

ONE-SHOT PREPARATION GUIDE

English Literature

Complete Era-by-Era, Author-by-Author, Genre-by-Genre Revision Guide

PPSC

FPSC

KPPSC

SPSC

AJKPSC

BPSC

Lectureship Tests

University Entry Tests

Interviews

Old English → Postmodern & Contemporary · Poetry · Drama · Novel · Criticism ·
Glossary · Quick-Fact Lists · Self-Test Match-ups

Table of Contents

1. Old English / Anglo-Saxon (450-1066)

- Beowulf, Caedmon, Cynewulf

2. Middle English / Medieval (1066-1500)

- Chaucer, Langland, Gawain-Poet, Malory

3. Renaissance (1500-1660)

- Elizabethan: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe
- Jacobean: Jonson, Donne, Webster

4. Metaphysical & Cavalier Poets

- Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Herrick, Lovelace

5. Restoration Age (1660-1700)

- Milton, Dryden, Bunyan, Restoration Comedy

6. Augustan / Neoclassical (1700-1745)

- Pope, Swift, Addison & Steele, Defoe

7. Age of Johnson / Sensibility (1745-1798)

- Johnson, Goldsmith, Gray, Rise of the Novel

8. Romantic Age (1798-1832)

- Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Austen

9. Victorian Age (1832-1901)

- Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Brontës, Hardy, Arnold

10. Modern Age (1901-1945)

- Yeats, Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, Lawrence, Conrad

11. Postmodern & Contemporary (1945-present)

- Beckett, Larkin, Hughes, Golding, Achebe, Rushdie

12. Genres & Literary Forms

- Poetry, Drama, Novel, Essay, Short Story types

13. Literary Criticism & Theory

- Aristotle → Postcolonial & Feminist theory

14. Glossary of Literary Terms

- A-Z quick-reference

15. Quick-Fact Lists

- Poet Laureates, Nobel Laureates, "Firsts", Pen Names

16. Self-Test: Author-Work Match-Up

- Tick-box practice round

1 · Old English / Anglo-Saxon Period

Begins with Germanic settlement of Britain; ends with the Norman Conquest (1066). Oral, alliterative verse; heroic and elegiac themes; strong Christian overlay on pagan material.

Key Characteristics

- Alliterative verse (no end-rhyme); caesura splits each line into two halves
- Kennings — compound metaphors, e.g. "whale-road" for sea
- Themes: fate (wyrd), heroism, exile, comitatus (warrior-lord bond), Christian moralising
- Literature preserved mainly in four manuscripts, the most famous being the *Beowulf* manuscript (Cotton Vitellius A.xv)

Major Works & Figures

Author/Work	Type	Key Facts
Beowulf	Epic poem, anonymous	Longest OE poem (~3,182 lines); hero Beowulf fights Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon
Caedmon	Poet (7th c.)	First known English poet by name; "Caedmon's Hymn" — via Bede's account
Cynewulf	Poet	Signed his poems in runes; wrote "Christ II", "Juliana", "Elene"
The Wanderer / The Seafarer	Elegies	Exile and loss themes; found in the Exeter Book
Venerable Bede	Historian (prose, Latin)	<i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> (731)
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle	Prose history	Compiled under Alfred the Great; earliest English historical record

Quick Fact

Alfred the Great (r. 871–899) promoted English prose translation and learning — a key patron of the period.

2 · Middle English / Medieval Period

Norman Conquest brings French vocabulary and courtly themes. Middle English emerges as a hybrid tongue. Chaucer dominates the close of the period.

