Worksheet 1: Morphology and Change

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: The Irregular Verb as a Linguistic Object

From a morphological standpoint, the English "irregular" verb is better described as a **strong verb** (Germanic) rather than an anomaly. The -ed default (the "weak" system) is the innovation; the vowel-change system (ablaut) is the original. Three processes are currently reshaping the irregular set:

Process	Description	Examples
Regularisation	A previously irregular verb acquires the -ed form, which then competes with or replaces the strong form	*thrived* overtaking *throve*; *sneaked* losing ground to *snuck* (paradoxically forming a new irregular)
Analogical levelling	Distinct past simple and past participle forms merge under one form (usually the past simple)	*shrank / shrunk → shrunk/shrunk*; *sang / sung → sung/sung* in some AmE dialects
New irregulars	A regular verb develops an informal irregular form by analogy with an existing pattern	*snuck* from *sneak* (by analogy with *stick/stuck*); *dove* from *dive* (by analogy with *drive/drove*)

Part A – Theoretical Analysis

> **Each item presents a linguistic puzzle. Provide a rigorous analysis.**

1. Corpus data shows that *snuck* is now more frequent than *sneaked* in American English and is gaining in British English. Using the concept of analogical change, explain how *snuck* arose and why it is spreading despite being historically a non-standard form.

2. Some speakers say "I have *shrunk* the shirt" (where *shrunk* is both past simple and past participle). Others insist on *shrank / shrunk*. What process is at work in the first group, and what does this tell us about the stability of the three-form system?

3. The verb *prove* has two past participles: *proved* (regular) and *proven* (irregular, from an older form). Explain why *proven* survives as an adjective (*a proven method*) while *proved* is more common as a verb participle (*she has proved her point*).

Part B – Prescriptivism and Description

> **Evaluate each prescriptive claim. Use linguistic evidence to accept, partially accept, or reject it.**

#	Prescriptive claim	Your evaluation
1	"'Snuck' is not a real word."	
2	"'They have sang the song' is always wrong."	
3	"'Gotten' is an Americanism and should be avoided in British English."	
4	"'The team was beaten' is correct; 'the team was beat' is not."	

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus Patterns and Collocational Precision

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: What Corpora Reveal

At C2, form knowledge is assumed. What distinguishes native-like use is **collocational precision** — knowing not just the form but which form appears in which lexical company. Corpus studies reveal that:

- Some participial adjectives are strongly preferred with specific nouns: *swollen* collocates with *river, ankle, eyes, pride* but not *costs* (where *escalating* is preferred).
- Some irregular past simples appear almost exclusively in certain constructions: *smote* and *slew* appear overwhelmingly in literary or biblical contexts, rarely in news corpora.
- Frequency asymmetries exist between forms: in academic corpora, *shown* vastly outnumbers *showed* as a past participle; in news corpora, *proved* and *proven* are roughly equal.

Part A – Collocational Discrimination

For each pair, state which collocation is more natural and explain why. Neither is ungrammatical — the issue is naturalness.

#	Pair	More natural & reason
1	a) a swollen budget b) an inflated budget	
2	a) a sunken feeling b) a sinking feeling	
3	a) a broken record b) a damaged record	
4	a) proven technology b) proved technology	
5	a) deep-seated resentment b) deep-sat resentment	

Part B – Register-Corpus Map

Place each verb form in the correct corpus category. Some may appear in more than one.

smote · thrived · wove · snuck · proved · slain · gotten · strove · leaped · cleft

Corpus type	Verb forms that appear here
Academic / scientific	
News / journalistic	
Literary / fiction	
Informal / spoken / social media	
Legal / formal documents	

Part C – Precision in Use

> **Rewrite each sentence to improve collocational precision. The verb form given is grammatically correct but collocates awkwardly.**

1. Her face had a swollen look after weeks of illness.

   _____

2. The argument was beaten in the second round of debate.

   _____

3. The river was sunken below its usual level.

   _____

4. He wore a broke expression as he left the courtroom.

   _____

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Style, Voice and Deliberate Variation

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Form as a Stylistic Choice

At C2, the use of a literary or archaic verb form is not an error — it is a **stylistic resource**. Writers deploy strong forms to achieve effects: gravity, irony, pastiche, or distancing from modern idiom. The ability to use such forms deliberately, and to recognise them in others' prose, is a hallmark of near-native literary competence.

