



**The Style Guide – How to Write  
A Level English Literature Essays for  
CAIE (2020)**

# Contents Page

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<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>The Assessment Criteria .....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>The Mark Schemes Explained .....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Types of Exam Questions Explained .....</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
Tackling passage-based questions .....	Page 9
Tackling wider questions .....	Page 11
<b>Style Tips for Successful Essay Writing</b>	
Style Tip 1: Writing well .....	Page 15
Style Tip 2: Helpful words and phrases for essay writing .....	Page 17
Style Tip 3: Writing effective introductions .....	Page 18
Style Tip 4: Writing effective conclusions .....	Page 19
Style Tip 5: Close textual analysis .....	Page 21
Style Tip 6: Using quotations .....	Page 24
Style Tip 7: Using context .....	Page 26
Style Tip 8: Using critics and ‘varying viewpoints’ (A Level students only) .....	Page 27
<b>The Approach to Good Essay Writing: An Overview .....</b>	<b>Page 32</b>
<b>Constructing the Perfect English Literature Essay</b>	
Breaking the question down .....	Page 33
Identify your gut response .....	Page 34
Making a plan .....	Page 38
Deciding on the order of your points .....	Page 41
Bringing contextual factors in .....	Page 42
Add critical views (A Level only) .....	Page 43
Writing the essay .....	Page 43
Checking your work .....	Page 43
<b>Preparing For Your Exams .....</b>	<b>Page 44</b>
<b>Final Note .....</b>	<b>Page 45</b>

# Introduction

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Being able to write a good essay is a vital skill for English Literature. It is not only the vehicle by which you will express your ideas, but the essay itself is proof of how well you can use language. These ideas may be very good, but if they don't come across clearly to an examiner, you will not get the marks you deserve.

It's important to note that different subjects have different approaches to essay writing and you need to be aware of what each subject requires, just as each subject has its own technical terminology.

Whilst everyone has their own way of writing and their own 'voice', there are some common guidelines you can follow to maximise your chances of success in your English Literature exams. The best place to start is by understanding the assessment criteria for the syllabus in order to understand what the examiners are looking for.

# The Assessment Criteria

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This guide is intended to help you address each of the assessment criteria that the examiner will be looking for when marking your work. These same criteria are the ones your tutor uses to mark each assignment on the Wolsey Hall course.

As you will see from the Cambridge Assessment International Examinations (CAIE) syllabus, the assessment objectives are as follows:

Assessment Criteria for Cambridge Assessment International Examinations: English Literature (9695)	
<b>A01</b>	The ability to respond to texts in the three main forms (Prose, Poetry and Drama) of different types and from different cultures.
<b>A02</b>	An understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings.
<b>A03</b>	The ability to produce informed, independent opinions and judgements on literary texts.
<b>A04</b>	The ability to communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate for literary study.
<b>A05</b>	The ability to appreciate and discuss varying opinions of literary works (Please note: this applies to <b>A Level only</b> . You do not have to quote from critical sources at AS Level.)

## The Mark Schemes Explained

Each of your assignments on the Wolsey Hall English Literature course is marked using real CAIE mark schemes. You should make yourself familiar with how these work so you can understand the scores you receive on the course, and how to improve these as you go along.

For **each** AS exam question, the mark scheme is the **same**, and the first **four** assessment criteria above are broken down as follows:

- **Knowledge**
- **Understanding**
- **Personal Response**
- **Communication**

At **A Level only**, a **fifth** assessment criterion is added to this:

- **Opinion**

The table below uses the descriptors for each of these categories from a **top band response** (22-25 marks). Beneath each descriptor from the exam board is an explanation of what this actually means in simpler terms.

### K – Knowledge

Evidence of a very good ability to **select relevant knowledge** to address the question with **effective use of references and quotation**. There may be evidence of **sensitive awareness of the contexts in which the literary works studied were written and understood**.

#### What this means:

##### 1. Answer the question!

It may sound obvious, but you would be surprised how often students either miss out vital parts of the question in front of them or try to answer a question that they *wish* had been asked.

You need to address **all key elements** of the question and make sure that **each and every paragraph is relevant**. Referring back to **key terms** from the question is very important in showing the examiner that you are on track.

##### 2. Use quotations from the text to support your points.

Always, always, *always* use the **PQC (Point, Quotation, Comment)** format for your points to ensure they are fully developed and illustrated by evidence from the text.

##### 3. Bring in some relevant details about contextual factors.

Make sure that these are **relevant** to the text, and that you include these as **part of the discussion**.

## U – Understanding

Evidence of very good understanding of ways in which writers' choices of structure, form and language shape meanings with sustained analysis and sensitive appreciation of literary methods and effects and contexts, possibly including literary genres and conventions.

### What this means:

#### 1. Write analytically, using the PQC format for your points.

Make sure you identify a **good range of literary and linguistic features** in the text, that you **identify these accurately** and **discuss the effects of the writer's choices**.

#### 2. Go into plenty of detail.

Explain your points **fully** and **develop** your ideas. It is far better to make fewer, well-developed and detailed points than lots of incomplete or superficial ones.

#### 3. Include structural features and aspects of form as well as language features.

Many students can identify metaphors or alliteration for example, but will shy away from discussing rhythm and metre in poetry, or stage directions in a play. Strong answers will **range across a number of features**.

#### 4. Show an awareness that poetry, prose and drama all contain elements particular to their form (e.g. stanzas in poetry, stage directions in drama, etc.) as well as sharing plenty of conventions (e.g. metaphors can appear in all three types of text). Use the correct critical vocabulary for the type of text you are discussing.

#### 5. Consider the literary genres of the text(s) you are writing about.

For example: is it a tragedy? A bildungsroman? Does it contain gothic influences? Is it free verse? A sonnet? Is it satirical? This is a kind of **literary context** and discussing these factors has the advantage of allowing you to include **more literary terminology**.

## P – Personal Response

Personal response to texts will be **perceptive**, often **freshly personal**, **fully supported with quotation**, and **may show originality in approach to and treatment of questions**.

### What this means:

#### 1. You need to respond to the text on a personal level.

This means identifying readings that **you** perceive in a text, which others may not. This does **not** mean you have to reinvent the wheel or find things nobody else has ever said about the text – this is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. You should however have an **opinion** on the text (which can be **supported by evidence** from it).

#### 2. Phrase your points 'softly'.

When discussing your own opinions, it is best to do so in a way that demonstrates **you understand that your reading is not necessarily the only one**. Try using 'softer' phrases like 'this **may suggest** that...', 'this **perhaps implies**...', 'this **could be seen as**...' This doesn't make you sound uncertain; it is a mature way of writing and demonstrates your appreciation of the fact that there are many ways to interpret a text.

**What this *doesn't* mean:**

**3. Using the first person...**

Contrary to how 'personal response' may sound, it does **not** mean you should use the **first person** in your writing. Avoid using 'I' at all costs in AS and A Level English Literature essays. It suggests too narrow a viewpoint and it lacks maturity of expression.

If you find yourself tempted to write in the first person, try **rephrasing the same idea without 'I'**. It can usually be done very easily and the result will be far more **clinical and academic** – which is exactly how an English Literature A Level essay should sound. You could use '**we**' for example, or '**the audience**' or '**the reader**'. You can also write in a more formal register, using phrases such as '**It can be argued that...**'

**C – Clarity**

Candidates will express **complex literary ideas and arguments with clarity and fluency**. Answers will have a **coherent structure, with logical progression and effectively linked paragraphs**. Expression will be **accomplished and appropriate**.

**What this means:**

**1. Make a plan.**

This should identify both **key points** to include, and ideally a **running order** for your paragraphs. Deciding what you want to say **before you begin writing** is the best way to ensure both 'fluency' and 'a coherent structure.' All of your assignments ask you to include a plan and submit this with your final essay. **Make sure you do this, as each one is a chance to practise the planning skills you will need in the real exams.**

**2. Write a clear introduction.**

This should be **appropriate to the type of question you have been asked** and leave the examiner in no doubt that you are answering the question. Introductions should **NOT** be generic – i.e. you should not write the same introduction each time you start an essay on a particular text. They should be specific to the question to show the examiner you understand what you have been asked.

**3. Make sure every paragraph has a clear purpose.**

Each one should ideally **begin and end decisively, showing a keen focus on the question** and should **advance the discussion**. If you don't know what the overall point of a paragraph is, neither will the examiner. A **clear topic sentence at the start of each paragraph** (which links to the material covered in your plan) will tell the examiner where your argument is going.

**4. Write a clear and decisive conclusion.**

This should clearly **bring your essay to a close** and again, **answer the question**. As with introductions, the type of conclusion you write will relate to the kind of question you have been asked.

**5. Write in good, clear English.**

You need to use **formal, Standard English** and **complete sentences at all times**. Be **academic** in your approach and show the examiner you take the process of essay writing seriously.

**6. Use a mature vocabulary.**

What this **doesn't** mean:

Using words that you don't understand or getting bogged down in overly complex sentence structures. Keep it **concise, polished** and **clear**.

**O – Opinion**

Considers **varying views**, arguing a **persuasive case**, **relevant** to the question, with support from the text.

**N.B. YOU ONLY NEED TO DO THIS IN A LEVEL ESSAYS; THIS IS NOT REQUIRED AT AS.**

What this means:

**1. Quote the views of other readers, i.e. critics.**

You need to show the examiner you have **read around your text** and have been exposed to the ideas and opinions of other readers, including **recognised critics** and that you can include these in your essays.

**2. Use these to develop your own argument – *engage with them*.**

This means using critics either because they **support your reading**, or in order to **argue against** them. Either way, the 'varying views' you bring in will help you to develop your own argument and make your position clear.

**3. Some ideas from critics can be paraphrased in your own words.**

But remember to **link the idea with a name**, so it is clear you are bringing in critical material.

**4. 'Varying views' may include other responses to the text, not necessarily specifically stated by critics.**

Sometimes you can be **more general** in showing you understand other views of a text, e.g. 'Some readers view Willy Loman as a spineless character in *Death of a Salesman*' even if you do not personally share them. Ideally you will have a **balance** of points like this and some **direct quotations from critical sources**.

**4. Make sure the quotations you use are relevant.**

**Don't** simply list all the critical quotations you know about the text; select ones that **relate to the question** you are answering.

The points above relate to **all** of the essays you will write in English Literature, both **passage-based** and **wider questions**. However, on each mark scheme, you will see the following tips specifically for passage-based questions at both AS and A Level:

In answers to passage-based questions, **work will sustain an appropriate balance between critical appreciation of given extracts, based on detailed critical analysis, and consideration of the broader textual issues raised by the questions, and relate part of a text to its whole** and vice versa in a **seamless argument**. There will be a **very good appreciation of the effects of the literary features of the text, with detailed analysis supported by relevant examples from the passage and the wider text**, where appropriate. There will be a very good knowledge of the **appropriate context** of the extract or work.

