3 Analysing the writer's perspective

Learning objectives

- To understand what is meant by a writer's perspective
- To explore a writer's perspective

Understanding why a person has written an article and what they think about the topic can often help you to explore the text fully.

Activity 1

Read the extract below closely and think about the writer and what they might have thought about when writing this article. Some of this text has been annotated with the techniques the writer has used to get their message across.

SPAG

Imperative verbs command the reader to become engaged with the text.

This is a superlative adjective, used here to suggest that compared to any other race this is the most difficult.

Questions are asked for dramatic effect, 'pain' and 'danger' show that the writer can't comprehend the big attraction of the ice mile and will explain why in the rest of the article.

Similes give vivid comparisons using things we are familiar with so we can clearly imagine what the writer is trying to explain. They use the words 'as' and 'like' to make the comparison.

Lists can be used to show there are multiple reasons.

Repetition is used to reinforce or stress a point of view.

Use of the personal pronoun 'I' reinforces the personal nature of the experience.

Meet the ice mile: the toughest swimming test on the planet

There's a new favourite pastime for swimming masochists: doing a mile without stopping in water colder than 5°C. With pain a certainty and the danger very real, what's the big attraction?

A few years ago I travelled to Finland to compete in the Winter Swimming Championships. It was one of their mildest winters for years but, even so, the water was still –0.7°C. Adrenaline got me through the very short race – but afterwards I felt like my hands had been slammed in a car door and that my feet had been pounded by mallets. It was brutal.

For the past 10 years I've been swimming outdoors throughout the winter. I've swum regularly, sometimes gloriously and sometimes painfully, in water gradually dropping to around 1°C or 2°C. [...] People ask me why I do it. I think it's a kind of invigorating, tingling, mad high – and a serious adrenaline rush. I love it. [...]

However there is one thing I have not contemplated, and have absolutely no wish to take part in. It's something that is gaining popularity among outdoor swimmers and endurance athletes around the world. It's a cold-water challenge called the 'ice mile'.

The basic rules for swimming an ice mile are pretty straightforward. Find a body of water that is below 5°C, and swim one mile under supervision wearing only your swimming costume, a pair of goggles and one silicone swimming hat. [...] It's a serious, serious endeavour that should not be taken lightly.

I have no desire whatsoever to swim an ice mile. Swimming a few hundred metres in water much below 10°C is enough of a challenge to me, and hurts like hell. It does to most regular cold-water swimmers. For every degree below 10°C, your feet and hands hurt more, your muscles contract so much it's hard to make your arms and shoulders stretch out to pull your stroke. Your hands splay as you lose motor function. You can have massive ice-cream headaches. And once you stop generating heat while swimming and are out of the water, the recovery is appalling and you can be cold all day. [...]

An ice mile to me seems punishing in the extreme. [...]

I have to admit to thinking that there is something macho about ice milers. It's a level of punishment and pain that I can't fathom and don't want to experience.

Sometimes a writer will explicitly state their view about something, for example, 'It was brutal.' Sometimes you need to work like a detective and look for clues or unpick words and phrases to help you understand the implicit point the writer is trying to get across.

Key terms

Impression: effect produced on the mind, ideas

Simile: a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another using the words *like* or *as*, as in *He's as fit as a fiddle*

Activity 2

Titles are carefully worded so you become instantly attracted to the text and continue to read. Look at the words highlighted below. Why do you think the writer may have selected these specific words?

Meet the ice mile: the toughest swimming test on the planet

In an exam situation there isn't time to analyse every single word. The following questions will help you focus on how to pick out explicit and implicit meaning.

Activity 3

Read the article again, recording words or phrases that give a positive or negative **impression** of cold-water swimming.

Positive language	Negative language
gloriously	painfully

Stretch

Choose one or two examples from each column and explain what the words suggest about cold-water swimming.

Exam link

In an exam, you will be asked to explain the effect of words and phrases and you may choose to pick out some words from the text to help you. You must make sure that your explanation of their effect is clear and concise.

Activity 4

The text has been annotated with some techniques we use when explaining how a writer might achieve an effect. For example, the writer may use the question 'With pain a certainty and the danger very real, what's the big attraction?' to emphasize the fact that she can't understand why anyone would willingly experience pain and danger for fun and that she questions the motives for swimming.

For each of the annotations around the extract:

- copy the relevant word or phrase
- copy the technique and explanation
- discuss why you think the writer has chosen to use this phrase and technique
- write down an explanation to show why you think each phrase is effective.

'I felt like my hands had been slammed in a car door'. **Similes** give vivid comparisons using familiar things so we can clearly imagine what the writer is trying to explain. They use the words 'as' and 'like' to make the comparison.

The simile is effective because we can imagine the intense pain that would be felt from slamming your hand in a car door and can imagine just how painful the swim must have been.

4 Changing perspective

Learning objective

- To understand a writer's perspective and how this can change

A writer's perspective is made up of the views and opinions they have about a topic. These views may change depending on when they write about an event. When deducing a writer's perspective, you need to understand exactly what that person thinks and feels about their topic.

Bungee jumping involves jumping from a tall structure while tied to an elastic cord. Buildings, bridges and cranes are commonly used, but extreme jumpers have been known to throw themselves from moving objects, such as hot-air balloons or helicopters. The thrill comes from free-falling and then being thrust back into the air as the cord recoils.

Activity 1

1. Imagine you have decided to take part in a bungee jump for charity. Use a table to record how you felt before, during and after your jump.
2. Discuss with a partner why your feelings might change.

