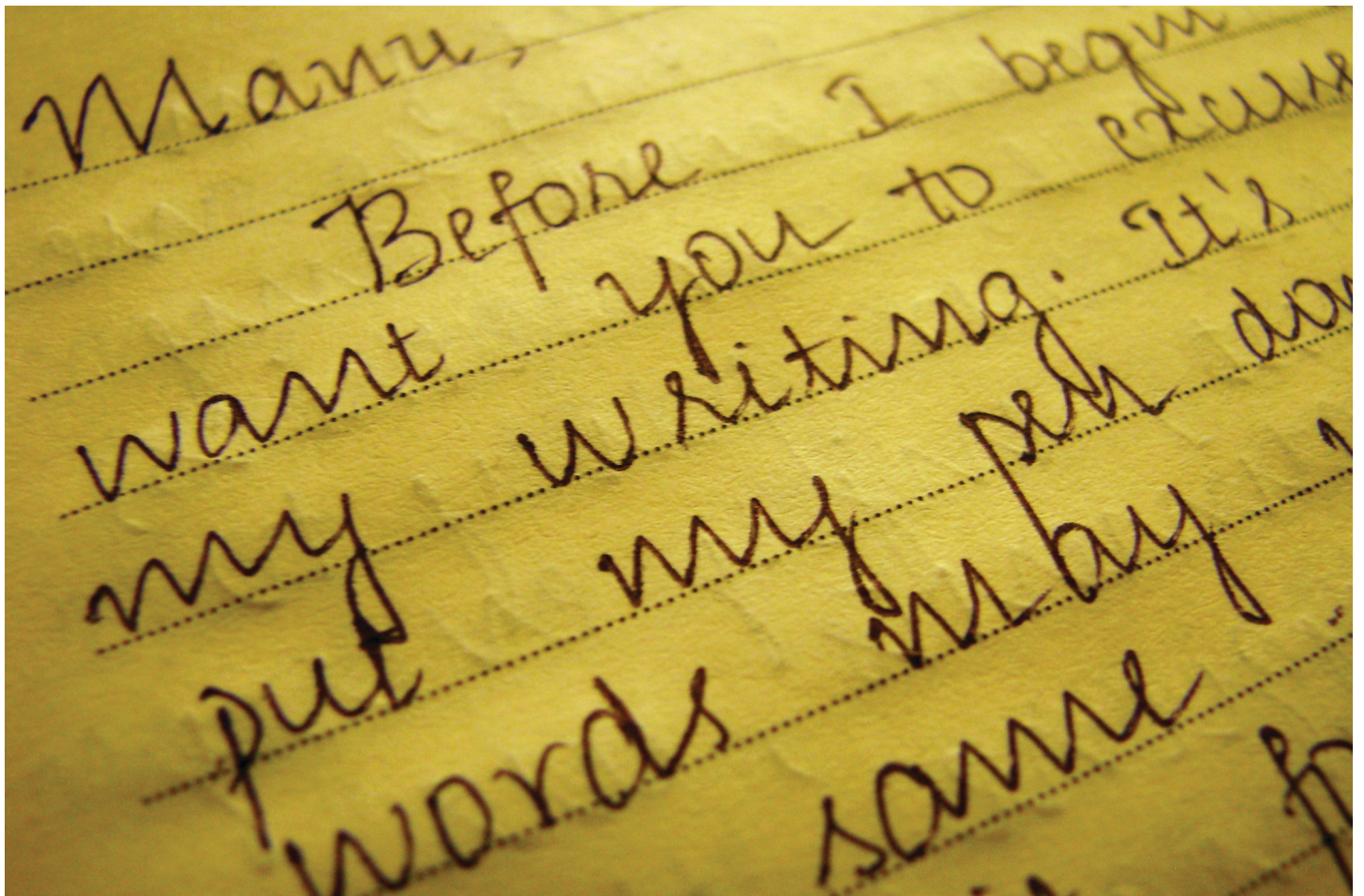


Form and uses of language



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Introduction

In this course we will consider how language can be used in different ways for different purposes. To do this we will use the theme of memorial and commemoration. After briefly discussing the life of the poet Siegfried Sassoon we will examine both his poetry and prose. Through this we will see how he conveys meaning in different ways for different audiences using different forms. Following this we will discuss more generally how different meanings can be conveyed using prose and poetic language.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 1 study in [Arts and Humanities](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand how language can be used for different purposes
- understand the importance of form and word choice when addressing different audiences.

1 Siegfried Sassoon: a case study

1.1 Introduction

Apart from writing poetry, Sassoon kept a diary during his war years, and after the war he wrote a semi-autobiographical novel. These writings are an example of how a writer can use language for different purposes and different audiences, while expressing the same theme – in this case, opposition to war. Before we look more closely at Sassoon's work, we need a few more details about his life.

1.2 The early years

He was born in 1886 into a wealthy family. After being educated at home until he was 13, he was sent to a prominent public school, Marlborough. Although he had begun to write poetry at an early age, his expectations – like those of many young men of his generation – were that his privileged life would continue without the need for him to do much more than indulge his hobbies of golf, hunting and socialising. He continued to develop a poetic style and by 1914 had published some poetry and prose. Following his horse-riding interests, he enlisted in 1915 in the Yeomanry, and was sent to the front in France in early 1916. In May 1916 he was engaged in a battle where he showed great bravery, and was awarded the Military Cross. Later he was wounded, and was sent home on sick leave.

1.3 The realities of war – a protest

While he was on leave, his conviction grew that those at home had little idea of the realities of war, and that the war was being deliberately prolonged by the politicians and generals who had the power to end it. He wrote a powerful statement to this effect, and sent it to his commanding officer. He also hoped that his protest would be read in the House of Commons, though fully recognizing that the punishment for this would be the enormous disgrace of a court martial and even prison.

But his protest failed. His commanding officer turned a blind eye to it, and his friends with influence in high places made sure that it was not made public at that time. Sassoon himself was sent to Craiglockhart, the medical hospital for shell-shocked officers. He actively sought to be returned to the front, and was considered sufficiently recovered to do so in 1918. His medical case sheet (Figure 1) is signed by Dr W.H.R. Rivers, who appears as a character in Pat Barker's fictional trilogy about the First World War.

