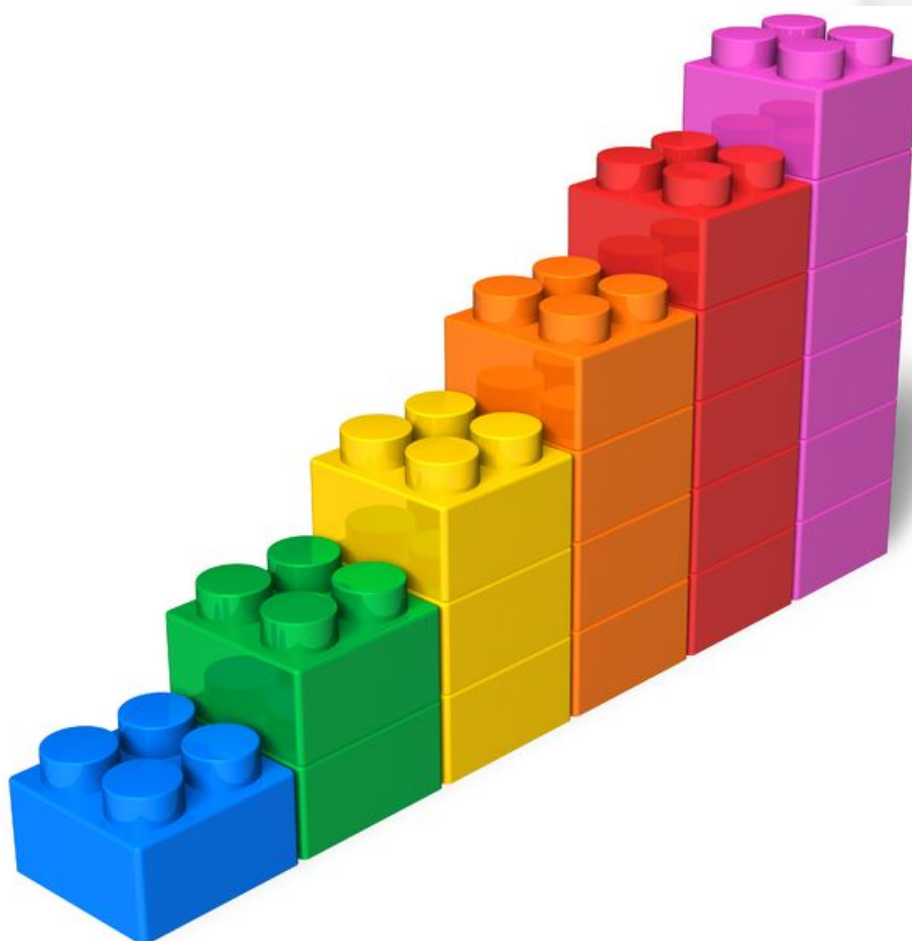


Higher English

Close Reading **CHUNKS**





This booklet contains 10 abridged selections (chunks) of quality journalism similar in style to close reading passages you will face in your exam.

They have been edited down to a length shorter than usual full-length close reading passages, but each chunk has been selected because it contains notable examples of language techniques.

There are no questions; instead, you must write your own!

This is intended to consolidate your knowledge of **close reading question types**, and develop your awareness of **specific language techniques**.



To ensure your questions are written in an appropriate format, you should get hold of some past papers and **examine the structure and wording of questions**.

You should also specify how many marks are attached to your question.

Again, studying past papers (and past paper marking schemes) will help you understand how the SQA **allocate marks**.

As ever, where you come across **unfamiliar vocabulary** (and there are some deliberately tricky words in these chunks!), you should reach for your dictionary, make a note of the definition, and begin using the word in your own writing or conversations.



Background + Suggested Question Types

1) The Brand Expands – Naomi Klein

This brief extract is taken from Naomi Klein's 1999 international best-selling exposé of marketing, advertising and corporate brands: *No Logo*. The book generated huge media attention around issues such as globalization, sweatshops, US corporate misconduct and the impact of multinational businesses on societies around the globe. This chunk discusses how brand logos moved from insignificance to become a central feature of designer clothes.

