



AQA GCSE English Literature



Your notes

How to Answer the Modern Prose and Drama Essay Question

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Structuring the Essay

Answering just one essay question can seem daunting. However, examiners just want to see your ideas and opinions on the modern text you have studied. The guide below will enable you to best express these ideas and opinions in a way that will gain the highest marks. It includes guides on:

- Answering the question
- Planning your essay
- Writing your essay

Answering the question

Regardless of which modern text you study, the type of question you'll need to write an essay for will be the same. You will be asked a question that asks you to analyse and write in detail about an aspect of the text. Your answer will need to address the text as a whole.

Completing the steps below will ensure you answer the question in the way that examiners are looking for.

6 key steps to answer the modern text exam question effectively:

1. The very first thing you should do once you open your exam paper is to look at the question:

- This sounds obvious, but it's really crucial to read through the question a few times
- Why is this important? Regardless of what subject you're being examined in, the single-biggest mistake most students make in their exams is not reading the question through carefully enough that they answer the question they **think** they're being asked, rather than the question they've actually been asked
- It's especially important to get this right in your GCSE English Literature exams because you only have five essay questions to answer across two papers, so if you misread a question, you're potentially costing yourself a large number of marks

2. Identify the **keywords** of the question:

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How does Russell present the importance of friendship in *Blood Brothers*?

Write about:

- examples of friendship in the play
- how Russell presents the importance of friendship.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]



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- The key words are the focus of the question: the specific themes, ideas or characters the examiners want you to focus on
- For the above question, the key words of the question are “**how Russell presents the importance of friendship**”
- This is the theme the examiners want you to explore in your essay
- Do not be tempted to write a question on a related theme, even if you have revised more for it: this will affect your overall mark badly, as you won’t be directly answering the question!
- In the example above, the theme is about **friendship**, so make sure you plan and write an essay about **friendship**, rather than, for example, the role of family in the text:
 - Although this could be viewed as a related theme, your answer won’t be focused on the question and will lose you marks

3. Critically evaluate the idea or theme of the question in terms of the text as a whole

- Think: what is this question asking, and what is it not asking?
- It is asking you to explore ideas about **friendship** – a special relationship or bond that exists between people
- The question is not asking you to explore any other themes
- Again, writing about related ideas will actually lose you marks as you aren’t answering the exact question you have been set. The examiner isn’t going to reward you extra marks for information that is factually correct or demonstrates a great understanding of the text if the information is not relevant to the question being asked

Planning your essay

Planning your essay is absolutely vital to achieve the highest marks. Examiners always stress that the best responses are those that have a logical, well-structured argument that comes with spending time planning an answer. This, in turn, will enable you to achieve the highest marks for each assessment objective. The main assessment objectives are:

AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write a clear essay with a central argument based on your own opinions ▪ Select quotations and references from the text
AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use analysis of the writer’s methods to support your argument
AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use contextual ideas and perspectives to support your argument and to provide further insight into the writer’s choices



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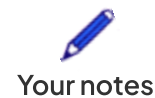
It is important to remember how marks are distributed for each assessment objective: there are 12 marks for AO1, 12 marks for AO2 and 6 marks for AO3. The mark scheme places assessment objectives AO1 and AO2 as the key skills, therefore while AO3 must be addressed in your response, your essay should focus predominantly on AO1 and AO2.

- Your plan should include all aspects of your response, covering all of the assessment objectives, but mainly focusing on AO1 and AO2:
 - Your overall argument, or **thesis** (AO1)
 - Your **topic sentences** for all your paragraphs (AO1)
 - The quotations you will be using and analysing from elsewhere in the text (AO1 & AO2)
 - A sense of why the writer has made the choices they have (AO2)
 - A sense of what contextual factors give further insight into the ideas and theme presented in the question (AO3)
- Therefore, a plan may look like the following:

Thesis statement:

Russell presents the importance of friendship through several characters in Blood Brothers, especially Mickey and Edward whose friendship is central to the play. Russell chooses to contrast the power and beauty of their childhood friendship with its final collapse in adulthood, which results in their tragic ending. Their friendship highlights one of Russell's key messages concerning social class, inequality and poverty which can have devastating consequences on people's lives.

Topic sentence	Quote from the text	Evidence from elsewhere in the text
Russell initially depicts Mickey and Edward's friendship as strong despite their disparate social backgrounds, which underscores his message that natural human bonds and relationships are more important than societal norms and expectations.	"If you loved me you'd let me go out with Mickey"	Russell illustrates how Edward and Mickey are inextricably linked and their refusal to be separated is evident, for example, through Edward as he disobeys his mother's instructions about associating with working-class friends like Mickey
Russell uses dramatic irony in his presentation of Mickey and Edward's friendship as 'blood brothers', which enables the audience to be fully aware of their fate, which further adds to the tragic element of the play as the two boys do not	"Ey, we were born on the same day... that means we can be blood brothers"	Russell uses the omniscient Narrator at the beginning of the play to remind the audience of the impending fate of Mickey and Edward, which enables the audience to feel greater sympathy for them as



fully understand the significance of their new brotherhood.		they watch them spiral toward their tragic end
Russell demonstrates how friendships grow and evolve over time, however, the growing tensions between Mickey and Edward cause them to disastrously part ways, which reveals how external influences, such as class and poverty, can negatively affect the natural bonds of friendship.	"Well, how come you got everything...an' I got nothin'?"	Russell depicts Mickey's tragic decline into violence and depression and contrasts this with Edward's prosperity and success, ending the play with the final collapse of their once close friendship
Russell's methods: The play's structure conveys the change in friendships; the irony of 'blood brothers'; the contrast between other friendships in the play		
Contextual factors: influence of social class on friendships; ideas about appropriate behaviour amongst classes and sexes; social background to the characters' lives; the influence of parents on friendships		

