part of your report ("your evaluation of the work experience"). That's where you're likely to find the most salient parts of your report.
- Keep the report's most essential findings to as few points as possible.

If you're considering making a slide show presentation aim for a maximum of 6 rows per slide, a maximum of 6 words per row, ca 6 cm font (ca 26 pt). Be sparing with unnecessary effects.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be clear about the time you have for your presentation. At the end of your presentation, clearly summarise the key conclusions of your report. Be prepared for questions. Have back-up material in case you're asked questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> about parts of the report you did not include in your presentation. Your report was compiled as a report. Your job now is to create a successful presentation. That means you'll have to pay attention to non-verbal communication skills as well - like maintaining eye focus and using your voice and gestures to good effect. |
|---|---|

BEFORE THE EXAM - PREPARATION AND PLANNING: A CHECKLIST

This is a checklist of the essential elements to consider in preparing and planning an oral presentation.

QUESTIONS	EXAMPLES	MY ANSWERS
1 What's the aim?	to show my oral communication skills	
2 What's the title?		
3 Who am I speaking to?	What do they know about the subject? How does this change my approach? What sort of questions will they ask me? What are the answers? What aspects will they be interested in?	
4 What are the main points I want to make?	1, 2, 3; first, second, third; point a, point b, point c	

DURING THE EXAM - MAKING A PRESENTATION

Step 1

The **beginning** of your presentation.

Get the audience's attention and signal the beginning.

- *Right. Well. Good. Fine. Great.*
- *Shall we start?*
- *Let's begin.*
- *Can I start?*

Choose one of the following techniques to begin your presentation:

- direct or rhetorical questions;
- an anecdote, unusual or surprising facts; for example, you could start by talking about something that happened to you as an intern, a curious fact or incident, a person you met, a part of a project you have been involved in;
- an illustration (a picture) from your intern experience.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Begin your presentation with a strong opener: find something in the report - a statement, a claim, a conclusion - that's likely to have a particular impact. Go straight to the report's key conclusion, and state it as concisely as you can.

Step 2

Give a **title** and introduce the **subject**.

What exactly are you going to speak about? Situate the subject in **time** and **place**.

- *I plan to speak about...*
- *I'm going to talk about...*
- *The subject of my presentation is...*
- *The theme of my talk is...*
- *I'll give you an overview of...*

Step 3

Announce your **outline**.

You want to keep the outline simple so 2 or 3 main points are usually enough.

- *I have broken my speech down/up into ... (three) parts.*

- *I have divided my presentation (up) into ... (three) parts.*
- *In the first part I'll give some information about ...*
- *In the next section I will explain ...*
- *In part three, I am going to show...*
- *In the last part I would like/want to give ...*

Step 4

Make a **transition** between the introduction and the body.

- *Now let us turn to point one.*
- *Let us now move on to the second part, which is, as I said earlier, about ...*

Step 5

Sequencing your ideas.

Here are a few possibilities for organising your ideas:

- chronological order;
- from general to specific;
- cause/effect; problem/solution.

TIPS and STRATEGIES

Try to be clear and concrete.

Use examples, rephrasing, summaries etc.

To give an example:

- *Now let's take an example.*
- *An example of this can be found... To illustrate this...*
- *Let's see this through an example. For example,*
- *For instance,*
- *e.g.*

To rephrase:

- *Let me rephrase that,*
- *In other words*
- *Another way of saying the same thing is*
- *That is to say*
- *i.e.*

To summarise:

- *To sum up,*
- *Let me summarise by saying*
- *So that concludes my overview*
- *In conclusion*
- *Briefly said*
- *In short,*
- *What I've tried to show in this part... To recap what we've seen so far...*

To emphasise:

- *What is very significant is...*
- *What is important to remember...*
- *I'd like to emphasise the fact that... I'd like to stress the importance of...*
- *What I tried to bring out... What we need to focus on...*

To refer to what you have said previously:

- *As I have already said earlier... As we saw in part one...*
- *To repeat what I've already said...*

To refer to what you will say:

- *We will see this a little later on.*
- *This will be the subject of part 3.*
- *We will go into more detail on that later.*
- *For now, suffice to say...*

To refer to common knowledge:

- *As you all may well know...*
- *It is generally accepted that...*
- *As you are probably aware (of)...*

Step 6

To **conclude** your presentation.

In the end you need to signpost the end of your talk. This may take the form of a recapitulation of the main points:

- *I'd like to summarise/sum up*
- *At this stage I would like to run through/over the main points...*

At the very end:

- *In conclusion I would like to say that ...*
- *My final comments concern ...*
- *I would like to finish by ...*