Effect	Typical forms	Example
Gravity / biblical register	smote, slew, begat, spake, writ, clad, forsook, bade	"He smote his opponents with a single argument."
Archaic / historical pastiche	strode, rode, bore, clove, wrought, begot	"The king strode into the hall and smote the table."
Literary elevation	strove, wept, crept, leapt, swept, wrung	"She wept, not for herself, but for those who would come after."
Ironic archaism	Any strong form used in a modern context where it is unexpected	"He dove for his phone the moment it rang." (ironic elevation)

Part A – Identify the Effect

> **State the effect of the highlighted strong verb form and explain how it works in context.**

1. "The analyst **smote** the argument with three data points." *(business journalism)*

   _____

   _____

2. "She **wept** for hours. But her tears, like everything else, **dried**." *(literary fiction)*

   _____

   _____

3. "He **strove**, **suffered**, and in the end **prevailed**." *(political eulogy)*

   _____

   _____

4. "She **dove** into the data." *(tech blog)*

   _____

   _____

Part B – Deliberate Choice

> **Rewrite each sentence twice: (a) with a modern/neutral form; (b) with an archaic/literary form. Then note what the choice changes about tone and implied speaker.**

1. "He went towards the city in great haste."
   (a) Neutral:

   (b) Literary:

   Effect:

2. "The old regime was destroyed."
   (a) Neutral:

   (b) Literary:

   Effect:

3. "She cried bitterly."
   (a) Neutral:

   (b) Literary:

   Effect:

Part C – Pastiche

Write three sentences in the style of a Victorian novel, then rewrite them in the style of a modern news report. The factual content must remain the same. Use deliberate strong/literary forms in the first version and neutral forms in the second.

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis and Extended Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

Language change is, by definition, a process that is always already underway. The strong verbs that have survived into Modern English did so not because speakers chose to preserve them, but because they were used too frequently for analogical pressure to dislodge them. This is a salutary reminder that grammar is not a system designed by committee but one that arises from — and is continuously reshaped by — millions of individual acts of acquisition and use.

The verbs now undergoing regularisation — *strove/strived, wove/weaved, crept/creeped* — are, tellingly, the low-frequency members of their ablaut classes. They are not disappearing because they are harder; they are disappearing because they are encountered rarely enough for the default rule to override stored memory. The strong verbs that will outlast all of us are precisely the ones a five-year-old acquires first: *went, was, did, said, got, made*. These will be the last to fall.

Questions

1. The writer uses the phrase "always already underway". Identify the rhetorical or philosophical register this phrase invokes, and evaluate whether it is appropriate for this context.

2. The passage contains the phrase "a salutary reminder". Analyse the collocation: what does *salutary* mean precisely, and why is it more precise here than *useful* or *important*?

3. The writer argues that low-frequency verbs are regularising due to "default rule override". Evaluate this claim using one piece of counter-evidence and one piece of supporting evidence from your own knowledge.

4. Identify all irregular verb forms in the passage (including participial adjectives). For each, state whether the writer could have used a regular form and what effect the change would have.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the **opening two paragraphs** (**220–260 words**) of a scholarly essay on the following: "*The fate of the English irregular verb is a case study in the relationship between frequency, memory, and linguistic change.*"

Requirements: (1) at least one strong verb form chosen for its register effect; (2) one participial adjective in a fixed collocation; (3) a metalinguistic adverb used with precision; (4) at least one morphological term (*ablaut, analogy, regularisation, levelling, strong/weak*) used correctly; (5) two

epistemic hedges calibrated to the strength of each claim; (6) at least one conjunct that maps the argument's logic precisely.

Word count: _____ Features: _____ / 6

Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Irregular Verbs

Worksheet 1 – Part A

#	Analysis
1	***Snuck*** **arose by analogy with the *stick/stuck, strike/struck* pattern — a productive irregular pattern that attracted *sneak* because of phonological similarity (initial /sn-/). It is spreading because it fills a phonological niche and is now so widely attested that it has achieved community acceptance. Its spread is a case of new-irregular formation, not regularisation — the reverse of the usual direction.**
2	**Analogical levelling: speakers who use *shrunk* as past simple are assimilating the past simple to the past participle form (levelling). The three-form system (shrink/shrank/shrunk) is unstable where the participle is more frequent in everyday speech than the past simple — exposure to *shrunk* overrides storage of *shrank*.**
3	***Proven*** **survives as a participial adjective because it has become lexicalised — it is stored as an adjective (*a proven method*) independently of the verb paradigm. Lexicalised adjectives are immune to regularisation pressure because they are not retrieved as verb forms at all. *Proved* as a participle remains because it is retrieved as part of the verb paradigm, where the regular -ed ending is the default.**

