



# STUDY SKILLS: SURVIVAL GUIDE



Advice and tips from the  
LGS English Department

## **PREFACE**

What follows is ADVICE, and is aimed at helping you to deal with the various skills-based problems you face, particularly in English, but also in other subjects. There are no hard and fast rules, but what follows has worked for people in the past, and so may also work for you. How you use it is ultimately down to you.

**JMG**

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# SECTION 1: SPEAKING AND LISTENING

## Introduction

Speaking and listening are about expressing yourself clearly and showing you can respond to other people's ideas  
This can only come with practice

In IGCSE English Language oral work counts for 20% of your final grade

## Key Skills

- Learn to listen to people – what they say and what they don't say (the only way to respond)
- Learn to listen in a critical way and think carefully about how you should respond
- Express yourself clearly – focus on your most important points
- Talk clearly and plainly (fancy words are useless if no-one understands them – you must be aware of your audience)
- Practice – sound confident

## Basic Speaking Skills

- Mature and assured use of standard English
- Perceptive listening to a range of complex speech
- Understanding of challenging ideas
- Originality and flair in adapting speaking to task and audience

## Remember CAP

- Courtesy – be courteous at all times, when speaking or, more importantly, when listening  
Audience – think about who you are talking to: keep it interesting, and keep them focused; avoid reading from notes
- Purpose – get your information across in an appropriate and clear way

## Using Clear English

Standard English is English that avoids :

- Local dialect
- Pronunciations/accents that make clear understanding difficult
- Slang (“mardy”), clichés (“sick as a parrot”), and grammatical mistakes (“I were sitting”)

## Types of Activity

- Individual – Presentation, giving a talk, role play
- Paired – discussion, interview, role play
- Small group – discussion, debate, question and answer session, role play



# **GIVING A TALK**

## **Introduction**

The reality you face is that at some point in your life ( job/university interview etc.) you will have to stand in front of others and speak. This is a vital skill to develop and use – and it has a real impact upon your life when you leave school. What follows is advice on dealing with such tasks.

## **Choosing a Topic**

- If you are given the choice choose a topic that you know plenty about
- Because you know about it, it will be much easier to explain
- This should make you more confident and enthusiastic
- Sometimes choosing a topic that has a definite point of view or argument is easier to present, and gives a definite structure to your talk

## **Planning a Talk**

- Don't write out a speech – it will lack spontaneity, you may forget bits, and worst of all you might be tempted to just read it out. Write section headings instead, and use flash cards if necessary during the talk
- Think about how your talk progresses logically – a list is tedious to listen to; a logical, progressive argument will engage your audience more effectively

## **Focusing the Audience**

- Give the audience a focus to their attention – a power point demonstration for instance (though beware of ‘death by power point!’)
- Avoid handouts – they can be too distracting – or time the point at which you use them
- Maintain eye contact – there is no better way of checking that people are listening to you. Nothing shows a lack of confidence more than the failure to engage the audience in eye contact

## **Presenting yourself**

- Confidence – in your materials, in knowing your stuff
- Body language – positive and open
- Humour can work, but it also can fall flat – be wary, and judge your audience carefully
- Fluency is paramount – try to avoid stumbling and hesitations; mistakes happen but don’t learning how to deal with them is key

## **The real thing**

- Practice beforehand to iron out any problems and to work on fluency
- Make sure any demonstration materials are organised and rehearsed to avoid fumbles – any thing technical should be checked beforehand to make sure it works
- Practice timings – don’t drag it out
- Don’t panic, try relaxation techniques



## SECTION 2: WRITING SKILLS

### FORMAL LETTERS—WORD-PROCESSED

This is the correct format for a WORD-PROCESSED formal letter (the sort you would use for applications, official communications, letters to the editors of newspapers etc)

	22 Hill Lane Belmont London NW1 4PR
	8 September 2011
The Manager City Bank High Street London NW2 5LM	
Dear Sir/Madam	
Re: Current Account number 24968476	
I should like to apply for an increase to my overdraft	
Yours faithfully	
<i>E. Barnes</i>	
E BARNES	

- Look at the layout above. Always remember to justify your address and the date to the right hand margin. Put the full name and address of the person you are writing to - the same as would go on the envelope - and if you do not know their name make sure that it goes to the right person via their official title (The Headmaster, The Editor, The Manager etc.).

- If you use Dear Sir/Madam, end Yours faithfully.
- A letter to an editor of a newspaper always begins Sir not Dear Sir
- If you know the name of the person you are writing to use Dear Mr Jones, Dear Mrs Brown, etc. and end the letter Yours sincerely
- Be Clear and to the point
- Do not write a formal letter as if it were to a friend
- In a word-processed formal letter paragraphs should have no tabulation (indents) at the beginning, and a line left between them
- This form of formal letter can use 'open' punctuation (i.e. none for addresses, greetings and salutations)
- Remember the necessity to sign the letter in ink and print your name in capitals underneath.



## FORMAL LETTERS—HAND-WRITTEN

This is the correct format for a HAND-WRITTEN formal letter (the sort you would use in an exam for applications, official communications, letters to the editors of newspapers etc.)

	22 Hill Lane, Belmont, London. NW1 4PR 8 September 2011
The Manager, City Bank, High Street, London. NW2 5LM	
Dear Sir/Madam,	
Re: Current Account number 24968476	
I should like to apply for an increase to my overdraft limit....	
Yours faithfully,	
<i>E. Barnes</i>	
E BARNES	

- Look at the layout above. Always remember to justify your address and the date to the right hand margin
- Put the full name and address of the person you are writing to - the same as would go on the envelope - and if you do not know their name make sure that it goes to the right person via their official title (eg The Headmaster, The Editor, The Manager etc.).

- If you use Dear Sir/Madam, end Yours faithfully.
- A letter to an editor of a newspaper always begins Sir not Dear Sir
- If you know the name of the person you are writing to use Dear Mr Jones, Dear Mrs Brown, etc. and end the letter Yours sincerely
- Be Clear and to the point
- Do not write a formal letter as if it were to a friend
- In a hand-written formal letter paragraphs should have tabulation (indents) at the beginning, and no line left between them
- This form of formal letter uses 'closed' punctuation (i.e. fully punctuated addresses, greetings and salutations)
- Remember the necessity to sign the letter in ink and print your name in capitals underneath



## NEWSPAPER ARTICLES: AN EDITOR'S ADVICE

### Sentences.

- Limit the Idea. Complex sentences are fine, but they should not be at the expense of sense. Try to avoid confusing the reader: "The full stop is a great help to sanity".
- Be Active and Assertive. Don't be afraid to be strong in your expression. It has a greater impact upon your reader: "...readers do not want to be told what is not. They should be told what is".
- Avoid Monotony. Vary the types of sentence you write to sustain the reader's interest.

### Words

- Be concise and edit out the unnecessary: "...prefer the short word to the long, the simple word to the complex, the concrete to the abstract...Nothing is so tiring to the reader as excavating nuggets of meaning from mountains of words".

### The Structure of a News Story

- Intro. State the facts: Who? What? Why? When? Where?
- Be direct and to the point - thirty words is enough to focus the reader's attention.
- DON'T get bogged down in chronology (telling the reader the exact order in which things happened), source obsession (giving too much weight to where the information comes from rather than the information itself), and overloading (trying to make the sentence carry too much information).
- Headlines must be concise but attention grabbing, especially in tabloid journalism where there is direct competition between papers and therefore headlines.
- imagine you are speaking on a public payphone with three minutes or less to get the point across, which will help you to concentrate on the real meaning of the story.
- Focus on how the story affects the reader. Use key words.

