



AQA GCSE English Literature



Your notes

Exam Tips

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Your notes

Find out how to perform at your best with our top tips for your AQA GCSE English Literature exams.

Grade boosters: How to get a top grade

You've revised all the key themes and learned some key quotations for your texts. It's now time to focus on your exam skills so you can confidently answer the questions in the GCSE exam.

Based on guidance from examiners' reports and experienced teachers, here are ten essential tips to hone your exam skills and feel really confident on exam day:

Practise writing essay plans and paragraphs

1. Write a **ten-minute essay plan** or a **timed paragraph** answering a [past exam question](#) after each revision or study session.

This is a strategy that Grade 9 students use. Regular exam practice will strengthen your hand muscles and build your confidence in answering questions.

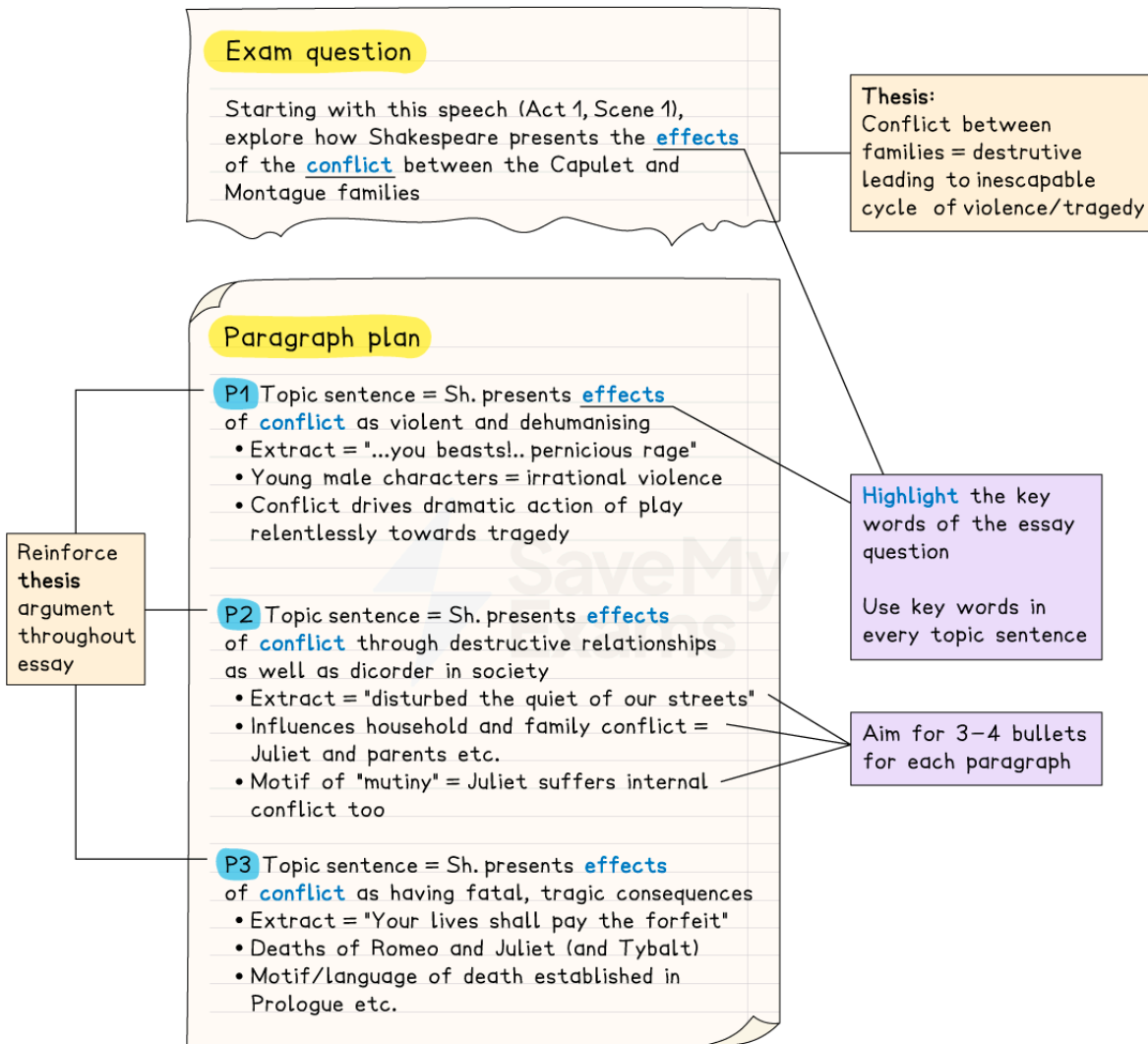
Make a plan in the exam

2. Create an **essay plan** (5–10 mins) with a **thesis statement** before you start writing in the exam:

- Start by highlighting the **key words** of the essay question
- Consider your **thesis** or central argument
- Plan three or four paragraphs, each with a **topic sentence** that includes the key words of the question and addresses your thesis
- Plan three or four bullet points of **evidence** from the text and/or extract



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How to plan an essay in the exam

Use the key words from the exam question

3. Always use the key words of the question in every **topic sentence** and in your **introduction** and **conclusion**.

Show you are consistently answering the question by using the key words of the essay in every paragraph of your essay. This will help you to keep focused in the exam.

Include textual references

4. Always include references to the text.

Try to use quotes if you can, but examiners will also reward you if you refer to plot events, key scenes or chapters, character development or even stage directions.

5. Learn micro-quotes.

Learn a couple of short, key word quotations for all major themes and characters in your texts:

- Shorter quotes are much easier to remember but only use them if they are relevant to the question
- Try to learn quotes that also include a literary device or language feature that you could analyse in your essay. For example, Macbeth's poisonous metaphor, "full of scorpions is my mind", describes his guilt and psychological turmoil

Manage your time

6. Manage your timings in the exam so you spend the right amount of time on each section of the paper.

AQA examiners say that students often lose marks when one exam answer is far longer than others on the same paper. For example, you get similar marks from both questions in Section A and B of the Paper 1 exam (34 or 30 marks) so divide your time equally between the two essays.