Key Characteristics

- Romance genre — chivalry, courtly love, quests (Arthurian legend)
- Religious allegory and morality plays (Everyman)
- Shift from alliterative to rhymed, syllabic verse (though alliterative revival occurs in the North/West, e.g. Gawain)

Major Authors & Works

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Geoffrey Chaucer	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i> , <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i> , <i>The Parliament of Fowls</i>	"Father of English Poetry"; first poet buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey; wrote in London (East Midland) dialect, shaping Modern English
William Langland	<i>Piers Plowman</i>	Alliterative dream-vision; social/religious allegory
Gawain Poet (anonymous)	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Alliterative romance; Arthurian chivalric test
Sir Thomas Malory	<i>Le Morte d'Arthur</i>	Prose compilation of Arthurian legend; printed by Caxton (1485)
John Gower	<i>Confessio Amantis</i>	Chaucer's contemporary and friend
William Caxton	—	Introduced the printing press to England (1476)

Must-Know

The Canterbury Tales uses a frame-narrative: pilgrims travelling to Canterbury each tell a tale. Written mostly in rhymed couplets ("heroic couplets" ancestor).

3 · The Renaissance (Elizabethan & Jacobean)

Revival of classical learning, humanism, exploration and drama's golden age. Subdivided into Elizabethan (1558-1603), Jacobean (1603-1625) and Caroline (1625-1649).

Elizabethan Age (1558-1603)

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
William Shakespeare	37-38 plays, 154 sonnets, <i>Venus and Adonis</i>	Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth. Comedies: Twelfth Night, As You Like It. Histories: Henry IV/V. First Folio published 1623 (posthumous)
Edmund Spenser	<i>The Faerie Queene</i> , <i>The Shepheardes Calender</i>	Invented the "Spenserian stanza"; allegory honouring Elizabeth I
Christopher Marlowe	<i>Doctor Faustus</i> , <i>Tamburlaine the Great</i> , <i>The Jew of Malta</i>	Pioneered blank verse tragedy ("Marlowe's mighty line"); rival/contemporary of Shakespeare
Sir Philip Sidney	<i>Astrophel and Stella</i> , <i>The Defence of Poesy</i>	First major English sonnet sequence; important critical essay
Thomas Kyd	<i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	Popularised the revenge tragedy genre

Jacobean & Caroline Age (1603-1649)

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Ben Jonson	<i>Volpone</i> , <i>The Alchemist</i> , <i>Every Man in His Humour</i>	Master of "comedy of humours"; first unofficial Poet Laureate
John Webster	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i> , <i>The White Devil</i>	Dark Jacobean revenge tragedy
Francis Bacon	<i>Essays</i> , <i>Novum Organum</i>	Father of the English essay; empirical/scientific method
King James Bible	—	Published 1611; hugely influential on English prose style

Exam Tip

Distinguish sub-periods by monarch: Elizabeth I → Elizabethan; James I → Jacobean; Charles I → Caroline. This mapping is a favourite MCQ trap.

4 · Metaphysical & Cavalier Poets

Two contrasting strands of 17th-century lyric poetry, running parallel to Jacobean/Caroline drama.

Metaphysical Poets

Known for intellectual wit, elaborate conceits (far-fetched metaphors), paradox, and colloquial argumentative tone. Term coined critically by Samuel Johnson.

Poet	Key Work(s)
John Donne	"The Flea", "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", Holy Sonnets — founder of the school
George Herbert	<i>The Temple</i> — devotional shaped/pattern poems ("Easter Wings")
Andrew Marvell	"To His Coy Mistress", "The Garden"
Henry Vaughan	"The Retreat" — mystical, nature-focused

Cavalier Poets

Royalist courtier poets; light, graceful, carpe-diem themes; simpler diction than the metaphysicals.

Poet	Key Work(s)
Robert Herrick	"To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" ("Gather ye rosebuds...")
Richard Lovelace	"To Lucasta, Going to the Wars", "To Althea, from Prison"
Sir John Suckling	Witty, casual love lyrics

5 · The Restoration Age

Begins with the return of Charles II and the monarchy. Theatres reopen (closed by Puritans 1642-60); witty, often bawdy Restoration Comedy flourishes; satire and heroic couplet dominate poetry.