Some other tips:

- You do not need to include a counter-argument (disagreeing with the question/including paragraphs which begin "On the other hand")
 - The questions have been designed to enable as many students as possible to write essays
 - Examiners say that the inclusion of a counter-argument is often unnecessary and unhelpful
 - It can affect your AO1 mark negatively

Writing your essay

Once you have read and evaluated the question and created a clear plan, you are ready to begin writing. Below is a guide detailing what to include.

Your essay should include:

- An introduction with a **thesis statement**
- A number of paragraphs (three is ideal!), each covering a separate point. It's a great idea to start each paragraph with a **topic sentence**
- A **conclusion**

Introduction

- Your introduction should aim to clearly, and briefly, answer the question



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- The best way to do this is to include a thesis statement
- A thesis statement is a short statement (one or two sentences) that summarises the main point or claim your argument is making
 - You should include the exact words from the question in your thesis statement
 - Examiners want to see **your own opinion**: your interpretation of what the writer is trying to show
- Your thesis statement should also attempt to explain **why** you think the writer has presented their characters in the way that they have: what are they trying to say overall? What is their message?
 - A good way to think about this is to ask: what is the writer's one big idea in terms of the characters or themes addressed in the question?
 - Include contextual ideas and perspectives to help explain the writer's intentions
 - Including the writer's message or one big idea helps create a "conceptualised response", which examiners reward with the highest marks
- An example of a thesis statement:

Question:

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How does Russell present the importance of friendship in *Blood Brothers*?

Write about:

- examples of friendship in the play
- how Russell presents the importance of friendship.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]**Thesis statement:**

"Russell presents the importance of friendship through several characters in *Blood Brothers*, especially Mickey and Edward whose friendship is central to the play. Russell chooses to contrast the power and beauty of their childhood friendship with its final collapse in adulthood, which results in their tragic ending. Their friendship highlights one of Russell's key messages concerning social class, inequality and poverty which can have devastating consequences on people's lives."

Some other tips:

- Introductions should not be too long, or include all the details of what each paragraph will include
 - You will not be rewarded for including the same information twice, so don't waste time repeating yourself
- Write your thesis in the third person, not the first person (don't use "I")



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- “I believe that Russell presents ideas about the importance of friendship”
- “Russell presents the importance of friendship through several characters ...in order to illustrate ...”

Paragraphs

- Try to include three separate paragraphs that cover three separate points
 - This will ensure your response is to what examiners call the “full task”
- Start each paragraph with a topic sentence
 - A topic sentence is an opening sentence which details the focus of its paragraph
 - It should include the words of the question
 - All topic sentences must relate to your thesis
 - They should be seen as sub-points that provide a more specific and narrower focus than your thesis statement
 - Everything that follows a topic sentence in a paragraph must support the point it makes

Example of a topic sentence:

“Russell initially depicts Mickey and Edward's friendship as strong despite their disparate social backgrounds, which underscores his message that natural human bonds and relationships are more important than societal norms and expectations.”

- Beware of writing an overly structured paragraph which follows a set pattern
 - You may have learned PEE, PEAL, PEED, or other structures for your paragraphs
 - However, examiners often say that although these are excellent for learning what to include in essays, they can be limiting in an exam
 - Instead, be led by the ideas in the text, and prove your own argument (both the overall thesis and your topic sentences)

Conclusion

- It is always a good idea to include a conclusion to your essay so that your essay reads as coherent and focused on answering the question throughout
 - This can result in improved marks for AO1
- However, there is no need to spend a long time writing your conclusion
 - A conclusion for a modern text should only summarise the proof you have provided for your thesis
 - It only needs to be two or three sentences long

- It should include the words of the question and your thesis
- Remember, you do not get rewarded for including the same information twice

An example of a conclusion:

"To conclude, Russell presents friendship as a fundamental aspect of people's lives and he demonstrates how these special relationships can be impacted by social inequality and injustice. Through Mickey and Edward, Russell argues that even the closest friendships - and by extension, all bonds between different groups in society - are tested, and potentially broken, by these inequalities."



