



How to succeed in

GCSE English

A Guide for Year 11 Students in 2007 - 2008 who are following
AQA English A Specification



How to Succeed in GCSE English

A Guide for Students who are following AQA English A Specification

There is more than one Exam Board offering courses in GCSE English and some Boards have a choice of A and B. This guide is designed to help students who are following AQA English A Specification.

1. KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Although their courses are structured differently, all the Boards are testing the same skills and expect you to read all three genres, or types of writing: prose (a novel or short story), poetry and drama (a play). They will also test you on a play by Shakespeare and on non-fiction or media writing. Some of you will be entered for the English Literature exam and so will read more texts, to be examined in a separate English Literature paper.

You will notice that your English exam has 2 papers and 2 different types of coursework: written and spoken (or oral). Together, the oral and written coursework counts for 40% so you can really influence your final grade by putting a lot of effort into producing your best work here. However, although they are important, coursework essays earn you 5% and essays in the exams are worth 15%, so make sure you prepare very carefully for these.

There are 2 levels of entry – Higher (A* - D) and Foundation (C – G).



2. WHAT ARE THE EXAMINERS LOOKING FOR?

To achieve your very best grade you need to make sure that you understand what the examiner is looking for in each paper. You also need to take note of the number of questions you have to answer and make sure you answer them all. An examiner isn't allowed to give you bonus marks for a particularly brilliant answer to the first question to compensate for the fact that you didn't have enough time to answer the second question.

Here is how the papers are structured, along with a few tips about how to do well:

ENGLISH PAPER 1 1 hour 45 minutes

SECTION A: Reading

You will need to answer all the questions in this section.
You are advised to spend about 1 hour on Section A.

Make sure that you start by reading the first passage very carefully. Take your time and don't rush as it's crucial that you have understood what it's about.

The first questions will be on the first passage. You will save time and be more efficient if you read the first passage and deal with this, before reading the second. It's likely that in the second question you will be asked to use material from both passages.

If the question gives you instructions, or suggests you "might like to consider" make sure you deal with these issues as your examiner's mark scheme will allocate marks to them.

You will have several questions to answer. Look carefully at the number of marks you can earn for each question and try to spend appropriate amounts of time on each. A rough guide is about twice as long as the number of marks available e.g. 10 minutes for 5 marks.

You also need to be aware of the difference between **FACT** and **OPINION**. It is a fact that a mobile phone enables you to call people wherever you are, but whether or not this is a good thing is a matter of opinion. You are likely to have a question testing your awareness of facts and opinions. In your answer, give evidence from the text to show why you think you are dealing with a fact or an opinion.

Remember: PEE - make a **p**oint, provide **e**vidence (a quotation from the passage) and then **e**xplain how your quotation proves your point.

In general, write in sentences and try to spell and punctuate accurately. However, if you are asked to list information then phrases are fine.

Try to use the full range of your vocabulary.

Here are a few tips on how to read effectively

1. As you read, try to remember P A T

Purpose What is the writing trying to do?

Audience Who is it aimed at?

Type What type of writing is it?

Purpose: What is the objective of the writing?

- Is it aimed at persuading the reader to adopt a point of view or do something?
- Is it trying to explain something?
- Is it trying to entertain?
- Is it presenting information?

Audience: Who is the article aimed at?

- A certain age group?
- Men or women?
- Those who share an interest, concern or hobby?
- People from a particular place?
- People who buy or use a certain product?

Type: Is it fiction or non-fiction?

In this paper you are dealing with non-fiction and media texts. Where did this writing appear? On the web? In a newspaper? In a magazine? How does this affect the writing?



2. Try to answer two questions:

| | |
|--------------|--|
| What? | What is it about? (Content) |
| How? | How is the content communicated to the reader? (Style) |

You can't do much until you've worked out **WHAT**

..... **but if you can comment on HOW then you will earn a lot more marks.**

HOW covers two main aspects: **language** and **presentation**.

When you are looking at **language**, think of the following:

T W I N

- T**one - is it passionate, funny, ironic?
- W**ords - is the vocabulary formal, colloquial (chatty), emotive, technical?
- I**magery - are there similes or metaphors etc?
- N**arrator - 1st or 3rd person? (I or s/he)

Presentation covers many aspects. Remember: always explain the effect on a reader.

