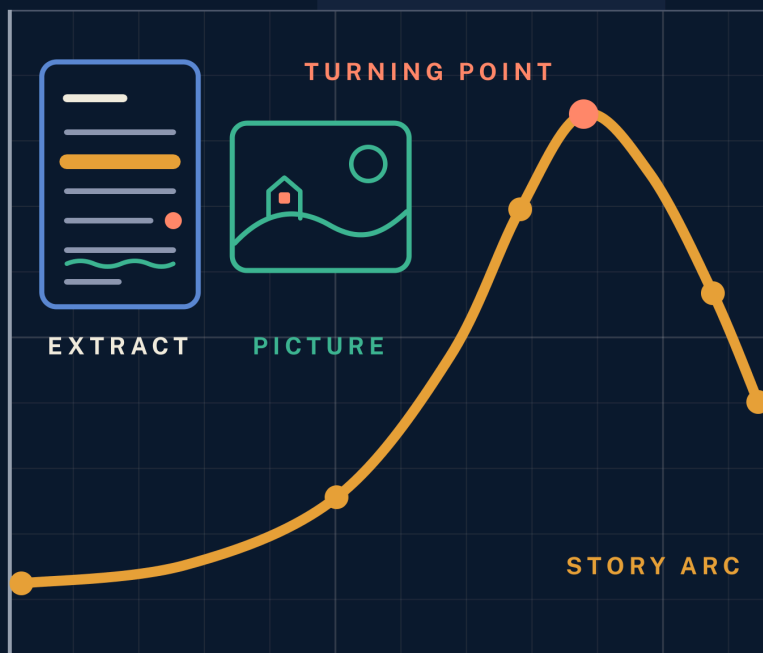


AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (8700) · PAPER 1

English Language Paper 1

Reading an unseen extract, and
writing a description or a story

Thirteen topics on two pages each: learn it, then use it. Original extracts with every question answered and marked, a full response marked line by line, and a practice source with its own Section A and Section B to finish.

**13**TOPICS, EACH ON TWO
PAGES**72**

KEY WORDS TO OWN

5ORIGINAL EXTRACTS,
FULLY ORIGINAL**80**MARKS IN THE PRACTICE
PAPER 1

Start here

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Two pages a topic

Learn it: sixty seconds of the skill, the facts with a circle to colour, key words, and a Spot it question on a sticky note.

Use it: the extract or example this skill needs, a real-tariff question answered and marked, how it could be asked, a box to write from memory, and a quick-fire quiz.

Four steps, every time

Predict how much you'll remember. **Recall** with the page covered. **Check** in another colour and fill the circles. **Repair** the weakest part, then come back in two days.

Where it comes from

The structure, marks and assessment objectives follow AQA's specification for GCSE English Language (8700, version 1.5). The exam technique comes from AQA's own Paper 1 papers, mark schemes and Reports on the Examination (November 2020, November 2021, June 2022, November 2022, June 2023). No AQA question, extract or mark scheme wording is reproduced: every extract, question, sample answer and practice source in this guide was written specifically for it.

A four-week plan

Week 1: Part one, topics 1 to 4. **Week 2:** Part one, topics 5 to 7, then the terms page. **Week 3:** Part two, topics 8 to 13. **Week 4:** the full marked response and examiners' notes (pages 33 to 35), then the practice source and both practice sections (pages 36 to 39). Come back to each topic two days later and again a week later. The tracker is on page 42.

First edition. No serving English teacher has read this guide through yet. If something should change, please tell Empower Educators at info@empowerededucators.co.uk.

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Know the exam

Paper 1 on one page

**Paper 1:
Explorations
in creative
reading and
writing**

Section A	Reading: one unseen literature fiction extract, four questions, 40 marks
Section B	Writing: one descriptive or narrative task, 40 marks
Exam	Written, 1 hour 45 minutes
Marks	80, which is 50% of the GCSE
Tiers	Untiered - the same paper for every student

AQA advises about 15 minutes reading the source and all five questions before you begin, then about 45 minutes on each section. Bring black ink. You must not use a dictionary. Every text on this paper is unseen - you will not have studied it before the exam.

The five questions, every time

The question types below recur, in this order, on every series. The wording changes with the source each time; the skill each one tests does not.

Q	Marks	AO	What it wants	Time
Q1	4	AO1	List several separate, correctly sourced details about a named person or thing, from specific line numbers. One mark each - no explanation needed.	~5 min
Q2	8	AO2	Analyse the writer's language (words, phrases, techniques, sentence forms) in a short, named section of the extract. Marked by levels 1 to 4.	~10 min
Q3	8	AO2	Analyse how the writer has structured the WHOLE extract: the opening focus, how and why it shifts, and any other structural choice. Marked by levels 1 to 4.	~10 min
Q4	20	AO4	Evaluate how far you agree with a statement about the second part of the extract, using the writer's methods as evidence. Marked by levels 1 to 4.	~20 min
Q5	40	AO5 + AO6	Either describe a scene, or write a story, from a choice of two prompts. 24 marks for content and organisation, 16 for technical accuracy.	~45 min

Sources: AQA GCSE English Language (8700) specification, version 1.5; AQA's Paper 1 question papers, mark schemes and Reports on the Examination, November 2020 to June 2023. Always check your own papers and the current specification.

Assessment objectives on Paper 1

AO3 (comparing texts) plays no part here: it belongs to Paper 2, where Section A gives two linked sources. Every Paper 1 reading question stays inside the single extract in front of you.

AO	What it asks for	Weight
AO1	Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.	2.5%
AO2	Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects, using subject terminology.	10%
AO3	Compare writers' ideas and perspectives across two or more texts.	N/A on Paper 1
AO4	Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.	12.5%
AO5	Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively; organise information and ideas.	15%
AO6	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.	10%

Know the exam

Reading the question

Section A's four questions build in demand, and in how they're marked. Knowing which kind of question you're looking at - before you start writing - tells you how much to write and what will actually earn credit.

Q1: point-marked (4 marks)

One mark per separate, correct detail. There is no level of response here - either a point is a genuine, accurate detail from the named lines, or it isn't. Four short, safe points beat one long, elaborate one.

Q2 and Q3: levels 1 to 4 (8 marks each)

Both are marked by the same four-level ladder: 1 to 2 marks (simple, limited comment), 3 to 4 (some understanding), 5 to 6 (clear, relevant explanation), 7 to 8 (perceptive, detailed analysis). The level depends on the quality of your best comments, not how many quotations you pack in.

Q4: levels 1 to 4, worth five times as much (20 marks)

The same four-level logic as Q2 and Q3, scaled up: roughly 1 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 to 15, 16 to 20 marks. Because it's worth half of Section A on its own, a rushed or very short answer caps how high it can reach however sound the ideas in it are.

Q5: two separate ladders at once (40 marks)

Content and organisation (AO5, 24 marks) and technical accuracy (AO6, 16 marks) are marked separately, by an examiner reading the whole response once. A piece can be imaginative and well organised but lose marks on accuracy, or the reverse - both skills need attention.

Roughly how to spend 45 minutes on Section A

Question	Suggested time	Why
Q1 (4 marks)	About 5 minutes	A point-marked question with a low ceiling - find your four points and move on.
Q2 (8 marks)	About 10 minutes	Enough time to select two or three precise quotations and explain each one in full.
Q3 (8 marks)	About 10 minutes	You're rereading the whole extract for this one, which takes longer than finding a quotation.
Q4 (20 marks)	About 20 minutes	Worth as much as Q1 to Q3 combined - plan a brief structure (your view, then three or four points) before you write.

If you're running out of time

Finish Q4 with a short, clear final paragraph rather than leaving it unfinished mid-point - a complete answer that stops reaching a full level still scores more than an answer that stops without a conclusion at all. Never leave Q1 until last: it is the easiest and quickest of the four.

1 *Part one · Reading the unseen extract*

Finding and listing details

*Learn it***In sixty seconds**

AO1 is partly about information stated directly: explicit information. Section A's first question is worth 4 marks, one for each separate, correctly sourced detail taken only from the line numbers you're given. A point can be a short quotation or your own words, and a phrase or even a single word is enough - full sentences aren't needed.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● *knew it* ● *shaky* ○ *missed*

- **AO1** has two halves: identifying and interpreting explicit and implicit information and ideas, and selecting and synthesising evidence from different texts. Paper 1's Section A has only one source, so the second half belongs to Paper 2, not here.
- The first Section A question is worth **4 marks**: one mark for each separate, correct detail, taken only from the line numbers the question names.
- A point can be a short quotation or your own words. Full sentences aren't needed - a phrase, or even a single word, is enough, as long as it's clearly about the right person or thing.
- **Explicit** information is stated directly: you don't have to work anything out, only find it and copy or paraphrase it accurately.
- Each of your points must be a genuinely separate piece of information. Saying the same thing twice in different words only ever earns one mark.
- If you quote, copy the exact words. A single changed or misread letter can flip the meaning of a quotation and lose the mark - a common and entirely avoidable slip.
- A small word like 'always', 'never' or 'sometimes' can change what a line actually says. Read the sentence again before you write your point down, not after.
- Check every point against two questions: is it from the line numbers I was given, and is it actually about the person or thing the question names?
- If you're unsure which points are strongest, a safe extra point costs nothing - but it still has to be a separate, accurate detail from the right lines.

Key words

- AO1** identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas; select and synthesise evidence from different texts. ☐
- Explicit** stated directly in the text - no working out needed. ☐
- Implicit** suggested rather than stated outright - the next topic. ☐
- Retrieval** finding and lifting out a specific piece of information. ☐
- Paraphrase** putting a writer's idea into your own words, keeping the meaning the same. ☐
- Synthesise** drawing evidence together, often from more than one text, into one combined point. ☐

AO1's wording names 'different texts' because the objective is shared with Paper 2, where Section A gives two texts to compare and combine. Paper 1's Section A has a single extract, so no Paper 1 reading question ever asks you to synthesise across texts - every answer stays inside the one source in front of you.

AQA's examiners have reported the same two slips on this question series after series: choosing a detail from outside the line numbers given, and choosing a true detail about the wrong person. Both are avoidable by rereading the line numbers and the name in the question before you start.

Spot it Which point would be credited?

A question asks for four things about Nana from lines 1 to 3 of Extract A, which open "Nana was waiting at the end of the lane". Which of these would AQA credit as one of the four?

- (A) She filled the kettle without being asked.
- (B) Nana loves her granddaughter very much.
- (C) She had not changed out of her gardening coat.
- (D) Mia had never seen her grandmother's cottage before.

Cover this, choose, then read

C. "She had not changed out of her gardening coat" is explicit, true, and sits inside lines 1 to 3. The kettle detail is true but comes much later in the extract, outside the given lines. 'Loves her very much' is a feeling the text implies, not a fact it states - too big a leap for this question. The cottage claim is simply wrong: the extract says the cottage "looked smaller than Mia remembered", which means she had seen it before.

1 *Part one · Reading the unseen extract*

Finding and listing details

Use it

Extract A: Low Tide. This extract is from the opening of a short story. Mia has arrived by car to stay with her grandmother, Nana, in a cottage by the sea.

- 1 Nana was waiting at the end of the lane, exactly as she had said she would be, with her boots
- 2 unlaced and a bucket swinging from one hand. She had not changed out of her gardening coat, and
- 3 there was a smear of green along one cheek where she must have wiped away a fly without looking. Mia
- 4 had forgotten how loud her grandmother's laugh was until she heard it carry across two gardens
- 5 before the car had even stopped.
- 6 "You've grown again," Nana said, which was what she always said, and pulled Mia into a hug that
- 7 smelled of salt and tomato plants. Over her shoulder, the cottage looked smaller than Mia
- 8 remembered, its windows blinked shut with the curtains Nana never opened before noon.
- 9 Inside, the kitchen table was already laid for two, though nobody had told Nana what time the train
- 10 got in. A pot of tea sat under its cosy, gone cold an hour ago by the look of the skin on its
- 11 surface. Mia noticed the second chair had been pulled out and pushed back in so many times that its
- 12 legs had worn two pale half-moons into the flagstones.
- 13 "Your mother rang," Nana said, not quite looking at her. "Twice." She filled the kettle again
- 14 without being asked, and the window above the sink filled with steam, and for a moment neither of
- 15 them could see the tide going out across the mud flats, the gulls following it down, patient, the
- 16 way they always were.

Extract A is reused on the next page, Topic 2, for a question about implicit meaning rather than explicit detail.

Read again the first part of Extract A, from line 1 to line 3. List four things about Nana from this part of the extract. [4 marks]

- 1 She was waiting at the end of the lane. ✓
- 2 Her boots were unlaced. ✓
- 3 She was carrying (swinging) a bucket. ✓
- 4 She had not changed out of her gardening coat. ✓

4/4

One mark per separate, accurate detail, each taken only from lines 1 to 3. A fifth point - a smear of green on her cheek, or that she had absent-mindedly brushed away a fly - would also be credited in place of any one of the four above. 'Nana was happy to see Mia' would not be credited here: it's a reasonable feeling, but it isn't stated in these lines.