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Writer's Methods & Techniques

Examiners want students to analyse a wide range of the writer's methods (AO2), not just the language. Remember, analysing methods means evaluating all of the writer's choices, which includes a lot more than just the lines they wrote for each character. It includes characterisation, form and structure. In this guide you will find sections on:

- **How to Quote from a Modern Text in your Essay**
- **Analysing the Writer's Methods**

How to quote the writer in your essay

- The modern text exam is a closed-book exam, which means you don't get a copy of the text to use in your exam
 - This means that examiners do not expect you to memorise dozens of direct quotations from the text
 - If you are memorising quotations, focus on learning a few, short quotations that are relevant to the key themes in the text you are studying
- References don't need to be direct quotations
 - They can be things that characters say in different parts of the text in your own words
 - They can be references to things that happen in the text, or the way that different characters are presented elsewhere
- Examiners repeatedly stress that textual references are just as valuable as direct quotations, when referencing the rest of the text
 - "You don't get extra marks for more quotations, but you do get more marks for making plenty of interesting comments about the references you have selected."
 - The most important thing is that these references are directly related to the ideas and themes you are exploring in your essay, and provide evidence to prove your thesis

Analysing the writer's methods

In order to achieve the highest AO2 marks, think about methods as the writer's choices, not just the language they are using. One way to address this is to recognise that writer's methods embrace anything the writer has done to create and develop meaning, so while this obviously includes language, other aspects of the texts also should also be explored. The structure of the text, the juxtaposing of scenes and incidents, the use of characters as contrasts or foils all allow you to see the text in a larger sense, linking different parts of it together and exploring the choices the writer has made. Therefore, you should

consider: What overall decisions has the writer made in relation to characters, setting, form and structure? For what reasons have they made these choices? What overarching message do they help to convey?

What not to do when analysing the writer's methods

- Don't "spot techniques"
 - Examiners dislike when students use overly sophisticated terminology unnecessarily ("polysyndeton"; "epanalepsis")
 - Knowing the names of sophisticated techniques will not gain you any more marks, especially if these techniques are only "spotted" and the writer's intentions for this language is not explained
 - Instead of technique spotting, focus your analysis on the reasons why the writer is presenting the character or theme the way they do
- Don't unnecessarily label word types
 - Similar to technique spotting, this is when students use "the noun X" or "the verb Y"
 - This doesn't add anything to your analysis
 - Instead, examiners suggest you focus on ideas, or images, instead of words, or word types
 - Instead of "Russell uses the metaphor to show..." use "Russell repeatedly uses allusions to superstitions which illustrate..."
- Don't limit your analysis to a close reading of the writer's language
 - You gain marks for explaining all of the writer's choices, not just their language
 - Only focusing on his language, therefore, limits the mark you will be given
 - Instead, take a whole-text approach and think about the writer's decisions about:
 - Form
 - Structure
 - Characterisation
 - Stagecraft
 - You do not need to include quotations to analyse the above, but you will still be rewarded well by the examiner
- Never retell the story
 - "Narrative" and "descriptive" answers get the lowest marks
 - Move from **what** the writer is presenting to **how** and **why** they have made the choices they have



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What to do when analysing the writer's methods

- Take a whole-text approach
 - This could involve commenting on structure: “ ‘at the start / this changes when / in contrast...’ “
 - Think about how characters develop: are they presented differently at different parts of the text? Why has the writer chosen to present this change?
 - Are characters presented differently from each other? Why? What does each represent?
 - Do characters' relationships with each other change? Why might the writer have chosen to do this?
- Remember that characters are constructs, not real people
 - Think about what each character's function is in the text
 - What does the writer use each character to say about humanity, or about society?
- Always frame your essay with the writer in mind
 - As the examiners say: “writers use methods, including language and structure, to form and express their ideas – the choices the writer makes are conscious and deliberate”
 - Therefore, write that the writer “highlights X”, “suggests Y”, “challenges Z”
 - Use the words “so” and “because” to push you to explain your own ideas further
 - “Russell uses the omniscient Narrator at the beginning of the play so that the audience is reminded of the impending fate of Mickey and Edward”
- Zoom out to big ideas in your analysis
- Go from analysing language, or other writer's choices, to the writer's overall intention, or message
- This should also link to your thesis, and argument throughout
- You can begin these “zoom-out” sentences with “Russell could be suggesting that because X, then Y” or “Russell could be using the character of X to challenge contemporary ideas about Y”
- Use modal language to present sophisticated ideas
 - Using words like “could”, “may” or “perhaps” shows that you are thinking conceptually



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Context

Context

There are only a maximum of six marks available in the modern text question for context. This may not seem like a lot, but six marks can be the difference between two entire grades at GCSE. Furthermore, if you understand how to effectively incorporate contextual understanding of your studied text into your essay, it can even boost your mark in AO1 too, and help you create a more sophisticated and conceptualised response.

Britain from 1945 onwards

Below is some general context related to modern Britain in which all of the writers wrote their texts. It should be stressed once again that it is not necessary, or even useful, to memorise all of this historical information, but that the notes below give a general sense of the behaviours and attitudes of the writer's time.

Remember, you should only revise those contextual factors that are relevant to the ideas and themes of the text you are studying.

The latter half of the 20th century saw many significant shifts in British culture and society. The end of the Second World War in 1945 marked a significant turning point, causing the prior society of class and Empire to disintegrate in order to address growing societal conflicts.