*Suggested question types: **imagery, word choice, writer's tone/attitude**. You may also be able to write **own words understanding** questions, or **summary** questions.*

2) Celebrity Role Models – Julie Deaner

Published on an American website (www.FamilyEducation.com), this chunk explores some of the issues surrounding celebrities and their status as role models.

*This chunk lends itself to **own words understanding** questions, **word choice, imagery or sentence structure analysis** questions, amongst others.*

3) 'What We Eat' from Fast Food Nation – Eric Schlosser

Schlosser's best-selling exposé of the fast-food industry shocked and fascinated the world on its release in 2001. His witty and engaging examination of every angle – the historical, social, political, economical – charts the rise and rise of fast food in America. In this short extract he explains the way in which fast-food has become an engrained part of our everyday lives.

*There are interesting examples of **sentence structure, contrast, word-choice and imagery** in this extract, amongst other language features.*

4) Laughter: Is it the best medicine? – A.C. Grayling

This short essay was included in philosopher A.C. Grayling's collection of essays *Thinking of Answers*. In it, he considers the nature and purpose of one of mankind's more peculiar habits: laughter.

*Consider **own words understanding** questions, **context** questions, **summarise** questions, or **imagery** questions, amongst others.*

5) Marilyn Monroe: The Auction – Paul Theroux

Theroux is an American novelist, essayist and travel writer. In this abridged extract of a very short piece (well worth reading in its entirety) he describes the auctioning off of Marilyn Monroe's personal belongings after her death, and reflects on the sadness and tragedy of her life through the objects and ephemera she left behind.

*The extract could lead questions about **word choice, contrast, imagery or tone** amongst others.*

6) Bubbles of fire tear into the sky – Robert Fisk

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, award-winning journalist Robert Fisk criticised other journalists for what he called “hotel journalism” – reporting the invasion from the safety of their hotel without experiencing events up-close. Published in The Independent on March 21, 2003, this piece – which with hindsight appears painfully prescient - exemplifies Fisk’s commitment to first-hand, honest journalism, rooted in personal experience which brings moments vividly to life for his readers.

*You may wish to write questions on **word choice, imagery and structure**, amongst other language features.*

7) The Pain of Plain – Linda Grant

Published in the lifestyle section of Intelligent Life magazine, this chunk is part of a larger polemic in which novelist Linda Grant launches an attack on beige sacks and other female garments that are not out of date but were never fashionable in the first place.

*This chunk could lead to **own words** understanding questions, **word choice, imagery or link sentence** questions, amongst others.*

8) A man’s guide to a woman’s wardrobe – Luke Leitch

In this extract from an article published in Intelligent Life magazine, Leitch undertakes the challenge of examining, analyzing and trying to decode the mysteries of the female fashionista’s wardrobe.

*Leitch’s article is rich in **word choice, imagery, contrast, humour & tone, sentence structure** and could also engender **summarise** and **own-words** questions.*

9) The most dangerous drug isn’t meow meow.

It isn’t even alcohol – Charlie Brooker

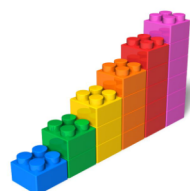
Written in Charlie Brooker’s inimitable style, this article is a response to the media furore which erupted in 2010 around deaths supposedly caused by the –then legal - drug Mephedrone (aka meow meow). In this chunk, Brooker turns his satirical eye to the newspapers’ and their often spurious claims regarding such topics.

*The extract could lead questions about **word choice, extended metaphor, anti-climax, humour, tone or contrast**, amongst others.*

10) Beach boys and girls tackle brutal realities – Russell Brand

From 2006-2009, comedian – and fervent football enthusiast - Russell Brand write a football column for the Guardian. His columns were typically humorous, witty and irreverent. This chunk is taken from an article in March 2009 when a personal beach kick-about led Brand to re-evaluate just how hard footballers work.