It could be asked as

- List four things you learn about a named character from this part of the extract.
- Give four things the extract tells you about the setting, from lines X to Y.
- Identify four details about [a character] from the opening of the source.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 9 got ___ / 9

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

1.1 Which two things does AO1 combine?

1.2 How many marks is Section A's first question worth, and how are they awarded?

1.3 True or false: a Q1-style answer must be written in full sentences.

1.4 Name one of the two slips AQA's examiners report most often on this question.

2 Reading between the lines

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Learn it

In sixty seconds

The other half of AO1 is implicit information: what a text suggests without stating outright. You build an inference from a specific detail, not a general impression, and you should be able to point to the exact word or action that gave you the idea. The best inferences are the ones the writer has clearly planted, not ones a different text could just as easily support.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **Implicit** meaning is suggested through detail, choice and action rather than announced in a direct statement. Inferring it is still AO1: part of identifying and interpreting information and ideas that are implicit rather than explicit.
- An inference needs two parts: the detail itself, and what it suggests. That “its legs had worn two pale half-moons into the flagstones” is the detail; that someone has sat there, waiting, many times before is the inference.
- Small, specific details carry more weight than you'd expect: a cold cup of tea, a chair pushed in and out, a sentence that avoids eye contact. Writers plant these on purpose.
- Watch for a gap between what a character says and what they do. Nana says nothing about missing Mia, but she lays the table before she knows the train time and makes tea an hour early.
- Avoid building an inference on a single word taken out of its sentence. A detail that is true 'sometimes' is a different fact from one that is true 'always' or 'never' - the qualifying word changes the whole impression, so check it before you build on it.
- An inference should be checkable: another reader looking at the same lines should be able to see where you got it from, even if they'd have phrased it differently.
- Don't let one striking detail override everything else in the extract. A balanced inference usually draws on more than one piece of evidence.
- The command for this skill is rarely 'infer' outright - it's folded into language and structure questions (Q2, Q3) and especially the evaluate question (Q4), so it's worth practising on its own first.

Key words

- Inference** a conclusion reached from evidence and reasoning, not stated directly. ☐
- Implicit** suggested by the text rather than announced by it. ☐
- Connotation** an idea or feeling a word suggests beyond its literal meaning. ☐
- Subtext** the meaning running under the literal words of a scene. ☐
- Textual evidence** a specific detail from the text used to support a point. ☐
- Over-inference** a conclusion the text doesn't actually support - a risk to avoid, not a skill to show off. ☐

Two details from Extract A, read together, do more work than either alone: the second chair's legs have worn “two pale half-moons into the flagstones”, and the tea has “gone cold an hour ago”. Each detail on its own is a small domestic fact. Together they suggest a habit - someone has sat and waited at that table often enough to wear the stone, and today was no exception.

A frequent slip is treating a qualified statement as if it were absolute: a detail that's only true 'sometimes' or 'not always' gets written up as though it were constant - which is exactly the kind of misreading AQA's reports describe costing marks on the more demanding reading questions. Re-read the exact words before you build an inference on them, not your memory of the gist.

Spot it Which inference is best supported?

Later in Extract A, Nana says “Your mother rang”, “not quite looking at her”, then “Twice”. “She filled the kettle again without being asked”. Which inference is best supported by this moment?

- (A) Something about Mia's mother is uncomfortable for Nana to talk about directly.
- (B) Nana did not hear the phone the first time it rang.
- (C) Nana dislikes making tea for visitors.
- (D) Mia's mother rings Nana every single day.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. 'Not quite looking at her' while raising the subject, and immediately busying her hands with the kettle, both suggest Nana is avoiding something uncomfortable rather than reporting a neutral fact. The other options either invent detail the extract doesn't give (how often the phone rings generally) or contradict it (she makes tea without being asked, which doesn't read as dislike).

2 Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Reading between the lines

Use it

Extract A: Low Tide. This extract is from the opening of a short story. Mia has arrived by car to stay with her grandmother, Nana, in a cottage by the sea.

- 1 Nana was waiting at the end of the lane, exactly as she had said she would be, with her boots
- 2 unlaced and a bucket swinging from one hand. She had not changed out of her gardening coat, and
- 3 there was a smear of green along one cheek where she must have wiped away a fly without looking. Mia
- 4 had forgotten how loud her grandmother's laugh was until she heard it carry across two gardens
- 5 before the car had even stopped.
- 6 "You've grown again," Nana said, which was what she always said, and pulled Mia into a hug that
- 7 smelled of salt and tomato plants. Over her shoulder, the cottage looked smaller than Mia
- 8 remembered, its windows blinked shut with the curtains Nana never opened before noon.
- 9 Inside, the kitchen table was already laid for two, though nobody had told Nana what time the train
- 10 got in. A pot of tea sat under its cosy, gone cold an hour ago by the look of the skin on its
- 11 surface. Mia noticed the second chair had been pulled out and pushed back in so many times that its
- 12 legs had worn two pale half-moons into the flagstones.
- 13 "Your mother rang," Nana said, not quite looking at her. "Twice." She filled the kettle again
- 14 without being asked, and the window above the sink filled with steam, and for a moment neither of
- 15 them could see the tide going out across the mud flats, the gulls following it down, patient, the
- 16 way they always were.

The same Extract A as Topic 1, reprinted here so the lines needed for this inference question are in front of you.

What can you infer about how Nana has been feeling while waiting for Mia to arrive? Support your answer with evidence from the whole extract.

[4 marks]

Nana has been waiting eagerly, and for longer than she will admit. The kitchen table is laid for two before Nana even knows what time the train gets in ✓, and the tea has already gone cold by the time Mia arrives, meaning it was made well before it was needed ✓. The chair opposite hers has worn "two pale half-moons" into the stone floor ✓, which suggests this is not the first time she has sat waiting at that table. None of this is stated directly - Nana never says she has been looking forward to the visit ✓.

4/4

Four inferences, each tied to a specific, quoted or precisely referenced detail, with the final sentence making explicit that none of it is stated outright - that last step is what separates inference from paraphrase. A weaker answer would assert 'Nana is happy' without naming any of the four pieces of evidence that actually support it.

It could be asked as

- What does this part of the extract suggest about how [a character] is feeling?
- What can you infer about [a character]'s relationship with [another character]?
- What impression do you form of [the setting] from this part of the source?

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

2.1 What two parts make up a complete inference?

2.2 Why does a qualifying word like 'always' or 'sometimes' matter so much when you're building an inference?

2.3 Name one risk to avoid when making an inference.

2.4 Which Section A questions rely on inference even though they don't name it directly?

3 Word choice and connotation

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

*Learn it***In sixty seconds**

AO2 asks you to explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language to achieve effects, using subject terminology accurately. The second Section A question (8 marks) usually names a short extract and asks how the writer uses language. Pick single words and short phrases, say what they literally mean, then what they connote, then the effect on the reader - and keep quotations short.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **AO2:** 'explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.'
- The language question names a short section of the extract. Stay inside those line numbers: AQA's examiners report students losing focus by discussing the extract in general.
- A **connotation** is the feeling or association a word carries beyond its dictionary meaning. The noun "honeycomb" literally means a wax structure made by bees; here it connotes something busy, enclosed, and full of separate, isolated cells.
- Choose single words or short phrases to analyse, not whole sentences. A long quotation forces you to discuss content ('what happens') rather than language ('how it's said').
- Say what a word means, what it connotes, and what effect that has on the reader - in that order. Each step should add something the previous one didn't.
- A **semantic field** is a group of words linked by one idea. "buzzed", "shrieked" and "scream" all belong to a semantic field of harsh or unsettling sound, even though none of them is the main image.
- Precise subject terminology (simile, metaphor, connotation, semantic field) is credited when it's used accurately - and loses nothing if a sentence doesn't happen to name a device at all, as long as the comment is sharp.
- Avoid writing about a quotation's content ('this shows it is late at night') when the question asks about language. Say which word does that work, and how.

Key words

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| AO2 explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects, using subject terminology. | ☐ |
| Connotation an association or feeling a word carries beyond its literal meaning. | ☐ |
| Semantic field a group of words linked by one shared idea or topic. | ☐ |
| Word class whether a word is a noun, verb, adjective and so on - naming it precisely can sharpen a comment. | ☐ |
| Effect what a choice of language does to the reader's understanding or feeling. | ☐ |
| Subject terminology the correct technical word for a language feature, such as metaphor or alliteration. | ☐ |

"a lit honeycomb nobody could sleep in" does three jobs in six words: it pictures the hospital (lit, many small identical cells of light), it adds unease (a honeycomb is busy and alive, not restful), and the final clause turns the image against itself - a place built of light and cells is exactly the place where rest is impossible. That last turn is worth more than naming the metaphor.

AQA's examiners have reported two common slips here: quoting a long phrase or whole sentence, which pushes the answer towards content rather than language, and reading an image literally rather than figuratively - treating a comparison as if the writer meant it to be taken at face value.

Spot it Which comment analyses language, not content?

A student is asked how language shows Theo's state of mind in Extract B, lines 1 to 5. Which comment is doing AO2 work?

- | | |
|---|---|
| Ⓐ It is night-time and Theo is standing outside a hospital, which is a difficult place to be. | Ⓑ The word "patient" applied to the windows is unsettling because it suggests the building is holding something back, waiting, rather than simply standing there. |
| Ⓒ The extract describes a hospital with lots of windows, some lit and some not. | Ⓓ Theo is probably worried about someone he knows who is in the hospital. |

Cover this, choose, then read

B. Picking one word and explaining its connotation and effect is exactly what AO2 rewards. The other three are all true readings of the content, but none of them analyses a word or phrase - they describe what is happening rather than how the writer's language makes it happen.

3 Word choice and connotation

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Use it

Extract B: The Last Bus. This extract is from a short story. Theo is waiting at a bus stop opposite a hospital, late at night.

- 1 The bus shelter had one broken bulb, and it buzzed like something caught in a jar. Theo stood under
- 2 it anyway, because the dark at the edges of the car park seemed to be waiting for him to step into
- 3 it. The clouds had sat low and grey all afternoon, as if they already knew. Across the road, the
- 4 hospital stood against the sky in square orange windows, stacked twelve high, patient and enormous,
- 5 a lit honeycomb nobody could sleep in.
- 6 He had counted the windows twice already. Counting things was something his hands needed to do when
- 7 the rest of him had nothing left to hold onto. Eighty-one lit, forty lit with a shadow moving behind
- 8 the blind, and one, on the ninth floor, third from the left, that he was not allowed to look at for
- 9 too long or his eyes would start stinging in a way that had nothing to do with the cold.
- 10 A wind came off the car park and dragged the smell of the chip shop across the road with it, greasy
- 11 and warm and completely wrong for tonight. Somewhere behind him a trolley wheel shrieked against the
- 12 tarmac, over and over, a small, scraping metal scream that nobody else seemed to hear. The rain had
- 13 stopped an hour ago, but the puddles kept the orange light anyway, holding it in broken coins on the
- 14 ground.
- 15 When the bus finally came, its headlights swept the shelter like a searchlight finding him out, and
- 16 Theo realised his hands had gone white around the strap of his bag. He got on. He did not look back
- 17 at the ninth floor. He told himself that not looking back was a kind of promise.

Extract B is also used on the next page, Topic 4, for a question about figurative language and sound rather than word choice.

Look in detail at lines 1 to 5 of Extract B. How does the writer use language here to describe Theo's view of the hospital?

[8 marks]

The metaphor "a lit honeycomb nobody could sleep in" ✓ 8/8 pictures many identical, busy cells of light, but its final clause turns the image against itself: a structure built of light and sealed cells is precisely where rest should be impossible ✓, preparing us for Theo's own sleeplessness before it is stated. The adjective "patient" ✓, applied to the building rather than Theo, displaces his anxiety onto the setting around him ✓. The simile "buzzed like something caught in a jar" ✓ makes even the light fitting sound trapped, extending the extract's sense of things held somewhere they cannot easily leave ✓.

This reaches Level 4 (7 to 8 marks) because each point moves from the word, to its connotation, to a specific effect - never stopping at 'this shows it is a hospital at night', which caps an answer at Level 1 or 2.

It could be asked as

- How does the writer use language here to describe [a character]'s feelings about [a place or situation]?
- Look in detail at this extract. How does the writer use language to create a sense of [tension/unease/excitement]?
- What impression of [the setting] does the writer's choice of language create?