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
John Milton	<i>Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, "Lycidas"</i>	Epic in blank verse on the Fall of Man; also active pre-Restoration (political prose, Puritan)
John Dryden	<i>Absalom and Achanitophel, Mac Flecknoe, All for Love</i>	First official Poet Laureate (1668); perfected the heroic couplet; father of modern English criticism ("Essay of Dramatic Poesy")
John Bunyan	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i>	Puritan prose allegory of the Christian's journey; hugely popular, second only to the Bible in circulation historically
William Congreve	<i>The Way of the World</i>	Finest Restoration comedy of manners
Aphra Behn	<i>Oroonoko</i>	First major English woman professional writer; early novel/proto-novel

Quick Fact

"Restoration Comedy" = comedy of manners: witty repartee, sexual intrigue, satirising upper-class society.

6 · Augustan / Neoclassical Age

Named after Emperor Augustus's golden age of Latin letters. Order, reason, decorum, wit and satire prized; the periodical essay and the novel are born.

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Alexander Pope	<i>The Rape of the Lock, An Essay on Criticism, The Dunciad</i> , translation of Homer	Master of the heroic couplet; mock-epic; "To err is human, to forgive divine"
Jonathan Swift	<i>Gulliver's Travels, A Modest Proposal, A Tale of a Tub</i>	Greatest English satirist; Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin
Joseph Addison & Richard Steele	<i>The Tatler, The Spectator</i>	Founders of the periodical essay; Sir Roger de Coverley papers
Daniel Defoe	<i>Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders</i>	Often called father of the English novel / journalism; realistic first-person narrative

Exam Tip

"Augustan Age" and "Age of Pope" are used interchangeably in MCQs — both refer to c.1700–1745.

7 · Age of Johnson / Age of Sensibility

Transitional period between Augustan order and Romantic feeling. Samuel Johnson dominates; the novel matures rapidly; "graveyard poets" anticipate Romanticism.

Key Figures

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Samuel Johnson	<i>A Dictionary of the English Language</i> (1755), <i>Lives of the Poets</i> , <i>Rasselas</i>	Towering critic and lexicographer; subject of Boswell's famous biography
James Boswell	<i>The Life of Samuel Johnson</i>	Landmark English biography
Oliver Goldsmith	<i>The Vicar of Wakefield</i> , <i>She Stoops to Conquer</i> , "The Deserted Village"	Novel, drama and poetry all excelled
Thomas Gray	"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"	Leading "Graveyard School" poet; pre-Romantic melancholy
Richard Brinsley Sheridan	<i>The School for Scandal</i> , <i>The Rivals</i>	Comedy of manners revival

The Rise of the Novel

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Samuel Richardson	<i>Pamela</i> , <i>Clarissa</i>	Epistolary novel (told through letters)
Henry Fielding	<i>Tom Jones</i> , <i>Joseph Andrews</i>	Comic epic in prose; picaresque
Laurence Sterne	<i>Tristram Shandy</i>	Experimental, digressive narrative — precursor to modernist technique
Tobias Smollett	<i>Roderick Random</i>	Picaresque novel

8 · The Romantic Age

Conventionally begins with Wordsworth & Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and ends around 1832 (Scott's death / Reform Act).
Reaction against Neoclassical reason: imagination, nature, emotion, the individual, the sublime.

Key Characteristics

- Emphasis on nature, imagination, emotion over reason
- Interest in the common man, childhood, the rural and the supernatural
- Political idealism (French Revolution influence, esp. on younger Romantics)
- "Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" — Wordsworth's definition of poetry

The "Big Six" Romantic Poets

Poet	Key Work(s)	Notes
William Wordsworth	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i> (with Coleridge), <i>The Prelude</i> , "Tintern Abbey", "Daffodils"	Poet Laureate 1843; wrote the manifesto Preface to <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> (2nd ed.)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", <i>Biographia Literaria</i>	Coined "willing suspension of disbelief"; major critic too
Lord Byron	<i>Don Juan</i> , <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>	"Byronic hero" archetype; died at Missolonghi aiding Greek independence
Percy Bysshe Shelley	"Ode to the West Wind", "Ozymandias", <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	Radical idealist; drowned 1822
John Keats	"Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "To Autumn"	Died aged 25 (1821); concept of "Negative Capability"
William Blake	<i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i> , "The Tyger", "The Lamb"	Visionary poet-engraver; pre-dates the other five, often grouped separately