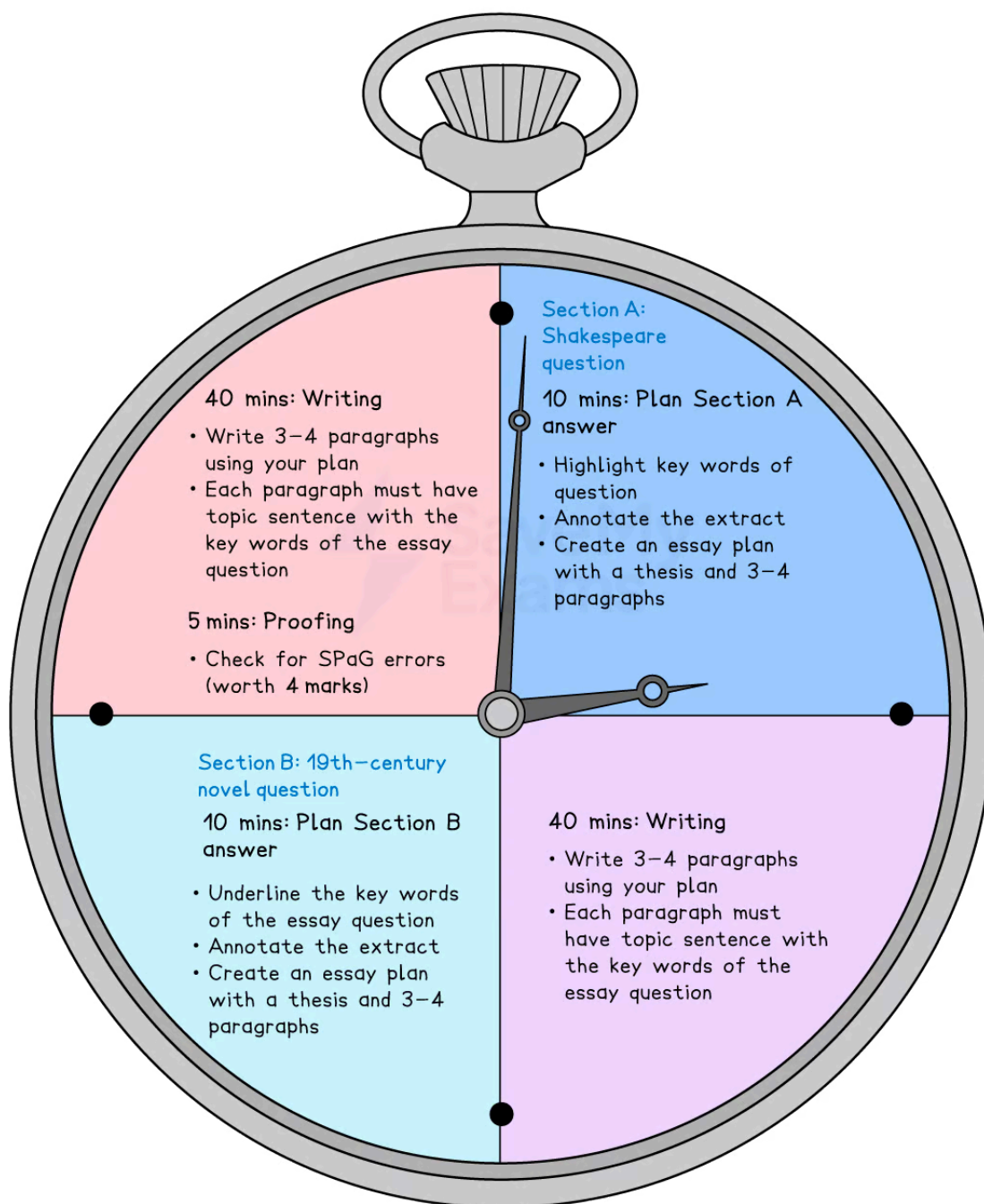
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How to manage your time in AQA GCSE English Literature Paper 1

Your notes

Context counts

7. Show a contextual relationship between the **text** and the **world we live in today**.

Examiners are impressed by your own contextual interpretation (AO3). This could be as simple as commenting on how Dickens' presentation of poverty in *A Christmas Carol* has parallels with the present-day rise in food banks or how Macbeth's ambition for power feels relevant to a modern audience as violent conflicts and leadership challenges are part of our society too.

Annotate the exam paper

8. Annotate the extract or poem.

If the question includes an extract or asks you to refer to a printed poem, take time to annotate the extract, focusing on how it explores the key words in the question. This will help you to feel more confident that you have excellent, text-based points to make when you are writing under pressure.

Answer the question!

9. Follow the exam question instructions.

If the question asks you to respond to an extract or a named poem, make sure you do! This includes the Shakespeare question, the 19th-century text question, the poetry anthology question and the unseen poetry questions.

Proofread

10. Check for errors to get an **extra 4 marks** for SPaG.

Leave five minutes to proofread your essay at the end of the exam for 34-mark questions (Shakespeare or modern texts). You can score an extra four marks for the quality of your expression, the use of appropriate vocabulary and the accuracy of your spelling and punctuation.

More revision support

You'll probably find you are more confident with some texts than others, so always focus on your weakest area of subject knowledge when doing last-minute revision.

Check out our guidance on how to answer the exam questions for:

[Shakespeare](#) | [19th-century texts](#) | [Modern texts](#) | [Poetry anthology](#) | [Unseen poetry](#)

Discover more tips for top-grade success in our learning hub articles:

[How to Get a 9 in GCSE English Literature](#)

[How to Write a GCSE English Literature Essay](#)

[How to Revise for your GCSE English Literature Exams](#)



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