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

3.1 Name the three things AQA's language question tells you to consider.

3.2 What is a connotation?

3.3 Why is a long quotation often a weaker choice than a short one for this question?

3.4 What is a semantic field?

4 Figurative language and sound

Learn it

In sixty seconds

The same 8-mark language question rewards named devices used accurately: simile, metaphor, personification, pathetic fallacy, and sound devices like alliteration and sibilance. A device only earns credit if it is both correctly named and genuinely present in the words quoted - a mislabelled or truncated example can lose more than it gains.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- ☐ A **simile** compares one thing to another using 'like' or 'as': "buzzed like something caught in a jar".
- ☐ A **metaphor** describes one thing as if it actually were another, without 'like' or 'as': "a lit honeycomb nobody could sleep in" - the hospital isn't compared to a honeycomb, it's called one.
- ☐ **Personification** gives a non-human thing a human quality or action: the dark "seemed to be waiting for him".
- ☐ **Pathetic fallacy** is a particular kind of personification: giving weather or a setting a mood that matches (or pointedly clashes with) the scene's emotion. "The clouds had sat low and grey all afternoon, as if they already knew" makes the sky complicit in the tension.
- ☐ **Alliteration** repeats a consonant sound at the start of nearby words: "broken bulb". It's a sound effect, not a meaning in itself - always say what the repeated sound adds.
- ☐ **Sibilance** is alliteration specifically with soft 's' or 'sh' sounds, often used for something hissing, unsettling or secretive: "a small, scraping metal scream that nobody else seemed to hear".
- ☐ Check a device both ways before you name it: is this genuinely what a simile/metaphor/personification/sibilance is, and does the exact words you've quoted actually show it? A device that only appears once you add words the writer didn't use doesn't count.
- ☐ Two or three well-explained devices, each tied to a precise effect, score higher than a long list of named terms with no explanation attached.

Key words

Simile a comparison using 'like' or 'as'.	☐
Metaphor describing one thing as if it were another, without 'like' or 'as'.	☐
Personification giving a non-human thing human qualities or actions.	☐
Pathetic fallacy weather or setting given a mood that matches or clashes with the scene.	☐
Alliteration repetition of a consonant sound at the start of nearby words.	☐
Sibilance alliteration using soft 's' or 'sh' sounds, often for a hissing or unsettling effect.	☐

"its headlights swept the shelter like a searchlight finding him out" is a simile doing more than one job: literally, the bus's headlights sweep across him; the comparison to a searchlight adds a sense of exposure, as if he's been caught at something, which fits a boy trying to hold himself together in public. Naming it 'simile' is worth little without that second step.

A device must be demonstrated by the exact words you quote. If you trim a quotation down to make a point and the trimmed version no longer shows the feature you've named, examiners will not credit the label - only the words actually in front of them.

Spot it Which label is both correct and supported by the quotation?

A student quotes Extract B, lines 10 to 15, and writes: "a small, scraping metal scream that nobody else seemed to hear" is an example of... which device, correctly identified?

- ☐ A Sibilance, because of the repeated soft 's' sounds in 'small', 'scraping' and 'scream'.
- ☐ B Alliteration, because 'metal' and 'scream' begin with the same letter.
- ☐ C A simile, because the trolley wheel is being compared to a scream.
- ☐ D Onomatopoeia, because 'wheel' sounds like what it describes.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. 'Small', 'scraping' and 'scream' all begin with the soft 's' sound close together, which is sibilance specifically, not just alliteration (which would need the same sound, and 'metal' and 'scream' don't share one). There's no 'like' or 'as', so it isn't a simile - the scream isn't being compared to the wheel, the wheel's sound is being called a scream, which is closer to metaphor. 'Wheel' doesn't imitate a sound, so it isn't onomatopoeia.

4 Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Figurative language and sound

Use it

Annotating a quotation: name the device, underline the evidence, then state the effect - never stop at the label.

buzzed like something caught in a jar

onomatopoeia

simile ('like a jar')

Onomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound it describes, such as 'buzzed'. The underline marks the words that prove each device: if the words you quote do not show it once trimmed, the label does not earn credit, only the words actually in front of the examiner do.

Look in detail at lines 10 to 15 of Extract B. How does the writer use language here to build tension?

[8 marks]

The sibilance of "a small, scraping metal scream that nobody else seemed to hear" ✓ makes the sound itself feel secretive, as though it is a warning meant only for Theo. Isolating him from everyone else nearby ('nobody else seemed to hear') increases his sense of being alone with his fear ✓. The simile "headlights swept the shelter like a searchlight finding him out" ✓ briefly makes Theo the object of search rather than the one waiting, as though his private distress has been exposed ✓. Even the smallest physical detail is pressed into service: his hands have gone "white around the strap of his bag" ✓, a literal description of grip that also implies how hard he is holding himself together ✓.

8/8

Every device here is correctly named, precisely quoted, and linked to an effect beyond the literal moment, which is what Level 4 (7 to 8 marks) asks for. Note that the final point doesn't need a named device at all to be credited - a sharp, accurate comment on word choice and effect is enough on its own.

It could be asked as

- How does the writer use language here to create a sense of threat?
- Look in detail at this extract. How does the writer use language to describe the atmosphere of the setting?
- Explore how the writer uses sound and imagery to convey [a character]'s state of mind.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

4.1 Define a metaphor in one sentence.

4.2 What distinguishes pathetic fallacy from personification generally?

4.3 Why must a device's example be checked against the exact quoted words?

4.4 What is sibilance?

5 Sentence forms for effect

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

*Learn it***In sixty seconds**

A02's language question explicitly includes sentence forms alongside words and techniques. A short, simple sentence can land harder than a long one; a list of three can build or deflate; a long, flowing sentence can mirror a flowing moment. Say what form the sentence takes and what that form does, not just that it is 'effective'.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- Sentence forms sit alongside word choice and named techniques as one of the three things AQA's own language question directs you to consider - it is not only about vocabulary.
- A **simple sentence** (one main clause) used after longer ones can land abruptly: "Now there was no view." The shortness itself is the effect, after two long sentences of description.
- A **list of three** (a triplet) builds a sense of completeness or rhythm: "There was rock, and fog, and the sound of her own boots." Three items feels whole in a way two or four don't.
- Short, declarative sentences placed one after another can mimic a character's own flat, exhausted thinking: "Her phone had no signal. It had had no signal for an hour. She had stopped checking."
- A long, multi-clause sentence can mirror something continuous or overwhelming - a journey, a rush of thought, a sustained physical effort - where a short sentence would break the flow.
- A single-word or minor sentence (no verb) can isolate an idea for emphasis, though it should be used sparingly and only where the writer's punctuation genuinely supports reading it that way.
- Don't just label a sentence as 'simple' or 'complex' - say what effect the choice has in that exact place: slowing the reader down, speeding them up, isolating a detail, building towards one.
- Sentence-form comments are credited exactly like word-choice comments: name the feature, quote it precisely, then explain the effect on the reader.

Key words

- Simple sentence** one main clause: a single complete idea. ☐
- Compound sentence** two main clauses joined by 'and', 'but' or 'or'. ☐
- Complex sentence** a main clause plus at least one subordinate clause. ☐
- Triplet** a list or structure of three items, often for rhythm or completeness. ☐
- Minor sentence** a deliberately incomplete sentence, used for emphasis. ☐
- Syntax** the way words and clauses are ordered and joined to form a sentence. ☐

The shift from Extract C's opening sentence - one long, winding sentence following Priya's counting and comparing the path "like a question that would not be answered" - to "Now there was no view. There was rock, and fog, and the sound of her own boots." is a shift in sentence form that mirrors the shift in what she can see: the long sentence had room for memory and comparison; the short ones only have room for what's directly in front of her.

AQA's reports note that comments on sentence forms are often left unconnected to the extract's meaning: students name a sentence type correctly but don't say why the writer chose it at that particular point in the text.

Spot it Which comment best explains the effect of the sentence form?

A student analyses "Her phone had no signal. It had had no signal for an hour. She had stopped checking." Which comment best explains the effect of these three short sentences?

- ☐ A The flat, repetitive short sentences mirror Priya's own flat exhaustion - she has stopped reacting to the bad news, just as the sentences stop building any tension around it.
- ☐ B The short sentences show that the writer could not think of anything longer to say at this point.
- ☐ C Short sentences are always used to speed up the pace of a story.
- ☐ D The repetition proves that Priya's phone is permanently broken.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. Linking the sentence form to Priya's state of mind is what A02 rewards here. 'Always used to speed up the pace' overclaims - short sentences can do several different jobs, not just one. The other two options either dismiss the writer's craft or make a claim ('permanently broken') the extract doesn't support.

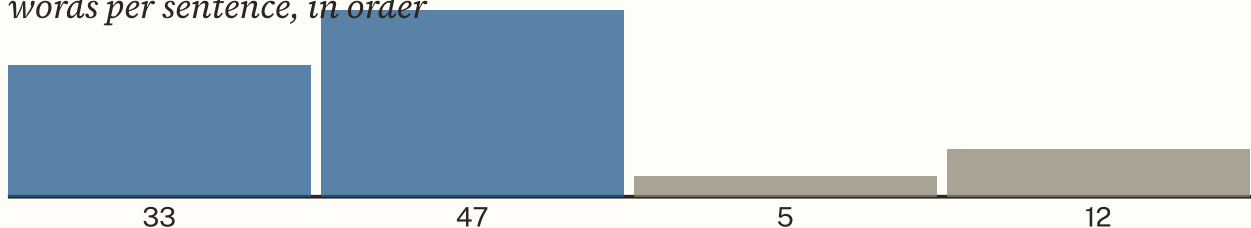
5 Sentence forms for effect

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Use it

Sentence length across part of Extract C, word by word sentence by sentence - the short run at the end is the point.

words per sentence, in order



Two long, winding sentences of description and memory, then a sudden run of short ones as the fog closes in. The shape of the sentences is doing some of the same work as their content.

Look again at lines 6 to 14 of Extract C. How does the writer use sentence forms here to build tension?

[8 marks]

After two long, flowing sentences describing the view and the memory of home, “Now there was no view. There was rock, and fog, and the sound of her own boots.” ✓ lands with real force. The first short sentence flatly contradicts the hopeful description that came before it, and the second is a triplet - rock, fog, the sound of her own boots - which feels complete in a way that leaves nothing else to hold onto ✓. The writer repeats this later with “Her phone had no signal. It had had no signal for an hour. She had stopped checking.” ✓, three short, almost identical sentences that mimic the flatness of giving up checking rather than describing it directly ✓.

8/8

Sentence forms are identified precisely here (a short sentence after long ones, a triplet, a repeated short-sentence run) and each is tied to a specific effect on tension or characterisation rather than just labelled, which is why it reaches Level 4 (? to 8 marks).

It could be asked as

- How does the writer use sentence forms to convey [a character]'s feelings here?
- Explore the effect of the writer's use of short and long sentences in this part of the extract.
- How does the writer's choice of sentence forms contribute to the mood of this passage?

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

5.1 Which three things does AQA's language question tell you to consider?

5.2 What is a triplet?

5.3 Why can a short sentence placed after several long ones be effective?

5.4 What should you always add to a sentence-form comment, beyond naming the type?

6 How writers structure a whole extract

Learn it

In sixty seconds

The third Section A question (8 marks) asks about structure across the WHOLE extract, not a named few lines. Look at what the writer focuses on at the start, how and why that focus changes, and any other structural choice - a flashback, a pivotal moment, a shift in pace, a cliffhanger - then explain the effect of each shift, not just describe it.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- A02's structure question looks at the extract as a whole: which part of it the writer puts in the spotlight to begin with, how and why that spotlight moves as the extract develops, and any other structural pattern worth commenting on - a flashback, a shift in pace, a cliffhanger.
- A **focus shift** is a change in what the narrative is paying attention to: from a wide view to a narrow one, from the outside world to a character's thoughts, from one character to another.
- A **flashback** interrupts the present action with a memory, then returns to the present. Extract C does this with Priya's memory of home, cut off when the wind "found a gap in the rocks".
- A **pivotal moment** is the point the whole extract has been building towards or turning on - often placed prominently, at the start of a paragraph or the end of a section.
- **Pace** can speed up (short sentences, quick events) or slow down (longer description) at a structurally important moment - and a change in pace is itself a structural choice worth commenting on.
- A **cliffhanger** ending leaves a question unresolved on the final line, pulling the reader's attention beyond the extract itself.
- **Juxtaposition** places two contrasting things near each other in the text - a warm memory beside a threatening present, a familiar detail beside a strange one - so the contrast itself makes a point.
- Avoid retelling the plot in order ('first this happens, then this') without commenting on why the writer arranged it that way or what effect the arrangement has - AQA's reports repeatedly flag retelling as the main reason this question underperforms.

Key words

Structure how a text is organised and arranged, as distinct from the words chosen within it. ☐

Focus shift a change in what the narrative pays attention to. ☐

Flashback a shift back to an earlier time within the narrative. ☐

Pivotal moment the point a passage turns on or builds towards. ☐

Pace the speed at which events seem to move, often controlled by sentence length. ☐

Cliffhanger an ending that leaves a question deliberately unresolved. ☐

Extract C moves in four structural stages: present action and counting (lines 1 to 6), a flashback to home cut off by the wind (lines 7 to 9), a narrowed, present-tense focus on just her feet and the path (lines 10 to 14), and a final rise in hope followed immediately by its collapse (lines 15 to 18). Naming all four, and saying why the writer orders them that way - building tension, then denying the relief it seemed to promise - is a Level 3 or 4 answer; naming only the flashback is Level 2 at best.

AQA's reports describe the main weakness on this question as a brief, generalised overview of events with no real comment attached - the kind of answer that could apply to almost any narrative extract, not just this one. Tie every structural point to a specific, locatable moment instead.

Spot it Which comment is specific to this extract's structure?