*There are many questions which could be asked about the **tone** of this piece; in particular its **humour**. The humour is created by a number of techniques including **word-choice, imagery and sentence structure**.*



Building Your Own Questions

Understanding Question Types

Own Words

*Explain in your own words what the writer means by...
Explain in your own words why / how / where / when...*

Quote

*Quote the expression which indicates/shows that...
Quote the word which conveys the writer's opinion/attitude...*

Context

How does the context help you work out the meaning of the word ...

Link

How does this sentence act as a link in the writer's argument?

Summarise

*Summarise in your own words the writer's point(s) about...
Summarise the two/three/four... ways in which ...
Summarise the writer's argument in these lines...*



Analysis Question Types

Word Choice

How does the writer's word choice convey/emphasise/illustrate/show/indicate...

Imagery

How does the writer's use of imagery convey/emphasise/illustrate/show/indicate...

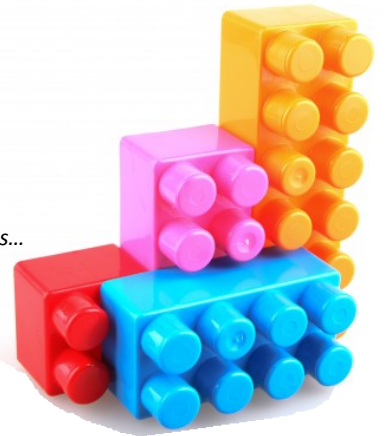
Sentence Structure

Show how the sentence structure of lines ... conveys/emphasises/illustrates/shows/indicates...

Tone

Identify the tone created in lines...

How does the writer's use of language in lines ... create a tone of ...



Evaluation Question Types

How effective do you find the opening lines in engaging the reader's interest?

How effective do you find the closing lines as a conclusion to the passage?

How appropriate do you find the image/anecdote/illustration in line ... in conveying the writer's point?



1) The Brand Expands

by Naomi Klein

Until the early Seventies logos on clothes were generally hidden from view, discreetly placed on the inside of the collar. Small designed emblems did appear on the outside of shirts in the first half of the century, but such sporty attire was pretty much restricted to the golf courses and tennis courts of the rich. In the late-
5 seventies, Ralph Lauren's Polo horseman and Izod Lacoste's alligator escaped from the golf course and scurried into the streets, dragging the logo decisively onto the outside of the shirt. These logos served the same social function as keeping the clothing's price tag on: everyone knew precisely what premium the wearer was willing to pay for style. Gradually, the logo was transformed from an ostentatious
10 affectation to an active fashion accessory. Most significantly, the logo itself was growing in size, ballooning from a three-quarter-inch emblem into a chest-sized marquee. This process of logo inflation is still progressing and this scaling-up of the logo's role has been so dramatic that it has become a change in substance. Over the past decade and a half, logos have grown so dominant that they have essentially
15 transformed the clothing on which they appear into empty carriers for the brands they represent. The alligator has risen up and swallowed the shirt.

2) Celebrity Role Models

by Julie Deaner

Celebrities are constantly in the spotlight, filling the pages of newspapers, tabloids, magazines, gossip websites and appearing on TV shows. The media are fascinated by problems in the private lives of celebrities, and compete to report on their endless partying, arrests, drug abuse, bad career choices, drunk driving, divorces, bad
5 parenting decision, personal mistakes, struggles, downward spirals...

Celebrities who project positive, healthy messages seem to be given less coverage, because drugs, break-ups, and train wrecks are considered more entertaining. And it seems that more and more stars who once appeared to be wholesome, such as Jessica Simpson, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera have now shed that image.

10 With unwholesome celebs constantly within kids' view and at their fingertips, parents may worry about their teenagers choosing these public personae as role models. Some kids and teens may find this sort of lifestyle appealing and may be intrigued by the lights, cameras, glamour and glitz.

