

PART B: READING COMPREHENSION

1. EXAMINATION OUTLINE

The framework that has been developed for each reading selection can be broken down in three distinct sections. According to the *1995 English 30 Information Bulletin*, the first few questions in the set will help to establish the context for the entire set of questions. The second subsection of questions will be directly related to elements of the selection such as:

- meanings of words and phrases
- figures of speech
- effects of rhetorical elements of style or technique
- characterization
- character traits or attitudes or motivations
- relationships between characters
- writer's tone

The last questions in a set will ask about more global elements that are best answered through a consideration of the reading selection as a whole: main idea or theme, or thesis, the writer's purpose, etc.

To better understand this whole concept, let us see how this would be applied to a typical excerpted piece. When reading a poem for example, the question set associated with it might fit the framework in the following way:

- i) The first two or three questions might be inference and application questions that are directed at testing your understanding of the poem or specific lines
- ii) The next three or four questions might be meaning questions on phrases, rhetorical elements, tone, etc.
- iii) The final few questions will tackle themes, your understanding of values expressed by the poet, etc.

2. QUESTION TYPES

To do well on the Reading Comprehension portion of the Diploma Examination, you should familiarize yourself with the particular question types so that you will clearly understand the intent of the question.

If you are able to incorporate this with a thorough understanding of the literary work, you should be in a position to do well on this test.

As mentioned previously, there are six main question types, classified in relation to course content or in relation to thinking skills.

The course content questions elicit:

- 1) Meanings
- 2) Critical Responses
- 3) Human Experience and Values

The questions that serve as a test of thinking skills focus on:

- 1) Literal Understanding
- 2) Inference and Application
- 3) Evaluation

COURSE CONTENT RELATED QUESTIONS

1) Questions on *meaning*

Questions on meanings are the most common course content related questions across all genres. Regardless of the exact nature of the selection, meanings elicit your understanding of :

- purpose
- theme
- thesis
- figurative and literal statements

Meanings can refer to a range of information, but in its simplest form, it is a test of knowledge and vocabulary.

The questions are fairly constructed so that information is available in the literary work itself.

A question that seeks to define the purpose of a literary work can be phrased in one of the following ways. Please be aware that the phraseology and identifying words listed here are not exhaustive. You may be able to come up with some of your own that you may want to add to this list.

The purpose of a literary work is to:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| ~ Illustrate | ~ Describe |
| ~ Explain | ~ Analyze |
| ~ Question | ~ Criticize |
| ~ Prove | ~ Persuade |

Knowing why a particular piece was written, may help you comprehend what is written. Thematic concepts may also be tested through meaning questions. You might ask yourself the following questions to arrive at the theme or thesis of the passage:

- What is the major issue or conflict that is being presented?
- What is the author's motivation for writing on this particular issue or topic?
- What impression has the writer evoked in you?
- What feelings do you have in regard to the overall passage?
- How does the writer treat the subject matter?
- Which theme predominates?

Even if you are able to recognize these word clues that point to a meaning based question, you will still need to distill the information from literal or figurative statements and details found within the reading selection.

2) Questions on *Critical Response*

This type of question will ask you to display your understanding of:

- Form
- Structure
- Style
- And the relationship between these elements to form and content.

Critical response should not be construed to mean that the examiner is asking for your opinion on a particular piece of literature. Instead, it is a disciplined response to the author's thoughts, images, characterizations, style, and viewpoint.

Critical response questions will assume that you have an understanding of the passage, but you have to carry it to the next logical step of applying the information.

Some commonly occurring questions that are categorized as critical response will take the following form:

- "Contrasting images in this poem are connected by what lines?"
- "An example of irony is..."
- "The dramatic effectiveness of these lines..."
- "The literary device that most enhances the dramatic effectiveness..."

-”The metaphor that best reveals what the character sees as his purpose...”

-”The narrator’s overwhelming sense of doom is most comprehensively conveyed...”