**Background Information for Intelligibility.** You cannot assume that your reader has digested every single piece of information on a subject – so some form of recap, or summary is necessary. This does not mean that you have to retell every single detail of the story's recent history, but assuming too much awareness on the part of the reader is a mistake. In a developing story over the duration of a few days it is advisable to assume, if anything, that the reader has no previous knowledge of the story. The skill is in editing for such readers without a recital of everything that has been going on – in other words, do it but keep it short.

**Story-telling.** Sometimes a rather dull factual story can be enhanced, if only in terms of variety, by the inclusion of narrative. Examples of times when this is appropriate would be:

- To add in to the main story, like zooming from a general scene to a detail.
- When a story is so familiar from other media that the readers know the outcome, but would now be intrigued by detail and drama.
- In follow up days of developing stories, to add in a greater sense of the human story taking place, and thus make it more appealing, though in effect “old news”.

**Headlines.** “The headline gives emphasis to a few words in bold type and every word must be weighed...[The headline writers] have to attract as many readers as they can into the text of the story, or condemn it to unread obscurity...The art of the headline lies in imagination and vocabulary; the craft lies in accuracy of content, attractiveness of appearance, and practicality.”

**Rules.** The headline must tell the news, giving a sense of what has happened to attract the attention, what is new and interesting, and what is different. The writer must think hard on what single element in the story makes it all of the above.

## WRITING TO ARGUE, PERSUADE, AND ADVISE

The first thing to remember is that this is a test of writing, and that you must therefore pay close attention to spelling, punctuation, grammar, and paragraphing, as well as form. The kind of writing targeted here is writing which argues, persuades or advises and to succeed on this you need to know the following:

- how to construct a progressive argument (Introduction > Thesis or central ideas > Antithesis or central counter arguments > Synthesis or a logical conclusion based upon the evaluation of the various points made)
- how to arrange content in a response
- how to sequence ideas
- how to choose the most effective vocabulary
- how to use punctuation effectively
- how to properly paragraph
- how to check and revise work once it is completed

You are tested on the following abilities:

- clear communication
- writing for a particular audience
- writing in an appropriate format
- organising ideas into sentences, paragraphs, and whole texts
- accurate spelling
- accurate punctuation
- breadth of vocabulary
- legible writing

The writing exam at IGCSE is focused around a 45 minute task (5 minutes for planning, 35 minutes for writing, and 5 minutes for checking). You need to be prepared for the following forms at least though you may only be asked to write the text of the article - make sure that you read the question and make sure you do what is required:

- Formal letter (handwritten) - general and to an editor
- Informal letter

- Magazine article (colour, columns, headline, strap line, illustration, diagrammatic information etc.)
- Broadsheet newspaper article - report and editorial (columns, headline, strap line etc.)
- Tabloid article (columns, sensationalist headline, illustration etc. - unlikely, since it does not require you to write enough, but useful to know anyway)
- Leaflet (breakdown of information into bite size chunks, illustration etc.)
- Description
- Argument on a given subject

To succeed you must consider the following areas as part of your planning process:

- What is the correct form required by the question?
- Who is the audience?
- What register (style of speaking, vocabulary, tone etc.) is appropriate for the task? (Do not go down the line of too much informality, your examiner may not be sympathetic. If you are unsure about anything that you want to write, ask yourself if it is likely to irritate, offend or annoy the person marking your paper. If the answer is yes, then do not include it)
- What is the purpose of the piece? You must argue, persuade, or advise according to the task set.

### **Final Points**

- Remember that presentation (handwriting etc.) is also likely to affect the way your work is perceived by the marker. If you know that you have poor handwriting under timed conditions you must do something about it - if the examiner can't read it they can't mark it, and thus you get nothing for what might be extremely good work
- Spell basic words correctly, do not write 'as well' or 'a lot' as one word, make sure that you use the right version of homophones (too, to, two, there, their, they're, were, where etc.), and always err on the side of formality when unsure.

## Writing to Advise - Some Pointers

- To sound authoritative, be specific. Use specific words and give specific examples - a good wine steward recommends Bordeaux rather than 'red' wine
- Write about a topic where you have some experience, so that you can provide some useful facts, and perhaps anecdotes specific to the task set
- Begin by letting the reader know that the information will be valuable - e.g. by stating the benefits of following your advice
- You could begin with an aphorism on your topic. Lord Chesterfield, for example begins, "The art of pleasing is a very necessary one to possess, but a very difficult one to acquire."
- If your essay is about solving a problem, describe the problem and let the readers know that you are going to explain how solving it is possible, or even easy
- Build the confidence of your readers with a sentence or two near the beginning that suggests what can be accomplished in inspirational terms
- If your essay is describing more than one task, present them in chronological order, as they will be performed, or start with the simplest task and move on from there to the more complex
- Include negative advice - what to avoid doing
- In giving instructions, keep your sentences simple and use the command form, leaving out "I think" or "I suggest" - though you can maintain this style for only part of the essay
- Address the reader as "you" to build a good connection, but don't do this for too much of your essay. Balance it with the third person voice
- Use analogies, similes, or metaphors that make the unfamiliar more familiar

You could conclude by summarising your advice and restating the benefits of following it - or you could conclude with an aphorism on the topic

## **ADVERTS AND ADVERTISING**

### **Verbal Appeals**

- Solving a problem – advertisers often pose a problem which can only be solved by buying their product
- Expert Advice – Advertisers play upon our desire for reassurance by offering expert advice, “more doctors recommend...”
- Comparisons – Here two products are compared to show that one is superior to another (though advertisers are careful to avoid naming directly competitive brands)

### **Desirability**

- Desirability can be used in a number of different ways and for different purposes. Attractive men and women may be presented to the audience, or advertisers may attempt to create anxiety in our minds about our desirability which can only be solved by using their product or advice. Often the intention is to provoke an impulsive act or decision on our part. The audience feels they must suddenly go out and buy the product.

### **The Herd Mentality**

- One way to convince people to buy something is to suggest that “everyone is doing it” and rely on the herd mentality in many people, who find safety in numbers. Adverts will often suggest that everyone has the product so you had better buy it as well.

### **Emotional Appeals**

- Advertisers occasionally use strong images that are intended to stimulate a sense of emotion or guilt, and that you need to buy the product or X will suffer. This is commonly used by charities, but also by less scrupulous businesses looking to manipulate our emotions for profit.

### **Keeping Up With the Joneses**

- Advertisers often assume that we want to show the world that we are successful and can keep up with others – which means purchasing the kinds of products and doing the kinds of things that others do.

### **Imitation of Celebrities/Celebrity Endorsement**

- Advertisers often lead us to believe that we can use the same products that they use and that they peddle on television and radio. By doing so we are able to identify with their exciting and glamorous lives. Many companies fight to place their products in films so that people associate the product with the star. Think of the products that were on show in the last Bond film.

### **Reward Yourself**

- Certain advertisers tell us, indirectly and in a subtle manner, to reward ourselves – “Because you’re worth it” – since you have worked so hard you deserve that cream cake.

### **Slogans**

- Slogans are phrases that describe a product or the corporation – as a kind of verbalised logo. The slogan is repeated over and over in advertisements. Remember that you will need a slogan for your poster and a couple of alternatives. Think of other products that have a slogan. How crucial is your slogan going to be to your campaign?
- “Because you’re worth it” (L’Oreal)  
“Beanz meanz Heinz” (Heinz baked beans)  
“Flash does the hard work so you don’t have to” (Flash cleaning products)

## POSTER IMAGES AND VISUAL PHENOMENA

You need to consider the role that images, typefaces, colour and other visual phenomena play in “selling” people products.