15 But the last thing parents want is for their tween or teen to emulate Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan's wild lifestyle. Parents may also worry that the wafer-thin frames of celebrities such as Nicole Ritchie, Hillary Duff and Mary-Kate Olson send unhealthy messages about body size – a size that is virtually unattainable for most girls. Parents who talk to their teens and establish a foundation for positive role models can help them to steer clear of this pop culture frenzy.

3) 'What We Eat' from Fast Food Nation

by Eric Schlosser

Over the last three decades, fast food has infiltrated every nook and cranny of American society. An industry that began with a handful of modest hot dog and hamburger stands in southern California has spread to every corner of the nation, selling a broad range of foods wherever paying customers may be found. Fast food is now served at restaurants and drive-throughs, at stadiums, airports, zoos, high schools, elementary schools, and universities, on cruise ships, trains and airplanes, at K-Marts, Wal-Marts, gas-stations, and even at hospital cafeterias. In 1970, Americans spent about \$6 billion on fast food; in 2001, they spent more than \$110 billion. Americans now spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars. They spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music – combined.

Pull open the glass door, feel the rush of cool air, walk in, get on line, study the backlit color photographs above the counter, place your order, hand over a few dollars, watch teenagers in uniforms pushing various buttons, and moments later take hold of a plastic tray full of food wrapped in colored paper and cardboard. The whole experience of buying fast food has become so routine, so thoroughly unexceptional and mundane, that it is now taken for granted, like brushing your teeth or stopping for a red light. It has become a social custom as American as a small, rectangular, hand-held, frozen, and reheated apple pie.

4) Laughter: Is it the best medicine?

by A.C. Grayling

There are two things everyone knows about laughter: that only humans do it, and that it is medicinal, even if it is not quite the best medicine for everything – it does not, for example, cure influenza unaided. When other animals draw back their lips to show their teeth it means they are about to attack. Hyenas and the Pacific Laughing Gull naturally produce ha-ha noises, the latter in an especially hilarious way; but it is humans alone for whom bared teeth and convulsive gasps express pleasure.

Of course there can be a dark side to laughter. There is an ocean of difference between laughing-at and laughing-with. There can be cruel and mocking laughter, humiliating, contemptuous and nasty laughter. A laugh can cut as sharply as a whip, destroy confidence, wound and disable. Just think of the harm done to a laughed-at child.

Laughter is also a cathartic activity; it emotionally cleanses, and keeps us from going insane in the face of the world's absurdities. Laughter cuts through most tangles, it punctures pomposity, and often constitutes a more effective counter to one's opponents than all the massed tropes of logic. The comedian-pianist Victryor Borge once said that laughter is the shortest distance between two people; when people are laughing together they are not fighting each other, for it is hard to dislike anyone with whom one shares a joke. It is even said that no woman can love a man who does not make her laugh.

A sense of humour is a mark of intelligence. There is a big difference between telling jokes and being witty, the latter constituting the true expression of intelligence, though seeing the point of a joke requires grey matter too. One can even be witty about jokes: 'An Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman go into a bar. The barman says "Is this a joke?"'

But laughter is about far more than jokes. People can laugh for no other reason than they are happy. They can laugh at past sorrows and unlucky turns; they can laugh with delight at unexpectedly meeting a friend. That all these things prompt laughter is a happy fact about human beings, and a hopeful one, given how much cause they have to weep. The witticisms prompted by tough times and bleak circumstances are a testament to the realism and courage human beings often display. They are also a testament to the absurdity of the world, and the amazing folly its human occupants equally often display. As we say when presented with the caprices, lunacies and incredibilities of the human condition, you have to laugh.