From this sampling of questions, you should notice how the effect of literary devices is gauged.

It is important to know the definitions of each device or figure of speech that has been learned over the course of the year. Knowing the meaning is essential to answering any related questions.

~ A list of frequently occurring terms is included in the appendix at the end of this booklet.~

Questions on form and structure as related to each genre, require that you have a working knowledge of the components of a poem, play, or passage. Terms related to each are also defined in the glossary so it may be beneficial to review them.

3) Questions on *Human Experiences and Values*

This particular question type requires that you to understand and interpret:

- Motives.
- Personalities.
- The effect of setting on character, mood, tone, and action.

Some questions that illustrate the human experience and values are given below:

-”According to the author, human misery is mainly the result of...”

-”In his final speech, the character asks Godbecause he associates his state of mind...”

-”The way this character is depicted in this poem can best be described...”

-”The character acknowledges the basis for his downfall...”

Here is one way to approach this type of question.

1. Notice the stem of the question, specifically the human element that is the focus, for example, “human misery” or “state of mind.”
2. Refer back to the passage and determine what information best relates to this question stem.
3. Apply the information to the complete question and see if that is the best answer.
4. Be aware that the part of the question that appears in bold is very important.

THINKING SKILLS

1) *Literal Understanding*

All English 30 students are expected to read and understand at least at the very minimal literal level. As such, the literal understanding questions are seldom utilized in the examination. When such a question does occur, the majority of the time, it is with a meaning-based question.

You must take this opportunity to pick up “easy marks” because these questions can readily be answered by referring to the reading selection.

Literal understanding questions tend to occur in works of Shakespeare or in other complicated or ambiguous works.

You must use the information gathering techniques mentioned earlier for each genre, to find the literal meanings. The source of problems for literal understanding is vocabulary. A common question that tests literal understanding may be phrased as:

”The context of these lines indicates that ‘assuage’ means...”

If the words you encounter are unfamiliar, use the context to extract possible meanings. You may also be able to substitute all of the possible choices into the sentence to determine which one fits in best.

2) *Inference and Application*

Carly Enright

Inference activities are those that require students to think beyond the information in the reading selection and infer information which, though unstated, can be supported by the reading selection.

The questions that routinely occur on the reading comprehension part of the test related to inference and application may be recognized by certain keywords.

- conveys
- foreshadows
- compares
- suggests
- contrasts
- implies

To improve your chances of correctly answering this type of question, you may want to use the following approach.

- i) Look to the stem of the question and see if you notice any of the keywords mentioned above, that will test your inferential thinking.
- ii) Go to the section of the passage that is the focus of the question and deduce or induce information that reasonably flows from what is presented
- iii) Examine this information in the proper context and with attention to tone, mood, point of view, and irony.
- iv) Extend this information to the question and see if the best result is present in one of the answers.

One manner in which your inference and application abilities are tested is by predicting outcomes. If you understand what the writer is saying, then you can reasonably expect what will follow or even what has happened previously. Accurate predictions are based on what is presented in the passage, supplemented by the reader's understanding that there is uniformity of thought and action. You would not pick something that was inconsistent with the reading unless the implication was that something unexpected was to occur.

3) *Evaluation*

Evaluation questions tend to have a noticeable stem, such as one of the following:

- Mainly conveys...
- Best explains
- Strongest example
- Least likely
- Most effectively

Clearly, these questions ask you to pick from options that range in degree. The difficulty is in selecting the option that suits the question modifier, instead of answering just part of the question.

A possible process in answering this type of question is presented below:

- i) Understand what the question is asking and which element is being evaluated
- ii) Be aware that there are answers of varying degree of correctness, and the selection you make has to correspond to the limitation of the question.
- iii) You must understand that the question is asking for some type of judgment, which is based on examination of the data in the literary work
- iv) Apply your decision making skills to systematically choose the best alternative.