Class, Poverty and Inequality

- Significant changes in legislation relating to social welfare were enacted with the formation of the **Welfare State**
- A series of social welfare policies were introduced after the Second World War so that the vulnerable in society would be offered some protection:
 - The **1942 Beveridge Report** advocated a system of social insurance for every citizen regardless of income, for example, the **Family Allowances Act of 1945**, the **National Health Service Act of 1946**
 - For example, in *An Inspector Calls*, Priestley sets his play at a period when the state would have offered little protection to people like Eva
- Social legislation led to widespread debates about equality and society began to advocate for further changes to the system to make it more fair for all
- Unemployment levels rose dramatically in the 1980s due to industries such as coal mines, factories, shipyards and steel mills closing down:
 - For example, in *Blood Brothers*, the city of Liverpool would have relied heavily on manufacturing industries and the impact of unemployment is revealed through the character of Mickey, who loses his job in a factory



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- Rates of poverty and wealth in Britain changed significantly in the latter half of the 20th century and although there is less extreme poverty than previously, Britain still has high levels of inequality in terms of wealth:

- For example, in *Blood Brothers*, Russell addresses ideas about social class and the effects of poverty and affluence on families through his depiction of the Johnstone and Lyons families

Immigration

- After the Second World War, Britain's economy was struggling and therefore the government promoted immigration from Commonwealth nations in order to bolster the economy
- The **1948 British Nationality Act** declared all colony populations British citizens which resulted in increased immigration to Britain:
 - For example, in *Leave Taking*, Pinnock provides an account of a second-generation immigrant family and focuses on the different experiences between a Jamaican mother and her teenage daughters
- People arriving from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia sometimes faced racism and discrimination:
 - For example, in *Anita and Me*, Syal presents Meena's encounters with racism in many different ways
- Immigrant communities introduced various music, fashion and cultural traditions to Britain, creating greater diversity:
- For example, in *Pigeon English*, Kelman explores ideas about culture and assimilation and about the immigrant experience in the inner city

Racism

- Amidst pervasive social and economic issues, protests spread around England, in the 1980s, in places such as Brixton, Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool as some sections of society believed their voices were being ignored:
 - For example, in *Princess and the Hustler*, Odimba specifically sets her play against the backdrop of the Bristol Bus Boycott in the 1960s, which arose when a Bristol company refused to employ Black or Asian workers
- Racial tensions meant that some of Britain's inner cities were sharply divided:
 - For example, in *Anita and Me*, Syal introduces ideas about racism and acceptance
- The **Race Relations Act of 1976** brought about some change, as it made both direct and indirect discrimination illegal and provided legal redress for those discriminated against through employment tribunals and the courts

Gender

- The civic and social roles of women continued to be challenged and women were redefining their position in society:



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- For example, in *Blood Brothers*, Russell presents ideas about the importance of strong women to guide children and alludes to ideas about the unreliability of men
- **Feminism** in Britain developed in the 1960s and legislation, such as the **1969 Divorce Reform Act**, allowed women greater freedoms in society:
 - For example, in *An Inspector Calls*, Priestley addresses ideas about **patriarchy** and **misogyny** and acceptable male behaviour towards women
- Women gained greater status in the workplace and the British government launched campaigns to encourage women to enter the labour market
- Individualism led to an increased rejection of stereotypical gender roles:
 - For example, in *A Taste of Honey*, Delaney presents an inversion of traditional gender roles through the characters of Jo and Geof, by subverting the idea that a woman is meant to take care of children

Audience

- If you are studying a play, then it would have an audience, and not a reader
- The audience would have comprised a wide range of social classes
- It is therefore useful to think of what their attitudes and behaviours would have been in general
 - What were the societal norms of the time?
 - How might these audiences have thought about topics like:
 - Social reform?
 - Racism?
 - Feminism?
 - Immigration?
 - Inequality?
 - These topics should relate to the text you have studied
 - Are the writers using the characters, or events in their texts, to **reflect**, or **challenge** these societal norms?

What not to do when exploring context

- Do not “bolt-on” irrelevant biographical or historical facts to your paragraphs
- Do not see context as history:
 - It is better understood as ideas and perspectives



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- Do not explore contextual factors in your essay if they are not:
 - Relevant to the ideas and themes of the text in general
 - Relevant to the question you have been set
 - Relevant to the central thesis of your own argument
- Do not only add context at the end of paragraphs, or in some set paragraph structure that includes context:
 - It is much better to incorporate contextual understanding into your argument, or into your analysis of the writer's methods
- Do not include the formulation "A 20th-century audience would think... whereas a modern audience would think":
 - This takes you away from your own ideas, and from answering the question directly
- Do not include analysis of adaptations of the text (for example a film version):
 - This will affect your focus on answering the question
- Do not include interpretations of the text based on literary theory (for example Marxist, feminist, Freudian and Nietzschean theories):
 - These do not contribute to your own interpretation of the text!

What to do when exploring context

- Ensure all your exploration of context is linked to:
 - The themes and ideas the writer is exploring in the text
 - The question you have been set
 - Your own argument
- Understanding that context is about understanding ideas and perspectives
 - Think: what were the particular attitudes and behaviours of the writer's time that give a greater understanding of a theme or character?
 - Do these societal norms help explain a character's actions, or development, over the course of the text?
 - Is there a reason why the writer is exploring a theme? Do they want to reflect or challenge their society's attitudes on a particular issue?
- Some of these ideas are universal:
 - Your own understanding of the following ideas are valid and useful to explore:

- Gender
- Class
- Racism
- Feminism
- Immigration
- Exploration of universal ideas and perspectives is equally valid, and awarded marks for context in the same way



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Mark Scheme

Mark Scheme

The mark scheme in English Literature can seem daunting, and difficult to understand. This is because there is no “correct answer” for any essay: the exam board does not provide points that need to be included in any essay, and instead, examiners have to use the mark scheme to place an answer into a level.