Romantic Prose & the Novel

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> , <i>Emma</i>	Novel of manners; irony; technically Romantic-era but classically restrained in style
Sir Walter Scott	<i>Waverley</i> , <i>Ivanhoe</i>	Father of the historical novel
Mary Shelley	<i>Frankenstein</i> (1818)	Gothic science-fiction pioneer; wife of P.B. Shelley
Charles Lamb	<i>Essays of Elia</i>	Familiar/personal essay revival

9 - The Victorian Age

Named for Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901). Industrial Revolution, empire, class tension, scientific doubt (Darwin), and the moral "double standard" all shape the era's vast, socially engaged novels.

Poetry

Poet	Key Work(s)	Notes
Alfred, Lord Tennyson	"In Memoriam A.H.H.", "The Charge of the Light Brigade", "Ulysses"	Poet Laureate 1850–1892; the era's representative poetic voice
Robert Browning	"My Last Duchess", "The Pied Piper of Hamelin"	Master of the dramatic monologue
Elizabeth Barrett Browning	<i>Sonnets from the Portuguese</i> ("How do I love thee?")	Leading woman poet of the era
Matthew Arnold	"Dover Beach", <i>Culture and Anarchy</i>	Also a major critic — coined "touchstone method"
Pre-Raphaelites (D.G. Rossetti, Christina Rossetti)	"Goblin Market", "The Blessed Damozel"	Medieval-inspired imagery, sensuous detail
Gerard Manley Hopkins	"The Windhover", "Pied Beauty"	Invented "sprung rhythm"; published posthumously (1918)

The Novel

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Charles Dickens	<i>Oliver Twist</i> , <i>Great Expectations</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	Serialized fiction; social criticism of industrial poverty
Charlotte Brontë	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Pen name "Currer Bell"
Emily Brontë	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	Pen name "Ellis Bell"; only novel
Anne Brontë	<i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i>	Pen name "Acton Bell"
George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)	<i>Middlemarch</i> , <i>Silas Marner</i> , <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>	Psychological realism; male pen name
Thomas Hardy	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> , <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> , <i>Jude the Obscure</i>	Wessex novels; tragic fatalism; also a major poet
William Makepeace Thackeray	<i>Vanity Fair</i>	"A novel without a hero"; satire of social climbing
Robert Louis Stevenson	<i>Treasure Island</i> , <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i>	Adventure & Gothic double
Lewis Carroll	<i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>	Pen name of Charles Dodgson, mathematician

Must-Know

Victorian novels were often published in monthly/weekly serial instalments — shaping cliff-hanger structure and episodic plotting.

10 · The Modern Age

Edwardian transition, then WWI trauma and Modernist experimentation: fragmentation, stream of consciousness, myth, and a break from Victorian certainty.

Poetry

Poet	Key Work(s)	Notes
W.B. Yeats	"The Second Coming", "Sailing to Byzantium", "Easter, 1916"	Irish; Nobel Prize 1923; symbolism & Irish nationalism
T.S. Eliot	<i>The Waste Land</i> , "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", <i>Four Quartets</i>	Nobel Prize 1948; also key critic ("Tradition and the Individual Talent", "objective correlative")
Wilfred Owen	"Dulce et Decorum Est", "Anthem for Doomed Youth"	WWI War Poet; killed in action 1918
Siegfried Sassoon	"Suicide in the Trenches"	WWI War Poet; anti-war satire
W.H. Auden	"Funeral Blues", "September 1, 1939"	Bridges Modernist and later 20th-century poetry