3. STRATEGIES

GENERAL STRATEGIES

A full term of work and learning culminates in the diploma exam. This exam gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their competence and understanding of the material covered throughout the course. If the exam tests your ability to regurgitate facts or figures, then memorization alone can be the key to success. The challenge arises when you have to read a selection of literature that you probably have not seen before, and answer questions that focus on a range of topics. Since each passage is distinct, with its own set of problems, students need to start with general strategies that can be applied to a variety of writings. They must be able to read passages of varying degrees of difficulty and understand what is written.

*** A thorough understanding of the literary selections is vital to scoring well.***

How can students improve their reading skills while preparing for a test of reading comprehension? The obvious answer is to practice.

*** There is no substitute for reading as many different literary works as possible by as many different authors, poets and playwrights.***

Regardless of the exact nature of the reading presented, you should follow a general procedure to increase your comprehension.

- 1) **Read the questions for that set first.** The reason for this approach is that it allows you to read the passage with a more discerning eye. Knowledge of an impending question directs your focus as you read the passage. Your motivation for reading the passage shifts from simply understanding the material, to purposefully seeking answers to the questions you have read.

Reading the questions beforehand should provide you with sound clues as to what part of the selection has extra importance.

If you do not find your interpretation in the question, look for other possible interpretations.

Your interpretation of a selection should be consistent.

- 2) **Read the passage actively.**

Active reading is the process readers use to circle, underline, mark or highlight the parts of a text that they judge to be important or relevant.

Reading actively enhances the comprehension process by stressing elements that are deemed noteworthy and allows for rapid recognition of information that is set off from the rest of the passage. Students can further their reading comprehension by asking some elementary questions as they read (possible exploratory questions are discussed in the next section). With some

questions already in their minds, students can approach the reading selection with some idea of what they should be looking for in the literature.

3) Consider sources of information aside from the passage itself.

i) Most literary works will have a title at the beginning and perhaps an explanation of the context and characters. This may prove to be beneficial in comprehending certain aspects of the work. The title itself could tell you what the subject matter is and, if the text is excerpted from a larger piece of work, reading it in the proper context will avoid misinterpretation.

ii) Another bit of information will appear at the end of the selected reading in the form of the name of the creator of the work, and perhaps his/her life span and nationality. For the student who may have read previous works by the same person, there could be similar themes, subject matter or styles of associated works, that will aid in interpreting the piece at hand.

iii) The country of origin and the date of birth and death, may seem to be extraneous, but may prove helpful in supplying the proper historical, nationalistic or geographical perspective.

Students who utilize all possible sources of information, may find some overlooked clues, that may augment their comprehension of the passage.

4) General Strategies for Multiple Choice Exams

i) Use all of the allotted time and answer every question.

ii) Since there are no deductions for wrong answers, guessing after careful consideration of all alternatives is an acceptable strategy. Use the process of elimination to narrow the choices so that your chances of getting the correct answer are increased. Do not look for patterns in the answer key.

iii) In your exam booklet, note questions which you will want to reconsider.

iv) If time permits, review your answers. Change an answer only if you feel that you have a better understanding of the passage upon a second reading.

v) Start at the beginning of the exam with the first selection. If you find that the reading is difficult, move on to a passage with which you are more comfortable. The confidence that you gain by doing some easier questions first may help you in dealing with some of the more difficult questions later in the exam.

vi) If a question refers to specific lines in the selection, take the time to reread those lines before answering the question.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Every reading selection will have some basic shared elements. In a generalized format, the writer states an idea, supports it with detail, which in turn leads to a logical conclusion.

To better understand the writing, you must first be able to define the writer's idea. From the supporting information that the writer provides, you should be able to accomplish the second task of clearly interpreting the thrust of the work. The final step is to make reasonable inferences from the conclusions that the writer has drawn.

This section deals with strategies designed to elicit this information from any type of literature. When you are confronted with a reading selection from the examination booklet, it is important that you have a clear idea of how to approach it. This basic focus should be the same regardless of the genre selected.

