

## The danger posed by Brexit during our greatest vulnerability

(776 words)

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### Questions (text analysis)

This worksheet is written in **British English** as the original article is.

### Pre-reading

1. What do you know about the British government's response to the coronavirus pandemic in the UK? Gather three to four points.
2. In approximately 100 words, define what a "no-deal Brexit" (or "hard Brexit") is.

### Questions

1. On 31 January 2020, the UK formally left the EU. How does this editorial view the behaviour of members of the Conservative Party around this time? Summarise this view in your own words.
2. Explain why the UK's situation has become so dramatic during the Brexit transition period.
3. What do the authors suggest is the solution to the current situation? List the points given.
4. How is this editorial structured? Subdivide the article into four or five parts, and summarise each section in one brief sentence.
5. Analyse the figurative language used to describe a looming Brexit in paragraphs 5, 6, and 9. Include a definition of the figures of speech called simile, metaphor, and personification.

**Abiturthema:**  
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## Sample answers

### Pre-reading

#### 1. Possible points

- The British government has been criticised for acting too late to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The government had made no sufficient preparations in the healthcare system after the WHO declared the virus to be a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020. As a result, there weren't enough ventilators, intensive care beds, or protective equipment for medical staff.
- Instead of introducing strict lockdown measures earlier like other countries, the government saw developing "herd immunity" as one possible early scenario. A complete lockdown was not imposed until late March 2020.
- There was no widespread testing of COVID-19 and tracing of infected people's contacts.
- Government leaders have been criticised for not communicating clearly (Johnson's TV message on 10 May regarding lockdown easing plans) or for seemingly breaking lockdown rules (Dominic Cummings, Chief Adviser to the Prime Minister).
- Government leaders (Prime Minister Johnson, Health Secretary Matt Hancock) caught the virus themselves.
- Mask-wearing was introduced later than in other countries. Since mid-May, people were advised to wear masks in enclosed public spaces. In England, mask-wearing has only been compulsory since 15 June (public transport) and 24 July (shops and supermarkets).

(For further information, please see: • [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/18/how-did-britain-get-its-response-to-coronavirus-so-wrong](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/18/how-did-britain-get-its-response-to-coronavirus-so-wrong) • [www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53397617](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53397617))

#### 2. Sample definition: no-deal Brexit

A no-deal Brexit means that the UK leaves the EU without an agreement. This would have far-reaching consequences for the economy and people's lives. The UK would no longer be a member of the EU single market and customs union, which means, for example, it would need to pay tariffs on trade with EU countries. EU laws and regulations would no longer apply to the UK (e.g., regarding food standards). There would be an external EU border ("hard border") between the UK (Northern Ireland) and Ireland with customs and security checks. British citizens would no longer be able to travel visa-free and work within the EU under the same conditions as EU citizens. **(113 words)**

### Questions

1. This editorial expresses a very critical view of the members of the Conservative Party and their behaviour in January 2020. Boris Johnson and his fellow hard Tory Brexiters are criticised for being too preoccupied with carrying out Brexit and therefore failed to realise the imminent danger of COVID-19, which snowballed in Britain soon after. The Prime Minister and his fellow Brexit campaigners are said to have paid more attention to their own political success than getting the British healthcare system ready for the pandemic. They deny these accusations because admitting to them would be a reason to resign, but they would rather focus on their success and stay in power. (paras. 1–3)
2. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic during the Brexit transition period has caused "unprecedented ... distress" (para. 5) to the British economy and the British people. Brexit, called the "second catastrophe" (para. 5), now dramatically worsens the situation, especially

because the British government insists on not extending the transition period (para. 6). The authors of this editorial are deeply worried because Brexit is going to damage the country anyway (para. 4), but not asking for more time during this unprecedented crisis is going to be a complete disaster for the country (paras. 10, 11). One main reason is that a no-deal Brexit seems more than likely to the authors in this situation. They list “uncomfortable facts” as key factors that will prevent a deal. There won’t be enough time or willingness to focus on the UK’s situation while the EU is dealing with the pandemic and the damage it has caused (paras. 7, 9). Furthermore, the British government is not flexible enough to make negotiations work and has no coherent plan (para. 8). All of these factors taken together has made the UK’s situation increasingly dramatic during the Brexit transition period.