A student is asked how Extract C is structured to interest the reader. Which comment does that job, rather than just retelling events?

- (A) The writer interrupts the present-tense climb with a sudden memory of home, then snaps back to the present exactly as the wind rises - so the flashback itself gets physically cut off, mirroring how fully the mountain reclaims her attention.
- (B) First Priya is walking in the fog, then she thinks about home, then she gets to a hut and the door is locked.
- (C) The extract has four paragraphs and each one is about a different part of the walk.
- (D) The writer wants the reader to feel sympathy for Priya because she is lost on a mountain.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. The credited comment identifies a specific structural device (an interrupted flashback) at a specific point and explains its effect. The other three either just retell the sequence of events, state a surface fact (paragraph count) with no comment on effect, or jump straight to a general claim about the writer's intention with nothing to support it.

6 How writers structure a whole extract

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Use it

Extract C: The Long Way Down. This extract is from a short story. Priya is descending a mountain path alone as fog closes in.

- 1 Priya had been counting switchbacks since the fog came down, which was a bad sign in itself:
- 2 twenty-three, twenty-four, the path doubling back on itself like a question that would not be
- 3 answered. An hour ago the view had stretched for miles, the valley laid out below in fields the
- 4 colour of old brass, and she had stopped twice just to look at it, because her father always said a
- 5 view like that was the whole reason for the climb.
- 6 Now there was no view. There was rock, and fog, and the sound of her own boots.
- 7 She thought of the kitchen at home, the kettle, the dog asleep across the back door so you had to
- 8 step over it, and for a moment the memory was so complete she could smell the toast. Then the wind
- 9 found a gap in the rocks and screamed through it, and the memory went out like a dropped match.
- 10 The path narrowed. On her left the mountain fell away into a white nothing that could have been ten
- 11 feet or a thousand, and Priya made herself stop looking at it and start looking at her feet instead,
- 12 one boot, then the other, then the first again. Somewhere below her, invisible, a stream was arguing
- 13 with itself over stones.
- 14 Her phone had no signal. It had had no signal for an hour. She had stopped checking.
- 15 When she finally saw the orange roof of the refuge hut, low and square against the grey, she did not
- 16 trust it at first, the way you do not trust good news that arrives too easily. She counted the last
- 17 six switchbacks without meaning to. Then she was at the door, and it was locked, and the fog was
- 18 already closing back in behind her.

The whole of Extract C: this question always covers the complete source, not a named few lines.

You now need to think about the whole of Extract C. How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

[8 marks]

The extract opens mid-action, counting switchbacks, dropping the reader straight into Priya's unease rather than easing in ✓. A flashback to home interrupts this, cut off abruptly, "the memory went out like a dropped match" ✓, showing how little control she has over her own attention here. The focus then narrows sharply, from the wide valley to "one boot, then the other, then the first again" ✓, mirroring her narrowing survival focus. The sighting of the hut looks like it should resolve the tension, but the final line denies that resolution, leaving a deliberate cliffhanger ✓.

8/8

Structural features are identified across the whole extract here, each linked to a specific effect rather than just named - a Level 4 (7 to 8 marks) answer.

It could be asked as

- How has the writer structured the text to build tension?
- What is the effect of the order in which the writer reveals information in this extract?

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

6.1 Name three structural features this question might reward.

6.2 Which part of the extract does this question cover?

6.3 What is the main weakness AQA's reports describe on this question?

6.4 What is juxtaposition?

7 Evaluating a writer's methods and effects

Learn it

In sixty seconds

The final Section A question is worth 20 marks - half of Section A's total - and assesses AO4: evaluating a text critically, supported by textual references, usually in response to a statement about the second part of the extract. The strongest answers reach a genuine judgement (to what extent you agree, and why), rather than only describing what happens.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **AO4:** 'evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.' It is marked by levels, like the two 8-mark questions, but is worth 20 marks on its own.
- This question is usually framed as a statement a student has made about the extract, asking 'to what extent do you agree' - and it is always focused on the second part of the source.
- An evaluation is not a retelling. State your own view of the statement, then support it with specific, well-chosen references - which can include language and structure, since those skills feed this question too.
- You don't have to agree completely or disagree completely. 'I largely agree, but...' or 'the writer leaves this genuinely open' can be a stronger, more perceptive answer than picking a side and ignoring the rest.
- Reference the writer's methods, not just the character's situation: a comment on what the writer does (a symbol, a shift in tone, an ambiguous image) outranks one only on what happens to the character.
- Quality beats quantity: a shorter answer with well-chosen, precisely explained evidence can outscore a longer one that strings together paraphrase, and this question is worth as much as Q1 to Q3 combined, so a rushed answer limits how high it can reach.
- Keep track of who is who. Over-using 'he' or 'she' without naming the character again can make an argument hard to follow - and hard for the writer to keep straight too.

Key words

AO4 evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.	☐
Evaluate weigh up a text and reach a judgement about it, rather than only describing it.	☐
Textual reference a specific, relevant detail from the text used as evidence.	☐
Writer's methods the deliberate choices (language, structure, viewpoint) a writer makes to create an effect.	☐
Ambiguity a meaning left genuinely open, so more than one reading is reasonably supportable.	☐
Critical response a reasoned judgement, not just a summary or a list of likes and dislikes.	☐

A statement like 'Callum overcomes his fear by the end' is deliberately debatable. He keeps swimming, but the final line frames that in practical terms, not triumphant ones. A Level 4 answer can agree, disagree, or - most perceptively - argue the writer leaves the question open on purpose, and support any of those with specific reference.

AQA's examiners have reported that misreading a single detail near the start of an answer can derail the whole response, because everything that follows gets built on it. Check your reading of a key moment before committing a whole paragraph to an interpretation of it.

Spot it Which approach reaches the highest level?

A student must evaluate how far they agree that 'Extract D shows Callum's fear completely overcome by the end.' Which approach is likely to reach the highest level?

- (A) Agreeing that his fear is faced rather than erased: he keeps going, but the final line frames this as a practical choice, not a triumphant one, and the goggles he carries stay a reminder of unfinished grief rather than resolved fear.
- (B) Simply retelling what happens to Callum from the start of the extract to the end.
- (C) Agreeing completely, because he does not turn back.
- (D) Disagreeing completely, because swimming across a lake is dangerous.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. Reaching a nuanced judgement with a specific reference and a comment on method is what earns the credit here. Retelling isn't evaluation. Both 'completely' answers pick a side without engaging the evidence against it - the pattern AO4's higher levels ask you to move beyond.

7

Part one · Reading the unseen extract

Evaluating a writer's methods and effects

Use it

Extract D: Open Water. This extract is from a novel. Callum is about to swim alone across a lake his grandfather used to swim every morning.

- 1 Callum had told himself the water would be exactly like the swimming pool at school, except colder and longer and,
- 2 obviously, without the tiled bottom six feet under his kicking legs to remind him the world still had a floor. He had
- 3 told himself a lot of things on the walk down to the jetty, and most of them had sounded braver in his head than they
- 4 did now, standing at the edge with his toes curled over cold stone.
- 5 His grandfather had swum this lake every morning for forty years, rain or frost, until the year he stopped being able
- 6 to. Callum had the goggles to prove it: scratched at the left lens, the strap gone soft and grey, exactly as they had
- 7 been left on the hook by the back door. He had come here to finish what his grandfather hadn't, though he was no longer
- 8 sure, standing here, whether that was a tribute or just a boy trying to borrow someone else's bravery.
- 9 The first hundred strokes were almost easy. The lake held the cold the way a held breath holds air, and his body
- 10 remembered rhythms he hadn't used since last summer, arm over arm, the small satisfying slap of each hand finding the
- 11 water. He did not look at the far shore. Looking at the far shore was how people stopped believing they could reach it.
- 12 Somewhere past the halfway buoy, the lake changed its mind about him. A current he hadn't accounted for pulled sideways,
- 13 patient and enormous, and the shore that had seemed close now seemed to be sliding away exactly as fast as he swam
- 14 towards it. His arms, which had felt borrowed from someone stronger an hour ago, now felt entirely and only his own,
- 15 which was to say, tired.
- 16 He thought about turning back. He thought about his grandfather's goggles, sitting dry on the hook at home for three
- 17 years, and about the particular kind of quiet that had settled over the house since. Then he put his head down, found
- 18 the rhythm again, slower now, and kept going, because stopping in the middle of a lake was not, whatever else was true,
- 19 actually a way of getting anywhere.

The whole of Extract D: this question focuses on the second half.

'The writer shows Callum's fear being completely overcome by the end of Extract D.' To what extent do you agree?

[20 marks]

I largely disagree. Callum has "told himself a lot of things on the walk down to the jetty" ✓, signalling constructed confidence, not calm. When "the lake changed its mind about him" ✓, it is given the agency Callum thought he had. His fear is never named again; instead his arms "now felt entirely and only his own, which was to say, tired" ✓, replacing fear with exhaustion, not the same as fear overcome. He keeps going "because stopping in the middle of a lake was not, whatever else was true, actually a way of getting anywhere" ✓, leaving the goggles, and the grief they stand for, unresolved.

19/20

Level 4 (16 to 20 marks): engages directly with the statement, draws on the writer's methods throughout, reaches a judgement rather than a flat yes or no.

It could be asked as

- 'The ending leaves the reader uncertain.' Evaluate how far you agree, using evidence from the text.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 7 got ___ / 7

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

7.1 How many marks is the evaluate question worth, and what share of Section A is that?

7.2 Which assessment objective does this question target?

7.3 Name one way to reach a higher level than agreeing or disagreeing completely.

8 Planning a description or a story

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Learn it

In sixty seconds

Section B gives a choice: describe a place or scene suggested by an image, or write a story suggested by a title. Both are worth 40 marks - 24 for content and organisation (AO5), 16 for technical accuracy (AO6) - for about 45 minutes' work. Two minutes spent choosing one moment, one viewpoint and a shape before you start writing is never wasted.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- Section B's single writing task offers a choice of two options: a descriptive task, usually prompted by an image, or a narrative task, prompted by a title or short scenario.
- The task is worth **40 marks** in total: **24** for content and organisation (AO5) and **16** for technical accuracy (AO6) - technical accuracy is 40% of this task, and AO6 overall must make up a fifth of the whole specification.
- An image prompt is a **starting point for your own ideas**, not a scene to transcribe. AQA's examiners have repeatedly reported that answers which list what's visible in the picture, moving around it like a tour, underperform answers that use it as a springboard.
- Choose **ONE** moment, situation or feeling before you choose any words. 'A busy market' is too big to control in 45 minutes; 'the moment a stallholder realises her till is short' is a moment you can actually develop.
- Decide your viewpoint (whose eyes, what tense, first or third person) and which one or two senses will carry most of the description, before you start the opening sentence.
- Plan a shape, not just content: where the focus starts, where it moves to, and where it ends. A plan that is only a list of things to mention tends to produce writing that is only a list too.
- Decide your final line, or at least the note you want to end on, before you write your first one. Knowing where you're going changes how you get there.
- A rushed two minutes of planning is not wasted time: it is bought back many times over when you don't have to stop halfway through to work out where the piece is going.

Key words

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| AO5 communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively; organise information and ideas using structural and grammatical features. | ☐ |
| AO6 use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. | ☐ |
| Descriptive writing writing that creates a picture or impression of a person, place or moment. | ☐ |
| Narrative writing writing that tells a story, with events unfolding over time. | ☐ |
| Viewpoint whose perspective the writing is told from, and in what person and tense. | ☐ |
| Scope how much ground a piece of writing tries to cover - usually, less is more in 45 minutes. | ☐ |

The two options are not as different as they look. A strong narrative response usually pauses to describe; a strong descriptive response usually implies something is about to happen, or has just happened. The 24/16 mark split and the AO5/AO6 skills being tested are identical for both - choose whichever option gives you a clearer, more controllable idea in the room, not whichever sounds more impressive.

AQA's examiners have reported, series after series, that the single biggest difference between a controlled answer and a weak one is whether the writer chose one moment and developed it, or tried to cover too much ground - a whole event, a whole day, a whole tour of a scene - and ran out of control, and often time, before the end.

Spot it Which plan is most likely to succeed in 45 minutes?

Four students plan their response to 'Write a description suggested by a photograph of a fairground at night.' Which plan is best suited to the time available?

- | | |
|---|--|
| A Focus on one child on the carousel, from the moment the ride starts to the moment it slows: sound, movement, and one memory the motion triggers. | B Describe every ride and stall in the photograph, left to right, in the order they appear. |
| C Describe the fairground opening in the morning, running all day, and closing at night. | D List as many different sounds, smells and sights as possible to show off a wide vocabulary. |

Cover this, choose, then read

A. Narrowing to one moment and one controllable idea, with room for description, movement and a personal angle, is what makes the first plan work. The other three all try to cover too much ground for 45 minutes - a full tour, a full day, or an unfocused list - which is exactly the pattern AQA's reports describe holding weaker answers back.

8

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Planning a description or a story

Use it*A plan that fits on a sticky note, made before a single sentence is written.***1. The idea**

One moment, one place, one feeling. Not a list of everything you could describe.