**What this means:**

**1. Make it clear you know where the passage is from within the text.**

Set the passage in its **context within the text as a whole**, identifying roughly where in the story it occurs/whether it is near the beginning or end/whether it is before or after any significant events in the plot, etc. For a poetry question, you might consider **how typical** the poem is of the poet's overall work.

**N.B. A single poem counts as a 'passage' and you need to link this to the 'whole text' (the whole collection of poems studied) by referring briefly to a few other poems from the collection.**

**2. Give an overview of what is happening in the passage in your introduction.**

Briefly **summarise** the **significance** of the passage or **give an overview of the poem**. Doing this in your introduction creates a strong framework on which to build in the body paragraphs that will follow.

**3. Make regular links between the passage in front of you and the rest of the text during the essay.**

The examiner needs to know that **you have read the whole text** and that you understand the **importance** of the chosen passage **within it**. Use the passage as a **springboard** from which you will make **frequent, brief links to the rest of the text, whilst still retaining a close focus on the extract**. For poetry, you need to make brief links to **other poems** in the collection.

**4. You have the text in front of you, so your analysis needs to be *extremely* detailed.**

**Don't make the mistake of thinking the passage-based questions are easier.** It's true that you **do have** the security of the material in front of you, and you don't need to remember **as many** quotations as you do for wider questions (though you should still be able to use some from elsewhere in the text when you link 'the part with the whole').

But the trade-off is that precisely **because** you have the text in front of you, the examiner expects to see an **extremely detailed understanding and analysis of the passage** in front of you **in addition** to all the other aspects of a good response. Be prepared, therefore, to **read very carefully, annotate the passage** and comment on a **very wide range of literary and linguistic features** in the discussion.

## Types of Exam Questions Explained

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In both the AS and the A Level exams, you will have a choice of **two** kinds of question on **each text**:

**1) A passage-based question**

**OR**

**2) A wider question**

You need to make sure you are prepared to answer **EITHER** kind of question on the day of the exam. Our English Literature courses will prepare you for **both** kinds of question.

**N.B. In AL Paper 5, you will be expected to answer *at least one* passage-based question, so you need to read the questions on both texts very carefully at the start of the exam and choose which question will be the passage-based one before you begin.**

Some students think they can avoid learning quotations and having to prepare as fully if they always answer the passage-based question, but this is a very risky strategy and should be avoided for the following reasons.

Firstly, if the passage-based question is not one that makes sense to you on the day of the exam, or is on a text or aspect of the text that you find very difficult, you need to be able to answer the wide question. Narrowing your options in advance is **not** a good thing.

Secondly, it is a misconception to think that the passage-based questions are easier for the reasons mentioned above. **The examiners will expect to see a really thorough and detailed discussion of a range of literary and linguistic features in a passage-based response** and you need to be confident that you are able to produce this.

*(N.B. The following examples apply to a range of different texts from recent AS and AL courses and depending on the year in which you are taking your exams, only some of them will include your texts. They still however give an indication of how questions may be phrased).*

### TACKLING PASSAGE-BASED QUESTIONS

Common examples of passage-based question formats include:

- Comment closely on the presentation of X in the following poem/passage.
- Comment closely on the following poem, considering ways in which it presents X.
- Discuss the effects of the writing in the following passage and consider how far it is characteristic of Woolf's narrative methods and concerns in the novel.
- Analyse the effects of the writing in the following passage and consider how far it is characteristic of Dickens' narrative methods and concerns.
- Comment closely on the following passage from *Elephant* by Raymond Carver, considering ways in which the writer creates mood and atmosphere.

- Paying attention to language and tone, analyse the dramatic effects in the following extract and consider how Shakespeare shapes an audience's response to Benedick here and elsewhere in the play.

**Top Tips:**

1. **Read the passage** carefully, with the **focus of the question** in mind. Underline key quotations you will use in your response as you go. **Label any literary devices** you can use in your close textual analysis.
2. Using the **focus of the question** as your guide, make a **quick plan of your key points** about the passage itself. This means deciding on your **topic sentences** for each paragraph. **You do still need a plan for this type of question, even if only a brief one.** This will stop your essay becoming a chronological list of points about the text and will ensure you have an argument. This is especially important in questions with a **specific focus**, such as 'mood and atmosphere' or 'a sense of threat'.
3. Your plan should **also** include:
  - Details of **brief links you can make to the rest of the text** (or other poems in a poetry question).
  - Relevant **contextual factors**.
  - Any **relevant critical quotations** (for AL essays only).
4. Start your essay with a clear introduction which sets the passage in context within the text as a whole as well as focussing on the key terms of the task.
5. Remember that **each of your body paragraphs should contain detailed analysis of language, form and/or structural features** used in the passage/poem so that your main focus throughout the essay remains on the passage/poem.
6. Bring in links to the wider text, contextual factors (and critical viewpoints at A Level) at **regular** intervals.
7. **Conclude** your essay in a way that feels **final** and with a **focus on the task**. In passage-based questions though, your conclusion does not have to be very long, and can be achieved by simply drawing the points of your final body paragraph to a close. A short closing sentence will often suffice.

**N.B. More detailed guidance on each of these elements of essay-writing is provided in the Style Tips which follow.**

## TACKLING WIDER QUESTIONS

These come in all shapes and sizes and it is difficult to predict what form they will take. This is why looking at past exam papers is so helpful, because you can get an idea of how the various questions tend to be worded (even for questions on texts you are not studying). There are however some fairly common formats that come up often.

All of these questions are marked in the same way, using the same assessment criteria, but you need to approach the essay plan and structure your argument according to the way the questions are phrased. **Planning is absolutely crucial to produce a well-written wider essay.** More detail on planning is provided later in this guide.

### 1. Simple ‘discuss’ questions:

- Discuss ways in which Frost presents humans in his poetry. Refer to **two** poems in your answer.
- Discuss Miller’s dramatic presentation of the relationship between Keller and Chris in *All My Sons*.
- Discuss the role and dramatic significance of the absent father-figure in *The Glass Menagerie*.
- Discuss Dickens’ presentation of the role and significance of charity in *Oliver Twist*.

**Top Tip:** The command word ‘discuss’ means you need to focus on the **key words of the task** and use these to put a clear plan of your material together, e.g. gathering examples of different forms of, and attitudes to, charity in *Oliver Twist*.

### 2. ‘In your view’ questions:

- What in your view is the role and dramatic significance of Hero within *Much Ado About Nothing*?
- What in your view does Woolf’s presentation of marriage contribute to the meaning and effects of *Mrs Dalloway*?
- What in your view does the relationship between Richard and Queen Isabel contribute to the play’s meaning and effects? (*Richard II*)

**Top Tip:** The key phrase ‘in your view’ means you definitely need to have an opinion on the topic, but does **NOT** mean you should use the first person in your answer. You should make your views clear, but must still use clinical, academic phrasing, e.g. ‘*It can be argued that the relationship between Richard and his wife is there to remind us that this frequently arrogant and misguided king has a more compassionate side...*’

### 3. 'In what ways and with what effects' questions:

- In what ways, and with what dramatic effects, does Miller explore moral responsibility in *All My Sons*?
- In what ways, and with what dramatic effects, does Shakespeare present kingship in *Richard II*?
- By what means, and with what effects, does Frost present beauty in the natural world? Refer to **two** poems in your answer.
- By what means, and with what effects, does Woolf employ contrasts of youth and age in *Mrs Dalloway*?

**Top Tip:** The key phrase 'in what ways' can simply be translated as 'How does the writer...?' This means you are looking at key literary devices as well the attitudes a writer may express to the given topic. The phrase 'with what effects' is slightly trickier. In general terms, this refers to the effects on the audience or reader, e.g. creating comedy, pathos, irony, suspense, etc. **BUT**, although you are writing about effects, **keep your focus on what the writer is doing** (which is measurable and something you can prove with quotations) **rather than on the reader's or audience's response** (which you cannot actually prove). Keeping your focus on the writer's methods will always mean your writing is analytical and appropriately detailed and you will never stray into woolly or abstract claims that cannot be supported. For example, '**Shakespeare** evokes pathos when...'

### 5. 'Compare ways in which' questions:

You will usually only be asked to write comparative essays where you have studied more than one individual text as part of a set text, e.g. in the collection of short stories in *Stories of Ourselves* or with poetry texts, where you may be asked to compare two poems from within the collection.

- Compare ways in which the writers of **two** stories encourage readers to feel sympathetic towards particular characters.
- Compare some of the ways in which **two** stories present moments of surprise.
- Compare ways in which Frost presents mankind in **two** poems.

**Top Tips:** The command word 'compare' means you need to **move regularly back and forth between the two poems or stories**, making a point about one and then a related point about the other. 'Comparing' also includes **contrasting**, so you may (and should) comment on similarities and/or differences between the texts.

**Use key words and phrases to flag up your comparisons and contrasts**, such as '*however*', '*by contrast*', '*similarly*', '*unlike...*', '*both writers present...*', '*Text A also...*' etc. You must **NOT** write everything about one text and then everything about the next, as this will not allow you to compare them or therefore to answer the question. **Not answering the question you have been asked is one of the most common reasons for losing marks in the exams.**

## 6. Questions with a prompt:

- ‘Our views of characters sometimes change as a story develops.’ In the light of this comment, discuss the presentation of characters in **two** stories.
- Miller describes Joe Keller as ‘a man among men’. In the light of this statement, discuss Miller’s portrayal of masculinity in *All My Sons*.
- ‘Richard is far too weak to be considered a tragic hero.’ In light of this comment, consider ways in which Shakespeare shapes the audience’s response to Richard in the play.
- ‘A character with hidden emotional strength’. Discuss the role and dramatic presentation of Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* in light of this comment.

**Top Tips:** Don’t be scared of questions with prompts in them. They are actually very helpful, as the prompts often give you ideas to explore which you may not otherwise have had and they can trigger a strong opinion or argument, which will help you demonstrate a clear and sophisticated personal response.

The key thing with these questions is to **break down the prompt and identify key words**, and then to include these in your plan.

**But you must ALSO look at the command word** that follows the prompt, e.g. ‘Discuss’, ‘Consider’, ‘Compare’ and any **focus** in the question itself, e.g. ‘the presentation of characters’, ‘the relationship between X and Y’, ‘the audience’s response’ or ‘poetic methods and their effects’.

This is a juggling act, but a plan which deals with **EACH** of these elements will provide you with not only a great argument, but also a clear map to follow as you are writing.

