

OCR English Language GCSE

A guide to the exams from

William Ellis School

J351/01 Communicating Information and Ideas



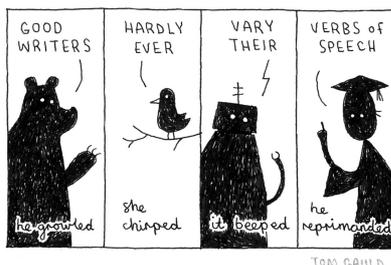
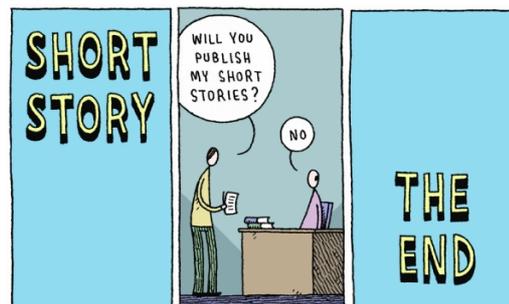
J351/02 Exploring Effects and Impact

Reading

Unseen texts



Writing



Some basic information

In GCSE English Language, reading is assessed using four Assessment Objectives, AO1–4:

*AO1: Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas
Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.

AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.

AO3: Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.

AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.

**AO1 is split into two strands:*

AO1i: identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.

AO1ii: select and synthesise evidence from different texts.

Writing is assessed using two Assessment Objectives, AO5-6:

AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different purposes, forms and audiences.

Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Different questions test different objectives. No one would expect you to remember all the details, but this guide does tell you; you will find that the wording of the questions will be helpful in showing you what skills are being assessed. **Ensure you understand what the high stakes reading question (Q4 on both papers) is looking for as you will be less used to this type of question.**

You will sit **two papers**, each lasting **two hours**. The first paper is called [Communicating Information and Ideas](#) and the second is [Exploring Effects and Impacts](#). Both papers have a **section A which tests reading** and a **section B which tests writing**. The reading questions are based on unseen texts. **Paper 2 will use slightly more literary non-fiction or fiction** whereas **Paper 1 will perhaps be more journalistic or informative** prose. You will need to practise dealing with a range of texts, e.g. travel writing, biography, journalism, letters, etc. **In Paper 1, one of the unseen texts will be always be a 19th century text.**

As you read this guide, pay attention to how Q2 differs between the two papers. Questions 1, 3 and 4, however, follow an identical format and are just applied to different sorts of texts.

In **section B**, where your **writing is tested**, you will be offered **two options to choose from**. **Paper 1** sets tasks that produce what we call **transactional writing** (writing to get things done, like to inform, argue and persuade. **Paper 2's writing tasks demand more open, expressive or creative writing**.

Timings

Each section of each paper is worth 40 marks. The exam board advises that you spend 1hr 10 minutes on section A (it is not allowed to print this advice on the paper). This gives you time to annotate the texts, gain an understanding of the themes and ideas and plan answers, which is highly recommended for Qs 3&4.

Section A (tests reading)



Section B (tests writing)



Marking

Most of the questions are marked according to six different levels, with level 6 being the best. However, question 1 on both papers is too straightforward to be marked like this and you can be right (4 marks), partly right (1–3 marks) or wrong (0). **Question 2 on Paper 1** is, similarly, too straightforward to be marked with six different band levels and there are **just three possible levels**, with level 3 being awarded for a full-mark answer.

The reading questions

General exam board advice:

Spend about 12-15 minutes reading and annotating the unseen texts. The reading guidance suggested below should help students to formulate a reading method that works best for them individually:

- **Look carefully at the title and the introduction to the text (the contextual information given in italics before the text begins)** and read steadily through to the end: consider the closing section carefully and go back to the title: see if you can make some links between the two.
- **Look back through the text and note/underline/highlight any words** that are unfamiliar: **use the context of the text to work out what they (might) mean**. (A glossary may be provided for one or two words that are generally considered as unfamiliar, but may not include all words which students could be unsure of).
- **Take an initial view of what the text is about, what point(s) the writer wants to get across** and some of the **ways they do so**.

- Read through the text again looking at the links between the sections/paragraphs and how they relate to the title and the conclusion.
- **When you have read both texts, make sure you have thought about what they have in common** and what there is to say about them.
- Now look at the tasks in the question paper: they will be **structured to help you frame your responses. Where there are bullet points, look carefully at what they ask you to do.** Go back to the texts and **locate the passages** (some answers will need to be based on a certain section and not the whole text) that the tasks are directing you towards. Circle relevant areas that you have to use for your answers.
- Finally go back to question 1 and then briefly plan your answers as you work through questions 2 to 4.

Again, good planning is different for each student, but **planned answers tend to be significantly more successful** than unplanned ones based on a hurried and potentially superficial reading.