*** You are reading to find out the main idea. You continue to read to find details and supporting information. From the conclusion that you draw, you must be able to make a logical extension of the writer's ideas.***

Here are some techniques to help you.

1) **To arrive at the main idea of a passage, poem, or dramatic piece, ask yourself some basic questions.**

i) What is the title of this work and do I understand why it was titled as such?

The answer to this question may immediately point you to the main idea of the passage.

ii) Why did the writer create this?

By understanding the author's purpose, you may see where the passage is heading.

iii) What main idea is the writer conveying directly or through characters, dialogue, imagery, etc.?

Remember that if the author does not speak directly to the reader, then one of the characters will carry the author's message.

iv) What is the topic sentence of the paragraph(s), or subject of the stanza(s), or interest of the character(s)?

Sometimes the main idea is not explicitly stated, but is found by interpreting dialogue or deciphering verse.

You may ask yourself these questions while you are reading or after you have read the passage in its entirety. Either way, the answer to these questions will help supply you with the main idea.

2) **You can now find clues that support the main idea through additional details or developments.**

Ask yourself some of these questions.

i) Does the writer offer proof or supporting information to validate his/her position?

Your interpretation of the author's ideas is reinforced by any supporting information that is provided.

ii) What specifics are given to expand on the general idea?

A general idea is usually supported with detail that defines the original idea.

iii) Is there a comparison to other related or parallel ideas?

An indirect writing style will require you to sift through parallelisms or syllogisms to come up with the proper interpretation.

iv) What information conforms to this position and contrasts the opposite view?

Similarly, a writer may offer arguments of opposing views as a means of enhancing his/her own view.

3) The third step is to take the information at hand with what is also implied, to reach a conclusion that is a logical extension of these ideas.

While watching a movie, you may find yourself wondering or guessing what will happen next. You are using your interpretative skills to infer possible outcomes and scenarios. Readings can also be approached the same way. Ask these questions to heighten your innate skills.

- i) From the information that has been presented, what outcomes or results can I expect?
- ii) Aside from that which is explicitly stated, what is implied or suggested?
- iii) Can this information be applied to another scenario?
- iv) What else would fit within the framework of the writer's position?
- v) How can the information contained in this passage be applied?

All of these questions should lead to logical conclusions, drawn from the information provided directly by the author or through dialogue and actions.

The three sets of questions outlined above will aid you in improving your comprehension of the literary selection. You may find yourself thinking of some of these questions while you are reading. Others may be best answered after you have had a chance to read the selection thoroughly.

UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

*** You will be facing a difficult challenge if you do not understand the thrust of the reading comprehension question. ***

This point cannot be stressed enough. You must know that comprehension applies to both the reading selection and the question. Misinterpreting either one will most likely lead to a wrong answer. A test of reading comprehension spans a broad range of possible questions. From our analysis of previous exams, we have determined the areas which are repeatedly tested. Some of these are outlined below.

You will be required to:

- Understand the focus of each question
- Know abstract ideas and relationships
- Recognize human values and their importance within the reading selection
- Understand the writer's attitude and style
- Evaluate literary styles, structures and ideas and how they are related.
- Go beyond the literary level and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the work.

You may also need to:

- Notice keywords apart from the words that may be highlighted.
- Work only with the information that is provided unless the question asks you to do otherwise.
- Know literary concepts such as metaphor, irony, theme, symbolism, and point of view.
- Know literary devices such as juxtaposition, enjambment, foreshadowing, etc.
- Know literature that is of varying degrees of difficulty.

There are several types of questions which are designed to elicit the points noted above. Regardless of the question, a basic understanding of the writing selections presupposes that the student has at least a working knowledge of each genre.

4. GENRES

It is important for students to understand the various genres as this will lend itself to a better appreciation of the reading. The English 30 exam will test the student's knowledge of five types of literary works: poetry, modern drama, Shakespearean drama, fiction and non-fiction. As a review, we have provided the following outline of each genre, and the related elements that have been tested on past diploma exams.