It is therefore essential to understand the mark scheme really well yourself: if you understand exactly what you are being assessed on, you understand how to improve. Below you will find sections on:

- **Translating the mark scheme**
- **Understanding the different levels**
- **How to get a Level 6**
- **Student-friendly mark scheme**
- **Tick list for success**

Translating the mark scheme

Here is a simple version of the AQA mark scheme for the modern text question, and below, a student-friendly translation of the mark scheme with expert advice and guidance, broken down into the different assessment objectives.



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AO1	<p>Read, understand and respond to texts.</p> <p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

AO1

What it says: “Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response”

What it means: Write a clear essay with a central argument based on your own opinions. All parts of the essay must directly answer the question

Commentary:

- Examiners want to see what they call a “coherent” response: an answer that relates to a central argument in every part of the essay
 - This is why it is vital to **plan** your answer first
- This argument should always link directly to the question, so include the key words of the question in your thesis and your topic sentences
- Examiners want to see your opinions

Tick list:

- Have I included a thesis statement in my introduction?



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- Does my thesis statement include a central argument based on my own opinions?
- Does my thesis statement include key words from the question?
- Have I included topic sentences for all of my paragraphs?
- Do all of my paragraphs directly answer the question?
- Have I included a conclusion that sums up my argument and links to my thesis?

What it says: “Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations”

What it means: Select quotations and references from the text. These must be accurate, and provide evidence for the points you make in your argument

Commentary:

- Examiners reward the highest marks to students who relate the ideas and themes to the text
 - To link to elsewhere in the text, use phrases like: “Earlier/later in the text”, “Similarly, in Act X, Scene Y”, “the writer also highlights this idea when”
- References do not need to be direct quotations
- You do not get more marks for more quotations
 - All references just need to be accurate and provide evidence for your points and overall argument
- All references must be relevant to the points of your essay
- Examiners dislike when students include irrelevant quotations

Tick list:

- Have I chosen two or three quotations from the text?
- Have I linked these quotations and ideas to other parts of the text?
- Do all of my references directly support my argument?
 - Does each reference I have included support the points made in my topic sentences?

AO2

What it says: “Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects”

What it means: Use analysis of the writer’s choices to support your argument. This evidence can be the language used by the writer, as well as the form of text chosen and the order of events in the text

Commentary:

- Examiners want students to move away from word-level analysis to whole-text analysis



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- This means not just focusing your analysis on the language in the text, or quotations you have memorised
- Instead, think about choices the writer has made in terms of form and structure, contrasts and character development
- This analysis should move from **how** the writer uses language, structure and form, to **why** they do it
 - What is the writer using their language/characters to say? What is the writer's overall message?

Tick list:

- Does my analysis provide evidence for the points in my argument?
- Have I moved from close word-level analysis to whole-text analysis?
- Have I included an analysis of structure and/or form?
- Have I explained my analysis in terms of the writer's overall message?

What it says: "[...] using relevant subject terminology where appropriate"**What it means:** Include terminology on writers' techniques **only** when techniques are explained fully and relevant to your argument**Commentary:**

- Examiners don't like what they call "technique-spotting"
 - This is where a student uses (sometimes very sophisticated) vocabulary to name the literary techniques the writer uses without explaining them
- Equally, they don't reward analysis that just names a word class ("the noun X"; "the verb Y")
 - They think this is "unnecessary and unhelpful"
- The writer's techniques should only be analysed if they provide further evidence to support your argument
- Examiners want students to move from **what** technique the writer uses to **how** and **why** they are using them

Tick list:

- Have I removed any unnecessary technique spotting?
- Have I removed any unnecessary naming of word classes?
- Have I explained the writer's use of techniques in terms of his overall message?

AO3



Your notes

What it says: “Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written”

What it means: Use contextual ideas and perspectives to support your argument and to provide further insight into the writer’s choices

Commentary:

- Context is not historical or biographical information that has nothing to do with the ideas presented in the modern text
- Instead, context should be seen as the ideas and perspectives of the writer’s time
- These ideas and perspectives (views on class, gender, race, etc.) help us understand why the writers present their text and characters in the way they do
 - Why do characters behave the way they do?
 - Why is this scene set in this particular place?
 - Why is this theme significant in the text?
- Examiners want to see context linked to the themes and ideas of the text
- All context should also be linked to your overall argument
 - What further insight does an understanding of the behaviours and beliefs of the writer’s era provide to my argument?

Tick list:

- Have I removed any irrelevant contextual information?
- Is all my context linked to the ideas and perspectives of the writer’s time?
- Does all my context provide additional insight into my main argument?

AO4

What it says: “Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.”

What it means: Use specialist terminology and key vocabulary throughout your essay to show a deep understanding of the ideas the writer is exploring. Structure your essay clearly, and spell and punctuate correctly

Commentary:

- Although AO4 on its own is only worth 4 marks, using key vocabulary and structuring your essay well will also increase your AO1 marks



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- Using specialist terminology can help you create a “conceptualised response”, which is rewarded with the highest marks
- Structuring your essay into clear paragraphs with clear topic sentences will also help you gain top marks for organisation

Tick list:

- Have I included key terminology throughout my essay?
- Have I paragraphed my essay clearly?
- Have I re-read my essay to check for spelling and grammar mistakes?