 **The tasks in each paper work in a progressive fashion, which increases in demand for skills and insight and accumulates knowledge and understanding. Each reading question builds on the one it follows.**

Question 1 on Communicating Information and Ideas & Q1 on Exploring Effects and Impacts:

On both papers, this question is based on text 1 and is a **'warm up' question** worth 4 marks altogether. You are required to pull out relevant information and do a very little bit of interpreting or explaining. You shouldn't need more than 5 minutes to do all of the parts of Q1.

The relevant assessment objective is A01 strand i (identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas).

A01i is assessed using short questions, offering low-tariff marks for straightforward responses, for example, asking for points or quotations taken directly from the text. Don't over-write (use the line space given and no more). You will need to be able to:

identify: retrieve data or facts: show what is explicit (openly communicated);
interpret: read between the lines and make simple inferences explain what is happening; show what is implied (*but not analyse*).

Answers have to be brief and to the point (so, for example, if you quote too much and don't pinpoint, you will not gain marks). Long-winded explanations will score badly.

Question 2 on Communicating Information and Ideas

The relevant assessment objective is A01 strand ii (**select and synthesise evidence from different texts**).

You have to **select appropriate material** from the texts **to suit the task**. The **evidence will be both what is explicit and implicit**, and responses should

demonstrate that understanding. You need to **synthesise** the material selected, i.e. **'combine the elements into a whole', in order to create a response.**

The task is two-fold: first pick out what is relevant from each text (planning) and then bring the material together, reorganising it in a relevant way.

For AO1ii responses, you may **paraphrase information** from the text. In these AO1ii tasks, **no opinions or analysis are required when paraphrasing.** (*Definition of paraphrasing: using different words to express a meaning, ideally more clearly.*)

An example of a question: say you have an 1855 letter to the Geographical Society by Isabella Bird, a pioneering woman explorer, and a 2010 newspaper story on Dervla Murphy, Ireland's best known contemporary woman explorer, you might get 'Isabella Bird and Dervla Murphy both won admiration for showing fiercely independent mindsets. What other qualities do they have in common? Draw on evidence from both texts to support your answer.' What you want to achieve in a response of no more than say ten lines is 'A detailed response which shows a secure ability to synthesise appropriate ideas and evidence from both texts, showing perceptive understanding of similarities, including conceptual ideas that link both texts.'

This is a medium-tariff question (the highest level is 3). We advise three short paragraphs, the first with a straight-forward similarity backed up by brief evidence from both texts, then a slightly more subtle similarity (again with brief evidence from each text), then a final short paragraph with a conceptual (ideas-based) similarity – and two bits of evidence. This simple formula often gains six marks.

Question 2 on Exploring Effects and Impacts (i.e. in Paper 2)

This is the only question that takes a different form on Paper 2 (Exploring Effects and Impacts). **For Paper 2, you are tested on your analytical skills (AO2).** It is worth the same number of marks as in Paper 1 (6 marks) but you are writing about **just text 1 and analysing its detail.** You will be given a section of the text to focus on so that your answer is concise and focused (the allocated line-space in the answer booklet should be enough) and any points you make will have to be linked to a certain idea (e.g. what makes a part of a text suspenseful or moving). Show that you can also use relevant subject terminology intelligently (so you might get a chance to analyse some hyperbole, or understatement (litotes), or irony, alliteration, metaphor, emotive language, listing, tricolons, etc.) If you are unsure of any of those terms, look them up and practise using them. The narrative voice should always be considered.

Question 3 on Communicating Information and Ideas & Q3 on Exploring Effects and Impacts:

This valuable question is marked for A02 skills (so language and structure analysis) and is **worth 12 marks.** It will be set on the second text in your paper.

AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.

This question marks a critical step forward in Paper 1: going from *what* the texts say to *how* they say it.

The wording of AO2 shows a growing hierarchy of skills: **Comment on** is to (at least) start to give a view of what has been read and how it works in the light of the task and **support what is said with references**.

Explain is 'make clear or intelligible/ give meaning/ make known in detail': in other words, students should start to analyse with clear supporting examples.

Analyse is 'examine in detail'. You should be making links between the writing and its effects that are complex and detailed.



You must write about both linguistic and structural elements of the text.

It is very difficult to make clear distinctions between language and structure, though the former may be more about words and phrases; the latter more about sentences and paragraphs. Structure is often less well covered than language. Structural elements could include the opening of the text, (with links to) the closure, links, climax(es), repetition, comparison, use of quotation or anecdote, etc.

Aim for a precise account of the way language and structure work to establish/ clarify/ reinforce/emphasise/echo /support the writer's themes, ideas, intentions and characters.