5) Marilyn Monroe: The Auction

by Paul Theroux

There is a powerful element of fetishism in any auction of celebrity memorabilia, but this was fetishism in its highest form, and at the highest prices. In the brilliant spotlight, isolated on a pedestal, beautiful and absurd, Lot 2 glittered like a surreal holy grail – a pair of red stiletto heeled shoes. Rubious and very pretty, of course, yet
5 no more than women's shoes. Staring fixedly at these shoes were a thousand eager faces. Superficially elegant, the atmosphere in Christie's main sale room in New York was in fact much more visceral, even outlandish, and as dramatic as a cargo-cult veneration of sacred totems.

10 Everyone in the room wanted those shoes, for they had been invested with the spirit of Marilyn Monroe, whose life was being celebrated and also re-evaluated.

The auction, 'The Personal Property of Marilyn Monroe', a name more suggestive than sonorous, was one of the grandest examples of pure theatre I have ever witnessed. After months of publicity, and a European tour of the choicest items, Marilyn Monroe's effects were sold in New York at this dramatic event spread over
15 two days. The ballroom sized auction room was packed: a mass of seated bidders and spectators, bright-faced with eagerness and dressed as though for a party; a hundred employees standing, holding telephones; at the back, a bank of television cameras, sixty or more, trained on the people and the lots as they were exhibited.

20 The items were spiritedly bid upon, yet behind those 576 lots was a sorry story of one of the loveliest and unhappiest women who ever lived. The auction said everything about the mute pathos of material objects, the sadness of used goods; about Hollywood, and American life; about Marilyn.

25 Studying these seemingly trivial objects, I felt I had been given a serious glimpse of Hollywood stardom; of the world of a lost soul. I grew up in the 1950s, and so it was also the world of my impressionable teens, when just a glimpse of Marilyn's bosom in a skimpy dress made me asthmatic with lust. The very ordinariness of the things said a great deal about Marilyn's life. It is one thing to read that Marilyn left school at fifteen, and, as an aspiring actress (one of the earliest fitness enthusiasts), exercised with weights, and was unhappily married to Arthur Miller. To see her
30 childish misspelled handwriting, and the old-fashioned hand weights, and the 'Certificate of Conversion' to the Jewish faith and the sheet of paper monogrammed MMM, blank except for the words in her writing penciled on one line 'He does not love me', is quite another.

35 Now this coherent collection is entirely dispersed. Because it has been broken up, each separate part of it has become a fetish object, open to interpretation, part of a new mythology.

6) Bubbles of fire tear into the sky

Robert Fisk

It was like a door slamming deep beneath the surface of the earth; a pulsating, minute-long roar of sound that brought President George Bush's supposed crusade against "terrorism" to Baghdad last night. There was a thrashing of tracer on the horizon from the Baghdad air defences – the Second World War-era firepower of old Soviet anti-aircraft guns – and then a series of tremendous vibrations that had the ground shaking under our feet. Bubbles of fire tore into the sky around the Iraqi capital, dark red at the base, golden at the top.

Saddam Hussein, of course, has vowed to fight to the end but in Baghdad last night, there was a truly Valhalla quality about the violence. Within minutes, looking out across the Tigris river I could see pin-pricks of fire as bombs and cruise missiles exploded on to Iraq's military and communications centres and, no doubt, upon the innocent as well.

The first of the latter, a taxi driver, was blown to pieces in the first American raid on Baghdad yesterday morning. No one here doubted that the dead would include civilians. Tony Blair said just that in the Commons debate this week but I wondered, listening to this storm of fire across Baghdad last night, if he has any conception of what it looks like, what it feels like, or of the fear of those innocent Iraqis who are, as I write this, cowering in their homes and basements.

That this is the start of something that will change the face of the Middle East is in little doubt; that it will be successful in the long term is quite another matter.

The sheer violence of it, the howl of air raid sirens and the air-cutting fall of the missiles carried its own political message; not just to President Saddam but to the rest of the world. We are the super-power, those explosions said last night. This is how we do business. This is how we take our revenge for September 11th.