- **Alliteration** – makes the text catchy – quick to read – grabs attention
- **Bullet points** – good way to organise a text – easier to identify different pieces of information
- **Captions** can help readers understand a picture
- **Colour** – there are lots of connections and links – colours reinforce messages – blue= crisp/ cold/ clean. Red= passionate/ sex/ love/ dangerous/ blood
- **Columns** – a way of organising text – they help to make the text clearer to the reader
- **Fonts** – classic/ formal/ old-fashioned/ modern etc – Fonts are chosen to impact on different audiences - and to grab attention
- **Graphs/diagrams** – help make difficult information easier to grasp
- **Headings** – important as a way of organising the text
- **Images** - similes – like/ as or metaphors – direct comparisons – these work to create images in words – so you can see the thing being described

- **Italics** – these emphasise information
- **Logos** – symbols of a company – represent things
- **Maps** – helpful in giving people info – finding or showing a place
- **Paragraphs** – organising text – comment if they are small – short/ easier to read or longer and more detailed – this makes a difference to a text and to the reader – connects with AUDIENCE
- **Pictures/ images** bring the text to life and grab attention – they can also break up the text, which is useful
- **Underlining** emphasises points made
- Always comment on the first, **visual impression** the text has – what do you notice when you look at the text on the page?

When you read through the text, highlight or underline features which you will want to comment on in your answer.

Remember: in your answer, don't simply observe
"The passage is broken up into a lot of short paragraphs."

go on to explain the effect of this
"This makes it easier to take in all the information."

SECTION B: Writing to argue, persuade or advise

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on Section B.

You need to answer **ONE** question here. **DO NOT WRITE ON ALL OF THE TOPICS!** When choosing your essay try to play to your strengths. Certain types of writing will suit you better than others, so before the exam talk to your teacher and try to decide what you do best. Whichever topic you take, be sure to focus on the key word argue, persuade or advise as the examiner will be marking your ability to do these things.



The following tips are applicable to your Section B answers on both papers.

1. Plan your answer – what are you going to say in each paragraph?
2. Remember PAT here as well. (Purpose, Audience, Type)
3. Think about language. It must be appropriate and should be as varied as you can manage.
4. Don't write too much – about 2 sides should be enough.
5. Some of the options will be linked to the passages you've just read. Use some of the ideas from the passages if this helps, but make sure you add some of your own.
6. Remember to write in sentences.
7. Vary the length of your sentences, balancing long, descriptive or informative ones with short, dramatic ones.
8. Punctuate accurately.
9. Use paragraphs and think about the overall shape of your writing. You should have a clear beginning, middle section and conclusion, not just a random assortment of ideas.
10. Think about layout and present your work appropriately. You could be writing a letter, an article for a magazine or the text for a leaflet.
11. If you're asked for your opinion then give it. The examiner won't hold it against you and your writing is likely to be more sincere and passionate if you genuinely care about something.

You have **45 minutes** to write your essay.

You should allow about 5 minutes to plan and 5 minutes to revise your writing.

Here are a few tips about writing different types of essay:

ARGUE

Definition

- To present reasons in support of or opposition to a course of action or an opinion
- To attempt to prove or disprove that something is true
- To express, develop and justify a point of view about issues, events, behaviour, attitudes

Examples

Letters to newspapers:

protesting against plans to build new houses in a local park

Articles on controversial topics:

raising the school-leaving age to 18

Structure:

- Opening statement giving opinion
- Series of paragraphs – argument then counter-argument (2nd guessing)
- Summary and conclusion – restating opinion

Language and style:

- Present tense
- First person (I think that....) and impersonal style (It could be argued that)
- Phrases to give own opinion: In my opinion / I believe / I am convinced that
- 2nd guessing to structure points:
Some people believe that... / It has been said that... / Supporters of hunting argue that...

Followed by:

But this is not the case. / This is to ignore the fact that... / This is not supported by the evidence...

- Linking words / phrases:
 1. Of sequence (order) – to structure whole text (Firstly, secondly, in conclusion / finally – and most importantly)
 2. Of cause and effect – to link points within a paragraph (Consequently, as a result, therefore)
 3. Of comparison – to link different arguments (However / on the other hand)
- Rhetorical questions (*Is this the sort of country we want?*) These involve the reader
- Similes and metaphors (*Smoking makes your breath smell like a car's exhaust fumes*)
- Exclamations! – make a point dramatic

Example of a question:

A newspaper has suggested that women are less suited to doing certain jobs than men are. Write an article for the newspaper in which you argue your point of view.

Remember to:

- Plan your answer
- Argue for or against
- Use language suitable for an argument



PERSUADE

Definition

- To encourage readers to accept a point of view, or to do something/ behave in a particular way

Examples

Letters to newspapers:

appealing to readers to give money to charity, or recycle waste

Advertising copy: encouraging consumers to buy a particular product; persuading people to stop smoking

Pamphlets:

making people aware of something, encouraging them to object to / support something

Structure:

- Opening statement
- Series of points + evidence/ elaboration
- Summary and restatement of opinion

Language and style:

- Present tense
- First person
- Logical connectives or linking words (therefore, because)
- Direct address to reader (If you don't vote to ban hunting then you will be sentencing many more defenceless animals to a protracted, painful death.)
- Emotive language (defenceless, protracted, painful)
- Lists of 3
- Repetition
- Short, dramatic sentences for impact
- Similes and metaphors

Example of a question:

Your school is holding a talent show to raise money for a national charity. Write to a famous person, inviting him or her to be the judge.

