GCSE AQA English Language 8700
Summary of changes for the 2026 exam series

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In January 2025, AQA announced some changes to Paper 1 and Paper 2 for GCSE English Language for first examination in 2026. Here is a summary of the changes.

Paper 1

Question number	2025 exam series	2026 exam series
Question 1	Students will be asked to read the first part of an extract, and write down four things about a specific item, setting or character.	Students will be given four multiple-choice questions (each with three options). The answers will still be drawn from the first part of the extract.
Question 2	No changes	No changes
Question 3	Students will be asked how the extract has been structured to 'interest you as a reader'.	Students will be asked how the extract has been structured for a particular effect, e.g. 'to create tension'. Students will be given additional guidance in the bullet points, by reminding them to consider features such as mood, tone and perspective.
Question 4	The question will give a statement, e.g. 'A student, having read this extract, said, "I can't believe Anita didn't react to the warning signs because the situation sounds really dangerous."'	Reference to 'a student' will be removed from the statement. The statement will be simplified, e.g. 'In this part of the source, Anita could be seen as brave or reckless'. Students will be asked to 'comment on' methods, rather than 'evaluate' them.
Question 5	Students will be given a choice between writing a description or writing a narrative.	In the descriptive question, students will be reminded to 'use their imagination' and to describe beyond what is in the image prompt. In the narrative question, students will only be expected to write the opening of a story, rather than a full story. There will be more guidance in the mark scheme to help teachers/markers.

Paper 2

Question number	2025 exam series	2026 exam series
Question 1	No changes	No changes
Question 2	Students will be asked to 'write a summary of what you understand' about either similarities or differences between a shared aspect of two extracts.	The question has been made clearer, asking what can be inferred about either similarities or differences between a shared aspect of two extracts.
Question 3	No changes	No changes
Question 4	In the bullet points, students will be asked to 'compare' methods.	In the bullet points, students will be asked to 'comment on' methods.
Question 5	No changes to the question.	There will be more guidance in the mark scheme to help teachers/markers.