Worksheet 1 – Part B

#	Evaluation
1	**Reject — linguistically indefensible. *Snuck* has a documented history of over 150 years, is formed by an English analogical pattern, and is now majority-preferred in AmE. The claim confuses 'non-standard' with 'not real'.**
2	**Partially accept. *Sung* as a past simple (*they sang → they sung*) is non-standard in formal and written English. However, in some AmE vernacular dialects it is a stable, rule-governed form. The claim is accurate for standard written English but overstates universality.**
3	**Reject in its absolute form. *Gotten* is in fact the older form — it is British English that lost it after the 17th century, while AmE preserved it. It is therefore an archaism, not an Americanism, and appears in some formal BrE contexts (*ill-gotten, forgotten, begotten*). Avoidance in BrE is a convention, not a rule.**
4	**Accept for formal written English. However, *beat* as a past participle (*they were beat*) is attested in informal speech and some dialects and represents analogical levelling. In formal standard English, *beaten* is required in the passive and in perfect constructions.**

Worksheet 2 – Part A

#	More natural & reason
1	***inflated budget*** **— 'swollen' collocates with physical or bodily excess; 'inflated' is the established metaphor for budgets/egos/prices in financial and evaluative contexts.**

2	***sinking feeling* — this is a fixed idiom meaning growing dread; 'sunken feeling' does not exist as an idiom and sounds physical.**
3	***broken record* — this is a fixed idiom ('like a broken record' = repeating oneself); 'damaged record' is literal but loses the idiomatic reading entirely.**
4	***proven technology* — the attributive adjective form; 'proved technology' is unusual because 'proved' is the verb participle, not the lexicalised adjective.**
5	***deep-seated resentment* — this is a fixed phrase; 'deep-sat' does not exist. 'Deep-seated' is lexicalised and its participial origin is no longer productive.**

Worksheet 2 – Part B (Register-Corpus Map)

Corpus	Forms
Academic / scientific	**proved, thrived, wove (if discussing textiles)**
News / journalistic	**thrived, proved, strove (elevated style), leaped**
Literary / fiction	**smote, slain, strove, wove, cleft, crept**
Informal / spoken / social media	**snuck, gotten, leaped (AmE)**
Legal / formal documents	**proved (as past participle), slain (legal contexts: slain victim)**

Worksheet 2 – Part C

1 Her face had a **gaunt / drawn** look after weeks of illness. (*swollen* implies puffiness, the opposite of illness-related hollowness.) **2** The argument was **demolished / refuted / defeated** in the second round. (*beaten* is idiomatic for people or teams, less so for abstract arguments.) **3** The river was **below / lower than** its usual level. (*sunken* implies physically submerged, not just low.) **4** He wore a **broken / stricken** expression. (*broke* is the past simple, not an adjective; the participial adjective is *broken*.)

Worksheet 3 – Part A

#	Effect and analysis
1	**Ironic archaism. *Smote* in a business journalism context imports a biblical/epic register into a mundane domain. The effect is humorous elevation — treating a routine analytical act as a heroic deed. The clash between register and subject matter creates the irony.**
2	***Wept* is literary elevation; it carries gravity and duration that 'cried' does not. The contrast with *dried* (regular, neutral) is deliberate — it creates a syntactic and tonal falling-away, enacting the drying of tears through the shift in register.**
3	**Tricolon with escalating gravity. *Strove* is literary but not archaic; it elevates the register to match a eulogy. The three verbs form a narrative arc: effort → suffering → achievement. The strong form of *strive* signals that this is a formal, permanent record.**

4	**Tonal ambiguity. *Dove* is AmE informal but also has literary overtones (the bird). In a tech blog, it may be unconscious AmE usage; it may also be semi-deliberate elevation of a mundane act. Either way, it is a register signal — the writer is not using standard BrE *dived*.**

Worksheets 3 and 4: Extended Writing Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Register command	Strong/literary forms used with demonstrable intentionality; no mismatch	0–6
Collocational precision	Fixed-phrase participle is natural; no forced or invented collocations	0–5
Metalinguistic accuracy	Morphological terms used correctly and without overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Hedges match claim strength; no underhedging of contested claims	0–5
Argument structure	Conjuncts signal logical relations precisely; no vague connectives	0–5
Task and length	220–260 words; opens with a contestable claim and develops it	0–5

> *The benchmark for C2 is not error-free English but conscious control: the student who writes strove and can explain in a footnote why they chose it over strived has demonstrated mastery. Collocational naturalness — the ability to choose a verb form that a native speaker would not notice — is the final and most elusive target.*