## 7. ‘How far...’ questions:

- How far and in what ways does Shakespeare depict Bolingbroke as the hero of the play? (*Richard II*)

Many of these questions will *also* contain a prompt, so the rules above apply too. The prompt could come from the text itself, for example:

- Amanda describes herself as ‘hateful to her children’. How far and in what ways does Williams’ presentation of Amanda support this view? (*The Glass Menagerie*)

Or from a critical source, for example:

- ‘Dickens shows us that self-interest is the only way to survive in a brutal world’. How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on Dickens’ presentation of characters in *Oliver Twist*?
- ‘Shakespeare manages to arouse our sympathy for Richard, despite his arrogance and poor leadership.’ How far do you agree with this comment on Shakespeare’s presentation of Richard? (*Richard II*)

**Top Tips:** The key phrase ‘how far’ means you must decide (**BEFORE** you begin writing) actually how much you agree or disagree with the prompt. It can be useful to think of a spectrum as follows:

**Totally Disagree ----- Totally Agree**

and then to decide where your viewpoint falls. Stronger arguments are likely **NOT to totally disagree or agree** because **recognising the counterargument** is important in tasks like these.

However, you should also **make sure that you do pick one side of the debate or the other**, because trying to argue a 50/50 perspective means your argument will feel weak and, at times, even contradictory. You will also not be able to show a strong personal view overall.

Think of it instead as being a 70/30 or 80/20 split. You obviously shouldn’t mention these figures (!) but deciding in advance which side of the fence you are on is crucial.

Note also that **you may disagree with some of the key words of the prompt, but not others**. This makes for a very sophisticated and nuanced argument, and is a great approach to take, but it requires very careful handling in your plan.

In the *Richard II* question above, for example, you may agree that Shakespeare arouses some sympathy for Richard, and you may agree that he is arrogant for the majority of the play, but you may disagree that he is always a poor leader. This would make a very interesting argument, and you would deal with this by breaking each point down in your plan to form what will become a series of separate body paragraphs in your essay.

## Style Tips for Successful Essay Writing

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The following is a series of tips on how to improve your essay writing, focussing on areas that students often find challenging and on common mistakes and how to avoid them.

### STYLE TIP 1: WRITING WELL

Good essay writing begins with good English and you need to be able to write well if you are going to show your ideas off to their best advantage.

Below is a list of tips for writing well.

#### ✓DO

- **Write in complete sentences at all times.** Check that every sentence makes complete grammatical sense.
- **Use formal, Standard English and an academic register.** This means writing in a formal way that is suitable for academic essays, so using 'frightening' instead of 'scary' or 'loses her grip on reality' instead of 'goes crazy.'
- **Write things out in full wherever possible.** So avoid contractions if you can, e.g. write 'does not' instead of 'doesn't'. This is all part of writing in a formal, academic register.
- **Punctuate accurately and carefully.** Check that you understand the rules for commas, brackets, apostrophes and semi-colons. If you don't, you need to learn them now.
- **Mention the author's name frequently.** This keeps you focussed on the author's methods and therefore on being analytical at all times. It also means you will avoid the common trap of writing about the characters as though they are real people. Even when texts are based on historical figures, they are still a piece of art, crafted in a specific way to achieve particular effects, and this means you must deal with them as such.
- **Write in the present tense when discussing texts.** This helps to avoid confusion about the use of a time in a text, e.g. if you are discussing a character both before and after their death. The present tense keeps things simple and clear.
- **Write in the past tense when discussing relevant contextual factors or details of the author's life.** These are historical facts, so the past tense is appropriate.
- **Use a mature vocabulary** – but make sure this is one you understand! If you want to use a new word, check the meaning first. This is best done for assignments, where you can look up definitions. Don't use a new word you're unsure of for the first time in the exam itself.
- **Include literary and linguistic terminology.** These terms are the tools of your trade and show the examiner you have studied the subject. You need them to express complex ideas clearly and precisely and using terminology accurately is something for which a lot of marks are awarded. It is absolutely vital and essays which do not contain literary terminology will never score a very high grade. Use the glossary in *Mastering English Literature* and the website links provided in the General Resources section of the course to broaden your critical vocabulary and make sure you revise key terms thoroughly before the real exams.
- **Be concise, yet detailed.** Avoid rambling, stick to the focus of the question and don't repeat yourself.

- **Keep coming back to the key terms of the question.** This shows the examiner that you are completely focussed on the task in hand.
- **Vary your sentence structures.** A mixture of longer, more complex sentences with shorter decisive ones is a good way to add sophistication and variety to your writing, but do check that the longer sentences make grammatical sense. If in doubt, shorter, clearer sentences are better than longer, confusing ones.
- **Use a range of words from the list of Helpful Words and Phrases to Use in Essay Writing** (see below).

#### ✖ DON'T

- **Use slang, abbreviations or a chatty tone.** These have no place in formal, academic essays and give a negative impression of your writing to the examiner.
- **Use contractions.** Instead, write words out in full, e.g. 'does not' rather than 'doesn't'.
- **Write in the first person.** Even if questions are phrased in a way that asks for your personal opinion, the first person suggests too narrow and immature a perspective. Use 'we' (to refer to readers and audiences) instead, or even 'one' to be more clinical and businesslike. Remember that all points which include the first person can be rephrased to sound much more formal, academic and analytical.
- **Start a sentence in one way and then change your mind, leaving the sentence unfinished.** Check that all sentences make complete grammatical sense. If you do not know what a 'complete sentence' is, make sure you learn this now. It is expected at AS and A Level and examiners will not waste time trying to understand points which are not clearly expressed.
- **Ask questions, rhetorical or otherwise.** Examiners want to see answers, not questions. If you want to ask a question in your essay, rephrase this to make it into a statement, e.g. *'The question of whether or not Richard II invites our sympathy is an interesting one'*.
- **Write in an overly emotional or sensational way about the text.** Whilst an examiner does want to see your personal response to the text, they expect to see this expressed in an academic and controlled way. Writing about how 'amazing' a writer's use of metaphor is, or describing how 'the intensity of the imagery is mind-blowing' is not only too emotional, but it lacks analytical support. Keep a clinical and detached focus throughout.
- **Use 'etc.' in place of explaining your point fully.** This implies you are bored by the point you are making and cannot be bothered to develop it! English Literature is all about detail, so if there is more to be said, you need to include it. Detail is everything in strong English Literature essays.
- **Use the authors' (and critics') first names on their own.** You are not on personal terms with Frost or Shakespeare, do don't refer to them as 'Robert' or 'William'! It is far too chatty for an academic essay. It is perfectly acceptable to use just a writer's or critic's surname.

## STYLE TIP 2: HELPFUL WORDS AND PHRASES FOR ESSAY WRITING

In English Literature, you often need to **explain what a quotation shows**. Below are some useful alternatives to the verb 'shows', which will enable you to vary your vocabulary in your essays:

**highlights**  
**demonstrates**  
**implies**  
**conveys**  
**illustrates**  
**suggests**  
**indicates**

To **describe the effect of a literary device a writer uses**, the following are useful:

**creates**  
**establishes**  
**depicts**  
**evokes**  
**portrays**

To describe **how a writer's methods build on an effect they have already created**:

**reinforces**  
**emphasises**  
**heightens**

You will also often need to mention the fact that a writer **uses** particular devices. Alternative words include:

**utilises**  
**employs**  
**exercises**

When **comparing or contrasting** two different stories or poems, for example, you could use the following words and phrases:

**similarly**  
**unlike**  
**whereas X does A, Y does B**  
**by contrast**  
**X differs in that it...**  
**this is different to...**  
**X and Y are similar in that they...**

And finally, make sure you **use the following conjunctions accurately**:

**However/yet/although** – these mean 'but' and should be used to connect **contrasting points**.

**Moreover/furthermore** – these words suggest that your next point **builds on** the one before.

### STYLE TIP 3: WRITING EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTIONS

A good introduction is really important as it is the **first impression** an examiner will have of your writing. Different types of essays require slightly different approaches to their introductions, but there are several key things *every* introduction should do:

#### ✓DO

What introductions *should* do:

- **Show the examiner that you are focussed on the task, by making specific reference to key terms from the question.**
- **Give a hint of what is to come in the body of the essay. This links to the points you have included on your plan.**

Beyond this, the shape of your introduction is governed by the kind of question you are answering.

**Introductions to passage-based questions should:**

- Focus on the question (using key terms from it)
- Put the passage into context within the text as a whole (in terms of how it relates to the task)
- Give a brief overview of the key points in the passage (or an overview of the essence of the poem)

**Introductions to wider questions should:**

- Focus on the question (using key terms from it)
- Pick apart the prompt if there is one
- Show that you have an opinion (e.g. for 'How far do you agree?' questions)
- Hint at what is to come

You may also refer to relevant contextual factors, or critical viewpoints (at A Level) if these are relevant.

#### Top Tip: Form and Genre in Introductions

The **form or genre** of a text is often a good thing to which you can make brief reference in an introduction, e.g. mentioning that a play is a tragedy or comedy, that a novel is a bildungsroman, that a poem is a sonnet or dramatic monologue. These are easy extra bits of terminology to slip into the opening discussion and show you understand what kind of text you are writing about.

See over the page for a list of things to **avoid** when writing introductions.

## ✗ DON'T

### What introductions should *not* do:

- **Ignore the question** and begin the same way as every other essay you have written about the text. Each introduction should be specific to the question you have been asked.
- **Start with anything along the lines of 'In this essay I am going to...' or 'This essay is about...'** If you have to explain this, something is seriously wrong! An examiner expects you to answer the question and that is *all* you should be doing; no explanation of this is required.
- **Regurgitate the same basic facts about a text or writer, irrespective of the question.** Sometimes context can help you add detail to an introduction, but it needs to be **relevant** to the question. Again, your essays on a text should not all begin in the same way.
- **Begin analysing the text using the PQC (Point, Quotation, Comment) structure.** This needs to start in the body paragraphs. Keep your introduction brief and just focus on an overview of the task.
- **Include long lists of methods the writers use.** Leave references to specific methods used by the writer until the analytical body paragraphs and then explore methods fully there (without listing, as each quotation should be dealt with separately). Including long lists of random terminology is never a good idea and they have no place in introductions.

## STYLE TIP 4: WRITING EFFECTIVE CONCLUSIONS

As with introductions, conclusions are important in terms of **how an examiner engages with your work**. It is the final part of the essay they will read and it is always a shame when a good essay peters out into a weak conclusion. Use these tips to help you leave the examiner with a really **positive final impression of your work**.

Like introductions, conclusions will be slightly different depending on the type of question you are answering, but below are some important tips to bear in mind:

## ✓ DO

### What conclusions *should* do:

- **Answer the question.** Remember that the key purpose of a conclusion is to give your final, considered response to the question, having weighed up the issue in the body paragraphs.
- If you have been asked **how far you agree or disagree with a statement**, then this is the time to sum up your overall response, having considered the evidence in the body of the essay, e.g. you mostly agree, or mostly disagree, etc.
- **Come back to the key terms of the question.**
- If your essay is a simple **'Discuss X' style question**, then you can give an overview of the importance of this element in the text, drawing together your findings and making a meaningful final statement.
- If your essay is on a **passage-based question** then the conclusion can be very simple, just giving an **brief overview** of how the writer does what the question asked you to focus on,

e.g. ‘create suspense’ or ‘present’ a character, but without repeating key content from the body paragraphs themselves. Think of a conclusion as being like a camera panning out at the end of a film – make general, broad points that draw the strands of the argument together and focus on the essence of the task.