Read the newspaper extract on page 25, which documents the writer's feelings before and after a bungee jump.

Activity 2

1. Look at the first section of the extract ('The fearful adventurer...'). Write down words or phrases that tell you how the writer is feeling.
2. Next to each word or phrase, write down one word that you think sums up how he feels.
3. What effect do these words and phrases have on you?

How the writer feels	One-word summary	Effect on reader
'apprehension is beginning to creep in'	uneasy	His nervousness is escalating so we sympathize with him.

Activity 3

Having completed the bungee jump, the writer explains his fear in the second section of the extract ('Fight the fear'). With a partner, make a list of the reasons he gives to explain why he found bungee jumping so difficult.

Stretch

Look back at the two sections of the text. Make a list of any similarities and any differences that you can see. Do you think the writer has changed his writing style and opinion after the bungee jump has taken place?

The fearful adventurer: confronting my demons at the world's highest bungee jump

I'm standing a few feet from the edge of the Bloukrans River Bridge. [...] It's famous for being home to the world's highest commercial bungee bridge jump.

My feet have been tied together, and two men are helping me hop to the edge. For the past hour while waiting my turn I've been trying to remain calm, but apprehension is beginning to creep in. I cautiously look down to where the Bloukrans River, several hundred metres below us, snakes its way to the nearby Indian Ocean. I quickly look up. 'Bloody hell', I think to myself. I decide not to look down again, but rather focus on the panoramic view in front of me.

I'm advised to jump outwards as much as possible, so I'll get a better bounce at the end. Is a better bounce a good thing? I'm not sure.

I take a deep breath and try to block out the voice in my head that's screaming, 'It's not too late to change your mind!' But I'm not going to chicken out – after all, I'm only doing this 216m-high escapade for one reason: to rebel against the fear that's begun to grip me as I get older.

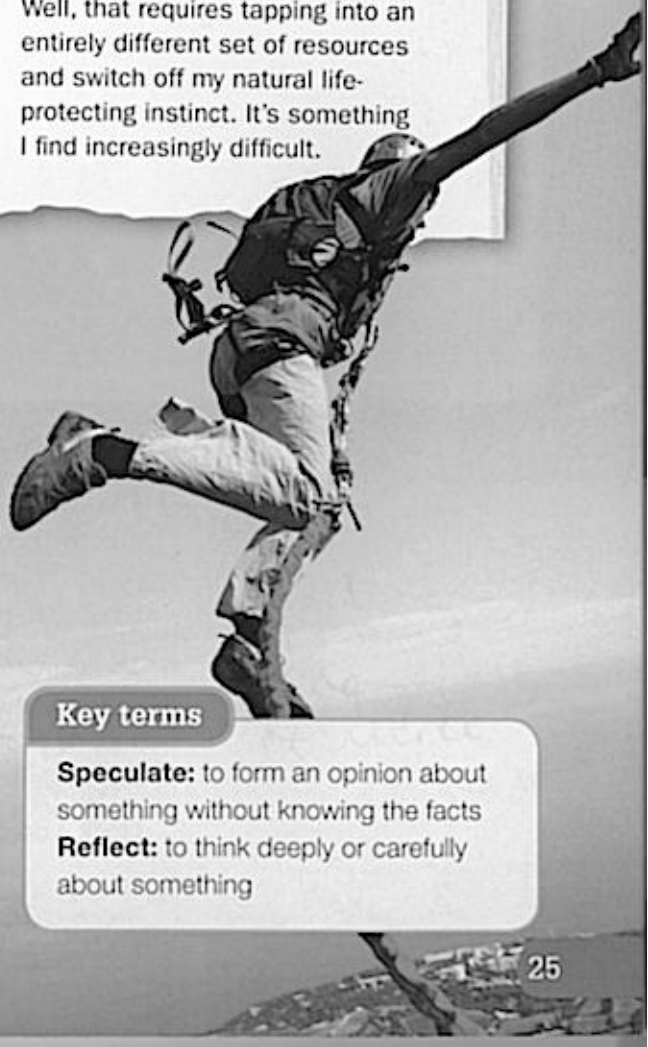
The words 'Three, two, one, go!' ring out. I throw caution to the wind and jump.

Fight the fear

There was, of course, absolutely no reason for me to be afraid. Face Adrenalin have seen an average of 110 jumps every day for the past 16 years – with a 100pc safety record. That's 642,400 people who've managed to conquer their fears and, more to the point, survive to tell the tale. [...]

Nonetheless, it was a big deal for me. [...] I've run hundreds of kilometres across deserts in the searing heat, plunged off ferries at dawn into ice-cold black water, skidded along mountain ridges on a bike, and ploughed through heavy jungle foliage – none of which has fazed me too much. I have no problem with the thought of being uncomfortably cold, hot, wet or sleep deprived.

But ask me to jump off a bridge? In an act where I have no control? Well, that requires tapping into an entirely different set of resources and switch off my natural life-protecting instinct. It's something I find increasingly difficult.



A writer's perspective before an event is often based on their opinions and knowledge about the topic. When a writer has formed an opinion without having experienced something for themselves, they are speculating. We use clues in a text to **speculate** about what might happen.

When a writer has a first-hand experience and then gives their views, this can be classed as factual, since their views are based on something that has happened. The writer in this text **reflects** on what happened and how he feels about it. Good readers can spot the difference between fact and speculation and use this to help them explain the effect of a text.

Key terms

Speculate: to form an opinion about something without knowing the facts
Reflect: to think deeply or carefully about something