3. According to the article, the only sensible solution for the UK would include the following points (para. 11):
- to apply for a one-year (or better two-year) extension of the transition period
  - to agree on paying additional budget contributions
  - to work with the EU on rebuilding the European economy.

#### 4. Possible structure

##### Part 1: Introduction (paras. 1–3)

The Tories’ Brexit obsession led to a weak government response to the spread of the coronavirus.

##### Part 2: Problem 1 (paras. 4, 5)

The first catastrophe, the COVID-19 pandemic, is going to be worsened by a second one, Brexit.

##### Part 3: Problem 2 (paras. 6–10)

By not trying to extend the transition period, the UK government is irresponsibly risking a hard Brexit with even more disastrous consequences.

##### Part 4: Conclusion (paras. 11–13)

A Brexit extension is absolutely necessary to avoid even greater disaster and human suffering.

##### Please note:

Alternative structures are possible – also with five parts, for example, paragraph 1 can stand alone (“The Tories’ Brexit obsession at the beginning of 2020”) with paragraphs 2 and 3 following (“The Brexit distraction and the weak government response to the coronavirus emergency”).

#### 5.

##### Sample definition: Simile, metaphor, and personification

- A **simile** is a figure of speech that expresses a direct comparison between two things. This figure of speech usually includes the words “like” or “as” (“You look like an angel!”).
- A **metaphor** is also a form of comparison, but it is indirect or implied. This figure of speech uses a word or phrase in a different context to describe something else. A metaphor cannot be taken literally (“Thank you! You are an angel!”).
- A **personification** gives human qualities to something that is not human (“The wind whispering through the trees ...”).

##### Figures of speech used to describe a looming Brexit in paragraphs 5, 6, and 9:

- **Simile** (para. 5): “ ... this second catastrophe ... is racing towards us like a runaway train loaded with explosives.”

- **Personification** and **metaphor** (para. 6): “Britain is getting set to jump off ...” (personification)  
“... a no-deal cliff ...” (metaphor)
- **Metaphor** (para. 9): “... a no-deal crash looms large ... ”

### Sample analysis

To describe a looming Brexit, this editorial uses powerful figurative language which centres around (fatal) catastrophes, collisions, bombs and complete self-destruction as well as the danger and fear that goes with that.

A **simile** of a racing train loaded with explosives (para. 5) is used to describe Brexit as an existential threat that will bring complete and sudden destruction to the country.

The **metaphor** “no-deal crash” (para. 9) ties in with this. It emphasises the view that sticking to the 31 December deadline will lead to a dangerous and frightening no-deal scenario that will bring catastrophic disruptions to the economy and vital security lifelines (paras. 5, 6, 9).

Leaving the EU during this health crisis would risk bringing greater distress to the economic and human well-being of a country that is already “at its moment of greatest vulnerability” (para. 6).

This is further expressed by characterising Brexit as a complete and wilful act of self-destruction at this point in time: A **personified** Britain is about to end its life by “getting set to jump off” a **metaphorical** “no-deal cliff” (para. 6). Altogether, the figurative language used here points to the critical need to extend the Brexit transition period.

**Tip for teachers!** For a more difficult version of this task, include paragraph 12. The figurative language used to describe Brexit in this paragraph mixes metaphor with personification.

- **Paragraph 12:** “It should be evident to even the most ideologically obsessed that taking back control cannot mean **kicking away** yet more human, economic, and social **props** as **the national edifice trembles** and people suffer and die.” (Para. 12)
- **Metaphor:** Britain is described as a building (“national edifice”) that is supported by “props”.
- **Personification:** This building is given human qualities (it “trembles”). The metaphor and personification taken together describe how unstable, vulnerable, and shaken the country is because of the coronavirus crisis. Personification is also used to describe what Brexit would mean to the UK in this situation: Leaving the EU now would be as if someone is destroying (“kicking away”) the last support the country has. Again, it would be an irresponsible and self-destructive act that would lead to complete collapse and cost more lives.