2. Viewpoint and senses

Whose eyes. What they'd notice first, and which one or two senses carry it.

3. The shape

Where the focus moves: wide to close, calm to tense, outside to inside.

4. The ending

The line you're writing towards, decided before you start the first one.

Plan a response to: 'Write a description suggested by a photograph of an empty swimming pool at night, lit from below.'

[0 marks]

1 The idea: a caretaker doing a final check before locking up, not a swimmer. **2 Viewpoint and senses:** third person, close focus on him; sound (echo, dripping) and light (the underwater glow) carry more than sight here. **3 The shape:** start wide (the whole pool, the quiet), narrow to one detail (a single light flickering), end on an action, not a description (he reaches for the switch, hesitates). **4 The ending:** the light goes out before he's ready for it to.

Plan

No marks are awarded for a plan itself, but every part of it should be visible in the finished piece: the single idea controls what gets included, the senses chosen control the imagery, the shape controls the paragraphing, and knowing the ending in advance stops the piece drifting or stopping abruptly.

It could be asked as

- Plan a response to a title of your own choosing, using the same four steps.
- Plan the narrative option instead of the descriptive one, for the same image.
- Take a plan you've already written and cut it down to one single controlling idea.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

- 8.1** How many marks is the Section B writing task worth in total, and how does that split?
-
- 8.3** Name the four things a two-minute plan should decide.
-

- 8.2** What is the most common reason AQA's reports give for a weak response to the image-based option?
-
- 8.4** True or false: the descriptive and narrative options are marked differently.
-

9

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Openings that do real work

Learn it

In sixty seconds

An opening has one job: to put the reader inside a specific moment, not to announce the topic. Avoid starting by describing the image itself ('in this picture I can see...') or by summarising what's about to happen - start inside the moment, with a detail, an action or a line of thought that could only belong to this piece.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- An opening line should be specific to your piece, not generic enough to open almost any piece on the same topic.
- Avoid writing about the task itself: 'In this image I can see a fairground at night' describes the prompt, not the scene - AQA's examiners have reported this exact habit costing marks under AO5's 'register and purpose'.
- Starting **in medias res** (in the middle of an action) drops the reader straight into a moment, with context filled in afterwards rather than set up first.
- Starting with a single, sharply observed detail can be more effective than starting with a wide establishing shot - a detail suggests a whole scene; a wide shot can read as a list.
- Decide your narrative viewpoint in the first line and keep it consistent: first person or third, past or present tense, whose thoughts you have access to.
- An opening doesn't have to be dramatic to work. A quiet, exact detail, placed with confidence, can do more than a sentence straining for impact.
- Avoid an opening that explains what the piece is going to be about ('This is a story about...'). Trust the reader to work it out from what you show them.
- Reread your opening once you've planned the rest of the piece - the strongest openings are often written, or rewritten, last, once you know exactly where the piece is going.

Key words

- Hook** an opening detail or line designed to draw the reader in immediately. ☐
- In medias res** starting in the middle of the action, rather than before it begins. ☐
- Register** the level of formality and the kind of vocabulary suited to a purpose and audience. ☐
- Narrative viewpoint** the consistent perspective (person and tense) from which a piece is told. ☐
- Establishing shot** an opening that sets the wider scene before narrowing in - useful, but risks becoming a list if overused. ☐
- Voice** the distinct way a piece sounds, shaped by word choice, rhythm and viewpoint. ☐

Two openings for the same fairground image: 'In this picture, there is a fairground at night with bright lights and rides' describes the prompt and goes nowhere. 'The carousel had stopped turning for the night, but Jozef could still feel it, somewhere behind his ribs' starts inside a specific body, a specific feeling, and a specific unanswered question (why can he still feel it) - all in one sentence, with the fairground implied rather than announced.

AQA's reports describe this as one of the most common and most avoidable weaknesses in Section B: writing that stays conscious of the task or the image, rather than committing fully to the world the writer is building. The fix is simple to state, if not always simple to do under time pressure - start inside the scene, not outside it describing the scene.

Spot it Which opening does the most work in one line?

Four students open their response to 'Write a story about moving to a new home.' Which opening line does the most work?

- (A) The removal van had already gone by the time Aisha realised she'd left her key under the old mat, for a stranger to find.
- (B) This story is about a girl called Aisha who is moving to a new house and feeling nervous about it.
- (C) Moving house can be a difficult and emotional experience for a young person.
- (D) Aisha woke up on moving day and got out of bed, ready for a busy day ahead.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. The credited opening starts inside a specific, slightly wrong-footing moment (a key left behind, for a stranger) that implies character and stakes without announcing them. The second line is a general statement, not a story. The third announces the topic. The fourth is a generic start-of-day moment with nothing distinctive about it.

9

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Openings that do real work

Use it

Four possible first lines for the same prompt, ranked by how specific they are to this piece rather than to the topic in general.

Weakest: states the topic. "This is a story about starting again after a difficult year."

Weak: describes the prompt. "In the photograph, a family is carrying boxes into a new house."

Stronger: a wide establishing image, but still generic. "The new house looked smaller than the old one, and emptier."

Strongest: one sharp, specific, unexplained detail. "The key had been under the mat for eleven years, and now it belonged to someone else's mat."

Write an opening line (not a full response) for: 'Write a story about moving to a new home.'

[0 marks]

Draft 1: "Today was the first day of the rest of my life."

Problem: this is a phrase most readers have met before; it announces a feeling rather than earning it.

Draft 2: "The removal van had already gone by the time Aisha realised she'd left her key under the old mat, for a stranger to find."

Why it's stronger: it is specific to one character and one small, telling mistake, it implies the bigger move without stating it, and it raises a question (what happens to that key, to that stranger) that the rest of the piece can choose to answer or leave open.

Draft

There are no marks for an opening line alone, but AOS's higher levels reward a register and voice that fit the purpose and audience with real confidence from the first sentence - a generic opening makes that much harder to demonstrate even if the rest of the piece is strong.

It could be asked as

- Write two alternative opening lines for the same prompt, and say which is stronger and why.
- Rewrite a generic opening ('This story is about...') as a specific, in-the-moment one.
- Write an opening line for the descriptive option on the same image, rather than the narrative one.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

9.1 Name one kind of opening AQA's examiners report losing marks under AO5.

9.2 What does 'in medias res' mean?

9.3 Why might the strongest opening line sometimes be written last?

9.4 Name two things to decide about viewpoint in your opening line.

10 Structuring a whole response

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Learn it**In sixty seconds**

AO5 rewards organisation as well as content: structural features used deliberately, and writing arranged into coherent, linked paragraphs. Paragraphing is an AO5 skill (organisation), not an AO6 one - it's a common mix-up. Plan a shape before you write: where the focus starts, a turning point or shift, and where it ends.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **Paragraphing is organisation, assessed under AO5**, not technical accuracy. A new paragraph signals a shift in time, place, focus or speaker, and a top-level answer links paragraphs with integrated discourse markers.
- A **time shift** (a flash-forward, a flashback, a jump of hours or years) is a structural choice, not just a content choice - say what the shift lets you show that strict chronological order wouldn't.
- A **turning point** - the moment a description's mood changes, or a story's situation changes - is often most effective placed deliberately, not stumbled into.
- **Pacing** across a whole piece can be controlled by paragraph length as well as sentence length: several short paragraphs in a row can speed up a climax; one long paragraph can slow a reflective moment.
- A piece doesn't have to resolve everything by the end. An ending that leaves one thing deliberately open can be more sophisticated than one that ties up every thread.
- Discourse markers that link paragraphs ('by the time', 'it was only later that', 'underneath all of this') do real structural work - more than markers that only sit inside a single sentence.
- A single structural idea, used well (one time shift, one turning point, one shift in focus), outperforms several structural tricks used without control.
- Structure is planned, not discovered mid-sentence - which is why Topic 8's two-minute plan should include a shape, not just a list of content.

Key words

- AO5 organisation** structural and grammatical features used to support the coherence and cohesion of a piece. ☐
- Time shift** a deliberate jump forwards, backwards, or across a gap in time. ☐
- Turning point** the moment a piece's mood, direction or situation changes. ☐
- Discourse marker** a word or phrase that signals the relationship between ideas or paragraphs. ☐
- Cohesion** how clearly a piece's ideas connect and follow from each other. ☐
- Pacing** the controlled speed at which a piece of writing seems to move. ☐

Paragraphing is one of the clearest places the sibling slip between AO5 and AO6 shows up: a new paragraph is an organisational choice (AO5), while the accuracy of the sentences inside it - punctuation, spelling, sentence construction - is AO6. The same is true of the passive voice, which can serve either skill depending on what it's doing: used to withhold or delay who did something, it's an AO5 organisational choice; used accurately and for effect, it's also assessed under AO6.

AQA's reports on the image-based option describe a specific structural failure: writing that proceeds like a tour around the picture, left to right or near to far, with no shift in focus beyond simply moving to the next visible thing. A deliberate shift (in time, focus or mood) reads as far more controlled than a tour, even with similar content.

Spot it Which structural choice is most deliberately controlled?

Four students structure a descriptive response to a fairground-at-night image. Which approach shows the most deliberate structural control?

- (A) Open on the wide scene and its noise, narrow to one still, silent ride at the edge, then end on a single light going out - a shift from loud to quiet, wide to narrow.
- (B) Describe the entrance, then the rides in the middle, then the stalls at the back, in the order they're laid out.
- (C) List every sound, then every smell, then every sight, one category at a time.
- (D) Describe the fairground opening, then being busy, then closing, covering the whole day.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. One deliberate structural shift, wide and loud to narrow and quiet, building towards a specific final image, is what sets the first version apart. The others are all organised by an external logic - the picture's layout, a list of senses, or the passage of a whole day - rather than by a chosen effect on the reader.

10

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Structuring a whole response

Use it

A shape for a 45-minute piece: not a plot summary, a tension line with one deliberate turn.

tension

wide, loud

narrowing

one still ride

the light flickers goes out

Plan the structure (not the full text) of a description suggested by a photograph of a fairground at night.

[0 marks]

Paragraph 1: wide shot, noise and movement, third person, present tense. **Paragraph 2:** narrows to one still, switched-off ride at the edge - a deliberate shift in focus, signalled by a discourse marker ('away from the noise, though,'). **Paragraph 3:** a single flickering light on that ride - the turning point, where mood shifts from lively to unsettled. **Paragraph 4 (short):** the light goes out. Ending on a short paragraph after three longer ones changes the pace deliberately, mirroring the moment itself.

Plan

No single structural feature here is unusual on its own - a focus shift, a turning point, a pace change - but using exactly one of each, in a planned order, is what separates a controlled AOS structure from a list of things that happen to be in the picture.

It could be asked as

- Plan the structure of a narrative response using one deliberate time shift.
- Identify the turning point in a piece of your own writing, and say whether it's placed where you intended.
- Rewrite a 'tour' structure (left to right, or chronological through a whole day) as one with a deliberate focus shift instead.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

10.1 Which assessment objective marks paragraphing?

10.2 Name one way to control pacing beyond sentence length.

10.3 What structural weakness do AQA's reports describe in image-based responses?

10.4 Does a piece need to resolve everything by its final line?

11

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Imagery that earns its place

Learn it

In sixty seconds

A05 rewards imaginative communication, not decoration. Show a feeling through a detail or an action rather than naming it; use one or two carefully chosen images rather than several competing ones; and reach for the word that's accurate for this exact moment, not the longest or most unusual word you know.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **Show, don't tell** means conveying a feeling through a concrete detail or action, rather than stating the feeling directly. 'His hands wouldn't stay still' shows nervousness; 'he was nervous' tells it.
- Showing isn't a rule to apply to every sentence - naming a feeling directly, once, at the right moment, can land harder after a paragraph of showing than another layer of imagery would.
- One well-chosen image, developed, is stronger than three competing ones in the same sentence. Imagery that piles up without a controlling idea behind it reads as unplanned rather than rich.
- AQA's examiners have reported 'contrived' imagery as a specific weakness: an extreme or dramatic image reached for because it sounds impressive, not because it's accurate to the moment being described.
- Choose the word that is accurate for this exact moment over the word that sounds most advanced. A writer who reaches for an unusual word because it impressed them in a vocabulary list, rather than because it's the clearest word available, is choosing register over meaning - and examiners notice.
- Imagery should match the register and purpose of the piece. A word or image borrowed from a very different kind of writing (overtly poetic language, a phrase that sounds quoted from somewhere else) can sit oddly against the rest of your voice.
- A semantic field, used with restraint, can unify a whole paragraph's imagery around one idea - more effective than several unrelated striking images scattered through it.
- Sensory detail works best when it's specific to the scene: not 'it smelled bad' but the one smell that belongs to this exact place and moment.