Understanding the different levels

The mark scheme for English Literature has six levels, with Level 1 at the bottom, and Level 6 at the top. Examiners do not receive a list of points that need to be included for a student’s essay to achieve Level 3, say, or Level 5. Instead, the mark scheme contains different “descriptors” for each level:

- “Descriptors” are the:
 - Features that a response is expected to have to achieve at each level
 - This means: How well a student has responded to the question (the overall quality of the answer)
 - Skills a student is expected to show to achieve each level
 - This means: The specific skills needed to explore and analyse a text
- For example, the “descriptors” for a Level 1 response are:
 - An attempt to answer the question (quality of answer)
 - A narrative or descriptive approach (quality of answer)
 - A simple analysis of the writer’s methods and context (skills shown)
- In contrast, examiners expect a lot more for a Level 6 response. The “descriptors” for Level 6 include:
 - Responding to the full task with a well-structured argument (quality of answer)
 - A critical, exploratory and conceptualised approach (quality of answer)
 - Insightful analysis of the writer’s methods (skills shown)
 - An integrated and exploratory approach to context (skills shown)

Essentially, when examiners are putting student essays into a particular level, they are just deciding **how well** the student has displayed the expected features and skills of each assessment objective. So, if you understand each AO, and what is required for each AO, you will know how to improve.



Your notes

What makes a Level 6 answer?

If you want to achieve a Grade 9, you should be aiming for a Level 6 response. Below you will see a table that explains how to move from a Level 5 response to Level 6.

Question:

0 2

How does Priestley present Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society?

Write about:

- some of the things Sheila learns in the play
- how Priestley presents Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Part of essay	Level 5	Level 6	Reason
Introduction	Priestley presents Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society in several ways. Once the Inspector arrives, Sheila begins to change as she quickly learns the important lesson of personal and social responsibility and this will be explored further in this essay.	Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society throughout <i>An Inspector Calls</i> . As her character develops, Priestley uses her to highlight his message about social and collective responsibility suggesting that everyone in the play, including the audience and wider society, also have important lessons to learn.	The Level 6 introduction is in the form of a thesis statement, which presents an overarching argument that includes Priestley as a writer making deliberate choices and conveying a message.
Topic sentence	As the play progresses, Priestley continues to present Sheila as a character who is learning to change her behaviour and attitudes.	Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society as Act I develops and he uses her character to highlight his message about social and collective responsibility.	The Level 6 response develops the idea within the question much more thoroughly and links it directly to Priestley's message.



Analysis of the writer's methods	<i>Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn through her use of emotional language. When she discovers Eva's fate, she is inconsolable: "I can't help thinking about this girl - destroying herself so horribly". Her language reveals her compassion for Eva's situation and demonstrates the lesson she has learned about social and personal responsibility for her actions. Her language is in sharp contrast to her parents who fail to show any empathy for Eva and who fail to accept any responsibility for the girl's fate.</i>	<i>Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn through her increasingly emotional language. Her dialogue reveals her sensitive nature and compassion and empathy for others less fortunate than herself. When she discovers Eva's fate, she is inconsolable: "I can't help thinking about this girl - destroying herself so horribly". Priestley sharply contrasts with the pompous language of her father and the condescending tone of her mother. Structurally, Priestley creates a strong contrast in the first half of the act compared to the second half in terms of both character and mood: while the first half illustrates the prosperity and smugness of the Birlings, the second half enables the audience to observe its destruction, as unlike Sheila, many of the characters fail to learn from their mistakes.</i>	<p>The Level 5 response presents thoughtful and developed ideas and demonstrates a clear exploration of the writer's methods to create meanings and uses appropriate references to support their ideas.</p> <p>The Level 6 response takes more of an analytical approach to the text by looking closely at elements of the method and selecting precise references to illustrate their argument. It provides an argument which is much more convincing in its exploration than the Level 5 response.</p>
Context	<i>During the period in which the play is set, women's rights were being sought through the suffragette movement which campaigned for gender equality for women. It was an increasing time of political agitation for women's rights. Priestley uses Sheila to show how women were learning important lessons about their role in society.</i>	<i>Priestley uses Sheila to show how women were learning important lessons about their role in the home and society, as this was a period when women's rights were being sought through the suffragette movement. Sheila belongs to a class where women would never be expected to provide for themselves and although she uses her power and position to suppress another female by having her fired, she does demonstrate a capacity to learn from that mistake: "And I know I'm</i>	<p>The Level 5 response is starting to demonstrate elements of exploratory thought concerning context</p> <p>and begins to convey some tentative ideas as to Priestley's purpose which is one of the indicators of a Level 5 response.</p>



Your notes

	<i>Priestley's message that members of society have duties and obligations towards the welfare of others is presented through the character of Sheila.</i>	<i>to blame – and I'm desperately sorry". Sheila's acceptance that she is responsible and accountable for her actions underscores Priestley's message that members of society have duties and obligations toward the welfare of others.</i>	The Level 6 response demonstrates a more integrated engagement with the text as a whole and its context, reflecting on the ideas in a more reflective and insightful way. Contextual information is also explicitly connected to Priestley's overall message.
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Overall student-friendly mark scheme

The GCSE mark scheme can be confusing as it is written for examiners, not students. Below is a translated mark scheme that breaks the assessment objectives into concise, clear instructions.