- **Make sure your essay ‘finishes’ rather than ‘stops’.** Draw everything to a close, so that your essay ends neatly rather than simply stopping, which can give the impression that you ran out of time. Conclusions should feel ‘final’.

## ✖ DON'T

### What conclusions should *not* do:

- **List all the key points again.** It is never necessary to repeat key content from the body paragraphs of your essay, and to an examiner, this just feels like you’re starting all over again. They have just read the essay; they don’t need to hear it again in miniature. This dilutes the effectiveness of the argument that came before and can make it seem as though you do not believe you have made your points effectively.
- **Include long lists of methods the writers use.** As with your introduction, leave references to specific methods used by the writer in the analytical body paragraphs. There is no place for these in effective conclusions.
- **Introduce new material.** If it’s relevant it should be explored in the body of the essay; if it wasn’t important enough to appear there, then it shouldn’t be appearing in the conclusion.

### Top Tip: Dare To Be Different...

Many students are taught to write ‘In conclusion...’ or ‘To conclude...’ at the start of their conclusions. This is not a terrible thing and you won’t be marked down for it, but it is a very generic approach and it does not allow for much creativity. There’s also something to be said for the idea that if you feel you have to flag up what the paragraph is there for, then it isn’t clear enough!

A good conclusion *feels* like a conclusion and so doesn’t really require you to beat the examiner over the head with it. So if you feel like breaking out of the mould and you trust that your writing itself will make it clear that it’s the conclusion, try ditching these comfortable phrases.

## STYLE TIP 5: CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This is absolutely **fundamental** to good AS and A Level English Literature essays. It is your chance to **engage with the writer's methods and to discuss these**, showing off an understanding of how the subject works. A lot of marks are available for this aspect of essay writing and it is essential to pack as much detail as you can into your work. You should read through this section and the following example very carefully and refer to it regularly when writing your own essays.

### Why Is Literary Terminology Important?

Put simply, it is the **tool of the trade** for an English Literature student, just like the specialist terminology for any other subject. It demonstrates to an examiner that you can **identify**, and that you **understand**, **how a writer uses language, structure and form to shape meaning**.

Having a wide critical vocabulary allows you to pinpoint what a writer has done in order to create particular effects and it actually **saves you time** in an essay, because each of these terms means something quite complicated that would take much longer to explain in your own words and without the appropriate terminology.

**However, you must be very wary of 'feature-spotting'**. This is when students simply identify a list of devices used by a writer, but do not actually **explore** or **engage** with any of these. There are very few marks available for feature-spotting so you must take care to avoid this.

In order to use literary terminology effectively, you must use **a three-point critical response** to make sure that you have explained not only what a writer has done, but *where they have done it* and *what the effect is*.

### The Three-part Critical Response

This can be referred to as **PQC (Point, Quotation, Comment)**. You may also know it from GCSE or IGCSE as **PEE (Point, Evidence, Explain)** or **PEA (Point, Example, Analysis)**. They all mean the same thing. It doesn't matter what you call it, as long as you use it.

- Your **Point** is a basic **statement of fact** about an element of the text.
- The **Quotation** is the **evidence** from the text you select to **support this statement**.
- The **Comment** is where you **analyse the quotation**, using **literary terminology**, to **explain the effects the writer has achieved** by using the devices you identify.

The following example is from an essay on 'The Rain Horse' by Ted Hughes, one of the short stories set for AS 2019 in *Stories of Ourselves*. It is part of a response to the following question. PQC has been indicated using different colours. Literary terminology is highlighted in bold.

Read the exemplar text carefully, noting:

- how quotations are **embedded**;
- how the points are **phrased**;
- how literary terminology is **incorporated**;
- how **detailed** analysis is **sustained** and the writer's effects are **explored fully**.

**Comment closely** on the following passage from *The Rain Horse* by Ted Hughes, considering **ways in which** the writer creates **mood and atmosphere**.

All around him the boughs angled down, glistening, black as iron. From their tips and elbows the drops hurried steadily, and the channels of the bark pulsed and gleamed. For a time he amused himself calculating the variation in the rainfall by the variations in a dribble of water from a trembling twig-end two feet in front of his nose. He studied the twig, bringing dwarfs and continents and animals out of its scurfy bark. Beyond the boughs the blue shoal of the town was rising and falling, and darkening and fading again, in the pale, swaying backdrop of rain.

He wanted this rain to go on for ever. Whenever it seemed to be drawing off he listened anxiously until it closed in again. As long as it lasted he was suspended from life and time. He didn't want to return to his sodden shoes and his possibly ruined suit and the walk back over that land of mud.

All at once he shivered. He hugged his knees to squeeze out the cold and found himself thinking of the horse. The hair on the nape of his neck prickled slightly. He remembered how it had run up to the crest and showed against the sky.

He tried to dismiss the thought. Horses wander about the countryside often enough. But the image of the horse as it had appeared against the sky stuck in his mind. It must have come over the crest just above the wood in which he was now sitting. To clear his mind, he twisted around and looked up the wood between the tree stems, to his left.

At the wood top, with the silvered grey light coming in behind it, the black horse was standing under the oaks, its head high and alert, its ears pricked, watching him.

A horse sheltering from the rain generally goes into a sort of stupor, tilts a hind hoof and hangs its head and lets its eyelids droop, and so it stays as long as the rain lasts. This horse was nothing like that. It was watching him intently, standing perfectly still, its soaked neck and flank shining in the hard light.

He turned back. His scalp went icy and he shivered. What was he to do? Ridiculous to try driving it away. And to leave the wood, with the rain still coming down full pelt was out of the question. Meanwhile the idea of being watched became more and more unsettling until at last he had to twist around again, to see if the horse had moved. It stood exactly as before.

This was absurd. He took control of himself and turned back deliberately, determined not to give the horse one more thought. If it wanted to share the wood with him, let it. If it wanted to stare at him, let it. He was nestling firmly into these resolutions when the ground shook and he heard the crash of a heavy body coming down the wood. Like lightning his legs bounded him upright and about face. The horse was almost on top of him, its head stretching forward, ears flattened and lips lifted back from the long yellow teeth. He got one snapshot glimpse of the red-veined eyeball as he flung himself backwards around the tree. Then he was away up the slope, whipped by oak twigs as he leapt the brambles and brushwood, twisting between the close trees till he tripped and sprawled. As he fell the warning flashed through his head that he must at all costs keep his suit out of the leaf-mould, but a more urgent instinct was already rolling him violently sideways. He spun around, sat up and looked back, ready to scramble off in a flash to one side. He was panting from the sudden excitement and effort. The horse had disappeared. The wood was empty except for the drumming, slant grey rain, dancing the bracken and glittering from the branches.

#### AN EXAMPLE OF POINT QUOTATION COMMENT: PQC IN ACTION

A menacing mood is created from the outset, as Hughes describes the **protagonist's** surroundings: 'All around him the boughs angled down, glistening, black as iron'. The **narrator** appears to be trapped, surrounded on all sides by the 'boughs' and the **simile** suggests the inhospitable landscape,

as the adjective ‘black’ conveys menace and the reference to ‘iron’ suggests the harsh nature of this environment. The man however is absorbed by the experience of sheltering in the rain and wants it ‘to go on forever.’ This implies he finds some peace in being away from civilisation, symbolised by the ‘blue shoal of the town’ which seems far away. He takes a pleasure in this exposure to nature and ‘stud(ies) the twig, bringing dwarfs and continents and animals out of its scurfy bark’. This imagery indicates that he is absorbed by his surroundings, which have tapped into his imagination. This notion is reinforced by the tricolon ‘dwarfs and continents and animals’ in which Hughes uses childlike lexis to imply the man’s engagement with the natural world in this moment. At this specific moment in the story, the atmosphere is ostensibly peaceful. This sense of contemplation and escape is juxtaposed with references to the man’s ‘sodden shoes and his possibly ruined suit’ which could act as a metaphor for his adult identity and responsibilities in the everyday world, things which seems to be fading away in this moment.

The horse is described in a way that is unsettling, both for the man and the reader; it is ‘standing under the oaks, its head high and alert, its ears pricked, watching him’. The adjectives ‘high’, ‘alert’ and ‘pricked’ imply the horse’s intense focus on the man which seems unnatural and this notion is further explored when we are told that ‘A horse sheltering from the rain generally goes into a sort of stupor’. By contrast however, ‘This horse (is) nothing like that’. Hughes’ simple, blunt declarative alerts us to potential threat and the mood darkens here. Pathetic fallacy runs throughout the story, and the description of the horse’s ‘neck and flank shining in the hard light’ is chilling. The adjective ‘hard’ again suggests the darker forces of nature, as well as visually illuminating the horse to stress its importance. The harsh plosive ‘k’ sounds in ‘neck’ and ‘flank’ heighten the sinister tone.

The protagonist’s fear is clearly indicated by his ‘icy scalp’ and the fact that he ‘shiver(s)’. Hughes’ third person, focussed narrative captures the man’s thoughts as they go through his mind: ‘What was he to do? Ridiculous to try driving it away.’ Here, the interrogative suggests his uncertainty and the adjective ‘Ridiculous’ conveys his attempts to reassure himself in the face of a threat he does not understand. This helps to build tension before the sudden change in pace and mood, when the horse charges at him; the man hears ‘the crash of a heavy body coming down the wood.’ The onomatopoeic ‘crash’ mimics the sound of the horse as it gallops towards him, but also implies the physical danger it could inflict due to its size and weight. Before the man escapes, he sees the horse’s ‘ears flattened and lips lifted back from the long yellow teeth’. The animal’s behaviour is openly threatening; it is ready to attack and references to its ‘long yellow teeth’ suggest it will. The man’s response is primal and instinctive: ‘Like lightning his legs bounded him upright and about face’. This simile illustrates the speed with which he responds to the danger, and echoes the violence of the ongoing storm around him. Hughes suggests that his body responds before his brain actively processes the threat by making his ‘legs’ the subject of the sentence.

Here you can see that each point is fully explored, linking the writer’s methods, which are clearly identified through accurate use of literary terminology, to the effects created. The key words of the question are mentioned several times, to show the examiner that the response is focussed and links to the rest of the story are woven into the discussion, as appropriate.

You will also notice that when individual words have been selected for comment, rather than using the word ‘word’, the specific word class has been identified, e.g. noun, verb, adjective etc. This is another great way to add in plenty of detail and to show the examiner that you understand how

language works. Quotations are also **embedded** neatly into the overall sentence structure and each one is introduced appropriately. See the next Style Tip for advice on using quotations effectively.

## STYLE TIP 6: USING QUOTATIONS

The best essays make use of **frequent, brief, relevant** quotations, which are **embedded** into the discussion.