Key words

- Show, don't tell** conveying a feeling or idea through detail and action, rather than stating it outright. ☐
- Imagery** language that creates a sensory or figurative picture for the reader. ☐
- Register** the level of formality and type of vocabulary suited to a purpose and audience. ☐
- Contrived** forced or unconvincing, often because an effect is being reached for rather than earned. ☐
- Overwriting** using more or showier imagery than a moment actually needs. ☐
- Controlling idea** the single idea that governs which images and details belong in a passage. ☐

Compare: 'The fairground was eerie and abandoned and full of ghosts from the past, like a graveyard of fun.' This reaches for three images in one sentence (ghosts, a graveyard, and 'fun' treated as a dead thing, closer to metaphor than personification) and none of them is developed. Against it: 'The carousel horses still wore their painted smiles, facing a crowd that had gone home hours ago.' One image, developed with one concrete, slightly unsettling detail (the painted smiles facing no one), says more by saying less.

AQA's reports describe two linked weaknesses here: unrealistic or extreme changes in atmosphere reached for dramatic effect rather than earned by the writing around them, and vocabulary chosen to sound impressive rather than because it is the clearest word for the moment. Both come from reaching for an effect instead of building one.

Spot it Which description shows rather than tells, without overreaching?

Four students describe a character's nervousness before a race. Which description does the job most effectively?

- (A) She checked her lace for the third time, though it had not come undone the first two.
- (B) She was extremely nervous and anxious about the race, more than she had ever been before.
- (C) Her heart was a wild bird trapped in the cage of her ribs, screaming to be free.
- (D) She felt a strange, unsettling, overwhelming, almost unbearable sense of dread.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. Showing nervousness through a specific, small, repeated action, and trusting the reader to read the feeling from it, is what earns credit here. The second tells the feeling directly with no image at all. The third reaches for a dramatic, slightly overworked metaphor that risks sounding contrived. The fourth piles up four adjectives where one precise one would do more work.

11

Imagery that earns its place

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Use it*Three sentences on the same idea, each doing a different amount of work.***Tells:** "She was nervous about the race."**Overwrites:** "Her heart was a wild bird trapped in the cage of her ribs, screaming to be free, as fear consumed her entire being."**Shows, with restraint:** "She checked her lace for the third time, though it had not come undone the first two."**Rewrite the following so it shows rather than tells, without overreaching: 'The old house was scary and made Dev feel very afraid.'**

[0 marks]

Rewrite: "Dev counted the stairs under his breath, the way he used to as a child, and still arrived at a different number every time."*Rewrite**The rewrite removes both adjectives ('scary', 'afraid') and replaces them with one specific, slightly strange habit that implies unease without naming it, and without reaching for an extreme or borrowed image. A common over-correction is to replace a flat 'telling' sentence with an overwritten one - the aim is control, not volume.**It could be asked as*

- Rewrite an overwritten sentence of your own so it uses one controlled image instead of several.
- Write a 'tells' version and a 'shows' version of the same feeling, and compare them.
- Identify the semantic field in a paragraph you've written, and check every image belongs to it.

*Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory**predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8*

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42**11.1** What does 'show, don't tell' mean?**11.2** Why might naming a feeling directly sometimes be the stronger choice?**11.3** Name one weakness AQA's reports link to 'contrived' writing.**11.4** Why can an unusual, impressive-sounding word sometimes cost marks rather than earn them?

12

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Sentence variety and punctuation for effect

Learn it

In sixty seconds

AO6's own wording names 'a range of vocabulary and sentence structures... with accurate spelling and punctuation' - sentence variety is an AO6 skill, tested on your own writing exactly as it is analysed on the reading paper. Vary sentence length and form deliberately, and use a wider range of punctuation than full stops and commas, accurately.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- ☐ AO6 names sentence structures directly, alongside vocabulary, spelling and punctuation - it is not only about correctness, but about range and control used for effect.
- ☐ Vary sentence length on purpose across a paragraph: several similar-length sentences in a row can read as flat, however accurate each one is individually.
- ☐ A simple sentence after two or three longer ones can land with real force - the same technique Section A's language questions ask you to analyse in a writer's extract.
- ☐ A colon can introduce a list, an explanation or a single sharp idea: used accurately, it signals confident control of sentence-level punctuation.
- ☐ A semicolon joins two closely related independent clauses without a conjunction; using one correctly is one of the clearest signals of a wide punctuation range.
- ☐ Question marks and single-word or minor sentences can be used for effect in first-person narrative, but sparingly - overused, they can start to feel like a trick rather than a technique.
- ☐ A piece doesn't need every punctuation mark to reach the top band - it needs a genuine range, used accurately, and chosen because it serves a specific sentence rather than because it's there to be shown off.
- ☐ Reading your own sentence aloud in your head is the fastest check for whether its length and form match the effect you want.

Key words

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| AO6 a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. | ☐ |
| Sentence variety a deliberate mixture of sentence lengths and forms across a piece. | ☐ |
| Colon a punctuation mark introducing a list, an explanation or an elaboration. | ☐ |
| Semicolon a punctuation mark joining two closely related independent clauses. | ☐ |
| Minor sentence a deliberately incomplete sentence, used sparingly for impact. | ☐ |
| Demarcation marking the boundaries of a sentence clearly and accurately - capital letters and end punctuation in the right places. | ☐ |

A single paragraph that uses only compound sentences joined by 'and' can be just as monotonous as one that only uses short simple sentences - range means variety, not simply avoiding one particular form. A strong paragraph might run: one longer, multi-clause sentence to establish a scene; a short sentence to land one detail; a question to hold the reader in a character's head; then a sentence using a colon to introduce a specific, concrete list.

AQA's reports note a lack of confidence in varying sentence types as a recurring weakness - many students can write accurately within one preferred sentence form, but don't deliberately vary that form across a piece. Range has to be planned for; it rarely appears by accident under exam conditions.

Spot it Which shows the widest range of sentence forms?

Four versions describe an empty platform after the last train leaves. Which shows the widest, most controlled range of sentence forms?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ A The platform emptied as the last train pulled away, taking its noise with it. Only the vending machine hummed. He checked three things at once: the board, his phone, the clock. | ☐ B The platform was empty. The train had gone. It was quiet. He checked the board. |
| ☐ C The platform had been busy, and now the train had gone, and it was quiet, and he checked the board. | ☐ D The platform was extremely, remarkably, unusually empty and silent after the busy, noisy train. |

Cover this, choose, then read

A. The credited version mixes a longer sentence, a short one, and a colon-led list - genuine variety. The second is a run of short simple sentences; the third strings clauses with 'and'; the fourth piles up adjectives instead of varying structure.

12

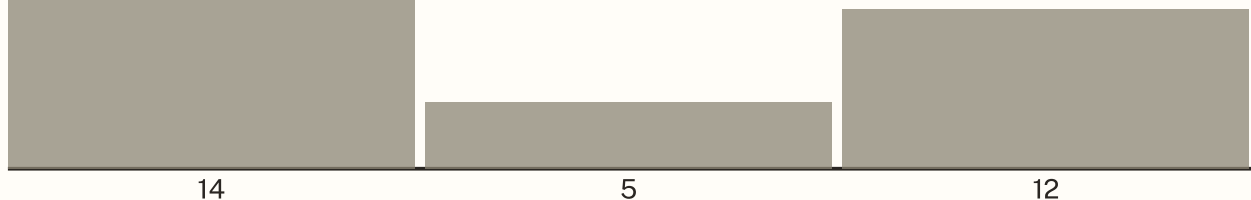
Part two · Writing a description or a story

Sentence variety and punctuation for effect

Use it

Sentence lengths across the credited paragraph above - long, short, then a longer colon-led list.

words per sentence, in order



Rewrite this flat paragraph so it shows a genuine range of sentence forms: 'The kitchen was quiet. Mum had gone to bed. The dishes were still in the sink. I didn't know what to do.'

[0 marks]

Rewrite: "The kitchen had gone quiet the way it only did after an argument, the kind of quiet with weight to it. Mum had already gone to bed. The dishes sat exactly where they'd been left: two mugs, a pan, a spoon balanced on its edge. I didn't know whether to wash them, or wait, or just go to bed too."

Rewrite

The rewrite keeps the same content but varies form: a longer opening sentence with a subordinate clause, a short simple sentence, a sentence built around a colon-introduced list, and a final sentence using a triple structure (whether to... or... or...) instead of a flat statement.

It could be asked as

- Identify the sentence forms used in a paragraph you've written, and rewrite it to add one you haven't used.
- Write a paragraph using at least one colon and one semicolon accurately.
- Take a paragraph of only short sentences and combine some of them for variety, without losing the original effect.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42

12.1 Where in AO6's own wording does sentence variety appear?

12.2 What does a semicolon correctly join?

12.3 Why can a paragraph of only compound sentences joined by 'and' still lack range?

12.4 What do AQA's reports say is a common weakness linked to sentence variety?

13

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Spelling, grammar and proofreading

Learn it

In sixty seconds

A06 also covers accurate spelling, secure Standard English grammar, and consistent sentence demarcation (capital letters and end punctuation in the right places). A short, planned proofread at the end - checking your own common error patterns, not reading for enjoyment - recovers marks that are otherwise given away for free.

Facts to know

Try it, then colour the circle: ● knew it ● shaky ○ missed

- **Sentence demarcation** means marking where a sentence starts and ends clearly and correctly: a capital letter, an end punctuation mark, and nothing run on past it without a connector.
- A **comma splice** joins two complete sentences with only a comma: 'The rain stopped, we went outside.' Fix it with a full stop, a semicolon, or a conjunction.
- **Subject-verb agreement** means the verb matches its subject in number: 'the group of children were' should be 'the group of children was' (the subject is 'the group', singular), though usage varies and consistency matters most.
- The commonest homophone slips in timed writing are **there / their / they're, its / it's**, and **your / you're** - each pair means something different, and a slip changes the meaning, not just the spelling.
- **Standard English** means the grammar expected in formal written contexts: consistent tense, consistent pronoun use, and avoiding features that belong to speech or dialect in formal narrative or descriptive prose (unless used deliberately, in dialogue, for character voice).
- Spell ambitious vocabulary correctly, or don't use it. A long, accurately spelled, well-chosen word is worth more than a longer one spelled wrong - and a wrong spelling of a word you were reaching for can draw attention to the error rather than the vocabulary.
- A proofreading pass should be targeted: check the two or three error types you know you make (a particular homophone, a particular tense slip, a tendency to run sentences on), rather than re-reading for enjoyment.
- Leaving five minutes at the end specifically for proofreading, separate from writing, is more effective than trying to proofread as you go - the two tasks use different kinds of attention.

Key words

- Demarcation** clearly and accurately marking the start and end of each sentence. ☐
- Comma splice** incorrectly joining two complete sentences with only a comma. ☐
- Homophone** a word that sounds the same as another but has a different spelling and meaning. ☐
- Standard English** the grammar and vocabulary conventions expected in formal written contexts. ☐
- Subject-verb agreement** making sure a verb's form matches whether its subject is singular or plural. ☐
- Proofreading** a final, targeted check for a writer's own common error patterns. ☐

A useful proofreading order: first, check every sentence actually ends where you meant it to (demarcation and comma splices); second, check your own two or three repeat offenders (a particular homophone, a verb tense you sometimes slip out of); third, and only if time allows, check spelling of any word you hesitated over while writing it. Trying to do all three at once, while also re-reading for content, tends to catch less than doing them in order.

AQA's reports note legible handwriting and consistent demarcation as recurring concerns under A06, alongside the homophone and agreement slips above - all of them are errors a short, targeted final check is well placed to catch, even under time pressure.

Spot it Which sentence has no technical accuracy error?

Which of these four sentences has no error in spelling, demarcation or agreement?

- (A) The group of tourists, tired after the long walk, finally reached the viewpoint they had been promised.
- (B) Their going to regret not bringing a coat, its going to rain later.
- (C) The group of tourists were tired, they sat down on the bench near the entrance.
- (D) After a long days walking the group of tourist's finally arrived.

Cover this, choose, then read

A. The credited sentence demarcates correctly, uses a subordinate clause accurately, and has correct agreement. The first confuses 'their/they're' and 'its/it's'. The second is a comma splice joining two complete sentences. The third is missing an apostrophe in 'day's' and wrongly adds one in 'tourist's'.

13

Spelling, grammar and proofreading

Part two · Writing a description or a story

Use it**A targeted three-pass proofread, in order, rather than one unfocused re-read.**

Pass 1 - demarcation: does every sentence start with a capital letter and end with the right mark, with no comma splices?

Pass 2 - your own repeat errors: check the one or two patterns you know you make (a homophone, a tense slip).

Pass 3 - ambitious spelling: any word you hesitated over while writing it, if time allows.

Proofread and correct this paragraph: 'Its been a long day, the kind where you're feet hurt before lunch. The group of hikers were ready to stop, they're guide however kept walking.' [0 marks]

Corrected: "It's been a long day, the kind where your feet hurt before lunch. The group of hikers was ready to stop; their guide, however, kept walking."

Corrected

Four separate fixes: 'Its' to 'It's' (it has been); 'you're' to 'your' (possessive, not 'you are'); the comma splice after 'stop' fixed with a semicolon; 'they're' to 'their' (possessive). Each is a different error type, which is exactly why a targeted, ordered proofread catches more than a single general re-read.

It could be asked as

- Proofread a paragraph of your own writing for one error type at a time.
- Write three sentences deliberately using there/their/they're correctly, to check you know the difference under no time pressure.
- Identify your own two most frequent error types from a previous piece of timed writing.