Assessment Objective	Number of marks	Meaning
AO1	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a clear essay with a central argument based on your own opinions All parts of the essay must directly answer the question Select quotations and references from the whole text Quotations must be accurate, and provide evidence for the points you make in your argument



Your notes

AO2	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use analysis of the writer's choices to support your argument Evidence can be analysis of the language used by the writer, as well as the form and structure of the text Include terminology on writers' techniques only when techniques are explained fully and relevant to your argument
AO3	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use contextual ideas and perspectives to support your argument and to provide further insight into the writer's choices
AO4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use specialist terminology and key vocabulary throughout your essay Structure your essay clearly, and spell and punctuate correctly

Tick list for success

Marking your own essays can be difficult. However, if you use the tick list below, you can see which features and skills you have, and haven't, included in your answer. If you can say 'yes' to all of the questions below, your essay should be heading toward the highest level.

AO1

- Have I included a thesis statement in my introduction?
- Does my thesis statement include a central argument based on my own opinions?
- Does my thesis statement include key words from the question?
- Have I included topic sentences for all of my paragraphs?
- Do all of my paragraphs directly answer the question?
- Have I included a conclusion that sums up my argument and links to my thesis?
- Have I chosen three or four quotations or references from the text?
- Do all of my references directly support my argument?
 - Does each reference I have included support the points made in my topic sentences?

AO2

- Does my analysis provide evidence for the points in my argument?
- Have I moved from close word-level analysis to whole-text analysis?

- Have I included an analysis of structure and/or form?
- Have I explained my analysis in terms of the writer's overall message?
- Have I removed any unnecessary technique spotting?
- Have I removed any unnecessary naming of word classes?
- Have I explained the writer's use of techniques in terms of their overall message?

AO3

- Have I removed any irrelevant contextual information?
- Is all my context linked to the ideas and perspectives of the writer's time?
- Does all my context provide additional insight into my main argument?

AO4

- Have I included key terminology throughout my essay?
- Have I paragraphed my essay clearly?
- Have I re-read my essay to check for spelling and grammar mistakes?



Your notes



Your notes

Model Answers

Model Answers

Below you will find a full-mark, Level 6 model answer for a modern text essay. Commentary below each section of the essay illustrates how and why it would be awarded Level 6. Despite the fact it is an answer to An Inspector Calls question, the commentary below is relevant to any modern text question.

A student-friendly mark scheme has been included here:

Assessment Objective	Number of marks	Meaning
AO1	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a clear essay with a central argument based on your own opinions All parts of the essay must directly answer the question Select quotations and references from the whole text Quotations must be accurate, and provide evidence for the points you make in your argument
AO2	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use analysis of the writer's choices to support your argument Evidence can be analysis of the language used by the writer, as well as the form and structure of the text Include terminology on writers' techniques only when techniques are explained fully and relevant to your argument
AO3	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use contextual ideas and perspectives to support your argument and to provide further insight into the writer's choices
AO4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use specialist terminology and key vocabulary throughout your essay Structure your essay clearly, and spell and punctuate correctly

Model Answer Breakdown



Your notes

The commentary for the below model answer as arranged by assessment objective: each paragraph has a commentary for a different assessment objective, as follows:

- **The introduction** includes commentary on all the AOs
- **Section 1** includes commentary on **AO1** (answering the question and selecting references)
- **Section 2** includes commentary on **AO2** (analysing writer's methods)
- **Section 3** includes commentary on **AO3** (exploring context)
- **The conclusion** includes commentary on all the AOs

The model answer answers the following question:

0	2
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How does Priestley present Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society?

Write about:

- some of the things Sheila learns in the play
- how Priestley presents Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Level 6, full-mark answer:

Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society throughout *An Inspector Calls*. As her character develops, Priestley uses her to highlight his message about social and collective responsibility suggesting that everyone in the play, including the audience and wider society, also have important lessons to learn.

Commentary:

- The introduction is in the form of a thesis statement
- It includes a central argument based on my own opinions
- It includes key words from the question:
 - "Priestley demonstrates Sheila's capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society throughout *An Inspector Calls*."
- It takes a whole-text approach, referencing characters across the whole text:
 - "Priestley uses her to highlight his message about social and collective responsibility suggesting that everyone in the play, including the audience and wider society..."



Your notes

- It acknowledges Priestley as a writer making deliberate choices and conveying a message
 - “Priestley uses her to highlight his message that everyone in the play, including the audience and wider society, also have important lessons to learn.”
- It includes modal language to show a conceptualised approach

Priestley demonstrates Sheila’s capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society as Act I develops and he uses her character to highlight his message about social and collective responsibility. Priestley first presents Sheila to the audience as “a pretty girl in her twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited” which suggests a silliness and perhaps also a naivety about her character. She is initially depicted as self-interested, relishing her engagement to Gerald, which fully aligns her with her family’s shallow and materialistic outlook. However, once the Inspector arrives, Sheila begins to change as she quickly learns the important lesson of personal and social responsibility while many of the others refuse to do so. Further, as a character, Sheila learns to become much more sympathetic and courageous. She is the first character (apart from the Inspector) to empathise with Eva Smith’s predicament and she is also the first to confess to having treated the girl poorly. She dramatically exits the stage when first shown a photograph of Eva and Priestley presents her as genuinely regretful of her actions. This growing maturity is also further revealed when Gerald’s affair is exposed, as she again demonstrates an understanding of his affair by applauding his honest confession. Similarly, she is also the first character to suspect the authenticity of the Inspector, though she comes to realise this is irrelevant. Although Priestley presents Sheila as somewhat self-interested at the beginning of Act I, there are early indications that she is a caring character and that she has the capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society in general.