### Balance

- This refers to the physical arrangement in the advertisement. There are two kinds:
  - AXIAL balance, where the visual elements are balanced either side of an imaginary vertical line or horizontal line through the centre of the advertisement
  - DYNAMIC balance, where the visual elements are not arranged in a balanced mannerAxial balance is generally associated with sophistication, elegance and understatement. Dynamic balance tends to be more visually exciting. Look at some examples considering what sort of balance they have and the sophistication or otherwise of the product.

### Spatiality

- This refers to the amount of white or empty space in the advertisement. White space is usually equated with sophistication and elite taste. Perfume and watch adverts are full of white space, whereas a supermarket advert would usually be full of visual items. Look at some examples considering how empty space is used, and whether it adds a sense of sophistication or not.

### Typefaces

- Typefaces suggest various things. In thinking about the typeface consider the product, its potential market, and the appropriateness of the typeface used (thin and elegant, thick, bold and brash). Think about what sort of writing, if any, you are going to use in your design, and how it will relate to the product and market.

## Colour

- Colour needs to be considered carefully. Is the coloration to be bright or subdued? Coloration could be used to suggest sophistication, restraint, passion, and raw energy, amongst other things.



## **DESCRIPTIVE WRITING**

In this type of essay you normally describe people, scenes, or events. Remember that a good description relies upon careful observation and that to get a good mark you need to show an eye for detail, a wide vocabulary, and the ability to use figurative language as a means to engage the reader's imagination. Tasks do tend to be fairly bland (especially at GCSE) so the art comes in making 'a silk purse out of a sow's ear'.

### **Problems**

- Wandering off of the topic
- Telling a story
- Listing features
- Describing things without any knowledgeable foundation

### **Guidelines**

- Don't get side-tracked into writing a vague and rambling piece founded on only one part of the topic
- Follow your plan carefully
- Develop each part of your plan as fully as possible
- Think of a number of adjectives that could be usefully employed to expand on a topic, but don't become a 'thesaurus child' - language has to be used with care and accuracy to be truly effective, and a random list of synonymous adjectives is not a good use of language.
- Involve all the senses, not just sight - remember to describe sounds (via onomatopoeia), smells, tastes, textures.
- Make use of contrasts - people in a good mood and a bad mood, a location at different times of the year
- Use figurative language - metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, personification. Imagery in particular can be used as a means to engage the individual response of the reader - they like that!

- Using the present tense can make your description more immediate - but it can be difficult to sustain. Whatever tense you use you must be consistent
- Using a third person omniscient narrator can make you more detached and dispassionate - a good idea with this sort of a task
- Remember that punctuation can be used for effect - a full stop or a comma in the right place can have a lot of impact.

### **Descriptions of People**

To describe a person well you will need to use observational skills, dealing with the following aspects:

- Physical features - facial features, colouring, height and body shape
- Age
- Clothing
- Posture
- Speech
- Mannerisms
- Their job
- How they relate to other people

Each of these headings might be used as the basis for a paragraph, but remember that you are not simply producing a 'wanted poster'.

Possible tasks:

- Your hero
- The oldest person you know
- Someone you can't stand
- Your favourite relative
- Your most memorable teacher
- Someone you feel sorry for
- Your next door neighbour
- Your best friend

## **Descriptions of Scenes**

The most important thing here is to try to visualise the scene in your mind as you write, but don't just think about its visual impact, remember the other senses as well. It might be a good idea to start with what you see as the most significant aspect of the place.

Possible tasks:

- The supermarket
- School assembly
- Thunderstorm in the city
- A location in winter and summer
- A country lane in autumn
- Your garden

## **Description of Events**

Beware of telling a story

Possible tasks:

- The circus
- The concert
- A helicopter flight over your local area
- Walking to school
- The worst/best lesson ever
- A ceremony you have taken part in



## **SECTION 3: CRITICAL SKILLS**

### **COMPREHENSION SKILLS**

#### **Survey of Skills**

##### **Questions First**

- Read the questions first so that you can see what information will be required for your answers
- This allows you to read the passages with some direction and means that you can use your annotation as reference points to avoid re-reading the passage

##### **Scanning**

- Scanning means reading for the main ideas
- Read through quickly
- Don't worry about trying to understand every detail, just the main ideas
- Check for obvious areas relevant to the questions you have been set

##### **Reading**

- Read the passage closely to understand the details
- Read each sentence carefully, making sure that you understand it
- Read and annotate the text, putting in markers relevant to the questions that have been set

##### **FARP**

In any piece of writing consider:

- Form (broadsheet editorial, tabloid front page, leaflet, letter, magazine article etc.)
- Audience (general readership, teenagers, adults, the educated and literate, left-wing, right-wing etc.)
- Register (vocabulary, tone, use of imagery, use of

images, statistics etc.)

- Purpose (persuade, argue, inform, explain, advise)

### **Types of Question**

- Factual – asking for facts to be listed from your reading of the piece of writing
- Opinion – asking you to interpret and read between the lines of what has been written
- Technical – asking you to analyse the techniques of writing that are being used and for what effect on the reader

### **Answering the Question**

- Look carefully at what the question is asking you for
- Answer the question that has actually been set and don't dump material that is not relevant to it - a waste of time and words
- Answer all the questions – you must be disciplined in your use of time

### **Detail**

- Put only enough detail in to get the relevant marks – roughly equate the number of points that you have to make to the number of marks available
- You gain marks for picking out the parts of the text that are relevant to the question and for using them in your answer



## READING POEMS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

### Titles

- What do the key words in the title bring to mind?
- Could they, or the whole title, have more than one meaning?
- Do you need to check the meaning of any of the words in the title?
- Has the poet gone for a complex/simple title or no title at all? Why?

### Speakers and Audiences

- Who is the speaker? Is it the poet, or is it a character?
- Why has the poet chosen the particular speaker?
- Who is the speaker addressing?: him/herself, a listener inside or outside the poem?

### Settings

- Where is the poem set?
- Is the setting the same throughout?
- Does it change inside or between stanzas/verses/sections of the poem?
- If it does change, why?

### Times

- When does the experience take place?
- Is it the same throughout?
- Does the time change inside or between stanzas/verses/sections?
- If it does change, why?

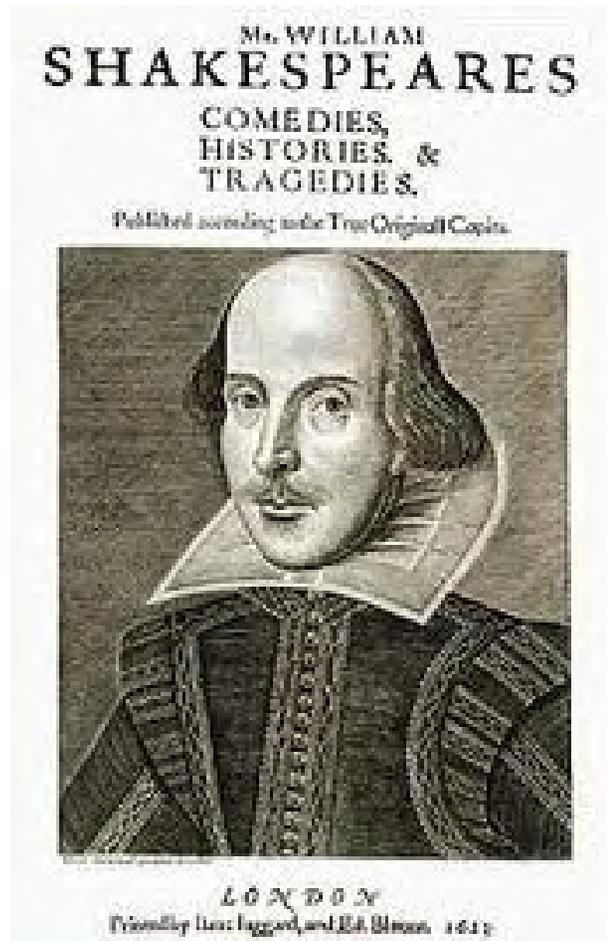
### Attitudes

- What is the speaker's/poet's attitude to the subject of the poem?
- Does it change in the course of the poem?