Cover both pages and write your sixty seconds from memory

predict ___ / 8 got ___ / 8

Quick-fire. Answers are on page 42**13.1** What is a comma splice?**13.2** Name the three commonest homophone slips in timed writing.**13.3** Why is a targeted proofread more effective than a general re-read?**13.4** What does AO6 ask for beyond accuracy alone?

Skills

Terms examiners expect

All 72 key words from across this guide, in the order they first appear, so you never have to hunt back through a topic to check a definition. Using a term accurately earns credit under AO2's 'relevant subject terminology' - using one inaccurately, or naming a device a quotation doesn't actually show, does not.

Term	What it means
AO1	identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas; select and synthesise evidence from different texts.
Explicit	stated directly in the text - no working out needed.
Implicit	suggested rather than stated outright - the next topic.
Retrieval	finding and lifting out a specific piece of information.
Paraphrase	putting a writer's idea into your own words, keeping the meaning the same.
Synthesise	drawing evidence together, often from more than one text, into one combined point.
Inference	a conclusion reached from evidence and reasoning, not stated directly.
Connotation	an idea or feeling a word suggests beyond its literal meaning.
Subtext	the meaning running under the literal words of a scene.
Textual evidence	a specific detail from the text used to support a point.
Over-inference	a conclusion the text doesn't actually support - a risk to avoid, not a skill to show off.
AO2	explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects, using subject terminology.
Semantic field	a group of words linked by one shared idea or topic.
Word class	whether a word is a noun, verb, adjective and so on - naming it precisely can sharpen a comment.
Effect	what a choice of language does to the reader's understanding or feeling.
Subject terminology	the correct technical word for a language feature, such as metaphor or alliteration.
Simile	a comparison using 'like' or 'as'.
Metaphor	describing one thing as if it were another, without 'like' or 'as'.

Term	What it means
Personification	giving a non-human thing human qualities or actions.
Pathetic fallacy	weather or setting given a mood that matches or clashes with the scene.
Alliteration	repetition of a consonant sound at the start of nearby words.
Sibilance	alliteration using soft 's' or 'sh' sounds, often for a hissing or unsettling effect.
Simple sentence	one main clause: a single complete idea.
Compound sentence	two main clauses joined by 'and', 'but' or 'or'.
Complex sentence	a main clause plus at least one subordinate clause.
Triplet	a list or structure of three items, often for rhythm or completeness.
Minor sentence	a deliberately incomplete sentence, used for emphasis.
Syntax	the way words and clauses are ordered and joined to form a sentence.
Structure	how a text is organised and arranged, as distinct from the words chosen within it.
Focus shift	a change in what the narrative pays attention to.
Flashback	a shift back to an earlier time within the narrative.
Pivotal moment	the point a passage turns on or builds towards.
Pace	the speed at which events seem to move, often controlled by sentence length.
Cliffhanger	an ending that leaves a question deliberately unresolved.
AO4	evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
Evaluate	weigh up a text and reach a judgement about it, rather than only describing it.

Skills

Terms examiners expect, continued

Term	What it means
Textual reference	a specific, relevant detail from the text used as evidence.
Writer's methods	the deliberate choices (language, structure, viewpoint) a writer makes to create an effect.
Ambiguity	a meaning left genuinely open, so more than one reading is reasonably supportable.
Critical response	a reasoned judgement, not just a summary or a list of likes and dislikes.
AO5	communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively; organise information and ideas using structural and grammatical features.
AO6	use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.
Descriptive writing	writing that creates a picture or impression of a person, place or moment.
Narrative writing	writing that tells a story, with events unfolding over time.
Viewpoint	whose perspective the writing is told from, and in what person and tense.
Scope	how much ground a piece of writing tries to cover - usually, less is more in 45 minutes.
Hook	an opening detail or line designed to draw the reader in immediately.
In medias res	starting in the middle of the action, rather than before it begins.
Register	the level of formality and the kind of vocabulary suited to a purpose and audience.
Narrative viewpoint	the consistent perspective (person and tense) from which a piece is told.
Establishing shot	an opening that sets the wider scene before narrowing in - useful, but risks becoming a list if overused.
Voice	the distinct way a piece sounds, shaped by word choice, rhythm and viewpoint.
AO5 organisation	structural and grammatical features used to support the coherence and cohesion of a piece.
Time shift	a deliberate jump forwards, backwards, or across a gap in time.

Term	What it means
Turning point	the moment a piece's mood, direction or situation changes.
Discourse marker	a word or phrase that signals the relationship between ideas or paragraphs.
Cohesion	how clearly a piece's ideas connect and follow from each other.
Pacing	the controlled speed at which a piece of writing seems to move.
Show, don't tell	conveying a feeling or idea through detail and action, rather than stating it outright.
Imagery	language that creates a sensory or figurative picture for the reader.
Contrived	forced or unconvincing, often because an effect is being reached for rather than earned.
Overwriting	using more or showier imagery than a moment actually needs.
Controlling idea	the single idea that governs which images and details belong in a passage.
Sentence variety	a deliberate mixture of sentence lengths and forms across a piece.
Colon	a punctuation mark introducing a list, an explanation or an elaboration.
Semicolon	a punctuation mark joining two closely related independent clauses.
Demarcation	marking the boundaries of a sentence clearly and accurately - capital letters and end punctuation in the right places.
Comma splice	incorrectly joining two complete sentences with only a comma.
Homophone	a word that sounds the same as another but has a different spelling and meaning.
Standard English	the grammar and vocabulary conventions expected in formal written contexts.
Subject-verb agreement	making sure a verb's form matches whether its subject is singular or plural.
Proofreading	a final, targeted check for a writer's own common error patterns.

Skills

A full response, marked: the strong version

Written for this guide, in response to: 'Write a description suggested by a photograph of a fairground at night.' This is roughly what 45 minutes, including two minutes' planning, can produce at the top of AQA's levels for both AO5 and AO6. The box below each paragraph explains why.

The carousel had stopped turning for the night, but Jozef could still feel it, somewhere behind his ribs, the way a held breath lingers after you've finally let it go. Strings of bulbs swung gently along the empty walkway, and in the gaps between them the dark pressed in close, patient, in no hurry at all.

AO5 A specific body, a specific unresolved feeling, from the first word - no describing the prompt, no announcing the topic.

AO6 A long, multi-clause opening sentence followed by a shorter one: deliberate variety from the first lines, not accidental.

Behind the ticket booth, a generator hummed on, powering lights nobody needed any more, and Jozef found he couldn't quite make himself switch it off. Each ride he passed still wore its daytime face: the painted horses mid-gallop, the teacups frozen at an angle, a fortune-teller's model hand curled around nothing in its glass case. It was easier, somehow, to imagine them waiting for the crowds to come back than to imagine they simply would not.

AO5 One controlling idea (suspended motion) runs through three different images, rather than three competing ones - organised content, not a list.

AO6 A colon introduces the list of frozen rides: a deliberate, accurate use of a punctuation mark beyond full stops and commas.

He found the switch for the carousel without really deciding to. For a moment, just one moment, he let it turn: the horses lifting and falling, the bulbs around the canopy blurring into a ring of gold, the tinny music starting halfway through its loop as if it had never really stopped, only waited for him. Then he cut the power again, and the dark came back in exactly where it had been standing all along.

AO5 A clear structural turning point - from passive wandering to one small, decisive action - placed deliberately in the middle of the piece, not stumbled into.

AO6 The parenthetical 'just one moment', set off by commas, isolates the decision for emphasis, used once rather than repeated until it loses its force.

By the time he locked the gate behind him, the fairground looked exactly as it had an hour before. Nobody would ever know the horses had moved.

AO5 A short final paragraph after three longer ones changes the pace deliberately. The action resolves, but the feeling is left open - no forced neat conclusion.

AO6 Past tense and third-person viewpoint, held consistently from the first line to the last.

Skills

A full response, marked: a weaker version

The same prompt, written to show roughly a Level 2 response. It isn't a bad piece of writing - it's accurate, and it's on topic - but it shows most of the AO5 gaps a mid-range answer tends to show.

In this picture, I can see a fairground at night. There are lots of lights everywhere and a carousel with horses on it. It looks really fun but also kind of creepy because no one is there. There is also a Ferris wheel in the background and some stalls where you could buy food. The fairground must have been really busy earlier but now it is closed and empty. I think fairgrounds are always exciting during the day but strange at night when no one is around. It makes me think about how things change depending on the time of day. Overall, this picture makes me feel a mixture of excitement and unease, and it's interesting how a fun, busy place can become so quiet and still when everyone goes home for the night.

What keeps this in Level 2, not higher

Gap	What the stronger version does instead
Opens by describing the prompt ('In this picture, I can see...') rather than entering a scene.	Opens inside a specific body and feeling, with the fairground implied rather than named.
Lists what's visible (carousel, Ferris wheel, stalls) in the order it's noticed, like a tour.	Builds one controlling idea (suspended motion) and chooses images that all serve it.
Tells the feeling directly ('it looks really fun but also kind of creepy') rather than showing it.	Shows the feeling through a specific action (switching the carousel on, then off again).
Ends on a general statement about fairgrounds rather than this piece's own events.	Ends on a specific, open final image that belongs only to this piece.
Sentence forms barely vary: mostly compound sentences joined by 'and' or 'but', with little variation in length.	Mixes long, short and colon-led sentences on purpose, across all four paragraphs.

Try it yourself

Take one sentence from the weaker version and rewrite it using a technique from Topics 9 to 12 - a specific detail instead of a list, a shown feeling instead of a told one, or a varied sentence form. Then do the same with a second sentence.

Skills

What AQA's examiners saw students get wrong

Paraphrased from AQA's Reports on the Examination for 8700/1 (November 2020 to June 2023). The struck-through text describes the weaker approach reported; the green text is what was credited instead.

Q1: the line numbers. ~~a detail taken from outside the line numbers given, or a true detail about the wrong person or thing.~~ every point drawn only from the named lines, and clearly about the right person or thing.

Q1: quoting exactly. ~~a misread or misspelled quotation that changes the meaning of the point.~~ the exact words, copied with care - a single wrong letter can lose the mark.

Q2: quotation length. ~~a long phrase or whole sentence quoted, which turns the comment towards content.~~ a single word or short phrase, with its connotation and effect explained in full.

Q2: figurative or literal. ~~a figurative image read literally, as if the writer meant it exactly.~~ the comparison named, then unpacked for what it figuratively suggests.

Q3: retelling, not analysing. ~~a brief, general overview of events with no comment on why the writer arranged them that way.~~ a specific structural feature, tied to a specific moment, with its effect explained.

Q3: sentence-form comments. ~~a sentence type named correctly but left unconnected to the extract's meaning at that point.~~ the sentence form linked to a specific effect exactly where it occurs.

Q4: proportion. ~~a short answer that doesn't reach the end of the extract's second part.~~ an answer that ranges across the whole of the second half, in proportion to 20 marks.

Q4: keeping characters clear. ~~over using 'he' or 'she' until the argument is hard to follow.~~ naming the character again whenever a pronoun could be ambiguous.

Q4: first impressions. ~~a whole answer built on one misread detail near the start.~~ checking a key reading before committing a paragraph to an interpretation of it.

Q5: using the image. ~~listing the details visible in an image, in the order they appear, like a tour.~~ treating the image as a prompt for an idea of the writer's own.

Q5: staying inside the scene. ~~writing consciously about the task itself, such as naming the picture or the title.~~ writing as if fully inside the scene from the very first line.

Q5: changing the mood. ~~an extreme, sudden change of atmosphere reached for dramatic effect.~~ a shift in mood or focus that is earned by what has come before it.

Q5: scope. ~~a recount-style structure covering a whole day, or a full tour of a scene.~~ one moment, developed, with a deliberately chosen shape.

Q5: voice. ~~lengthy direct speech, or a talking animal or object, used to carry the voice.~~ voice and atmosphere built mainly through description and action.

Q5: staying in form. ~~drifting into a different kind of writing, such as a discursive argument on an issue.~~ staying inside the descriptive or narrative form the task actually asks for.

AO6: vocabulary. ~~a word reached for because it sounds impressive, not because it fits the register.~~ the word that is most accurate and clearest for this exact moment.

AO6: sentence variety. ~~one preferred sentence form, used accurately but without variety across the piece.~~ a deliberate range of sentence lengths and forms planned in before writing.

AO6: punctuation range. ~~long stretches with little punctuation beyond full stops and commas.~~ a wider range, used accurately, even if some marks are used only once or twice.

General: learned responses. ~~a heavily rehearsed answer that doesn't quite fit the actual prompt given.~~ a response planned freshly from the prompt that's actually in front of you.

General: question order. ~~answering Section A out of order, which can mean less insight is carried into Q4.~~ working through Questions 1 to 4 in order, building understanding as you go.

Practice

Practice: the source

A fresh extract, written for this guide, with its own four Section A questions overleaf and a Section B task after that. Read it once all the way through before you start, exactly as AQA advises for the real paper.