Commentary:

- Paragraph begins with a topic sentence
- Topic sentence directly addresses the question (“Sheila’s capacity to learn important lessons”)
- Topic sentence has a narrower focus than the thesis statement
- The whole paragraph is related to the topic sentence
- Paragraph includes multiple references to the rest of the text
- All references are linked to the question, and support the argument of my topic sentence

Priestley demonstrates Sheila’s capacity to learn through her increasingly emotional language. Her dialogue reveals her sensitive nature and compassion and empathy for others less fortunate than herself. When she discovers Eva’s fate, she is inconsolable: “I can’t help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly”. Priestley sharply contrasts this with the pompous language of her father and the condescending tone of her mother. Indeed, Structurally, Priestley creates a strong contrast in the first half of Act I compared to the second half in terms of Sheila’s character and mood: while the first half illustrates the prosperity and smugness of the Birling family, the second half enables the audience to observe its destruction, as unlike Sheila, many of the characters fail to learn from their mistakes. Similarly, Sheila’s dialogue also demonstrates her increasing assertiveness towards her parents. Even at the beginning of the play, she challenges her father’s opinions about the workers in his factory, by asserting: “but these girls aren’t cheap labour, they’re people”. As the play progresses, she continues to challenge her parents for not



Your notes

learning from the Inspector, thus illustrating her greater capacity to learn from her mistakes. While both Sheila and Eric learn more lessons than the other characters in the play, it is Sheila who is transformed more than any other character. Although Eric echoes many of his sister's sentiments, Sheila is a much more assertive, alluring and intuitive character than her brother. Priestley uses this intuition to foreshadow later events in the play. For example, she makes the comment to Gerald: "...except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you" which is used to allude to Gerald's affair with Eva. Therefore, Priestley uses Sheila as a symbol of hope for the younger generation by demonstrating her capacity for change and her acceptance of both personal and social responsibility, which is one of Priestley's fundamental messages in the play.

Commentary:

- The analysis provides evidence for the points in the topic sentence (all evidence relates to Sheila's capacity to learn important lessons)
- Whole-text analysis of the writer's methods
- The analysis includes other wider choices made by the writer:
 - Characterisation
 - Structure
- All analysis is explained fully in terms of the question and my own argument
- The analysis explained in terms of the writer's overall message

As the play progresses, Priestley continues to present Sheila as a character who is learning to change her behaviour and attitudes. For example, at the beginning of the play, she largely plays a typical role within her patriarchal society and is obedient to her father. However, as the play develops, Sheila begins to challenge her father and her dialogue increasingly demonstrates an assertiveness towards her parents. Priestley uses Sheila to show how women were learning important lessons about their role in the home and society, as this was a period when women's rights were being sought through the suffragette movement. Indeed, this growing agitation for gender equality is also evident through Sheila's refusal to continue her engagement with Gerald even though he claims "everything's all right now". By offering the ring again to Sheila, Priestley also shows Gerald has not learned anything from the Inspector, which is in stark contrast to Sheila, who has learned so much. Sheila belongs to a class where women would never be expected to provide for themselves and although she uses her power and position to suppress another female by having her fired, she does demonstrate a capacity to learn from that mistake: "And I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry". Sheila's acceptance that she is responsible and accountable for her actions underscores Priestley's message that members of society have duties and obligations towards the welfare of others and that they have a collective and social responsibility to take care of each other. Towards the end of the play, Sheila's language is full of irony in order to highlight Priestley's message even further, when she says: "So there's nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn. We can all go on behaving just as we did". For Priestley and Sheila, there are many important lessons to be learned by everyone.

Commentary:



Your notes

- Does not include any irrelevant historical or biographical facts
- All context is linked to the topic sentence (“Priestley uses Sheila to show how women were learning important lessons about their role in the home and society”) and the argument as a whole
- All context is integrated into the analysis of the writer’s methods
- Understanding contextual ideas and perspectives provides additional insight to my main argument
- Context is sometimes implied, rather than explicit. This still shows sophisticated awareness of ideas (“and although she uses her power and position to suppress another female by having her fired, she does demonstrate a capacity to learn from that mistake”)

To conclude, Priestley presents Sheila’s capacity to learn important lessons about herself and society in order to convey Priestley’s message that all actions have consequences and that everyone can learn something from their past actions. Sheila’s ability to change is used by Priestley as a symbol of hope for the younger generation and her capacity to change and her acceptance of social and collective responsibility demonstrates Priestley’s insistence that this extends beyond the confines of a family unit and spreads to society as a whole: to learn important lessons about ourselves and society is a fundamental aspect of his message.

Commentary:

- Conclusion uses key words from the question
- Conclusion links to thesis
- Conclusion sums up more detailed arguments outlined in topic sentences of all paragraphs
- It also gives a fuller understanding of the writer’s intentions, based on ideas explored in the essay