- Does he/she resolve questions which are raised?
- Do any contradictions or problems remain?

### Language

- What poetic techniques are being used and why?
- Imagery – simile and metaphor (Select Identify Explain Comment)
- Onomatopoeia



## POETIC DEVICES

- **Alliteration**

Repetition of the same consonant sound - particularly at the start of words.

John Keats emphasises several consonant sounds (s, m, f, v, r) in 'To Autumn'. The smooth sound of m is particularly played upon to create a rich, autumnal atmosphere.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom friend to the maturing sun,  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run

From John Keats, 'To Autumn'

It is no use simply stating that alliteration occurs within a poem unless you can go on to discuss its effect. Ask yourself whether it produces a distinctive tone.

In Wilfred Owen's First World War poem, 'Exposure', the snow that blows over the trenches is both fast and bitter:

...sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew

and sinister and furtive:

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces

- **Assonance**

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in adjoining words, or words near to each other, in poetry

But when thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,  
But sigh'st my soul away, thou weep'st, unkindly kind  
My life's blood doth decay.

From John Donne, 'Song'

Assonance helps to create tone. By repeating the 'i' vowel sound, John Donne creates a tone of lamentation and regret.

In 'Exposure', Wilfred Owen captures the thudding sound of an artillery barrage by repeating the 'u' sound initially used in 'gunnery':

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,  
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.  
From Wilfred Owen, 'Exposure'

- **Blank verse**

Poetry that is written in lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter (see METRE) is called blank verse. It is very common in English and is often used for telling a story or thinking about ideas and feelings.

As with all metres, there is little point in commenting on the iambic pattern of blank verse unless you notice interesting variations in it where the poet wants to emphasise a particular word.

Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

From Tennyson, 'Ulysses'

Tennyson tells the story of Ulysses and explores his feelings on growing old. He subtly varies the iambic pentameter to draw attention to important words (e.g. 'not' in 'We are not now...') to emphasise Ulysses' awareness of his own frailty.

- **Imagery**

Any FIGURATIVE language (metaphors and similes) or descriptive language that appeals to one of the five senses is called an image. Images make a writer's ideas concrete, create atmosphere, and build patterns within a poem. When Duncan, King of Scotland, is murdered, Shakespeare uses very varied imagery to show the situation's horror:

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!  
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence  
The life of the building!

'Confusion' is like a craftsman, making his 'masterpiece'; then murder is seen as a thief breaking into a religious building. In a metaphor, the king's body is likened to a temple.

Images can be metaphors, similes, symbols and personification. In Seamus Heaney's poem 'Death of a Naturalist' the imagery is very rich and appeals to the sight ('green'), hearing ('gargled delicately', 'a strong gauze of sound') and touch ('the warm thick slobber/Of frogspawn').

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart  
Of the townland; green and heavy headed  
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.  
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.  
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles  
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.  
There were dragon-flies, spotted butterflies,  
But best of all was the warm thick slobber  
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water  
In the shade of the banks...

- **Metaphor**

A way of comparing two things or ideas in which they are fused together so that one effectively becomes the other. Here, Philip Larkin gives a sense of the impressive size of

some trees by comparing them to castles:

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Philip Larkin, 'The Trees'

In Sonnet 116, Shakespeare describes love as 'the star to every wandering bark' ("bark" = a boat). Through the metaphor (love = a star), we see how love's constancy amidst change and danger is like a star - a fixed point in the sky.

- **Similes**

A simile is a way of comparing one thing to another. Similes are common in both poetry and prose. Similes always include the words 'like' or 'as'. In his poem 'The Warm and the Cold', Ted Hughes uses a series of similes to depict the way in which animals, birds and insects are perfectly adapted to survive the harshness of cold winter weather:

Freezing dusk has tightened  
Like a nut screwed tight  
On the starry aeroplane  
Of the soaring night.  
But the trout is in its hole  
Like a chuckle in a sleeper  
The hare strays down the highway  
Like a root going deeper.  
The snail is in the outhouse  
Like a seed in a sunflower.  
The owl is on the gatepost  
Like a clock on its tower.

The simile which opens this verse captures the cold – almost metallic – harshness of the evening: dusk is 'like a nut screwed tight'.

- **Metre**

Metre is the regular rhythms of poetic lines created by a sequence of stressed or unstressed syllables.

A recurring unit of stressed and unstressed syllables is called a foot. Different types of foot have different names: eg iambic = unstressed + stressed

*This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle*

This is iambic pentameter. (Pent = 5) There are five feet in this line:

This roy/al throne/ of kings/, this scep/tred isle

- **Rhythm**

Poets can use all sorts of rhythms to create effects. Rhythm in poetry can be fast and lively:

Letters of thanks, letters from banks  
Letters of joy from girl and boy

or surging, suggesting sadness:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,  
Saying that now you are not as you were

Examples of words you could use to describe rhythms include:

awkward heavy swaying tense  
lively brisk flowing smooth

- **Sonnet**

Sonnets are poems constructed around very tight rules of composition. They will generally have:

14 lines

An iambic rhythm (see Metre above)

be in either iambic pentameter or hexameter

have a 'turn' or change in meaning between lines 8 and 9

be written with a conventional rhyme scheme

they should have either an octet and sextet (a Petrarchan sonnet) or three quatrains and a couplet (Shakespearean/Spenserian sonnets)

Couplet - a pair of rhymed lines

Quatrain - four lines of rhyme

Sextet - six lines of rhyme

Octet - eight lines of rhyme

If you look at the following Shakespearean sonnet you can see the general construction:

When my love swears that she is made of truth, (a)  
I do believe her, though I know she lies, (b)  
That she might think me some ill-tutored youth, (a)  
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties. (b)

Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, (c)  
Although she knows my days are past the best, (d)  
Simply I credit her false speaking tongue: (c)  
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed. (d)

But wherefore says she not she is unjust? (e)  
And wherefore say not I that I am old? (f)  
Oh, love's best habit is in seeming trust, (e)  
And age in love love's not to have years told. (f)

## POETRY ESSAY PLANNING SAMPLE

And in our faults by lies we flattered be. (g)

TASK: Compare 'Search for My Tongue' with one or two other poems, showing how poets reveal their ideas and feelings about cultural identity

### INTRODUCTION

' Both Sujata Bhatt and Tom Leonard see language as an essential part of an individual's sense of cultural identity. Both outline the pressures to lose or abandon their language, and their contrasting emotions about this. Bhatt's speaker is sad and reflective, Leonard's reveals a deep seated anger and resentment at a value judgement. Both poets use stylistic devices as a means to communicate their ideas and feelings more effectively for the reader.'