Fiction & Drama

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
James Joyce	<i>Ulysses</i> , <i>Dubliners</i> , <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	Stream-of-consciousness pioneer; Irish; <i>Ulysses</i> set on a single day (Bloomsday, 16 June)
Virginia Woolf	<i>Mrs Dalloway</i> , <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , <i>A Room of One's Own</i>	Stream of consciousness; Bloomsbury Group; key feminist essay
D.H. Lawrence	<i>Sons and Lovers</i> , <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>	Explored instinct, sexuality, industrial dehumanisation
Joseph Conrad	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> , <i>Lord Jim</i>	Polish-born; colonial critique; frame narrative
E.M. Forster	<i>A Passage to India</i> , <i>Howards End</i>	"Only connect"; colonial and class themes
George Bernard Shaw	<i>Pygmalion</i> , <i>Arms and the Man</i> , <i>Man and Superman</i>	Nobel Prize 1925; drama of ideas

11 · Postmodern & Contemporary Literature

Post-WWII disillusionment, the Angry Young Men, Theatre of the Absurd, decolonisation, and a globalised, self-referential literary landscape.

Author	Key Work(s)	Notes
Samuel Beckett	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Theatre of the Absurd; Nobel Prize 1969
George Orwell	<i>1984</i> , <i>Animal Farm</i>	Dystopia; totalitarianism critique
William Golding	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	Nobel Prize 1983; allegory of human savagery
Philip Larkin	"Church Going", "This Be The Verse"	The Movement — plain-style, anti-Romantic poetry
Ted Hughes	<i>Crow</i> , "The Thought-Fox"	Poet Laureate 1984; married to Sylvia Plath
Sylvia Plath	<i>Ariel</i> , <i>The Bell Jar</i>	Confessional poetry
John Osborne	<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1956)	Kitchen-sink drama; "Angry Young Men"
Harold Pinter	<i>The Birthday Party</i> , <i>The Caretaker</i>	Nobel Prize 2005; "comedy of menace"; the "Pinter pause"
Doris Lessing	<i>The Golden Notebook</i>	Nobel Prize 2007
Chinua Achebe	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	Nigerian; foundational postcolonial African novel
Salman Rushdie	<i>Midnight's Children</i> , <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Booker of Bookers 1993; magical realism
Seamus Heaney	<i>Death of a Naturalist</i> , "Digging"	Irish; Nobel Prize 1995
Kazuo Ishiguro	<i>The Remains of the Day</i> , <i>Never Let Me Go</i>	Nobel Prize 2017
Ian McEwan	<i>Atonement</i>	Contemporary literary fiction

12 · Genres & Literary Forms

Cross-period reference: know the defining features and one flagship example of each form.

Poetry — Forms

Form	Defining Feature	Example
Epic	Long narrative poem, heroic deeds, elevated style	Beowulf, Paradise Lost
Sonnet	14 lines, iambic pentameter; Petrarchan (octave+sestet) or Shakespearean (3 quatrains+couplet)	Shakespeare's Sonnets
Ode	Formal, elevated lyric addressing/celebrating a subject	Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"
Elegy	Poem of mourning/lament	Gray's "Elegy...", Tennyson's "In Memoriam"
Ballad	Narrative folk song, simple quatrains, refrain	"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"
Dramatic Monologue	Single speaker addresses a silent listener, reveals character	Browning's "My Last Duchess"
Pastoral	Idealised rural/shepherd life	Spenser's "The Shepheardes Calender"
Free Verse	No fixed metre/rhyme scheme	Eliot, Whitman (American)

Drama — Forms

Form	Defining Feature	Example
Tragedy	Serious action, downfall of a noble protagonist via a "tragic flaw" (hamartia)	Hamlet, King Lear
Comedy	Light tone, resolves happily (often marriage)	Twelfth Night, The Importance of Being Earnest
Comedy of Manners	Satirises upper-class social behaviour and wit	The Way of the World
Tragicomedy	Blends tragic and comic elements	The Winter's Tale
Revenge Tragedy	Protagonist seeks vengeance for a wrong; violent climax	Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy
Theatre of the Absurd	Illogical situations, breakdown of meaning/communication	Waiting for Godot
Kitchen-Sink Drama	Gritty, working-class domestic realism	Look Back in Anger

