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The Pearson English VCE In Focus guides have been written to the new Victorian Certificate of Education English and English as an Additional Language Study Design for 2016–2020 and cover Unit 3 Area of Study 1: Reading and creating texts. In this Area of Study, you are expected to be able to develop and justify your own personal and detailed interpretations of texts.

The In Focus: The Left Hand of Darkness guide is divided into four sections:
1: Introduction
2: Reading for meaning
3: Responding to text
4: Mastering the essay
Responding to the text

This section provides a step-by-step guide on how to shape and plan your response to different types of questions and prompts, and includes a list of essay topics. The section outlines how to develop and support your contention and use quotations. At the end of the section is a set of learning activities.

Mastering the essay

This section outlines the different essay types and provides an essay sample with annotations.

eBook and online resources

Online resources support the study of texts and include:

- graphic organiser templates
- worksheets
- essay templates
- weblinks.

Responding to the text

Individual read texts and respond to them in different ways. These responses can take on many forms, but in VCE English, you will be required to write a creative piece or a text response essay.

**ESSAY TYPES**

**Thematic essay**

Thematic essays are designed to test your understanding of a text and your ability to respond to a text question. Thematic questions ask you to explore one or more of the themes raised in the text. You will be asked to respond to one of many different types of essay questions that focus on different aspects of the text. These different types of questions can focus on different aspects of the text and require you to consider a range of connected ideas and concepts to support your contention and use quotations. At the end of the text, there are a number of steps to take, a text response essay is divided into main sections and subheadings.

**Best paragraphs**

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**Thematic questions and prompts**

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**Thematic essay questions on The Left Hand of Darkness**

- What different kinds of love are presented in The Left Hand of Darkness?
- What different kinds of loyalty and betrayal are presented in The Left Hand of Darkness?
- How is the concept of gender portrayed in The Left Hand of Darkness?
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The creative response

In both Unit 1 and Unit 3, you are asked to respond creatively to a text in Area of Study 1, ‘Reading and creating texts’. To demonstrate mastery of these sections of the course, you need to be able to explore ‘how meaning is created in a text’ and respond to the text by developing a creative response.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

You have two choices when deciding how to respond creatively to The Left Hand of Darkness:

- adding to The Left Hand of Darkness — adding to the original material requires you to think about what new perspective or idea you can bring to The Left Hand of Darkness (‘What do I want to explore further?’)

  or

- adapting The Left Hand of Darkness — adapting the original material requires you to manipulate the story and plot in The Left Hand of Darkness (‘What do I want to change?’).

**Additions**

An addition provides you with limitless opportunities to re-imagine the text; however, you still need to stay true to the original story. By adding to the original story, you have the opportunity to ask questions that the original piece overlooked or deliberately left unanswered. You can fill in gaps about what happened before, during or after an event, or view an event from another character’s point of view.

First, you need to consider what elements of the original story in The Left Hand of Darkness you want to examine.

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**The Left Hand of Darkness**

What do I want to explore further?

**Plot**

- Prequel or Prologue: What happened before Genly Ai arrived in Gethen?
- New events: What’s missing or unexplained? What else might have happened?
- Epilogue or Sequel: What happens to Argaven Harge, King of Karhide?

**Character**

- Expanding on minor characters: Obsle, Yegey or Shusgis
- Changing narrative perspective (What does another character think about an established event?): The view of Estraven or Argaven
- Expanding on a character, such as Tibe
A sequel or an epilogue will enable you to answer the question, ‘What happened next?’ You might want to know how your characters responded to what they had experienced. Did any of the characters meet again? What happened to Argaven, the Commensals or Ashe? What was life like for the people of Winter? Perhaps you’re interested in a tangent that the story might take you on. It’s possible too that your story hinted at more adventures or relationships or challenges to come.

You need to consider how your sequel or epilogue can seamlessly fit in to the original piece of work. It is sometimes helpful to think of the work you are creating as a missing scene or a missing chapter. In order to achieve this, think about the questions that are outlined in the mind map below.