### SPEAKERS

- Both poets use a first person speaker to make their meaning more immediate for the reader, but...
- Bhatt's speaker is reflective and sad at the potential loss of her 'mother tongue' and the conflict she feels, but is happy in her final realisation
- Leonard's ironic speaker unveils the patronising attitude of the media and officialdom to the use of accent

### ATTITUDES

- A major difference between the two poems is that Bhatt's is less confrontational about the idea of language loss (primarily because that language can never be truly 'lost')
- Leonard's poem reveals a deep resentment in the harsh satirical portrait of the newsreader's patronising and narrow-minded views of people with accents
- Bhatt reflects that you can't lose your language, and thus your cultural identity, but Leonard feels that there is an impetus to have it taken away from you, because of pejorative views of what is 'correct'

## READERS

- Both poets address an Anglophonic reader, the speakers of English and Standard English/RP respectively
- Bhatt seeks to make the reader aware of the alienation felt by non-English speakers in an Anglophonic culture
- Leonard seeks to make the reader aware of the way that non-RP speakers feel patronised and belittled
- They both directly address the reader, and make them active participants in their relative debates

## TIMES AND PLACES

- Neither poem is exclusively linked to a particular time and space: the ideas are very contemporary since they deal with issues central to cultural identities, across the ages – the loss of language and value judgements of what is 'correct'
- Whilst both are contemporary their ideas are timeless

## LANGUAGE: SIMILARITIES

- Both poets use free verse: more reflective of the natural rhythms of speech – less focus upon form and more on meaning
- Both poets use structure to reinforce their meaning: Bhatt uses the stanzas to reflect the phases of understanding; Leonard uses the autocue format to reflect the speaker
- Both poets use linguistic representations to affect the reader: Bhatt includes the Gujarati to give the reader the experience of the foreign; Leonard uses the phonetic representation of accent to contrast with the overt meaning of the poem to create a paradox and undermine that overt meaning

## LANGUAGE: DIFFERENCES

- Bhatt is more reliant upon imagery: the extended metaphors of language-tongue and language-pl
- The negative and then positive diction of Bhatt

- The aggressive diction of Leonard

### Conclusion

'Both poems succeed in communicating the links between language and cultural identity. The reader is forced to examine their views about what it means to be a non-standard English speaker, and confronts their own values as a consequence'.



## WRITING CONTEXTUAL ESSAYS

### Introduction

- Briefly explain what is happening in the extract(s) to show basic comprehension
- Say why the extract(s) is(are) important: character revelations, thematic importance, stylistic devices, relevance as a key moment to the text as a whole

### Character

- Focus only on the main characters, and do not get bogged down in talking about all and sundry (it makes you essay tedious and list-like)
- Think about how their character is revealed through what they say/do and what others say about them
- Think about how the reader/audience is supposed to respond to them

### Theme

- What are the central ideas/themes within the extract?
- How is the reader/audience supposed to respond to these themes?
- What statement is the novelist/poet/playwright making by discussing these ideas?

### Style

- What key devices is the author using? ; stylistic devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, imagery, dramatic irony etc)
- Narrative devices (1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> person, dialogue, description, stage directions, supplementary notes)
- What effect is the author trying achieve for the reader/ audience?

## Conclusion

- Is the piece successful?
- Does it have impact upon the reader/audience as a piece of drama/poetry/prose?
- Are there any other reasons it might be important to the play/poem/novel as a whole?



## TERMINOLOGY TO USE IN CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The following is a list of literary devices which writers use.  
You must be able to:

- Identify them.
- Explain how effective they are – how they help the writer to put their message across.

**Alliteration** - repetition of consonant sounds

**Antithesis** - the placement of opposite ideas or descriptions next to each other for direct contrast

**Aside** - in drama, a character speaks to audience without other characters hearing

**Assonance** - repetition of similar sounding vowel sounds

**Blank Verse** - unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter

**Caesura** - a pause within a line of poetry, usually indicated by a full stop

**Colloquialism** - the use of everyday language rather than formal language

**Diction** - the choice of words used in a literary text

**Dramatic Monologue** - a poem written in the first person – the voice is the persona's (an assumed identity) rather than the poet's

**Enjambment** - line of poetry runs on to a new line without punctuation at the end

**Foreshadowing** - an event in a novel which predicts/relates to a later event

**Graphology** - the physical layout of the writing – useful when analysing poetry

**Hyperbole** - exaggeration for the sake of emphasis in a literary text

**Iambic Pentameter** - lines of verse containing ten syllables with stress on first syllable

**Imagery** - when language is used in a figurative sense for a specific effect

**Juxtaposition** -the placing of ideas or images next to each other for a specific effect

**Metaphor** - the direct comparison of one thing to another – an extended metaphor is when the metaphor is repeated throughout the writing

**Mood** - the feeling or emotional state evoked by the writer

**Onomatopoeia** - words which imitate the actual sound they describe

**Oxymoron** - the use of two usually opposite words to describe something

**Pathetic Fallacy** - the description of weather/nature using human attributes or to reflect mood

**Personification** - the use of human qualities to present an object or idea

**Sibilance** - the repetition of an 's' sound

**Simile** - the comparison of two things using like or as

**Soliloquy** - in drama, a long speech delivered to other characters is a public soliloquy; a private soliloquy is the expression of the character's private thoughts

**Stanza** - in poetry (alternative name for a verse)

**Symbolism** - a visual image which represents an idea

**Tone** - the attitude/emotion evoked from the words used

## **SECTION 3: PRACTICALITIES**

### **NOTE TAKING**

Many students feel that they should take copious notes, others that they do not need to take any – both are probably wrong. Some feel guilt, some spend enormous amounts of time taking laborious notes from various sources that they do not need, or spend time which could be more usefully spent on other work. Some resort to using highlighters for marking text and end up highlighting everything. Those who take no notes at all sometimes struggle to put others' material into their own words because they have had no practice, or struggle to extract key points of an argument, or may be disadvantaged because they have no access to necessary material.

### **Why? How? When?**

Why?:

- To have a personal record of material
- To make the learning process an active one
- If you can put someone else's words into your words you will by necessity understand the material
- As a brief record for revision
- To select key points for a specific use
- To remember, to summarise, to organise, to concentrate material, to highlight key words or ideas, to plan

How?:

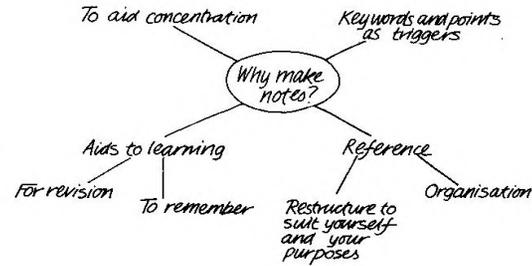
- As an outline of the main points, numbered and abbreviated
- As a précis ( a shortened form of the passage )
- As mind-maps
- As a flow chart
- In a note book
- On index cards
- On the text (in margins and underlinings)

When?:

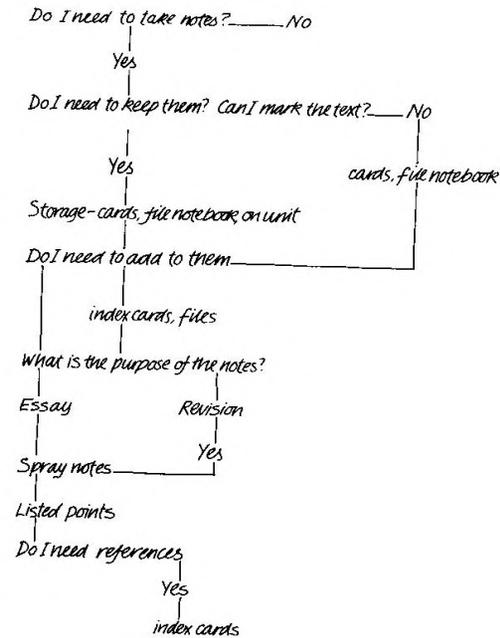
- If there is no other access to the material (nothing on the web, things said in lessons etc)
- After looking through the text at least once

### Some Methods

#### 1. Mind-Maps



#### 2. Flow Chart



## **The SQ3R Technique**

- Survey – scan the material to get an overall impression, using introduction, preface, contents, headings, summaries, and conclusion. Look for signposts ('The most important...', 'Essentially...', 'Firstly...', 'Finally...', etc).
- Question – construct questions, or use those provided by the author (not unusual in text books) to aid your search for useful information.
- Reading – read through the text, possibly section by section (depends on the length of the text) marking key passages.
- Recall – close the book and try to recall what has been read and then note points (this is the longest stage).
- Review – check the notes against the text.