Source: *Three Elms Farm*. *This extract is from a novel set in 1940. Edith, evacuated from London, has just arrived at a farmhouse belonging to Mrs Bellamy, a stranger to her.*

- 1 Mrs Bellamy was not what Edith had pictured. She was shorter than the letter had made her sound, and
- 2 broader, with sleeves rolled to the elbow and a smear of flour across one forearm like a bandage.
- 3 She did not smile exactly, but she looked at Edith the way a person looks at a fence post they are
- 4 deciding whether to replace, which was, Edith thought, at least a kind of attention. Behind her, two
- 5 dogs sat so still and so identical that Edith wondered for a moment if they were a single dog seen
- 6 twice.
- 7 "You'll be wanting the room at the top," Mrs Bellamy said, as though this had already been settled
- 8 somewhere Edith hadn't been present for. "Mind the fourth stair. It complains."
- 9 The farmhouse smelled of woodsmoke and something baking, and underneath that, faintly, of animals, a
- 10 smell Edith's mother would have called common and which Edith decided, cautiously, that she did not
- 11 mind. The hallway was dim and narrow and hung with photographs of people who all seemed to be
- 12 squinting at the same invisible sun.
- 13 Her room at the top of the stairs had one window, and through it, fields rolled away in every
- 14 direction like a sea that had somehow been persuaded to stay still. There was no sound from London
- 15 in it at all: no trams, no sirens, nothing but, somewhere distant, a single repeated bird call,
- 16 patient as a clock.
- 17 She unpacked her case onto the narrow bed. Her mother's handkerchief. Her brother's cap, kept though
- 18 he would never ask for it back. A photograph, curling at one corner. She arranged them on the
- 19 windowsill in an order that meant something only to her, and then she sat on the bed and did not
- 20 cry, because she had decided three stations ago that she was not going to, and a decision, once made
- 21 properly, Edith believed, could be held onto the way you held onto a railing on a moving train.
- 22 Downstairs, a door banged, and one of the two identical dogs began, for no reason Edith could
- 23 discover, to howl.

Practice

Practice: Section A, questions 1 and 2

- 1

Read again the first part of the source, from line 1 to line 5. List four things about Mrs Bellamy from this part of the source. *[4 marks]*

- 2

Look in detail at this extract, from line 9 to line 12 of the source. How does the writer use language here to describe the farmhouse? You could include the writer's choice of: words and phrases; language features and techniques; sentence forms. *[8 marks]*

Mark your answers on page 43.

Practice

Practice: Section A, questions 3 and 4

3 You now need to think about the whole of the source. How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? [8 marks]

4 Focus the rest of your answer on the second part of the source, from line 13 to the end. A reader said, ‘By the end of this extract, Edith has successfully pushed away her sadness about leaving home.’ To what extent do you agree? [20 marks]

Practice

Practice: Section B

5 A travel magazine has asked for contributions for a creative writing feature.

Either describe a journey to an unfamiliar place, using the idea of arriving somewhere you have never been before.

Or write a story about leaving something behind.

(24 marks for content and organisation, 16 marks for technical accuracy) [40 marks]

Two minutes, before you write a word

1. The idea

One moment, one place, one feeling. Not a list of everything you could describe.

2. Viewpoint and senses

Whose eyes. What they'd notice first, and which one or two senses carry it.

3. The shape

Where the focus moves: wide to close, calm to tense, outside to inside.

4. The ending

The line you're writing towards,
decided before you start the
first one.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a vertical margin line on the left side, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard sheet of stationery.

Answers

Quick-fire answers

1 Finding and listing details

- 1.1** Identifying and interpreting explicit and implicit information, and selecting and synthesising evidence from different texts.
- 1.2** 4 marks - one for each separate, correct detail.
- 1.3** False - a short phrase, or even a single word, is enough.
- 1.4** Choosing a detail from outside the given line numbers, or about the wrong person (either answer accepted).

4 Figurative language and sound

- 4.1** Describing one thing as if it actually were another thing, without using 'like' or 'as'.
- 4.2** Pathetic fallacy is personification specifically of weather or setting, matched to the mood of the scene.
- 4.3** A trimmed or inaccurate quotation may no longer show the feature being named, so the label would not be credited.
- 4.4** Alliteration using soft 's' or 'sh' sounds, often for a hissing, secretive or unsettling effect.

7 Evaluating a writer's methods and effects

- 7.1** 20 marks - exactly half of Section A's 40.
- 7.2** AO4: evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- 7.3** Reach a nuanced judgement, or argue the writer leaves it open, backed by evidence.

2 Reading between the lines

- 2.1** The specific detail itself, and what that detail suggests - both parts are needed.
- 2.2** Dropping it changes the claim: 'sometimes true' and 'always true' support different, not interchangeable, inferences.
- 2.3** Over-inference: a conclusion built on a single detail that the rest of the text doesn't support.
- 2.4** All of them to some degree, but especially the structure question (Q3) and the evaluate question (Q4).

5 Sentence forms for effect

- 5.1** Words and phrases, language features and techniques, and sentence forms.
- 5.2** A list or structure of three items, often used for rhythm or a sense of completeness.
- 5.3** The contrast itself creates the effect - the shortness lands harder because of what came before it.
- 5.4** The specific effect it has in that exact place in the text - not just that it is 'effective'.

3 Word choice and connotation

- 3.1** Words and phrases, language features and techniques, and sentence forms.
- 3.2** An association or feeling a word carries beyond its literal, dictionary meaning.
- 3.3** A long quotation pushes the answer towards discussing content rather than the specific language.
- 3.4** A group of words linked by one shared idea or topic, such as a field of harsh, unsettling sound.

6 How writers structure a whole extract

- 6.1** Any three of: focus shift, flashback, pivotal moment, pace change, cliffhanger, juxtaposition.
- 6.2** The whole of it, not a named few lines - unlike the two language questions.
- 6.3** A brief retelling of events with no comment on why the writer arranged them that way, or what effect the arrangement has.
- 6.4** Placing two contrasting things near each other in the text so that the contrast itself makes a point.

Answers

Quick-fire answers, continued

8 Planning a description or a story

- 8.1** 40 marks: 24 for content and organisation (AO5), 16 for technical accuracy (AO6).
- 8.2** Listing or touring the details of the picture rather than using it as a prompt for the writer's own ideas.
- 8.3** The one controlling idea, the viewpoint and senses, the shape, and the ending.
- 8.4** False - both are marked against the same AO5 and AO6 criteria, out of the same 24 and 16 marks.

11 Imagery that earns its place

- 11.1** Conveying a feeling or idea through concrete detail or action, rather than stating it directly.
- 11.2** Because, used sparingly after a build-up of showing, a direct statement can land harder than another layer of imagery.
- 11.3** An extreme or dramatic image or atmosphere reached for effect, rather than earned by what surrounds it.
- 11.4** If it isn't the clearest or most accurate word for the moment, it signals reaching for register over meaning.

9 Openings that do real work

- 9.1** An opening that describes the image or announces the topic, rather than starting inside a specific moment.
- 9.2** Starting in the middle of the action, with context filled in afterwards.
- 9.3** Because it works best once you already know exactly where the whole piece is going.
- 9.4** Person (first or third) and tense (past or present) - and then keep both consistent.

12 Sentence variety and punctuation for effect

- 12.1** 'A range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect.'
- 12.2** Two closely related independent clauses, without a conjunction.
- 12.3** Range means genuine variety of form, not just avoiding short sentences - repeating one form, even a longer one, is still monotonous.
- 12.4** Writing accurately within one preferred sentence form, without deliberately varying it across a piece.

10 Structuring a whole response

- 10.1** AO5 - organisation, not AO6.
- 10.2** Paragraph length - several short paragraphs can speed up a climax; one long one can slow a reflective moment.
- 10.3** A 'tour' structure that follows the picture's own layout rather than a deliberately chosen shift in focus.
- 10.4** No - a deliberately unresolved ending can be more sophisticated than one that ties up every thread.

13 Spelling, grammar and proofreading

- 13.1** Joining two complete sentences with only a comma, where a full stop, semicolon or conjunction is needed.
- 13.2** There/their/they're, its/it's, and your/you're.
- 13.3** It checks for specific, known error types in a planned order, rather than relying on noticing errors by chance while reading for sense.
- 13.4** A genuine range of vocabulary and sentence structures, used for clarity, purpose and effect - not just correctness.

Answers

Your tracker

Colour a circle when it's done. Return two days later, and a week later.

Topic	Learn it	Use it	Recall box	Quick-fire	2 days later	1 week later
1 Finding and listing details	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2 Reading between the lines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3 Word choice and connotation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4 Figurative language and sound	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5 Sentence forms for effect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6 How writers structure a whole extract	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7 Evaluating a writer's methods and effects	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8 Planning a description or a story	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9 Openings that do real work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10 Structuring a whole response	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11 Imagery that earns its place	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12 Sentence variety and punctuation for effect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13 Spelling, grammar and proofreading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Lost marks on the practice questions? Go here

Question	Go to	Pages
Practice Q1 (explicit detail)	Topic 1	5–6
Practice Q2 (language)	Topics 3 and 4	9–10, 11–12
Practice Q3 (structure)	Topic 6	15–16
Practice Q4 (evaluate)	Topic 7	17–18
Practice Q5 (writing)	Topics 8 to 13, and the full marked response	19–20–29–30, 33–34

Answers

Practice: Section A, marked

1 Any four of: she was shorter and broader than Edith expected; her sleeves were rolled to the elbow; she had a smear of flour on one forearm; she did not smile (exactly); she looked at Edith appraisingly, as if deciding something; two dogs sat behind her, very still and identical. [1 mark each]

2 Level 4 (7 to 8 marks) would explain, for example, that the clause “which Edith decided, cautiously, that she did not mind” uses the adverb ‘cautiously’ to show Edith consciously revising a judgement passed down from her mother, which says as much about her mother’s attitude as her own; that the photographs “squinting at the same invisible sun” is a strange, slightly uneasy image for something as ordinary as old photographs, extending the farmhouse’s air of being lived in by generations Edith doesn’t know; and that “dim and narrow” uses two adjectives in quick succession to compress the hallway, mirroring how enclosed and unfamiliar it feels to her.

3 Level 4 (7 to 8 marks) would note: the extract opens on a character assessment (Mrs Bellamy sizing Edith up, and vice versa) rather than on scenery, which prioritises relationship over setting from the first line; the focus then widens outward in stages - the hallway, the room, the view from the window - mirroring Edith settling into an unfamiliar space one layer at a time; the unpacking of personal objects marks a deliberate narrowing back from landscape to the intensely personal; and the final line, the dog howling “for no reason Edith could discover”, is a structural cliffhanger that unsettles the composed close of the previous paragraph.

4 A strong answer could reasonably argue either way, or both. Agreeing: Edith actively holds onto her decision not to cry “the way you held onto a railing on a moving train”, an image of effortful control rather than ease, suggesting she has successfully managed her sadness rather than not feeling it, which could support the statement. Disagreeing, or qualifying it: the dog’s unexplained howl immediately after she succeeds in not crying undercuts any sense of resolution, and the writer never actually says the sadness has gone, only that Edith has decided not to show it - a Level 4 answer would recognise that ‘successfully pushed away’ and ‘controlled in front of others’ are not quite the same claim, and evaluate the gap between them.

Practice: Section B

There is no single correct version of a descriptive or narrative response, so none is given here. Instead, mark your own attempt against the method on the full worked response (pages 33–34): did you plan one controlling idea before you wrote the first line, did your paragraphing show a deliberate shape rather than a tour or a recount, and did you vary your sentence forms on purpose? Ask a partner or teacher to check your reading against the same three questions.

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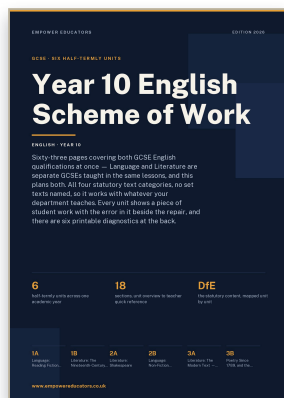
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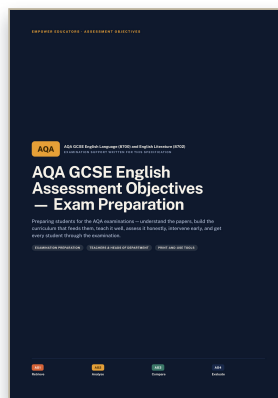
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The English department's playbook, with Language inside it.



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Year 10 to Year 11. One sequence table a year, unit by unit and in teaching order.



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The English department's books, one for each board, with Language inside them.



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Exam-style questions, each answered three times: weak, middling and strong.



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Year 10 to Year 11. A4, printable, one per unit.



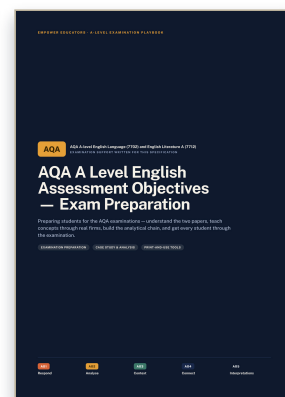
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