Not even George Bush made any pretence in the last days of peace to link Iraq with those international crimes against humanity in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. But some of the fire that you could see bubbling up through the darkness around Baghdad last night did remind me of other flames, those which consumed the World Trade Centre. In a strange way, the Americans were – without the permission of the United Nations, with most of the world against them – acting out their rage with an eerily fiery consummation.

Iraq cannot withstand this for long. President Saddam may claim, as he does, that his soldiers can defeat technology with courage. I doubt it. For what fell upon Iraq last night – and I witnessed just an infinitely small part of this festival of violence – was as militarily awesome as it was politically terrifying. The crowds outside my hotel stood and stared into the sky at the flashing anti-aircraft bursts, awed by their power.

7) The Pain of Plain

When I see drably dressed women wearing cardigans like ironed porridge, or wrinkled, beige, calf-length linen skirts, I wonder what was going through their minds when they picked their clothes off the rail in a shop and tried them on. Did they really think: "This is lovely. I'll take it"?

5 Despite the cutting-edge eccentricity of British street style, despite the British designers Alexander McQueen and John Galliano running notable Parisian fashion houses, despite, back at home, having Vivienne Westwood and the quieter pleasures of Nicole Farhi and Betty Jackson to choose from, many British women—unlike their French and Italian counterparts—dress like frumps. Of course, British men dress
10 even more badly, but being men, they are not on the receiving end of endless finger-wagging from the fashion pages. The word frump is always applied to women; there does not seem to be a male equivalent.

Is it that these women do not care what they wear or what they look like? It seems unlikely—for if they did, their choice of clothes would be more truly random: they
15 would buy the first thing they saw when they walked into the shop, or wear what they already owned until it fell to pieces. Yet I often see women trying on outfits that make them look ten years older, that drown their shapes, in shades that draw all colour from their now-lifeless skin. They gaze intently at their reflection. They ask a friend or husband for their opinion. Does it suit me, they ask? Do you think it's too
20 short? Do they have it in another colour? Should I get the next size up? On occasion I have even been bold enough to intervene, and begged them not to buy something so unflattering. Sometimes this works, and they put the shapeless beige sack back.

What business is it of mine what people wear? The answer is, it's everyone's business. Other people's clothes are part of the background music of our lives. As we
25 walk about we can hardly avoid the sight of others; and just as it is a pleasure to gaze upon a good-looking man or woman (however unfair that may be to the rest of us), so it is a delight to see a really stylish man or woman. You don't have to be young, thin or rich to be stylish; merely to care about what you look like, to take an interest, to regard dress as part of aesthetics, like architecture and landscape. And of course,
30 dowdy dressers have the same right to be provided for by the retail trade as fashion victims who crave leather leggings, and everyone else in between.

However, I suspect that many women's apparent desire to dress invisibly conceals a rats' nest of insecurities. Wanting people not to look at you can be caused by anxiety about your size; or your shape; or your age. It might even be caused by uncertainty
35 about your actual identity. If you don't know who you are—or don't like what you are—how can you accurately express or define yourself through clothes? So wince, if you must, as a badly dressed woman passes by; but remember that the prompts for her choices were, probably, not entirely sartorial.

8) A man's guide to a woman's wardrobe

by Luke Leitch

In September 2009 I was working on the features desk of the Times in London when I was told that I was needed to cover for a member of the fashion team who had gone on maternity leave. Under-dressed and overwhelmed, I set off to report on a round of womenswear shows. From New York to Paris via London and Milan, I sat shabbily hunched among the straight-backed, soignée ranks of the world's fashion professionals, staring dumbly at the catwalks like some novelty savage on his first day in court.

I have now spent two years embedded deep in female territory: in fashion, with a capital F. And I have started to get the hang of it. What has become clear is that fashion is to many women what sport is to many men: a pastime, a passion, a shared language, a form of self-definition, and a temporary escape from the opposite sex, all rolled into one deeply satisfying whole.