## **Dunleavy's 'Gutting the Literature'**

- Establish the status of the source details of the author, the stated aims, introduction, contents, index
- Identify useful passages and pick out the most important
- Skim read the section with a rapid scan of the preceding material to grasp the context
- Read in depth this and any other selected section

## **5. Active Reading**

Ask the following questions at the outset:

- What information do I already have on this subject?
- How does this accord with the material I have so far and how does it differ?
- What do I need from this book or article?

This will require:

- More than one run through the material, shifting back and forth as needed
- Splitting up the reading into manageable sections, appropriately selected
- Looking at some sections in more depth than others.

assessing and understanding them

## **ESSAY WRITING**

### **HOW TO PLAN AND WRITE DISCURSIVE ESSAYS**

#### **STUDY THE TEXTS/ISSUES**

- Before you go anywhere near an essay you have to have studied the basic information that you will need to select from
- For literature essays you need to understand characters, style and themes
- For issue based essays you need to have researched the issues

#### **ANALYSE THE QUESTION**

- Read the question carefully and decide what key material is required for the answer
- Focus on the key words in the title to do with subject matter
- Focus on key terms which shape your response: argue, persuade, instruct, advise, discuss

#### **NOTE PRELIMINARY IDEAS**

- Put together your initial responses to the question, such as all the reasons that Macbeth is or is not a villain
- Don't be afraid to brainstorm ideas (you can put them in some sort of order later) through use of spider grams or flow charts

#### **FIND EVIDENCE**

- In order to support your arguments/ ideas you must supply examples from experience, general knowledge, or from the text you are studying
- Either use direct quotation (word for word) or reference (in your own words)
- If you cannot prove your argument/ idea you should think carefully about whether you should say it

## **PLAN YOUR ARGUMENT**

- You need to consider the way in which your argument or case moves forwards
- For a discursive essay think about ideas for (thesis), ideas against (antithesis), and reasoned conclusions (synthesis)
- Organise your notes into a logical order
- Think about a link sentence at the start of each major section that ties back to your stated argument

## **WRITE THE ESSAY**

- Having done everything else write the first draft of the essay
- Redraft checking for flaws in the logical development of your argument, or points that you have not proven
- Proofread, checking for spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes — be aware that you will probably lose marks if you do not do this

## **USING EVIDENCE EFFICIENTLY**

### **Work out your argument**

- The first thing you must do is work out what you are supposed to be arguing – without an argument there is nothing to prove
- Arguments are based around opinions rather than proof
- Arguments must be directed to the question or task set

### **Finding textual evidence**

- You need textual evidence to support the argument
- This should be no more than four lines of text – any more looks like a gravestone in your essay and is unlikely to be helpful in improving your grade
- Large extracts should be selected from to back up arguments

### **Highlight key words and phrases**

- As part of the preparation process it is a good idea to underline the key phrases and words that you think prove your point
- If you can't do this it probably isn't a very good piece of evidence
- Highlighting or underlining reminds you of the need to focus on key words and phrases in your analysis

### **Analysis**

- This is where you pick up the majority of your marks
- You should make sure that you are talking about the ways in which the language of your evidence proves your argument to be true
- You are showing the marker the clear links between your argument and your evidence
- It is often a good idea to start from a position of what the poet-novelist-playwright is doing

## **Edit**

- If your analysis goes according to plan then the actual quotation set apart becomes redundant as you will have included the key words and phrases in your analysis
- Therefore you will be able to get rid of the mega-quote and make your essay shorter and even more focused – this only works, however, if you have embedded material from the quotation in your analysis

## **Example (PEE)**

(Point/Argument) Shakespeare presents Shylock as character embittered by Christian persecution:

(Evidence) “You that did void your rheum upon my beard,  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur/ over your  
threshold: monies is your suit.”

(Explanation/Analysis) Shakespeare shows us that Shylock has suffered multiple indignities at the hands of Christians, spitting upon him (“void your rheum”), and kicking him like a stray dog (“spurn a stranger cur”) – essentially dehumanising him and seeing him as little better than an animal. Shakespeare shows Shylock’s awareness of the irony of this situation: now they need him and his money they have a problem. It is no wonder that Shylock is so embittered.

## **EDITING CRITICAL ESSAYS**

### **Appropriate Language**

- You are looking to write in formal English
- Your work must be grammatically correct
- It should not contain slang words and expressions
- It should not contain dialect
- It should not contain contractions
- Sometimes it is better to write in short sentences using simple vocabulary – clarity is the most important part in communicating meaning

### **Audience and Tone**

- Much of what you write will be for an adult reader
- You must therefore keep this audience in mind constantly whilst writing and editing: it will affect the way you treat your subject matter, the language you use, and the tone you use

### **Sentences and paragraphs**

- Sentences are complete units in themselves of subject-object-verb
- Sentences do not start with conjunctions
- Varying the length of sentences helps avoid monotony
- Paragraphs are for sections of your argument, and cover topics – if you do not change subject you should think twice before changing paragraph

### **Layout**

- Quotations – short ones should be embedded in the text of your analysis in quotation marks, long ones should be set apart with a line left above and below, and should be set out as in the original text. Do not indent the analysis that follows – you have not changed subject so it is not a new paragraph

- Titles - should be italicised or underlined for published works (*The Sunday Times*, *Frankenstein*), or in inverted commas for titles that are part of larger collections such as individual poems ('Search for My Tongue')

### **The Best Words**

- One of the biggest problems in essays is the use of the thesaurus: students think that vocabulary has to be complicated to get the best mark
- The reality is that essays need to be written in plain English – and it is better to write concisely and coherently than to use four words that mean the same thing
- Sometimes people use a word from the thesaurus in the wrong context. This does not make you look smart - quite the contrary!

### **Argument**

- There has to be a sense of a clearly organised response to the question set
- YES-NO argument?
- Argument clearly divided into sections – introduction>characters/speakers>themes>stylistic devices>conclusion
- Argument should be organised to avoid useless repetition of the same ideas

### **Use of Source Material**

- Arguments must be proven and this can only be done through the proper use of evidence – direct reference or direct quotation
- Evidence cannot simply be dumped – it must be analysed in a detailed way to emphasise the link between the argument and the evidence – you must show that your idea is reasonable

- Analysis can be of text, image or film
- You do not need to use four quotations to prove the same point – a waste of words and time – quote the best example in full, and refer to the other examples

### **Things to Avoid**

- Clumsy and mechanical expressions - “in this essay”, “in this quotation”, “I am going to show”
- Vogue words – “basically”, “trashy”
- Solecisms – “we was late”, “he could of done better”
- Ambiguity – make sure your meaning is clear
- Tautology – saying the same thing twice or more

### **Introductions and Conclusions**

- Check that your introduction is focused upon the question set, and that you are putting forward your position. If you cannot state your essential argument in a sentence you don’t have one
- Conclusions should bring together your information and overview, showing why your overall position is reasonable

### **...and finally**

- Always remember that your marker would rather read four good sides of concise analysis than ten sides of waffle
- Quality is what matters, not quantity, and to get an A\* you must be concise – so do not aim low
- If you are given advice on how to improve your work  
ACT UPON IT

## A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM (SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA)

“Plagiarism is the use or close imitation of the language and ideas of another author and representation of them as one’s own original work.”