The Novel — Types

Type	Defining Feature	Example
Epistolary	Told through letters/documents	Pamela, Clarissa, Dracula
Picaresque	Episodic adventures of a roguish hero	Tom Jones, Moll Flanders
Gothic	Mystery, horror, decaying settings, the supernatural	Frankenstein, Dracula
Bildungsroman	Coming-of-age / growth narrative	Great Expectations, A Portrait of the Artist...
Stream of Consciousness	Unfiltered flow of a character's thoughts	Ulysses, Mrs Dalloway
Dystopian	Nightmarish future society, political warning	1984, Brave New World (Huxley)
Historical Novel	Fictional story set in a real past era	Waverley, Ivanhoe
Novel of Manners	Social conventions/class of a specific milieu	Pride and Prejudice

Prose Non-Fiction

- **Essay** — Bacon (formal, aphoristic) vs. Lamb/Addison-Steele (familiar, personal)
- **Biography/Autobiography** — Boswell's *Life of Johnson*
- **Diary** — Samuel Pepys's Diary (Restoration social record)

13 · Literary Criticism & Theory

A heavily tested area in lectureship papers — match critic to key idea/term.

Critic / Theorist	Key Idea / Term	Period
Aristotle	Poetics: mimesis (imitation), catharsis, hamartia, unity of action	Classical
Longinus	On the Sublime — elevated, transcendent effect of great literature	Classical
Philip Sidney	The Defence of Poesy — poetry teaches and delights	Renaissance
John Dryden	An Essay of Dramatic Poesy — father of English criticism	Restoration
Samuel Johnson	Preface to Shakespeare, Lives of the Poets — moral/common-reader criticism	18th c.
William Wordsworth	Preface to Lyrical Ballads — poetry as "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," recollected in tranquility	Romantic
S.T. Coleridge	Biographia Literaria — distinguishes Fancy vs. Imagination	Romantic
Matthew Arnold	"Touchstone Method" — judge new poetry against acknowledged classics; "criticism of life"	Victorian
T.S. Eliot	"Tradition and the Individual Talent" (impersonal theory); "objective correlative"	Modern
I.A. Richards	Practical Criticism — close reading, "New Criticism" foundation	Modern
F.R. Leavis	The Great Tradition — moral seriousness in the novel canon	Modern
Northrop Frye	Anatomy of Criticism — archetypal criticism	Mid-20th c.
Roland Barthes	"Death of the Author" — meaning made by the reader, not authorial intent	Structuralism/Post-structuralism
Jacques Derrida	Deconstruction — texts contain internal contradictions destabilising fixed meaning	Post-structuralism
Michel Foucault	Power/knowledge, discourse analysis	Post-structuralism
Edward Said	Orientalism — foundational postcolonial theory	Postcolonial
Elaine Showalter	"Gynocriticism" — study of women's writing as a distinct tradition	Feminist
Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar	The Madwoman in the Attic — feminist reading of 19th-c. women's fiction	Feminist

14 · Glossary of Literary Terms (A-Z Quick Reference)

Allegory — narrative with a symbolic second meaning (Pilgrim's Progress)

Alliteration — repetition of initial consonant sounds

Allusion — indirect reference to another work/person/event

Anti-hero — protagonist lacking conventional heroic qualities

Antithesis — contrasting ideas balanced in parallel structure

Apostrophe — address to an absent/abstract entity

Assonance — repetition of vowel sounds

Bathos — anti-climactic, unintentional drop from the sublime to the trivial

Blank verse — unrhymed iambic pentameter

Caesura — a pause within a line of verse

Catharsis — emotional purging felt by the audience of tragedy

Conceit — extended, ingenious metaphor (metaphysical poetry)

Deus ex machina — improbable device resolving a plot

Dramatic irony — audience knows more than the character

Elegy — mournful, reflective poem, often for the dead

Enjambment — sentence runs over the line-break without pause

Epiphany — sudden moment of realisation (key in Joyce)

Foreshadowing — hints of events to come

Hamartia — the tragic hero's fatal flaw/error

Hubris — excessive pride leading to downfall

Hyperbole — deliberate exaggeration

Iambic pentameter — line of 5 iambs (unstressed-stressed), 10 syllables

Imagery — language appealing to the senses

In medias res — narrative begins in the middle of the action

Irony — gap between expectation/statement and reality

Kenning — Old English compound metaphor ("whale-road")