### Frequent

Quotations show that your work is **anchored to the text** and an examiner will expect to see them in **every** body paragraph in your essay. Be very wary of writing entire paragraphs (other than your introduction and conclusion) which contain no quotations.

### Brief

**Don't** spend ages copying out reams of text. As a rule of thumb, you should use **no more than what you are going to analyse, and no less than what makes sense within the sentence**.

A **single word or phrase** may be enough, but if you are talking about the effect of a metaphor or a complete sentence, then obviously you need to quote enough to demonstrate that it *is* a metaphor.

### Relevant

If you are using PQC effectively, then your quotation will **support the point you have made**.

### Embedded

This means **integrating quotations into your own sentences** so that the overall sentence is **meaningful** and **grammatically sound**.

**Avoid 'floating quotations'** – don't start sentences with quotations. You need to lead into, and out of, your chosen quotations smoothly.

The following examples use extracts from some of the stories in *Stories of Ourselves* to illustrate how to use quotations effectively.

✓	<i>The narrator describes how 'the sea unceasingly shifts and stirs and sends out fingers, paws, tongues to probe the shore'. Ahdaf employs sibilance to emphasise the sound of the moving water and the personification, along with the dynamic verb 'probes' suggests the sea is an inquisitive being with a mind of its own.</i>
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**'Sandpiper' – Ahdaf Soueif**

Your quotation should **fit with the sentence around it**. This may involve **editing** the quotation to make it fit. This is fine, but you must use the appropriate conventions to show you have done this. **Any changes you make to a quotation should be demonstrated by the use of brackets**. Read through the examples that follow.

### Changing the Tense of a Quotation:

<b>Original text:</b>	<i>Lord Emsworth's eyes bulged and he gargled faintly.</i>
<b>New sentence:</b>	<i>Lord Emsworth's shock and disapproval are evident when his 'eyes (bulge) and he gargle(s) faintly.'</i>

**'The Custody of the Pumpkin' – P.G. Wodehouse**

### Changing the First Person to the Third Person:

<b>Original text:</b>	<i>Carrying my child and loving her father, I sat on the beach, dug holes in the sand and let my thoughts wander.</i>
<b>New sentence:</b>	<i>The narrator tells us how when she was pregnant and in love '(she) sat on the beach, dug holes in the sand and let (her) thoughts wander'.</i>

**'Sandpiper' – Ahdaf Soueif**

### Cutting Out Part of a Quotation:

<b>Original text:</b>	<i>I kneeled down on the ground, opened the paper sack and began picking up the black seeds.</i>
<b>New sentence:</b>	<i>'I kneeled down on the ground (...) and began picking up the black seeds.'</i>

**'The Taste of Watermelon' – Borden Deal**

Please note that in cases like the above, the brackets show that the ellipsis is not part of the original sentence, but is something you have added.

### Indicating Line Breaks in Poetry and Drama Written in Verse:

When quoting from poetry, or from drama written in verse, such as Shakespeare, remember to indicate **line breaks**, using the symbol /, for example:

In 'Birches', Frost describes how the boy 'fl(ings) outward, feet first, with a swish,/ Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.'

Notice in the above example, that the line break is indicated by the forward slash symbol, and the punctuation appears exactly as it does in the text – including the capital letter for the next line of poetry.

**Top Tip: Don't mention 'quotations'!**

**NEVER use the word 'quotation' (or 'quote') in your essays.** This is a term we use as readers and students of the subject in order to refer to the material we need to learn and use, but they are *not* quotations when the writer uses them for the first time.

Not only this, but there is always something better and more precise to say, such as 'line', 'sentence', 'image', 'metaphor' etc. **These are literary terms, but 'quotation' is not.**

✗	<i>In the <b>quotation</b> 'for a moment like a nightmarish leopard', Hughes suggests the sinister nature of the horse.</i>
✓	<i>Hughes suggests the sinister nature of the horse when he describes it as appearing 'for a moment like a nightmarish leopard'. <b>Here, the simile...</b></i>

**'The Rain Horse' – Ted Hughes**

## STYLE TIP 7: USING CONTEXT

Contextual factors are very important because they show that you understand that your text was not written in isolation, but is a product of the time in which it was written and was influenced by a range of other factors.

Context can include both **the circumstances affecting a text when it was written** and how we may respond to it now. However, the first kind is the easiest to write about and the most important.

**Contextual factors can be:**

- Historical
- Social
- Cultural
- Political
- Religious
- Philosophical
- Literary
- Biographical

The most important thing to remember about context is that it must be **relevant** to the essay you are writing.

You should also try to keep contextual discussion **brief** (there is no need to branch out into a history essay) but also **refer to it at regular intervals** as you go along. A few brief sentences here and there, which show you have read about the text and its author, go a long way.

A good acronym to remember for using context is **ROBE: relevant, brief, often and embedded.**

**Top Tip: DON'T cram it all into one single paragraph, or put it all in the introduction; make it part of your overall discussion.**

**Literary contexts** are doubly important because they add something to your analytical discussion of the text and also provide the opportunity for you to include more **literary terminology**. If your text is a comedy or tragedy, or a bildungsroman or contains gothic influences or was influenced by the Romantics, then this is really important to bring in early on in the essay so you can integrate it into the discussion.

**Top Tip: Approach Biographical Contexts With Caution**

Biographical context can be a very useful context indeed, but make sure you use it with caution. You must **not** make sweeping claims about a writer's life and how it influenced their work **unless there is direct evidence from the text** to support this. **It cannot be proved, and it is not analytical.** However, dropping in a few details of a writer's life and suggesting how this **may** link to the text, is fine. When writing about 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost for example, you may wish to mention the poet's own struggles with depression, since the speaker in the poem is tempted to give up on life before deciding at the end that he must carry on. You should **not** claim that the poem is about Frost himself, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Frost's own experiences *may* have influenced it.

**Keep it relevant.** Not every detail you know about a writer's life will relate to the question you have been asked. For example, knowing that a writer went through a messy divorce may have nothing to do with the aspect of the text you are analysing, so would feel out of place! However, with some texts, the author's life is a prominent source of inspiration. This is true in *The Glass Menagerie*, where there are a great many similarities between Williams' own life and the events and characters in the play, so these details would be more relevant.

## STYLE TIP 8: USING CRITICS AND 'VARYING VIEWPOINTS' (A LEVEL STUDENTS ONLY)

Using critical viewpoints in your essays at A Level demonstrates that you have read around your text and that you are aware of the **key interpretations** of the text and that **there is more than one way to view a text, its characters, themes and message.**

At A Level, you need to refer to critical viewpoints on the day of the exam and this means you **do** need to **learn** some key critical quotations as well as quotations from the texts themselves.

### How Many Critical Quotations Should I Use?

There is no set number for this, but a good rule of thumb is to try and **include three or four in each essay**, from **a range of different sources.**

### How Do I Use Them?

There are two main types of critical viewpoint you can incorporate into your essays:

- 1) You can quote **directly** from critical sources;

**OR**

- 2) You can **summarise critical ideas** and readings in your own words.

**Ideally you will do both.** In both instances, you should **link the material used to a named source**, to indicate that you have done the critical reading.

### Direct Quotations

As a rule of thumb, it is best to use direct quotations when they are **pithy, memorable and concise** – in effect **when a critic words something so neatly that it saves you time to use their words rather than your own**. These are the critical quotations you should be looking out for to learn for the exam.

### Summarising Ideas

This is a better option to take when a critic's idea is a big, complicated one, and cannot easily be summed up by a phrase or sentence from their work. You can provide an overview instead, e.g. **'Siegel interprets *Othello* as a Christian allegory and draws parallels between Desdemona and Christ, Iago and Satan, and Othello and Adam.'** Here, the critic's viewpoint is summarised, but not directly quoted.

As with any quotations, you should **lead into, and out of, the critical quotation smoothly and in a way which makes it part of your own sentence**.

### How to Use Critics in More Detail

There are also two main **ways** in which you can use critical viewpoints in your essays.

- 1) To **support** your argument – i.e. where you agree with what the critic says

**OR**

- 2) To **argue against** – i.e. when you do not agree with what the critic says.

Both are useful in different ways.

Overall though, the main thing is to **engage** with the material you use, rather than simply 'bolt it on'.

The following are some examples of critical material, as applied to *Mrs Dalloway*. Take note of how these quotations are **embedded** in the discussion and how the authors' names are included. (**N.B.** These quotations are from real critical texts, so you could use them in your essays on *Mrs Dalloway*.)

### Examples of Critical Viewpoints in Use:

- a) The character of Septimus allows Woolf to explore the traumatic effects of World War I upon soldiers. The passages describing his experiences of London are disturbing, capturing the idea that, as **Eagleton describes it, he feels 'persecuted by reality itself', and has 'a sense of the**

sickening precariousness of the world'. Woolf demonstrates how his perception of the world around him has been tainted by his trauma...

- b) The main interest in *Mrs Dalloway*, as Mepham argues, is the characters' 'subjective lives' and the 'mental processes with which they react to events'. Woolf's use of the interior monologue form allows her to capture subtleties of emotions and memories which may not otherwise be apparent on the surface.
- c) London plays a crucial role in the novel, and is inextricably linked to the modernist style Woolf employs. Marcus comments on how she makes use of both 'perambulation and locomotion' around the city, as well as 'new devices of the camera' such as 'flashbacks, montage, tracking shots' in order to bring both setting and character to life.
- d) Mepham questions whether we should see Septimus' death as 'a victory for the brutal doctors and their insensitivity' or 'a successful defiance of their arbitrary and ignorant power' by a man who refuses to give up his soul to the medical community.
- e) Fragmentation is a key theme in the novel; not just in society itself but in Woolf's characterisation. Septimus is the most obviously fragmented character, as he is traumatised by his experiences in World War I, but even the protagonist, Clarissa, according to Eagleton, 'feels herself to be an assemblage of different parts, not at all as 'composed' as she looks.' This is fragmented sense of self is fundamental to Woolf's narrative; she examines the differing elements that make up each individual: our past, our present, our experiences, our relationships and our fears, exploring these through what she described as her 'tunneling process'.
- f) When Peter Walsh leaves Clarissa's house, he is evidently disturbed by the strength of his feelings. His interior monologue suggests he is 'having an argument inside himself' and reveals his 'defensive tone of voice' (Marsh). It is as though he feels judged and criticised by Clarissa and his former friends. Woolf explores his insecurities in his reflections as he walks through London.
- g) The blending of past and present is an important device in the novel. As Schwarz notes, 'Clarissa's life is a function of a few critical decisions made years ago.' This applies most significantly to her very rational and measured choice of Richard as a partner over either Peter Walsh or Sally.
- h) Rezia struggles with her husband's illness, fearing its consequences but also its reflection upon her. She is unsure of how to relate to him and embarrassed by his behaviour in public, but as Marsh points out, she is also 'exaggeratedly loyal to her husband, and regards his weaknesses as a secrete she must guard at all costs'. Septimus' deteriorating mental health therefore places a burden on their relationship, and Woolf shows sympathy for both characters, neither of whom know how to reach one another.
- i) The party frames the novel and the preparations for it reveal a great deal about Clarissa's life and personality. Schwarz suggests that Clarissa gives parties in order to connect with others and stave off her loneliness and because she needs to be validated by the people around her.