“Within [academia](#), plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered [academic dishonesty](#) or academic fraud and offenders are subject to academic censure. In [journalism](#), plagiarism is considered a breach of [journalistic ethics](#), and reporters caught plagiarizing typically face disciplinary measures ranging from suspension to termination. Some individuals caught plagiarizing in academic or journalistic contexts claim that they plagiarized unintentionally, by failing to include [quotations](#) or give the appropriate [citation](#). While plagiarism in scholarship and journalism has a centuries-old history, the development of the [Internet](#), where articles appear as electronic text, has made the physical act of copying the work of others much easier, simply by [copying and pasting](#) text from one web page to another.”

“Plagiarism is not [copyright infringement](#). While both terms may apply to a particular act, they are different transgressions. Copyright infringement is a violation of the rights of a copyright holder, when material protected by copyright is used without consent. On the other hand, plagiarism is concerned with the unearned increment to the plagiarizing author’s [reputation](#) that is achieved through false claims of authorship.”

“In the academic world, plagiarism by students is a very serious offense that can result in punishments such as a failing grade on the particular assignment (typically at the high school level) or for the course (typically at the college or university level). For cases of repeated plagiarism, or for cases in which a student commits severe plagiarism (e.g., submitting a copied article as his or her own work), a student may be suspended or expelled. Many students feel pressured to complete papers well and quickly, and with the

accessibility of new technology (the Internet) students can plagiarize by copying and pasting information from other sources. This is often easily detected by teachers, for several reasons. First, students' choice of sources are frequently unoriginal; instructors may receive the same passage copied from a popular source from several students. Second, it is often easy to tell whether a student used his or her own "voice." Third, students may choose sources which are inappropriate, off-topic, or contain incorrect information. Fourth, lecturers may insist that submitted work is first submitted to an online plagiarism detector."

"In many universities, academic degrees or awards may be revoked as a penalty for plagiarism."

"There is little academic research into the frequency of plagiarism in high schools. Much of the research investigated plagiarism at the post-secondary level. Of the forms of cheating (including plagiarism, inventing data, and cheating during an exam), students admit to plagiarism more than any other. However, this figure decreases considerably when students are asked about the frequency of "serious" plagiarism (such as copying most of an assignment or purchasing a complete paper from a website). Recent use of plagiarism detection software (see below) gives a more accurate picture of this activity's prevalence."

"For professors and researchers, plagiarism is punished by sanctions ranging from suspension to termination, along with the loss of credibility and integrity. Charges of plagiarism against students and professors are typically heard by internal disciplinary committees, which students and professors have agreed to be bound by."

"Since journalism's main currency is public trust, a reporter's failure to honestly acknowledge their sources undercuts a newspaper or television news show's integrity and undermines its credibility. Journalists accused of plagiarism

are often suspended from their reporting tasks while the charges are being looked into by the news organization.”

“The ease with which electronic text can be reproduced from online sources has lured a number of reporters into acts of plagiarism: Journalists have been caught "copying-and-pasting" articles and text from a number of websites.”

### **Online plagiarism**

“Content scraping is a phenomenon of copy and pasting material from internet websites, affecting both established sites and blogs.

“Free online tools are becoming available to help identify plagiarism, and there is a range of approaches that attempt to limit online copying, such as disabling [right clicking](#) and placing warning banners regarding copyrights on web pages. Instances of plagiarism that involve copyright violation may be addressed by the rightful content owners sending a [DMCA](#) removal notice to the offending site-owner, or to the [ISP](#) that is hosting the offending site.”

“It is important to reiterate that plagiarism is not the mere copying of text, but the presentation of another's ideas as one's own, regardless of the specific words or constructs used to express that idea. In contrast, many so-called plagiarism detection services can only detect blatant word-for-word copies of text.”

### **Other contexts**

“Generally, although plagiarism is often loosely referred to as theft or stealing, it has not been set as a criminal matter in the courts. Likewise, plagiarism has no standing as a [criminal](#) offense in the [common law](#). Instead, claims of plagiarism are a [civil law](#) matter, which an aggrieved person can resolve by launching a lawsuit. Acts that may constitute plagiarism are in some instances treated as [copyright infringement](#), [unfair competition](#), or a violation of the doctrine

## **COURSEWORK: SUPERVISION AND DRAFTING**

Source: EdExcel IGCSE and OCR English Literature Syllabuses

There are three different stages in the production of coursework: planning of the task; first draft; final submission. The permitted level of supervision is different at each stage. Teachers can advise students about the production of coursework, but should not proof read early drafts or correct every technical error. Teachers may suggest improvements to the content of the coursework, but it is the student's responsibility to make any corrections. There is no limit to the number of coursework pieces a student may produce from which to select the best piece for final assessment, nor to the number of drafts at IGCSE that a student may produce. However, teachers should be mindful of the overall weighting of written coursework (40%) and make sure that the coursework paper does not take up an inordinate amount of curriculum time.

### **Planning of the task**

It is expected that the teacher will provide detailed guidance to candidates in relation to the purpose and requirement of the task. Teacher's advice might include:

- discussion and guidance on an appropriate and effective title;
- recommended reading;
- possible structure;
- resolving practical and conceptual problems;
- research techniques;
- help with time planning;
- monitoring of progress throughout the process to ensure that candidates are proceeding successfully.

### **First draft**

What teachers can do: review the work in either written or oral form, concentrating on the appropriateness of the title and content; structure; references.

- What teachers cannot do: having reviewed the candidate's coursework it is not acceptable for teachers to give, either to individual candidates or to groups, detailed advice and suggestions as to how the work may be improved in order to meet the assessment criteria.

**Examples of unacceptable assistance include:**

- detailed indication of errors or omissions
- advice on specific improvements needed to meet the criteria
- the provision of outlines, paragraph or section headings, or writing frames specific to the coursework task
- personal intervention to improve the presentation or content of the coursework

Once the final draft is submitted it must not be revised:

- in no circumstances are 'fair copies' of marked work allowed
- adding or removing any material to or from coursework after it has been presented by a candidate for final assessment would constitute malpractice.

## REVISION

There is no hard and fast rule as to how to revise because people do it successfully in different ways (and subject teachers will be able to advise particular methods that work in their own subjects). However, everyone has exams, and everyone agrees that a student has to prepare for them if they want to succeed and if they want the process to be less stressful. Revision of notes, essays and other materials is essential if you are not only being tested on your factual recall, but also on your ability to use that material to answer particular questions in particular ways. Sometimes, just knowing the facts is not enough.

### Getting Started

- Know what you are revising for. You need to ensure that you know what you are expected to do in the test/exam: how long is the exam?; what tasks will you be expected to fulfil?; how long should you spend on each task?; is it a test of factual recall or skills? There is no point revising material that will not be needed or not taking the skills into account when you are preparing.
- Organise your material (into separate files is probably the best way), filing any handouts, exercise books, or notes into a logical order (in English, for example, it might be as follows: your annotated copy of the text; your detailed plot notes; your essays/notes on character, theme, style; supplementary secondary reading). If you cannot navigate your way around your material how can you revise effectively?
- Start revising material early. Reinforcing your understanding and testing yourself on what you do or do not know cannot be done in an evening before the test/exam. It has to be carefully built up so that you can retain as much as possible, and so you can fill in the gaps in your knowledge (asking questions of the teacher, practising the skills, going to another source). Also, if you allow yourself plenty of time to do it, you can make the process less stressful.