### When and where:
- How far into the future? The next hour? The next day? Two, five or ten years later?
- Where will you set your sequel? In Hain or another fictional universe?
- Are you returning to a place established by the text or creating your own? Terra, Gethen, Ekumen or elsewhere?

### Plot:
- What has happened before the sequel and what occurs after it in Terra, Gethen or Ekumen?
- Will there be any interesting plot developments?
- What is it about your sequel that adds to the original?
- Do you have something new and fresh to say?
- Where does your piece fit into the storyline?
- Are you going to address the whole text or just a selected part?

### Characters:
- Which characters are you going to use?
- Are they main or incidental characters?
- How have existing characters changed or developed?
- Will you add new characters? A new king?
- How are new characters related or do they relate to the established characters?

### Genre:
- Are you staying in the science fiction genre?
- If you change the science fiction genre, how can you successfully transplant the characters?
Adaptations

An adaptation is a modification or adjustment of the original work, yet still remains faithful to the original text. You need to have a thorough understanding of The Left Hand of Darkness in order to be successful at adapting the text.

There are many ways that you can go about creating your adaptation. First, you need to decide what to change and how to change the text. Consider the following questions in developing your response.

- **The Setting or Character**
  Changing the setting or character will require you to use language that will set the new scene or describe the new or altered characters. Consider using the ‘five senses’ as a way to make sure that your audience experiences a vivid scene. The questions that are outlined in the mind map below will assist you in creating a vivid description of a new scene or character.

  - **Sight:** What does the setting or character look like? What does the character see?
  - **Sound:** What is the character hearing? What sounds can be heard in the setting? Is the sound important or incidental?
  - **Smell:** What are the smells of the setting or that the character can detect?
  - **Taste:** What can the character taste?
  - **Feel:** This can be either intangible, like emotions, or tangible, like fabrics, leaves or other textures.

  Questions to ask yourself before you adapt a text and suggested ideas

- **The Setting or Character**

Using the five senses in your writing

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**Format**

A creative response can take many formats. The list below includes some of the formats that can be used:

- a monologue
- a script
- a graphic text
- a short film
- a prologue
- an epilogue
- a chapter
- a series of letters
- a series of journal entries
- an illustrative narrative.

**REQUIREMENTS**

VCAA English and English as an Additional Language Study Design Unit 3 states that the creative response can be either written or oral. The Unit 3 Creative response has the following requirements:

- Written response: 800–1000 words
- Oral: 4–6 minutes

For EAL students:

- Written response: 700–800 words
- Oral: 3–5 minutes

**Writing the reflective statement**

The VCE English Study Design asks you to explain and justify the decisions you made during the writing process. Your reflective statement’s purpose is for you to acknowledge and articulate what insights you have gained into *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

You should be able to explore your own writing in juxtaposition with that of Ursula Le Guin, the author of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Your reflective statement must:

- use appropriate language to describe what and how you wrote
- explain your thinking and writing process
- describe your intended audience
- assess your piece to see whether you met your aims.

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<thead>
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<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link to <em>The Left Hand of Darkness</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation and structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanics of style and writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmental process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intended audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate language choices</td>
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<td>Thinking process</td>
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Reflective response checklist
Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* is arguably one of the most influential texts concerning gender and androgyny in the science-fiction genre to date. This text explores the role of sex, the other, balance and harmony on a planet called Winter, where members of the society are neither male or female, but have the ability to change genders in different reproductive cycles.

**THE STUDY DESIGN**

VCE Units 1 and 3 ask you to identify, discuss and analyse how certain features of texts create meaning and shape interpretation. In these units, entitled ‘reading and creating texts’, you are expected to be able to develop and justify your own personal and detailed interpretations of texts.

**Key knowledge and skills**

For this part of the course, you will need to produce both a creative response and a sustained analytical interpretation, known as a text response essay. This study guide helps you to develop a text response essay, although some creative suggestions are also included. You will need to plan, draft and edit your essay, and ensure that it includes relevant, detailed textual evidence.

You will also need to demonstrate a range of different knowledge and skills that you have developed through your reading of the set text.