**N.B. In the above example, the critic's idea has been summed up in simplified terms.**

## Top Tips for Using Critical Quotations in Your Essays and the Exams

### How Many Critical Quotations Should I Learn?

Students often ask how many critical quotations they should learn for the exams. The frustrating answer is that there is no set number! You need to use common sense here. At A Level, you **must** use critical viewpoints in **every** essay, whether you are answering the passage-based or the wider question.

### How Many Critical Quotations Should I Use in My Essays?

As a rule of thumb, it is a good idea to include around **three** quotations from critical sources, **spread out across the essay**, and to select these from **different** critics to demonstrate that you have read a range of secondary texts and articles.

As you could be answering a question on any topic, theme, character, part of the text, poem or story, this means you need to be well-equipped to bring in some critical quotations in a range of situations. But you cannot possibly learn critical quotations on every aspect of each text. What you need to do, therefore, is look out for **multi-purpose quotations which are adaptable to a range of different situations**.

### What is a Multi-purpose Quotation?

As the name suggests, ‘multi-purpose quotations’ can be used for more than one thing, e.g. **‘Tom needs to escape Amanda’s clutches if he is to have any chance of forging his own identity’**. (Rebecca Warren)

The critical quotation above, about the character of Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* for example, could be used in an essay about Tom’s character, Amanda’s character, or for any essay on a related theme, such as identity, independence, family relationships, desire for escape, etc.

It is often the case that **character-based quotations** are multi-purpose, since characters will come up in every kind of essay, so be on the lookout for useful character-based critical quotations to learn as you complete your wider reading, because these are easy to slip in to your essays.

Some examples relating to *The Glass Menagerie* are below (again, these are real quotations, so you could use these in your essays):

Tom **‘sometimes seems very lonely and unloved’**. (Bottoms)

The characters in the play are **‘hemmed in by their illusions’**. (Warren)

Laura **‘rarely speaks in anything other than short, hesitant sentences’**. (Bottoms)

Early in the play Amanda is **‘presented as an actress, self-dramatizing, self-conscious’**. She is **‘a martyred mother’**. (Bigsby)

But look out too for **general quotations** about key themes, motifs and ideas, as these can also be slipped into a wide range of essays on different topics. For example:

**‘(T)he apartment is both literally and figuratively a trap’**. (Bigsby)

**‘Story and play are rooted firmly in Williams’ own life’**. (Bigsby)

Williams’ use of a narrator figure who is also a part of the action on stage **‘enables the playwright to draw attention to the theatricality of *The Glass Menagerie*’**. (Warren)

You do **not** need to learn quotations for every scene in a play, chapter in a novel or poem in a collection, but you **do** need to learn a range of useful general quotations that you can bring in to a variety of essays. Learn these according to the **following categories: character, theme, setting and the text as a whole**.

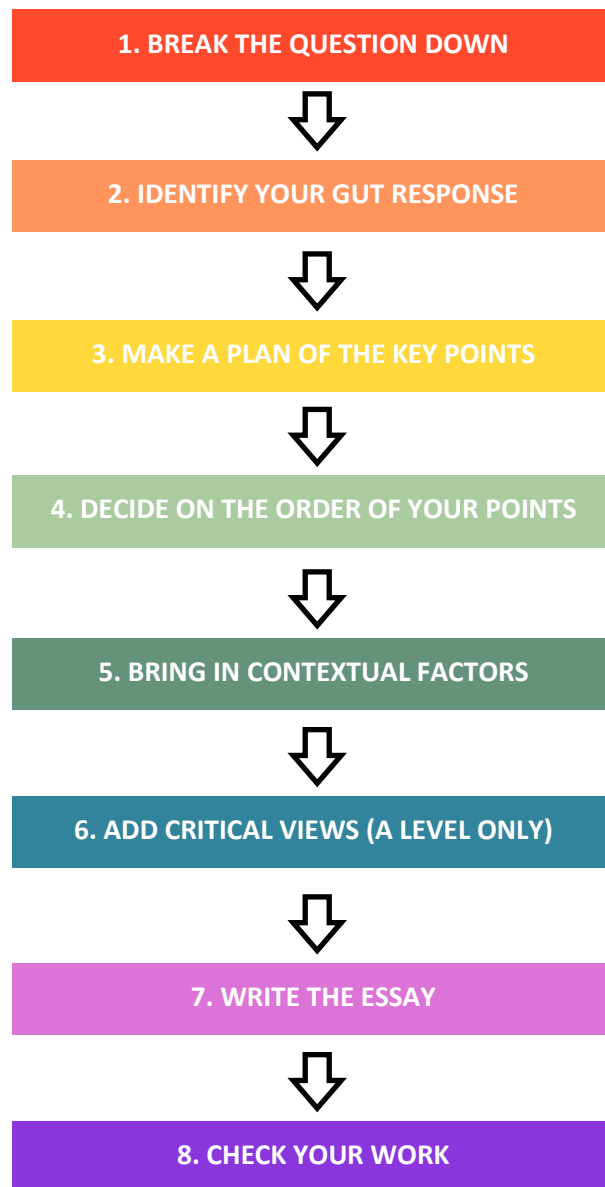
For poetry collections, you should learn some quotations about **key poems** (i.e. ones there is a high chance you would choose to write about if they came up in a passage-based question or which are useful poems for a range of wider questions). But you should also learn some **general quotations** about the poet’s work as a whole or typical themes and ideas they explore.

**Top Tip: Be brave!** Look out for critics with whose opinions you **disagree**, too. You may not always find these, but if you do, note them down, because **arguing against a critic is a great way to assert your own viewpoint and also show how confident you are in your interpretation of a text**.

## The Approach to Good Essay Writing: An Overview

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The diagram below gives an overview of the essay-writing process. **Each of these stages is important and should not be skipped.** If you use this diagram to help you approach each of your assignments, not only will your essays be better, but you will also become much quicker at working through each of these stages by the time you come to sit the final exams.



# Constructing the Perfect English Literature Essay

Now let's go through those stages in more detail and look at each one:

## 1. BREAKING THE QUESTION DOWN

Breaking the task or question down means looking at the **key words** and identifying exactly what you are being asked to do.

### Example 1: A Passage-based Question

**Comment closely** on the following passage from *The Rain Horse* by Ted Hughes, considering **ways in which** the writer creates **mood and atmosphere**.

AS Paper 3-style question

Passage-based questions are the easiest to break down. The key words are very obvious, but they are still important to focus on, as the question is asking you to read through the extract with this focus in mind, rather than simply write everything you can think of about the passage.

In this example, the key words are:

Key Words	What They Mean
<b>Comment closely</b>	This is the <b>function</b> part of the task and means that you need to go into <b>plenty of detail</b> .
<b>ways in which</b>	This means you need to look at the <b>writer's methods</b> , identifying these with <b>appropriate literary terminology</b> .
<b>mood and atmosphere</b>	This tells you exactly what to <b>focus</b> on in your reading of the passage, so you need to think about <b>what these are and how they work in a text</b> .

### Example 2: A Wider Question

**Discuss the dramatic presentation and significance of the relationship between Amanda and Laura** in *The Glass Menagerie*.

AL Paper 6-style question

Wider questions can require a little more thought to break them down, but it's a really important part of the essay-writing process.

Key Words	What They Mean
<b>Discuss</b>	This is the <b>function</b> word of the task and it is inviting you to <b>explore the topic as you see fit, choosing what is relevant from the play to support your argument.</b>
<b>dramatic presentation</b>	This is a common phrase in questions on drama. It is a reminder to you that, because you are looking at a play, you need to pay attention to <b>the conventions of theatre</b> and think about <b>how the events are portrayed on stage</b> as well as looking at language and dialogue.
<b>significance</b>	The significance is <b>the importance of the topic in the text as a whole</b> – so how it relates to the overall message and concerns of the text.
<b>The relationship between Amanda and Laura</b>	This is <b>topic</b> of the question.

## 2. IDENTIFYING YOUR GUT RESPONSE

This means that you need to work out what your answer is **before** you begin writing. It sounds obvious, but sometimes students begin writing before they know what they want to say and essays really suffer when this happens. **An essay should be a finished product, not a chance to work out what you think as you go along.** This is what the **plan** is for.

Not knowing what your response is before you start writing increases the chance that you will contradict yourself as you write, that you may repeat things or miss them out, and that your essay will not feel planned or as though it has been carefully thought through. **Examiners (and tutors!) can tell when you are deciding what you think as you go along** and this does not make a good impression.

For passage-based questions, **reading and annotating** the passage will help you to decide what you what you are going to focus on.

For wider questions, you will usually have an **initial gut response** to the task as you read it. If not, then the **plan** will also help you to work this out. The key words in the following task have been marked out for you.

### Example 1: A Wider Question

**Discuss** **two** stories from the selection **in detail**, saying **how far** they **present a pessimistic view of humanity.**

**AS Paper 3 question (June 2013)**

For this essay question, your initial, gut response might be along the following lines. (**N.B.** a double column can be very useful when you are dealing with two separate texts).

**You would NOT need to write all this down under timed exam conditions; you would use very brief words, phrases and abbreviations to save time. The examples below are fleshed out here to help you see more clearly how the argument can be broken down in your mind before you begin.**

'A Taste of Watermelon'	'Elephant'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borden initially presents a slightly pessimistic view of humanity in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr Wills' obsession with the melon (seemingly above his family).</li> <li>○ The narrator's urge to take this from him in an act of vanity to impress his friends.</li> <li>○ The boys' violent destruction and waste of the melon which they cannot eat.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>HOWEVER...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The act of stealing the melon and its consequences are pivotal in the story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr Wills' rage and grief turn out to have been prompted by love for his sick wife.</li> <li>○ The narrator feels shame for his actions.</li> <li>○ The narrator faces up to his responsibilities and makes amends.</li> <li>○ This in turn allows Mr Wills to express his desire for the support of a son and also the company of his neighbours.</li> <li>○ The narrator's father supports him but does not defend him; this enables him to learn an important lesson about adulthood.</li> <li>○ New bonds are formed and the story ends with hope for the future.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>SO...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What begins as a story about anger, isolation, greed, territorial behaviour and frustrated desire (all 'pessimistic' aspects of humanity) turns into one about friendship, empathy, compassion and redemption, via the medium of a coming-of-age story.</li> <li>• This is NOT a pessimistic view of humanity at all. The suggestion is that we all have faults, but we can overcome these. This is a very positive message, so this contradicts the prompt in the question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carver's story is much bleaker. The narrator is trapped in an endless cycle of providing for his ungrateful and parasitic family. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The narrator is worn down by their demands and gives away so much money each month that he can no longer even support himself.</li> <li>○ His family members use emotional blackmail to get what they want – playing on his love for them, but not showing any love in return.</li> <li>○ Carver explores characters who will continually abuse the trust of those who care for them.</li> <li>○ He also suggests that many of these characters are able to work but choose not to, instead of relying on charity from a man who can ill afford it.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>HOWEVER...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although we may view the narrator as weak for not challenging his family members, it is love that leads him to support them. This is a positive quality (though it may be abused by less scrupulous people).</li> <li>• The narrator's memories of his father, as explored in the dream, are positive. His father provided him with support and love – but he was the only one.</li> <li>• The narrator's journey at the end of the story suggests that he has found a kind of temporary peace and escape from his dreary life.</li> </ul> <p><b>SO...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the overall message is a pessimistic one, the narrator's generosity is in some ways positive. He is a good man, BUT others in his life abuse this kindness. The overall message is therefore mixed.</li> </ul>

These **simple statements of fact** are a very helpful starting point for a plan, where you can flesh out your ideas in more detail. You may even like to write down a few statements like this at the start to organise your basic ideas. This can be a very calming thing to do in an exam if you feel panicked at the beginning.

