**Speech and writing. Indicating status**

In answering questions at Advanced level, you will have opportunities to interpret language data, which are included in the exam paper. These may be transcripts of spoken data. You must prepare by practising with examples you find for yourself, or with those which your teacher provides. This guide should help you identify appropriate features of spoken English.

**Speech and writing**

The outward difference between speech and writing is a source of much confusion. Mistaken or "flat earth" views about language appear when we apply to speech inappropriate prescriptive ideas about formal written language. However, it is equally mistaken to suppose that speech has no grammar or distinctive structures and forms it has.

Speech is historically prior to writing, and most people speak long before they are literate. But written English is often seen as more prestigious. Here are some reasons for this attitude:

* teachers don't teach people to speak, but do teach (most of) them to read
* writing is an important medium for advanced and higher education
* literature lends its prestige to the written form in which it is published
* writing is used by rulers, bureaucrats and lawyers to record, publish and enact important decisions, laws and treaties
* spoken English is often spontaneous, while written texts (especially those which are published) are more tidy, structured and subject to editorial revision
* in the past the literate were more or less identical with those who enjoyed power, wealth and prestige for many people, writing retains this supposed superiority
* early studies of language were based on written texts it is only recently that linguists have described the patterns and structures which characterize speech

However, if either deserves to be called the "real" or original form of the language it is speech. For centuries, in which most ordinary people were technically illiterate, spoken English enabled them to carry out all the business of their daily lives. In the 20th century the development of efficient and inexpensive recording technologies has made it possible for speech to be reliably recorded. Already we see the results of this:

* in England and Wales, children learn (and are assessed in) speaking and listening under the National Curriculum
* younger people seem less concerned than their elders with standard spelling forms
* spoken presentations are used in business to promote teamwork
* audio and video recording technologies are used to record proceedings in courts, in council chambers and in parliament
* new technologies such as telephony, voice-mail and video-conferencing mean that spoken interaction is no longer restricted by geography

It may well be that in the 21st century, speech will no longer be seen as the poor relation of writing, or its less educated precursor. In reality, we use both, but usually we need each for specific purposes. In studying English, you should learn about the [underlying grammar](http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/engstruct.htm) of all texts, spoken and written. But you should also learn about structural features specific to each.