■ **KEY KNOWLEDGE**

Your text response should demonstrate that you:

- understand the values the text conveys
- understand how readers can interpret texts in different ways
- understand the various features of a literary text, including structure, conventions, language, metalanguage and other stylistic features.

■ **KEY SKILLS**

On completion of this unit of work, you should be able to:

- explain and analyse the features of a text and how these influence interpretation
- identify and analyse the implied views and values of a text
- use textual evidence accurately to justify analytical responses
- read and understand different viewpoints to develop an interpretation of your own.
Checklist
To assist you, there are a set of key knowledge and skills that can work as a checklist, some of which include:

- an understanding of the world of *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- the ways Ursula Le Guin creates meaning and builds the world of the text and responds to different contexts, audiences and purposes
- the ways in which readers’ interpretations of *The Left Hand of Darkness* differ and why
- the literary features of *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- the views and values that are explored by Ursula Le Guin.

What the examiners are looking for
When writing your text response essay in the examination, you need to complete three fundamental components.

First and foremost, you must answer the given question. This means writing a response that is tailored and relevant to what is being asked of you. Many students fall into the trap of writing all they know about a text, ignoring what the question is actually asking of them. A better text response should demonstrate that you can analyse, understand and discuss ideas relating to the given topic.

Secondly, you must structure your response so that it reads as a properly formulated essay, composed of an introduction, body paragraphs with supporting evidence and a conclusion.

Finally, you need to concentrate your analysis on how the author has used literary devices to create meaning. This means that your analysis focuses not just on characters and plot, but rather on the way the text is written, particularly the language and style.

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<tr>
<td>☐ has an introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ develops and sustains a contention</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ defines, outlines and explores the question in the introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ has at least three body paragraphs</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ has a clear point encapsulated in a topic sentence</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ uses supporting evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ uses a key quotation or quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ uses links and connectors between paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ has a conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ restates and rephrases your contention in the conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ answers the topic clearly, coherently and thoroughly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ uses formal language.</td>
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Text response essay checklist
Reading for meaning

As you read, you need to become an active reader, seeking out and searching for meaning beyond the literal words on the page. Reading your text for a second and third time and understanding the following will help you to develop the skills you need to competently analyse the literary features within the text.

Ursula Le Guin poses serious and complex questions about how societies live, the way they interact with each other and the impact they may have on the way people live in the future. Examiners expect you to read *The Left Hand of Darkness* and use it as a lens to assess the way we live as humans.

BEFORE READING

Context

Before we can understand the meaning of a text, we need to understand the world in which it was created, including the social, political and cultural movements of the time. Being able to identify historical context will assist in understanding Ursula Le Guin’s perspective of the world.

■ THE SPACE RACE

The 1960s saw the space race between the USA and the Soviet Union come to fruition. Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space in 1961, with an American to follow the next month. In the years that followed, millions of dollars were assigned to NASA and space exploration by the US Government led by President JF Kennedy, who made it a priority to successfully place a man on the moon. *The Left Hand of Darkness* was first published in 1969, the same year Neil Armstrong, an American, first walked on the moon.

While sci-fi has long imagined extra planetary and extra-terrestrial happenings, the 1960s were a very real and exciting time in the history of space exploration, of new frontiers and the possibility of worlds once unknown.

![Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon.](image)
FEMINISM
While the sci-fi genre has commonly re-imagined the universe with alternative planets and worlds, it was common for this to be the place of male rather than female writers. Ursula Le Guin published her novel in a time that coincided with a second-wave of feminism, a period which began in the early 1960s with the release of Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*. This book challenged the domestic sphere of a woman and invited them to find fulfilment outside the home. During this time, women across the western world were fighting for career and pay opportunities equal to men with the Equal Right Amendment Act being passed by US Congress in 1972.

Did you know?
First-wave feminism began in the 19th and early 20th centuries and focused mainly on the legal rights of women and most importantly the right to vote, known as woman’s suffrage. Before this movement, women had little say over their children, property and income, education and marriage. Some important figures in this movement include Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Betty Friedan led the second-wave feminist movement.

Adela Pankhurst Walsh, whose family campaigned for women's suffrage in the UK, emigrated to Australia where she was an activist for women's causes.