Litotes — understatement via negation ("not bad")

Malapropism — comic misuse of a similar-sounding word

Metaphor — direct comparison without "like/as"

Metre — the rhythmic pattern of stressed/unstressed syllables

Motif — recurring element with symbolic significance

Onomatopoeia — word imitating a sound

Oxymoron — two contradictory terms combined

Paradox — statement that seems self-contradictory but reveals truth

Pathetic fallacy — nature reflecting human emotion

Personification — human qualities given to non-human things

Protagonist / Antagonist — main character / their chief opponent

Simile — comparison using "like" or "as"

Soliloquy — character speaks alone, revealing inner thoughts

Symbol — object/image representing something beyond itself

Synecdoche — part representing the whole ("all hands on deck")

Tone — author's attitude toward subject/audience

Unities (three) — Aristotelian action, time, place in classical drama

Verisimilitude — the appearance of being true/real

Zeugma — one word governing two others in different senses

15 · Quick-Fact Lists

The trivia most commonly tested in MCQ-format lectureship papers.

Notable "Firsts"

Title	Holder
First English poet (named)	Caedmon
Father of English poetry	Geoffrey Chaucer
First official Poet Laureate	John Dryden (1668)
Father of the English novel	Daniel Defoe (or Henry Fielding, per some sources)
Father of English criticism	John Dryden
Father of the English essay	Francis Bacon
First English dictionary (major)	Samuel Johnson (1755)
First printer in England	William Caxton (1476)
First major woman professional writer	Aphra Behn
First English autobiography (claimed)	Margery Kempe, <i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i>

Pen Names

Pen Name	Real Name
Currer Bell	Charlotte Brontë
Ellis Bell	Emily Brontë
Acton Bell	Anne Brontë
George Eliot	Mary Ann Evans
Lewis Carroll	Charles Lutwidge Dodgson
George Orwell	Eric Arthur Blair

British/Irish Nobel Laureates in Literature (selected)

Year	Laureate
1907	Rudyard Kipling
1923	W.B. Yeats (Irish)
1925	George Bernard Shaw
1948	T.S. Eliot
1969	Samuel Beckett (Irish)
1983	William Golding
1995	Seamus Heaney (Irish)
2005	Harold Pinter
2007	Doris Lessing
2017	Kazuo Ishiguro

Poet Laureates of England (selected milestones)

- John Dryden (1668) — first official holder
- William Wordsworth (1843)
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1850)
- Ted Hughes (1984)
- Andrew Motion (1999)
- Carol Ann Duffy (2009) — first woman Poet Laureate

16 · Self-Test: Author-Work Match-Up

Tick the box once you can correctly pair each work with its author from memory — no peeking!

✓	Work	Author (cover and recall)
☐	Doctor Faustus	Christopher Marlowe
☐	The Faerie Queene	Edmund Spenser
☐	Paradise Lost	John Milton
☐	The Rape of the Lock	Alexander Pope
☐	Gulliver's Travels	Jonathan Swift
☐	Tom Jones	Henry Fielding
☐	Tintern Abbey	William Wordsworth
☐	Ode to a Nightingale	John Keats
☐	Wuthering Heights	Emily Brontë
☐	Middlemarch	George Eliot
☐	Tess of the d'Urbervilles	Thomas Hardy
☐	My Last Duchess	Robert Browning
☐	The Waste Land	T.S. Eliot
☐	Mrs Dalloway	Virginia Woolf
☐	Heart of Darkness	Joseph Conrad
☐	Waiting for Godot	Samuel Beckett
☐	Lord of the Flies	William Golding
☐	Look Back in Anger	John Osborne
☐	Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe
☐	Midnight's Children	Salman Rushdie

Final Exam-Day Tip

Re-scan the era banners (colour-coded, Sections 1-11) the morning of your test, then run this match-up table once more as a last confidence check. Good luck!