### Example 2: Another Wider Question

This example is a more complex question, because it has two parts to it: a specific prompt (a view of the text) and then the question itself. The key words have been marked out for you below.

**N.B. You will see here that there are key words in both the prompt and in the task itself.**

‘Despite its **atmosphere of security and privilege**, the novel offers **glimpses** of the **frightening instability** of human life.’

**How far** and in **what ways** do you agree with this comment on *Mrs Dalloway*?

AL Paper 6-style question

A response to the question above should involve the following steps. **(N.B. You DON'T need to write all of these down, but this is how your mind should be working as you tackle the question.)**

**Step 1: Break down the key terms and hone in on what they mean to ensure you understand the task:**

- **‘atmosphere of security and privilege’** – refers to the mostly socially powerful, affluent characters on whom the core of the plot is focussed.
- **‘glimpses’** – a partial or momentary view of something.
- **‘frightening’** – something which creates fear, either in the characters themselves or perhaps the reader.
- **‘instability’** – to be insecure, vulnerable or at risk in some way (it also has connotations of ‘mental instability’).
- **‘human life’** – the state of being human in all its forms. This could refer to issues of life and death, but also relate to marriage, friendships and identity, as well as human life on a social level.

**Step 2: With the above in mind, now think about your gut response:**

This will form the basis of your argument, be key in your introduction and reiterated in more certain terms later on in your conclusion, once you have backed it up in the body paragraphs.

One response to this essay question could be summed up as follows:

- **This statement is partially true:** Woolf does create an atmosphere of **‘security and privilege’** in the novel, e.g. in her depiction of Clarissa and Richard’s comfortable life and the wealthy, socially affluent circle of friends to which they belong, **AND** she also presents characters who

exist in a much more **'frighteningly unstable'** state, most notably Septimus, **BUT** even seemingly **'stable'** characters however experience moments of **'instability'** of some form and thus she examines the human condition (**'human life'**) from all angles.

### Step 3: Now gather the evidence you will actually use to prove your argument:

To explore the nuances of the argument, you will need to relate **each point** back to the key words of the task, and find specific topics for your each of your paragraphs. A good rule of thumb here is to begin with the most obvious points and branch out into more nuanced and original ones as you develop the overall argument. You need the underlying cake before you can add the icing!

- **Septimus** is the most striking example of a character whose life is **'unstable'** – he is suffering from what we would now call 'PTSD' and is haunted by his experiences in World War I. This mental **'instability'** is so serious that it eventually leads to his suicide.
- **Woolf's characterisation of Septimus** and her narrative style literally give us **'glimpses'** of this through his hallucinatory and fragmented view of the world, where quite ordinary things appear deeply disturbing to him because of the experiences he has had.
- **World War I** itself is also an example of the **'frightening instability of human life'** on an even larger scale. The novel was written its aftermath and examines its effects on a whole society, not only on Septimus. It shook the world and left a legacy of political, economical, emotional and social problems behind it. Several of the characters reflect on the war beyond Septimus.
- **Rezia** also struggles with Septimus' illness because she does not know how to help him and is trapped in a marriage where she cannot relate to her husband. She is **'frightened'** of the possible consequences of his **'instability'**.
- **However, the threat of 'instability' can ALSO be found in those characters who belong to the world of 'security and privilege'**, such as Clarissa and Richard. One example is the moment when Peter visits Clarissa, and the suggestion of shared feelings between them temporarily disrupts the **'security'** of her marriage. Clarissa is also troubled by thoughts about her achievements and purpose in life through **'glimpses'** she has of her own insignificance. Richard invitation to lunch with Lady Bruton, without her, is also a threat.
- **Clarissa's own health is fragile (therefore 'unstable')** and several references are made to this. She contemplates her own death at the end of the novel when she watches the old woman through the window opposite and is deeply affected by news of Septimus' death.
- **The narrative style of the novel both reflects and tries to capture a sense of 'instability' as well as exploring the human condition ('human life')**. Woolf's method of 'tunneling' and showing us the inner depths of her characters reveals a great deal about each, and allows their insecurities to be explored. Modernism itself is linked to **'instability'** as it is characterised by fragmentation and the novel focusses on **'human life'** because it shows what is going on deep inside each character's mind.

### Step 4: Think about your conclusion, which will be drawn from the findings above:

- Woolf examines a range of very different characters – old and young, male and female, wealthy and poor – and thus examines **'human life'** from many different perspectives. She shows that many of these characters' lives are **'unstable'** in one way or another, or could become so quite easily, and that this quality is ultimately part of the human condition.

### 3. MAKING A PLAN

**Too few students plan their essays, and of those who do, many are not thorough enough.** Many students jot down a few basic points and then begin writing, as they fear that planning takes too long. But planning is a very important element of success in exams and examiners expect to see a plan at the start of each essay. **Students who plan their work tend to perform much better on average than those who don't.**

**10 minutes** spent planning your work means **45 minutes** of writing when you know exactly what you need to cover (with **5 minutes** left at the end for checking your work) – and this is **much more efficient** than 1 hour of writing when you haven't thought your ideas through properly.

A good plan is more than simply a list of points to include; it helps you establish more than simply what to include in your essay.

#### Why Plan?

- A plan allows you to **pour all of your ideas onto the page** and then **organise them**. You may reject some, and you may expand on others, but going through this process is really important.
- A plan helps you to **test your initial gut response and check if you have enough evidence to support the argument you plan to put forward**. Interesting ideas and connections will also come to you as you plan if you devote enough time to it.
- **Writing a plan is reassuring**. Exams are stressful and taking a moment to organise your thoughts means that what you do go on to write in the essay will be **relevant** and **sensible**. Essays often go wrong when students jump in too quickly and aren't methodical.
- **Seeing a plan is also reassuring for the examiner!** It means that they know you have thought about your argument and that you care about the final product: the essay. There are no marks available specifically for a plan, but seeing one **does** affect how examiners read your work. If you run out of time, an examiner can also see from your plan what you **intended** to include.

#### Why You Should Use a Spider Diagram

- These are much better than jotting down random notes in a list, because you can explore **connections between ideas**. This will help you to create a **fluent argument** and allow you to **develop** your ideas fully.
- Spider diagrams are **not linear**, so you can **play around with the order of your points** and make sure your **paragraphs connect neatly** in the essay. This will make the overall argument more coherent and polished.

#### Planning Passage-based Questions

Plans are less important for passage-based questions but it is still quite helpful to make them and so you should practise this during the course. Making them means that **you are not just going to move chronologically through the text in front of you**, and also allows you to plan for **links to the rest of the text, contextual factors and for critical views (A Level only)**.

## Planning Wider Questions

You **definitely** need to plan wider questions, because **you are completely in charge of all the material you will include**, and a plan is the **only** way to sort this out and **check you have included all of the different assessment criteria** before you start writing.

### Examples of Effective Planning in Action:

Let's look at the following example of an exam-style question on Robert Frost to see a plan in action.

With **close reference to two poems** discuss the **presentation of the desire to escape** in Frost's poetry.

**AS Paper 3-style question**

In the following, three possible poems are discussed, to give you some further ideas. You only need to refer in detail to **two poems** for the essay (but it is a good idea to make more general references to other poems across the collection as added context).

An initial, gut response to the question above might be:

- Lots of Frost's poems contain speakers who 'desire to escape', e.g. 'Stopping by Woods', 'After Apple-Picking' and 'Birches'.
- **What do the speakers want to escape from?** The speakers usually desire to escape the burdens of life (often human ones) – e.g. 'promises to keep' in 'Stopping by Woods', being 'overtired/Of the great harvest' in 'After Apple-Picking' and 'weary of considerations' in 'Birches'.
- **What are the speakers' feelings about escape?** The speakers are often old, weary and tired of life. This is a common persona used by Frost and imagery of autumn/winter, suggesting the later stages of life abounds in 'After Apple-Picking' (autumn) and 'Stopping by Woods' (winter). In 'Birches' where the speaker is less melancholic, winter imagery is used, but the snow is 'melting' and there are hints of spring. Memories of youth and energy link to the desire to escape being less serious.
- **What form does the escape take?** The 'escape' means different things in different poems, but it is often linked to death in some form – this varies in the poems above – 'Stopping by Woods' contains the strongest desire to give up and suicide is an underlying theme; 'After Apple-Picking' is more ambiguous (as 'sleep' could be death, hibernation or 'just normal human sleep'); 'Birches' equates escape with almost going up to heaven, but crucially, being brought back again.
- **What role does nature play in this escape?** Does it offer solace and calm or is there something more threatening and oppressive about it?

**N.B. From these examples, 'Stopping by Woods' and 'Birches' are good examples to choose for the final essay because can they illustrate two quite different views of escape (one much more melancholic than the other).** Nevertheless, as you need to show an overall knowledge of the collection, some *brief* references to 'After Apple-Picking' (and any other relevant poems you think of) would be useful.

Now we need to put these basic ideas and **key points** into a spider diagram, as follows:



Once you have the plan of the key ideas, you need to **make sure you can support these with evidence from the text.**

In **passage-based questions**, this obviously means finding the parts of the passage that **support** your argument. (But don't forget that you also need to make links to the rest of the text).