A) POETRY

There are several elements that are unique to poems and thus are keys to a more complete understanding of this genre. What follows is a discussion of the terms and definitions that are basic to the composition of poems. As mentioned earlier, questions on past diploma exams have assumed that the student has some technical knowledge of poems.

A POEM is a composition of lines, thoughtfully constructed in rhythm and rhyme, to express ideas and feelings through imagery and sound.

A poem can be one of a number of recognized forms, a few of which are noted below.

- i) Ballad
- ii) Blank Verse
- iii) Sonnet
- iv) Free Verse
- v) Epic

Ballad - Is notably a poetic account of a simple story with a universal theme such as love, honor, courage, etc.

Blank Verse - Lines that do not rhyme but are usually ten syllables each(5 Iambs).

Sonnet - A form of poetry that is normally 14 lines and 2 distinct ideas.

Free Verse - A poem with no recognizable pattern in either meter or form and usually a variety of rhythms.

Epic - A poem that relates the life or accomplishment of a heroic figure.

Analysis of past diploma exams reveals that the form of poetry that predominates is free verse. Other forms that have appeared on past exams are ballads and blank verses. Do not assume that the other forms of poetry will never appear on future exams.

Once you are able to recognize the type of poem you are reading, the next step is to identify the word usage. A poem tends to be much shorter in length than other literary works, but this does not mean it lacks depth or detail. **Words in poems are often used at a figurative level, evoking imagery and sound through use of metaphor, simile, rhyme, and rhythm.**

For example, "*whispering pines*" does not necessarily mean that the trees were talking to each other, but rather the image is of wind blowing through the pines creating vibrations that may sound like whispers. The above example of a metaphor requires use of imagination to get an exact sense of what the poet is trying to convey. Poets achieve an economy of words by condensing their ideas or thoughts into as small a phrase as possible. A simile is another tool used by poets to achieve this result. Here is one such example: "*Like a lark....*" This does not mean that the subject was a bird, but rather it should evoke the image embodied in the simile "*Happy like a lark*", as cheerful and carefree.

Poets lend extra meaning to their words through the calculated use of rhyme and rhythm.

Rhythm is created by the careful use of words in sequence that match a particular pattern. This pattern is defined by the number of accented or unaccented syllables and how they are strung together. An accented syllable is the one which is stressed when the word is read aloud. Rhythm patterns (feet) can be classified into four main categories.

Iamb - A poetic foot where the accented syllable follows an unaccented one.

Trochee - A poetic foot where the accented syllable precedes the unaccented syllable (opposite of Iamb).

Anapest - A poetic foot in which 2 unaccented syllables precede the accented syllable.

Dactyl - A poetic foot in which the 2 unaccented syllables follow the accented syllable. (opposite of anapest)

Certain questions on past diploma exams have addressed these terms so you should have a good understanding of each poetic foot. Rhythms can also appear in the repetitive use of certain consonants (consonance) or of certain vowels (assonance) or the repetition of a letter as the first letter in every word (alliteration). Rhyme schemes are determined by the pattern of rhyming words at the end of each line or there may be medial rhymes which occur internally in a sentence.

Reading a poem with attention to the rhyme and rhythm will aid in understanding mood, atmosphere, feelings and emotions and thus will increase your comprehension. “Hear” the poem!

On past exams, of those poetry questions that were most poorly done, over 50% were questions that combined critical response, and inference and application. When faced with this type of question on poetry, the points to remember are:

- Look to the figurative meaning of the word or passage
- Understand the stylistic devices in use e.g. imagery, symbolism, etc.
- “Listen” to the rhythm and rhyme that the poet has created.

B) MODERN DRAMA

Selections of dramatic pieces are presented on diploma exams for a specific purpose. Students are exposed to different genres so that questions can be based on the inherent nature of each genre. In regards to dramatic works," it is expected that students will 'see' and 'hear' the given scene within the context that is presented..."

(Source: English 30 Information Bulletin).