Most men, when they think of women's fashion at all, tend to see it only in terms of how it makes them feel—whether it arouses, confuses, or repels them—rather than considering what it makes a woman feel. Let's not overstate this: cracking the code of fashion won't provide men with an Enigma machine with which to read every baffling unknown in a female soul. Yet a close and at least partially informed snoop through the contents of a woman's wardrobe can at least explain why they wear the things they do. And that's got to be better than nothing.

Take the wardrobe. How much space does she devote to it? The answer is often: "not nearly enough". The walk-in wardrobe—effectively a separate bedroom for clothes, bags and shoes—has been the ultimate clothing-consumers' fetish since the mid-1990s. Anna Dello Russo, the flamboyant, self-styled "Lady Gaga of fashion" and fashion director-at-large of Vogue Japan, has gone one step further. She has two apartments in Milan: one for her, and one for her clothes.

Size is not the only issue. Recently I toured the cavernous walk-in wardrobe of Tamara Mellon, the co-founder of Jimmy Choo shoes, and was confronted by a systemised kaleidoscope in which everything inside was grouped by shade. It was like walking into a paint-colour chart. Other women I have consulted speak of ordering their dresses according to season, designer, length, material—or various combinations of all these. The more elaborate the personal Dewey system, the more central fashion seems to be to its mistress's identity. The point of a well-marshalled wardrobe is to allow its owner total mastery over her fashion arsenal. And only when everything is thus at her fingertips is she best placed to choose what to wear. Humdrum considerations such as weather and practicality play a passing part, but ultimately this is a decision dictated by three factors: the individual, the occasion and the season's trends.

Trends are the lingua franca of fashion. To understand them—and to articulate them by wearing them—emits a signal of membership. Women notice other women wearing pink jeans, an Issa drape-front dress or an Erdem lace, and recognise this as very now. Or at least they did in April. Maintenance of fashion membership demands constant vigilance, for what is very now can very suddenly become very then.

9) The most dangerous drug isn't meow meow. It isn't even alcohol...

by Charlie Brooker

I'm a lightweight; always have been. I didn't get properly drunk until I was 25, on a night out which culminated in a spectacular public vomiting in a Chinese restaurant. Ever wondered what the clatter of 60 pairs of chopsticks being simultaneously dropped in disgust might sound like? Don't ask me. I can't remember. I was too busy
5 bitterly coughing what remained of my guts all over the carpet.

These days I'm sickeningly lily-livered, by choice rather than necessity. I don't smoke, I drink only occasionally, and I'd sooner saw my own feet off than touch anything harder than a double espresso. I don't want to get out of my head: that's where I live. In summary: if I've learned anything, it's that I don't much care for
10 mood-altering substances. But I'm not afraid of them either. With one exception.

It's perhaps the biggest threat to the nation's mental wellbeing, yet it's freely available on every street – for pennies. The dealers claim it expands the mind and bolsters the intellect: users experience an initial rush of emotion (often euphoria or rage), followed by what they believe is a state of enhanced awareness. Tragically this
15 "awareness" is a delusion. As they grow increasingly detached from reality, heavy users often exhibit impaired decision-making abilities, becoming paranoid, agitated and quick to anger. In extreme cases they've even been known to form mobs and attack people. Technically it's called "a newspaper", although it's better known by one of its many "street names", such as "The Currant Bun" or "The Mail" or "The
20 Grauniad".

In its purest form, a newspaper consists of facts which, in controlled circumstances, can actively improve knowledge. Unfortunately, facts are expensive, so to save costs and drive up sales, unscrupulous dealers often "cut" the basic contents with cheaper material, such as wild opinion, bulls**t, empty hysteria,
25 reheated press releases, advertorial padding and photographs of Lady Gaga with her bum hanging out. The hapless user has little or no concept of the toxicity of the end product: they digest the contents in good faith, only to pay the price later when they find themselves raging incoherently in pubs, or – increasingly – on internet messageboards.