Remember to:

- Plan your answer
- Set out your answer as a letter
- Make sure the language is suitable to persuade
- Make sure the language is suitable for a famous person

ADVISE*Definition*

- To offer advice to a person
- To recommend that someone does something

Examples

Letter to a friend: suggesting how to give up smoking

Article in a magazine: guiding potential buyers about how to choose a mobile phone

Structure:

- Opening statement
- Organise ideas into points running logically
- Conclusion

Language and style:

- Present tense
- Directly address the reader
- Keep language simple, but appropriate for reader
(less formal if advising a teenager than if advising an MP)
- Give examples/ details

Example of a question:

You are a journalist working for a magazine. Write an advice sheet aimed at teenagers advising them about how to keep healthy.

Remember to:

- Plan your answer
- Use language suitable for a teenager
(NB This is an exam. Don't be too realistic! Don't use texting language/ style either.)
- Make sure you advise
- Use specific examples



ENGLISH PAPER 2

1 hour 30 minutes

SECTION A: Poetry from Different Cultures

You have 45 minutes for each section.

In the exam you will have a copy of the Anthology of poems which you have been studying in class. There are two different clusters of poems and some of you will have studied just one cluster. Make sure you answer the question on these poems. This is not the time to start looking at the other poems, just because the question for them sounds more interesting!

You have to answer one question and, if you have studied one cluster of poems, there will be no choice.

1. You will be told to write on one poem and then invited to choose a poem to compare with it. Think carefully about which poem would go well with the first. If you choose poems which have little in common you'll find it difficult to write much.
2. The question will link the poems in some way – e.g. poems which reveal feelings or deal with a sense of belonging to a particular culture. Jot down the way this theme is treated in the poems you will discuss.
3. Consider the stylistic features of both poems – stanzas (verses), imagery, diction (words), narrator, rhythm, and rhyme. Underline key features to remind yourself to mention them.
4. Plan your answer – what are you going to put into each paragraph?
5. You need to answer three questions – **What? How? and Why?**

What?

- Is the poem about?
- Impression is the poet trying to create?
- Is the tone of the poem?

How?

- Does the poet convey his/ her ideas?
To answer this question you will need to comment on aspects such as the “voice” of the poem, the language, tone, imagery, structure, rhyme, and rhythm.

Why?

- Avoid simply observing stylistic features e.g. “The poet uses alliteration in the third line.”
Try to explain why s/he uses alliteration, or why s/he includes a particular metaphor.
What is the effect of the alliteration?

6. When comparing poems you have two choices:
Either: you deal with different aspects of the poems in different paragraphs (one paragraph on theme, one on the use of narrator, one on language, one on imagery etc)

Or: you discuss one poem in detail first, before moving on to the second. Keep referring back to the first using phrases such as: similarly; in contrast; also; however; just as....so too; equally; unlike. **You might find this easier.**
7. In your opening sentence, bring together both of the poems e.g. "*Nothing's Changed* and *Two Scavengers* both show us societies in which rich and poor people lead very different lives, but whereas in the first poem, poverty is caused by a person's race, in the second it is the result of his job."
8. Use the present tense.
9. Quote to illustrate your points – but don't copy out long extracts.
10. Remember **PEE:**

Point: make a point
Evidence: quote
Explanation: explain how your quotation proves your point

You might have missed the explanations in class of some of the poems. If you'd like a bit of help understanding them, then look at this website, aimed at both students and teachers:

Andrew Moore's teaching resource site

Type **Andrew Moore** into the search engine and then click on to **www.universalteacher.org.uk** then click on to **GCSE AQA Anthology** and then select *Poems from Different Cultures*.

You might also find the **BBC GCSE Bitesize website** useful. Click on to English.

SECTION B: Writing to inform, explain or describe

This is similar to the writing exercise in Paper 1, so you need to pay attention to spelling, paragraphs, language etc just as before. This time, the examiner is wanting to see how you write to inform, explain or describe, so here are a few tips on writing these essays.

Once again, you have to choose just ONE task and should write about 2 sides.



INFORM

Definition

- To give information to the reader

Examples

Travel brochure or advertisement:

setting out itinerary for an adventure holiday or journey

Newspaper article:

informing readers about the attractions available to tourists in a particular area

Letter:

offering part-time job to a student and setting out terms and conditions of employment

Structure:

- Clear opening
- General information about the topic
- More specific information
- Summarising conclusion
- Interesting lay-out, easy to read

Language and style:

- Present tense
- First or third person (depends on topic – can be personal)
- Linking words/ phrases to make the essay clear and coherent
- Mostly facts (but can be opinion if it's a personal text)
- Specific examples
- Bullet point summaries could be appropriate

Example of a question:

Write a letter to a teachers' magazine informing them about what life is really like for people of your age.