One scene excerpted from a long play may not seem to be the ideal source of this type of sensory and auditory information. Closer examination of the scene may shed some light on possible clues.

One of the keys to understanding what happens or exists in a play is found in the dialogue and the stage directions. There may be a lot of information available from these two sources.

The playwright does not speak directly to the reader nor does he/she provide descriptions of characters or events. **All this is to be inferred from the conversations between characters, their attitudes toward each other, and their actions.**

To grasp the full extent of the dramatic piece presented in the examination:

- i) You will have to imagine the setting, and how the characters move and act in this setting.
- ii) Accurately determine a character's personality.
- iii) Understand their motives and feelings so that you can make reasonable inferences as to their future behavior.

*** It is essential when reading a play that you "hear" the dialogue and successfully feel the conflicts or emotions being displayed. ***

The controlling element of any dramatic work is the nature of the conflict. This may be the central conflict of the whole play or a secondary conflict between characters, nevertheless, conflict is what moves a play along. This is true whether it is a comedy, romance, drama, or tragedy.

The bulk of the questions on the reading comprehension examination that deal with drama will be on inference and application and meaning.

Though this genre is handled fairly well by students, the questions that relate to human experiences and values, are areas of concern. Well over 40% of the poorly done questions, tested this particular element. When trying to determine the prevalent values, you must ask yourself some basic questions.

- i) Do I understand the setting and how the characters interact with each other?
- ii) From the dialogue and action, can I determine the personalities of the characters?
- iii) Do I understand the motivations and the ongoing conflicts in the scene?

Answering the above questions accurately will elevate your understanding of the scene and help you in tackling questions on human experiences and values.

C) SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

The elements of modern drama and Shakespearean drama differ in a few well-defined areas. **The most noticeable obstacle to comprehending works of Shakespeare is the archaic language and syntax. Students often have difficulty in simply understanding what is written.** This is due in part to the use of Elizabethan English which is not easily recognizable to 20th century students. **The problem is compounded by the use of a technique called inversion which reverses the normal order of words.** For example, "He is the lord of the manor", becomes "The lord of the manor is he!".

The difficulty level rises when sentences are long and complicated.

When faced with questions that require a deeper understanding of Shakespeare, remember that though the language may be unfamiliar and the sentence structure oblique, the central elements of the play are still the same.

Shakespeare ideas of love, hate, loyalty, greed, happiness, courage, religion, tragedy and different forms of human conflict are basic to most dramatic works, and one of these themes will be found in the excerpted section of the play.

To simplify Shakespearean dialogue:

- i) Work through the sometimes longer and more complex sentences to get a literal meaning and make sensible deductions from the speech and dialogue.
- ii) Visualize the setting and action and predict possible outcomes.
- iii) Relate the personality and motivations of the characters to universal elements found in all literary works.

Eternal relationships between man/man, man/woman, man/God, man/family and man/environment, will reveal themselves to the well-prepared reader.

You will be asked to identify and understand one or more of these conflicts as it relates to Shakespeare's play. Again, dialogue and action, interpreted through the interplay of characters and their attitudes, should reveal a relationship that is integral to the scene.

Examination questions regarding Shakespearean drama will most often be on meanings, and inferences and applications.

Not surprisingly, in the context of Shakespeare's plays, questions on meanings are the ones that have proven to be most difficult on past exams. As noted earlier, there are specific reasons for this failure to extract the correct meaning. These reasons are enumerated below:

- i) The language is archaic.
- ii) The syntactical structure is difficult.
- iii) Sentences are sometimes long and complex.

To compensate for archaic language, read any available footnotes, or try to use context to determine individual word meanings. Break up complex sentences into smaller fragments and try to get meanings of the smaller parts. Link each meaning to each part of the sentence and see if the entire meaning now makes sense. Imagine the setting and see how the interplay of characters reveals their personalities and motivations. If you are able to accomplish these tasks, then Shakespearean drama should become more manageable.