- Draw up a revision timetable ('progressive delaying-of ritual' or 'stuff to do'). To be able to keep the stress to a minimum you need to know how much you need to do and when you are going to do it. Allow yourself a realistic amount of time for the revision period, and set realistic goals for what you will revise (in a two hour session it may be realistic to revise your notes on the characters of *Of Mice and Men*, revising the entirety of your course is not). Ticking off the sessions is very satisfying, and build in rewards for successful completion of tasks.
- Time the session. There is no optimum time, but learning to work under pressure for a couple of hours is a good idea - that is what you will have to do in an exam. When you start it may be difficult to sustain and you may need the occasional short break to help your concentration, but with practice this is a discipline that can stick - remember that you cannot leave an exam half-way through to get a drink or something to eat.
- Avoid distractions. This does not just mean turning off the television - lots of things can distract your focus and attention. In the place where you intend to work remove visual stimuli (that poster with lots of irrelevant information on it, the magazine you have not read yet), and technical temptations (the games console, the computer with access to facebook, chat rooms etc, the mobile phone). Some people say that playing music whilst revising helps them. However, a word of warning - if it is music that has lyrics you might find yourself focusing on them rather than your work, and you don't take your MP3 player (or equivalent) into the exam with you, so it may not be a good habit to get into.
- Keep everything you need in one place. Nothing is more annoying than wasting precious time looking for your pen or some paper.
- Build in time when you do not revise. Everyone needs a break. Do not feel guilty about this.

## Methods

- Just reading your notes repeatedly is not the best way of retaining information - especially if that is not what works best for you. Some learners remember things best because of what they see (reading/viewing), some by what they hear (recording/listening), some by what they do (enacting/writing). There are many ways to achieve the same end.
- Read and make condensed versions of your notes.
- Draw mind-maps or flow charts on large pieces of paper to allow yourself to see the way information connects.
- Make posters, pictures or illustrations that you can keep looking at - helpful if you have a strong visual memory.
- Record yourself making key points about a particular subject, reading key speeches from a text etc - then play it back when you are travelling.
- Highlight key areas of notes or books (as long as they are yours!). Do not highlight everything or it is as much use as highlighting nothing - you must focus on the main ideas
- Discuss your revision with others. If you can explain it to others you will understand it - they may also ask you questions that will allow you to fill in the gaps in your knowledge.
- Watch revision DVDs. Make sure that you are active in watching though: make notes, discuss etc.
- Make up acronyms. MINTS (Militarism, Imperialism, Nationalism, Treaties, Sarajevo = causes of the First World War), SIEC (Select, Identify, Explain, Comment = how to talk about poetic images).
- Review. Take time to review what is working for you when revising, whether you are sticking to your programme, whether you need to up the pressure or not.
- Practice old questions. Set the right amount of time. If it is an essay subject sometimes writing out a detailed plan is all you need to do, and can be done more

quickly ( practice in writing five minute plans is a good idea - reflective of how much time you have in the real exam room).

## **EXAMS**

Exams are a fact of life for students - there has to be a method of checking the levels of attainment that is reasonably equal and fair. Nobody likes exams, and not everyone approves of how they are marked or how they are not always a reflection of your best work...but you are stuck with them, so it is best to know how best to cope with them. Always remember that exams are a test of performance, not ability.

### **Before**

- Make sure that you know your exam timetable. It is important that you know what you are supposed to be doing and when - it allows you to plan your revision properly for the final run-in to the terminal exams.
- Make sure that you know the exact nature of the exam. Check the format, timings and expectations of the exam.
- Know where and when your exam is. This means you can allow time to avoid last minute panics and crises
- Adhere to additional rules the exam or exam board may specify, such as writing in black ink (for certain external exams).
- Make sure you have read all your information sheets if you are taking trial exams or internal exams.
- Make sure that you have all the equipment that you need - and that it all works.
- Take one exam at a time. There is no point worrying about an exam you have in four days' time if you have an exam today - try to keep it all in perspective.
- Go to the toilet before the exam.
- Do not take a mobile phone, crib sheets, essay plans, or anything else that could be construed as cheating into the exam room with you. Any exam materials you are allowed (such as prepared texts or notes in Drama/Theatre Studies) should conform to the

particular exam board's rules – ask your teacher if in doubt. This sounds obvious, but you would be surprised.

- Keep calm.

### **During**

It is normal to be stressed - adrenalin is one of the things that allow you to write faster...Take a deep breath. Read the question paper carefully. Don't immediately launch into it without due care - it is very important that you fulfil the task correctly. Highlight the key words within the question (e.g. "Write a formal letter to your Headmaster where you argue that examinations are a complete waste of time.")

Remind yourself of the exam structure. Stick to your timings - if you have two hours to do two tasks and they carry equal marks you should spend an hour on each. Don't lose track of time - have a watch on your desk in your eye line.

Stick to the disciplines you have practised in lessons - planning, writing, and checking.

Allow time to check through at the end - it is not just English Language exams where you will be marked on the basis of the quality of your written English.

### **After**

It is probably not a good idea to talk too much with fellow pupils about what you wrote in the exam - it tends to make you paranoid and there is nothing you can do about the paper once it has been taken in. The same thing applies to talking to staff about it...

If you think that it didn't go according to plan keep it in perspective - you really don't know until you get the results back.

What is Plan B? Most of the time people get exactly the grade that is expected and that they have worked so hard for, but sometimes results don't go to plan (overambitious expectations, a bad day in a particular exam, etc). Having a contingency plan, just in case (learn from your mistakes, resit the module, insurance offer from university B, asking

## RECOMMENDED READING

### Language Skills

- **Bowkett**, *100 Ideas for teaching Thinking Skills*, Continuum 2006
- **Burt**, *A guide to Better Punctuation*, Stanley Thornes 1983
- **Burt**, *A Guide to Better Spelling*, Stanley Thornes 1982
- **Cowley**, *Getting the Buggers to Write* (2nd Edition), Continuum 2004
- **Cowley**, *Getting the Buggers to Think*, Continuum 2004
- **De Bono**, *Six Thinking Hats*, Penguin 1999
- **Dowis**, *The Lost Art of the Great Speech*, Amacom 1999
- **Evans**, *Essential English for Journalists*, Pimlico 2000
- **Germov**, *Get Great Marks for Your essays*, Allen and Unwin 1996
- **Parkinson**, *I Before E (Except After C): Old School Ways to Remember Stuff*, Michael O'Mara Books 2007
- **Phythian**, *Teach Yourself Correct English*, Hodder 1985
- **Senior**, *Getting the Buggers to Read*, Continuum 2005
- **Taggart and Wines**, *My Grammar and I (Or Should That be 'Me?'): Old School ways to Sharpen Your English*, Michael O'Mara Books 2008

## Critical Skills

- **Boulton**, *The Anatomy of Poetry*, RKP 1953
- **Boulton**, *The Anatomy of the Novel*, RKP 1975
- **Burton**, *The Criticism of Poetry*, Longman 1974
- **Cadden**, *Drama appreciation for A Level*, Edward Arnold 1988
- **Cadden**, *Poetry Appreciation for A Level*, Edward Arnold 1984
- **Cadden**, *Prose appreciation for A Level*, Edward Arnold 1984
- **Coombes**, *Literature and Criticism*, Penguin 1953
- **Cuddon**, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Penguin 1982
- **Fry**, *The Ode Less Travelled*, Hutchinson 2005
- **Mayne & Shuttleworth**, *Considering Drama*, Hodder 1990
- **Mayne & Shuttleworth**, *Considering Prose*, Hodder 1984
- **Mullan**, *How Novels Work*, Oxford 2006
- **Phythian**, *Considering Poetry: An Approach to Criticism*, Hodder 2004
- **Pickering**, *Studying Modern Drama* (2nd Edition), Palgrave 2003
- **Woodley**, *A Look at Rhythm, Rhyme and Verse Form*, Oxford 1968