EXPLAIN

Definition

- To make something easier to understand by giving a clear and detailed account of it
- To justify actions and words

Examples

Web site entry:

an explanation of why a penalty can be awarded in netball or football

Leaflet:

an explanation of how to recognise the symptoms of meningitis

Newspaper article:

an explanation to a non-specialist of how a tsunami is formed

Structure:

- Clear opening
- Careful ordering of points, leading logically through the topic
- Words/ phrases to link points
- Summarising conclusion

Language and style:

- Present tense
- First person
- Linking words/ phrases
- Simple, clear language
- Authoritative tone
- Examples and analysis of examples

Example of a question:

Many people have hobbies. Write about one of yours, explaining what it involves and what it means to you.



DESCRIBE

Definition

- To give the reader an account of something (a place or an event) or someone

Examples

Travel writing:

a description of a place and/or its inhabitants

Autobiographical writing:

an account of something that happened to you in the past

Structure:

- Clear introduction
- Careful development of ideas
- Links between paragraphs
- Conclusion

Language and style:

- Give your thoughts and feelings
- Use similes and metaphors
- Appeal to the senses – what can you hear, see, touch, smell or taste?
- Include details – colour/ shape/ size/ movement/ texture

Example of a question:

Places can seem different at different times of day. Choose a place you know well and describe it at two different times of day.

3. HOW TO REVISE

To earn a good grade in many of your GCSE subjects you'll have to learn a lot of facts and information, but it's less obvious how to revise in English. You can make a real effort to learn how to spell words which you find difficult, you can try to memorise technical terms such as simile and metaphor, but most of the marks are awarded for how well you can demonstrate certain skills, such as the ability to write in a particular style.

The only way you will make progress with your skills is by practising them.

Specimen papers are a great way of revising quite close to the exam. If you want to do something useful, but only have a short amount of time to spare, then practise a few of the following:

- Find the picture of someone you don't know in a newspaper or magazine. Try to describe this person as accurately as possible in no more than one short paragraph
- Write the opening of an account in which you have been asked to describe a favourite place
- Jot down 3 things about each of the poems in the cluster you have read
- List all of the poems you have studied. Alongside, write which poems could be linked with them and explain how
- Give 3 different words/ phrases you could use to link paragraphs or ideas
- Think of 3 ways of persuading a reader
- Set out a letter and then show how you would end a letter
- Find an article in a newspaper or magazine. Try to find 3 facts and 3 opinions
- Find an advert. Look at how it has tried to influence the reader
- Write down a couple sentences with at least 6 nouns and 4 verbs. Now add adjectives and adverbs to make the writing more vivid
- Learn PAT, PEE and TWIN
- Go back over something you've written and try to revise it. This means reading it slowly and carefully, checking to see that it makes sense and trying to correct mistakes in spelling, style and punctuation



APPENDIX

Glossary of useful words

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Adjective | Adds more information about a noun or pronoun <i>The sky was grey, stormy and threatening.</i> |
| Adverb | Adds more information about verb, explaining how, where, why or when. Many adverbs are formed by adding -ly to the end of an adjective <i>Quick - quickly ; sincere – sincerely; faithful – faithfully</i> Other adverbs include: here, there, once |
| Alliteration | Repetition of a letter, usually at the beginning of a word <i>The cunning cat couldn't catch the cautious canary</i> |
| Assonance | Repetition of a vowel sound <i>How now brown cow</i> |
| Audience | The people to whom a piece of writing or a speech is addressed |
| Cliché | An over – used expression <i>I feel over the moon</i> |
| Conjunction | A joining word The most common are: <i>and, or, but, because, although</i> |
| Irony | Saying or writing one thing and meaning another <i>Leaving the keys in the house and locking us out is really helpful.</i> |
| Metaphor | When one thing is said to be another; an implied comparison <i>You are my sun. A red river flowed across the battlefield.</i> <i>The general roared at the soldiers.</i> |
| Onomatopoeia | Sound words <i>Buzz, plop, ping</i> |
| Phrase | A group of words without a complete verb. It is part of a sentence. <i>A useful idea, the most exciting experience, a vivid dream</i> |
| Sentence | A group of words containing a verb which form a grammatically complete unit <i>The girl thought this had been the happiest day of her life.</i> |
| Simile | A comparison between two things which uses either like or as <i>The released prisoner felt like a schoolboy again, with his whole future before him.</i> |
| Verb | A being or a doing word <i>To be, to have, to smile, to speculate, to decide, to worry</i> |

For more information about useful terms, look at:

www.buzzin.net/english



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