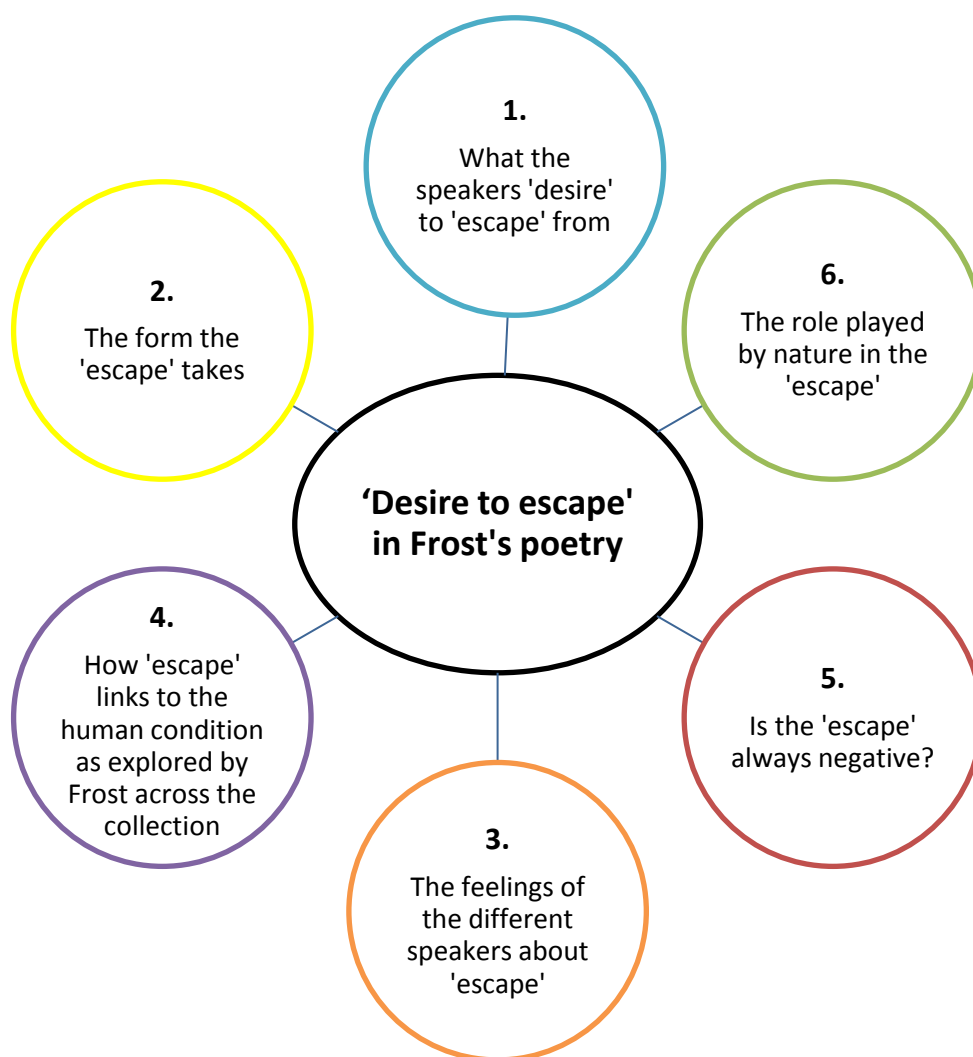
In **wider questions**, this means drawing on the quotations you have **learnt** to support your argument.

## 4. DECIDING ON THE ORDER OF YOUR POINTS

Here is the same plan again, but this time a **running order** for the points has been included.

**You should think of each of these numbered points as ‘sections’ rather than paragraphs in the essay.** Some may be big points and may take more than one paragraph to explore fully, whereas others may be much quicker to explain.

**Split your paragraphs regularly, at appropriate intervals,** to make your essays **clear and easily readable**. If a paragraph is getting too long, it is fine to break it up and continue the same idea in a second paragraph, providing you choose a sensible place to do this. The following points are for your body paragraphs. Please see the guidance on introductions and conclusions earlier in this guide.



**You should also note than in the plan above, no paragraph is devoted to ‘language’, ‘form’, ‘imagery’ or ‘structure’.** This is a common mistake students make when planning. You should remember that close textual analysis (using PQC) will underpin EVERY single paragraph. The points above are your argument. Your argument is then illustrated by references to the text, and the quotations chosen are then analysed closely. Close analysis is vital and should occur in EVERY paragraph.

## 5. BRINGING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IN

Now you have made your plan, you need to think about where you can **include some contextual factors in the discussion**. Remember that this should be brought in **little** and **often** and must be **relevant** to the task. Think of **ROBE**: **relevant, often, brief** and **embedded**.

This is important to consider before you start writing, because you can plan to make **regular references to different kinds of context** and **ensure that nothing is left out**.

For example, in the plan above, you could add in some of the following contextual factors:

1. **What the speakers 'desire' to 'escape' from – Frost's own experiences of depression throughout his life plus his experience of the deaths of a number of his family members.** (Though we must only suggest this *may* have influenced some of the attitudes expressed in his more melancholic poems, **NOT** that each is specifically about this.)
2. **The form the 'escape' takes – Some of the biographical context above could alternatively be relevant here, if you have not already covered it.**
3. **The feelings of the different speakers about 'escape' –** The boy in 'Birches' is much more optimistic than the older-sounding speaker in 'Stopping by Woods'. His escape is only temporary and his youth could be linked to the **Romantic theme of transience** and also to **the idea of children having an innate innocence and connection with nature**. It would also count as literary context (and an awareness of Frost's overall methods) to mention that **Frost frequently takes on the persona of an old, weary man** in his poems.
4. **How 'escape' links to the human condition as explored by Frost across the collection –** You should mention **some brief links to Frost's work as a whole here** and discuss how 'escape' is typically depicted/any exceptions to this rule. For example if you mentioned 'Home Burial' here, and considered the wife's desire to escape confronting her grief, you may briefly mention **the tensions Frost experienced with his own wife after the death of their son, Elliott**. We know that this poem is heavily autobiographical.
5. **Is the 'escape' always negative? –** This may lead to some discussion of **Frost's own religious and spiritual beliefs** given the suggestion of an afterlife in 'Birches'.
6. **The role played by nature in the 'escape' –** This very much links to **Romanticism** in that in 'Birches' especially **nature provides an opportunity for renewal and spiritual solace**. In 'Stopping by Woods', both sides of nature are depicted: its dangers and its beauty. This therefore partly *contrasts* with the more traditional **Romantic ideas about nature** as a mostly positive force. Either way, the vibrant descriptions of nature could be linked to **Frost's lifelong love of it and his work as a farmer in New England**.

You do **not** have to include all of these contextual factors at every point mentioned above, but the above list should give you an idea of how context can be woven neatly into the discussion as it evolves. **N.B.** Notice that in the list above, there is a blend of **different types of context**.

## 6. ADDING CRITICAL VIEWS (A LEVEL ONLY)

You don't have to write these down in full on your plan, but it is helpful to **think** about where you can best **integrate** the critical material you will use in the essay.

As with context, you want to make several references to critical views and **ensure these are embedded into the discussion** so you can **engage** properly with them and use them to **strengthen your argument**. You might like to add the **names of the critics** to the relevant sections on your plan so you remember to include them as you go along.

## 7. WRITING THE ESSAY

Now you are ready to write a beautiful, methodical, clear essay, **using your plan as a kind of map**. Use all of the tips about writing clearly, accurately and analytically in this guide to help you write the essay. Include **quotations and analysis (PQC)**, **context** (and **critics at A Level**) and make sure you **explain your points fully**.

Remember to construct **an appropriate introduction and conclusion** and to **ensure your paragraphs link to one another** in a way that **allows the argument to develop**.

**Refer back to your plan regularly** to check you have included everything you wanted to and that nothing is repeated.

## 8. CHECKING YOUR WORK

Always leave time to check your work carefully once you have finished writing. You should do this for **every** assignment you submit on the course because you have plenty of time to make sure that each piece of work you submit is **your very best work**.

Get into the habit of **being your own editor** and **finding your own errors** before you submit your work; this applies to assignments as well as to exam papers. This will make you a much more confident writer and will mean you can check your work more efficiently on the day of the exam.

In the exam, try to leave **5 minutes at the end of each task** to read over your work and to check for **errors, omissions** and **clarity**. It is amazing how many silly mistakes you can make, especially under timed conditions and when you feel under pressure. If you have left something out, and can't fit it in on the page, add an asterisk and put the point at the end of the essay.

## Preparing For Your Exams

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Perfecting good essay-writing skills is an ongoing process and you should be working on this throughout the course, using the feedback you receive on each assignment to develop and improve your skills in the next. **Never underestimate the importance of this process.**

The reason we do not ask you to complete your assignments under timed conditions on this course is because you should treat each one as a chance to not only research the topics you have been asked about, but also as an opportunity to master good essay-writing technique. **This takes time.** Writing under timed conditions *before* you have learnt strong essay-writing skills often means learning bad habits and cutting corners. Instead, you need to focus on learning perfect form – and **then** on speeding that up.

Your essays will take you longer at the start of the course, but by the time you reach the end, if you have worked on your technique consistently, you should be writing much more detailed, confident and sophisticated essays and doing so more quickly. Effective planning takes a long time to master, but regular practice will help you to speed up enormously. Once you have learnt quotations, you will also speed up further, because you are not searching for the evidence in your texts or notes.

At the end of the both the AS and AL courses, the **final two assignments are timed** and take the form of complete exam papers. **Think of these as mock exams.** Prepare for them by revising thoroughly, learning quotations from the texts (and from critics for AL) and **complete them under exam conditions.** (Advice and tips for revision can be found in the final module of each course).

This is the only sensible way to test the progress you have made and to make sure you are ready for the real exams. Your grades and feedback on these final two assignments will tell you a lot about how much revision you still need to do and the areas on which you need to focus.

Towards the end of the course, you should also begin to complete a range of **past paper questions under timed conditions.** You can find these in the **Exams Module** at the end of the course (for those texts which have already been examined) and also from the **Practice Essay Questions** documents (or in your editions of the texts) from the course modules.

### How To Use Your Time in the Exams

Each exam paper for English Literature is **two hours** long and in that time, you will need to write **two** essays. These are worth the same number of marks, so you need to spend **one hour on each question.** You should break this down as follows:

- **10 minutes** for **reading** the question, **breaking it down** and **planning** your response.

(**N.B.** passage-based questions may sometimes require a little more time for reading, but generally are quicker to plan, so **15 minutes maximum** for this stage – including reading – should be enough).

- **40-45 minutes** for writing the essay.
- **5 minutes** to **check your work** at the end and correct any mistakes or add in any extra detail you have missed.

## Final Note

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There is a lot to take in in this guide, but if you practise your writing skills regularly, reading your tutor's comments on each assignment very carefully as you progress through the course and making full use of all the materials provided to help you on Canvas, you *will* see an improvement in your essay-writing skills and your grades *will* improve.

Your essays do not have to be perfect at the start of the course, but to perform really well in your final exams, you need to keep building on your existing skills and taking your arguments and analysis further with each new task. Rome wasn't built in a day, so remember that excellent essay writing is something you need to keep working on throughout your course. But your efforts will be well worth it. Being able to write well is a skill you can use across your A Level subjects, and one which you can take with you to university and beyond. It is something you will never forget once you've learnt how to do it.

Good luck and happy writing.