Tragically, widespread newspaper abuse has become so endemic, it has crippled the country's ability to conduct a sensible debate about the "war on drugs". The current screaming festival over "meow meow" or "M-Cat" or whatever else the actual users aren't calling it, is a textbook example. I have no idea how dangerous it is, but there seems to be a glaring lack of correlation between the threat it
30 reportedly poses and the huge number of schoolkids reportedly taking it. Something doesn't add up. But in lieu of explanation, we're treated to an hysterical, obfuscating advertising campaign for a substance that will presumably – thanks to the furore – soon only be available via illegal, unregulated, more dangerous, means.

Personally speaking, the worst substances I've ever encountered are nicotine
40 (a senselessly addictive poison) and alcohol (which spins the inner wheel of judgment into an unreadable blur). Apart from the odd fond memory, the only good thing either really have going for them is their legality. If either had been outlawed I'd probably have drunk myself blind on cheap illegal moonshine or knifed you and your family in the eye to fund my cigarette habit.

10) Beach boys and girls tackle brutal realities

by Russell Brand

England play Slovakia today and the questions that have arisen have the same reflective familiarity of Robert De Niro snarling "Are you talking to me?" into the mirror during the film *Taxi Driver*. Today as a nation we scream into the looking glass, "Should David Beckham play?" "Ought Stevie Gerrard be used in the hole?" "Is it time to blood in a new goalkeeper?" and "Is Nat Lofthouse, as his name suggests, a great big lurching liability?" Nat's modern-day equivalent, moody Minotaur Wayne Rooney too has question marks hovering above his head – as if trying to complete a tricky crossword in that stupid town that Roger Rabbit lived in. Wayne Rooney has a temper; he is an adrenalised dragon of a man scorching goalward with fascistic focus. What sweet horror it must be to feel the locomotive rumble of his approach as a sweet and tender centre-back, staring into the dread-in-red as, nostrils flared, he approaches like thunder and strikes like lightning.

I played football on the beach yesterday with my best friend and two Australian girls, pebbles for goalposts and the ocean as referee. We divided the teams into one male, one female formations and I made my mate go with the smaller, more fragile girl, secretly knowing that the athletic girl on my team would be our linchpin, captain, engine room, flair player, workhorse, safe pair of hands, wing-wizard, boy-genius, journeyman and coach.

I am not a good footballer. Minutes into the match, though, in spite of its informal nature I was hurling myself at the opposition, going over the ball, leaving arms trailing, whispering threats and, unforgivably, gobbing in the tunnel. The game, like booze, brings your demons to the fore and allows them to dictate. I was surprised how much I cared about the result, disputing goals (easy with no crossbar and ground-level posts), demanding penalties and, after one wasted free-kick, actually crying. At one point I did get sand kicked in my face – not by a bully in an unjustified attack but by a five-foot brunette irritated by my off-the-ball bikini tugging.

People like me who don't play much sport but write about it seldom realise how bloody difficult it is. Only in its eviscerating midst can you appreciate the prowess of those who make it look easy. I briefly took up boxing and found it so knackered and frightening that I instantly vowed obsequiously to polish the boots of any professional that I ever chance upon. With my bottom. Like a dog doing a naughty carpet drag. Even with all the wheezing and ill feeling it was still a great game of beach football and that's the main thing. The result is not important, right? It's the taking part. It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game. Like Kipling said of victory and defeat; treat those two impostors just the same.

Forty minutes of the beautiful game was not only enough to leave me with serious injuries (back and sole of foot), it also reminded me what a Sisyphean arse-ache it must be to compete at the top level. We shouldn't lament Gerrard's inconsistent international form – we should commend him for getting through matches without crying. Instead of worrying about where our next keeper's coming from we should take David James, Robert Green and Ben Foster on a trip to Disneyland and tell 'em they're "simply the best".

So regardless of how the Three Lions fare tonight, let's salute them. I'm sure they'll try their hardest and however badly things go it's difficult to envisage that any of them will go so low as to demand a penalty on the basis that they were bitten by a crab, and for that we ought to be truly proud.