D) PROSE

Fiction and non-fiction readings are grouped together since they share many of the same characteristics. Non-fiction works tend to be more issue-based or expository and thus structured in some form that is accessible to the reader. Fiction by definition can encompass topics from the fantastic to the sublime yet still be readable. In either case, there are certain basic elements to prose which serve as a basis for our analysis. Reading selections from fiction and non-fiction pose their own set of problems for the reader. Normally, literal knowledge is fairly easy to ascertain so these passages will test other areas of comprehension. A reading selection on prose will most likely be divided into smaller units, and it is in these paragraphs that the student can begin scanning for the required information.

The first paragraph of a passage usually contains the topic sentence or describes the author's purpose for the whole work.

You may be able to quickly locate this statement because the ones that follow are built to support or illustrate the thesis statement. Another possible placement for the topic sentence is at the end of the first paragraph, after the author has led up to it with a succession of points or arguments. In some writings, the author may not explicitly state a thesis statement but will make a series of statements that imply a main idea. Once you have determined the central focus of the writing, you will be better prepared to answer related questions, or questions that ask you to make inferences and extrapolate to other ideas or situations.

*** The author's use of irony, sarcasm, tone, mood, or satire may pose unnoticed problems for the student, in the simplest of passages.***

It will be important to understand how each of these elements affects the reader's interpretation of the dramatic work. The first step is to differentiate between various literary techniques. Some terms that have been presented over past exams are defined below. A more complete list of terms that might be encountered on the exam are listed in the appendix.

Tone - The writer's language, style, and attitude to the subject matter will lend an overall impression to the material

Mood - The atmosphere of the passage as determined by presentation, setting, and actions.

Irony - Refers to a meaning, when revealed, which is opposite of what was originally believed.

Irony may be pervasive or it may be used as a figure of speech in a limited scope.

Satire - Refers to the author's treatment of a subject matter which is often disrespectful, designed to poke fun at well-known persons, institutions or beliefs.

Sarcasm - The purposeful use of the exact opposite in meaning, often to convey displeasure or harshness.

The author's use of these literary devices will disguise the true meaning of the text if the student does not perceive the subtle nuances. When reading a passage, ask yourself questions that will help you determine if the information is to be interpreted at more than the literal level. Problems may arise if you fail to recognize that other elements are in play which substantially alter meaning.

Here are some things to consider while reading the text.

- What is the author's point of view?
- Is the writer appealing to your emotions or to your logical side?
- Am I supposed to make assumptions based on this information or is the information incomplete?
- Is my personal bias affecting my perception of this work?
- If the writer is being satirical or ironic, what is the opposite view that is his/her real belief?
- What does the writer's tone do to the literal meaning of the sentences, verse, or dialogue?

If you are able to answer some of these questions while reading the selection, you should overcome some of the ambiguity presented by the above-mentioned literary devices. Each question on the examination will be designed to test a certain aspect of your knowledge.

Questions on prose in the reading comprehension examination tend to focus on meanings, inferences and applications.

When dealing with questions on prose that test meanings or inference and application, there are certain points to remember.

- i) Recognize irony, sarcasm, or satire and how each will affect the literal meaning of a word or phrase.
- ii) The tone, mood and viewpoint of the author may also obscure the correct interpretation of the passage.
- iii) Understand the thrust of the writing so that you are able to make proper inferences from the material.

A FINAL WORD

The information on *Reading Comprehension* that is provided in this booklet has been designed to help students in their preparation for the Diploma exam. It is very important that this information be used in conjunction with the curriculum-based material that has been covered over the school term. Students are advised to read their assigned readings carefully so that they have a thorough understanding of each. There is no substitute for reading as much as possible so that the process of comprehension continues to improve.

Students who wish to access actual Diploma questions may find that their own teachers are a good source of study materials. Or, they may contact Alberta Education at (403) 427-0010 for information on how to obtain questions from previous exams that can be used in their preparation for the Diploma final.