Expect questions for number 3) with wording something like this... 'Explore how XXX uses language and structure in this letter to convey his feelings about xxxxxx. Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.'

Or

'Look again at lines 1–22. Explore how the writer presents Lady Williams' attitude towards Sir Ellis, the statesman. Support your ideas by referring to the language and structure of this section, using relevant subject terminology.'

Question 4 on Communicating Information and Ideas & Q4 on Exploring Effects and Impacts:

So high value is this question (and new in terms of its demands to many students) that the exam board has published a whole guide just to this question. This can be found at <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/309675-reading-skills-comparing-and-evaluating-texts-question-4-teacher-guide.pdf>

The **question is worth 18 marks** (so nearly half the total for section A) and so should take up a substantial amount of the whole time for the reading section (around 25–30 minutes). **Six of the marks go for AO3; 12 of the marks for AO4.**

AO3: Compare writers' ideas and perspectives as well as how these are conveyed across two or more texts.

AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.

Some material used in previous tasks can be re-used, if developed to suit this task.

You will need to show you can **compare ideas and perspectives in both of the unseen texts** in each exam paper. When looking at perspectives, you are thinking

about how the writers view a subject and how their treatment of the subject shows this. You may be looking for evidence of the writers' different or similar standpoints (e.g. one may have experienced something directly, the other may be reflecting on another's experience). The **final bullet point is a reminder to be comparative** throughout.

A top-level (level 6) comparison is described like this by OCR:

'A detailed, interwoven comparison which explores writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed.'

Most of the marks are for critical evaluation, though you won't see the word 'evaluate' on the paper. This requires you to **make judgements about the texts together**, in light of the **given focus**, and to **offer a personal response**, informed, and **supported through references** to the text and **understanding of their genres** and their **authors' standpoints**. Personal opinions unsupported by textual detail are not considered as judgements and so you must **refer to both texts** in your response. The idea of a **critical evaluation also involves 'stepping back' and arriving at an assessment**.

So the task **requires personal engagement and taking an overview from a critical distance**. It is made more tricky by having to remember to use **textual references** that are apt and convincing to support your points. These **can be quotations or paraphrase**.

The Q4 tasks will come up with a **particular take on both texts**; it will be a statement with a 'How far/' 'To what extent' phrase as a reminder to exercise your evaluation skills. Whether you agree, disagree or partly agree with the given statement doesn't matter nearly as much as **the quality of the argument and the evidence and judgements** which support it. We teach you to write what we call as short-hand a 'Yes...but' opening which you follow through to a conclusion where you state your judgement more explicitly.

The best answers show the **evaluating going on throughout the candidate's answer** (it is not left until the end as a kind of add-on). This is the approach we want you to take. It means that, perhaps for the first time, you may be using the first-person voice quite a lot in your answer (though you can also write using the third person, just as successfully). There are top-mark examples of students using the third-person voice and the first-person voice, so feel free to choose which is most comfortable.

A top-level (level 6) evaluation is described like this by OCR:

'A sustained critical evaluation demonstrating a perceptive and considered response to the statement and a full explanation of the impact of the texts on the reader.'

'Comments are supported by apt, skillfully selected and integrated textual references.'

***Expect questions for number 4) with wording something like this... 'These texts show the importance of not being held back by traditional boundaries.'* How far do you agree with this statement?**

In your answer you should:

- discuss what you learn about the importance of breaking through boundaries (AO4)
- explain the impact of these ideas on you as a reader (AO4)
- compare the ways ideas about challenging boundaries are presented. (AO3)

The writing questions

The **assessment of writing skills is worth 50% of your total GCSE English language** mark. It should be clear by now that any lapses in control and style are costly; nor will students who take the approach of 'I go through and put in punctuation afterwards' manage to get out of this with a good mark.

You will need to show that you can:

Produce original texts in a variety of forms. This will include non-fiction and creative writing forms.

Produce clear and coherent texts. This involves writing effectively for different audiences and purposes, such as writing to describe, narrate, explain, inform, instruct, argue and persuade.

Writing tasks will ask for writing in different styles which could include narratives, personal writing and descriptive pieces. These tasks will appeal to a range of familiar experiences, such as starting a new school, being an outsider, making choices, making a difference, childhood, courage, deceit, fear, journeys, etc.

At least one of the options will be loosely linked thematically to the unseen texts, and one of the genres offered will be one of the genres used in one of the unseens (so if you read a 21st century speech and a 19th century letter in Paper 1, you might expect to have the option of writing a letter or a speech in Section B).

You should **consider spending about 50 minutes** of the two-hour exam time **on the writing section**; this includes the time taken to choose the task and to plan. Take time to read through the details of both tasks so that you can decide which best suits you.

It is important that you briefly plan your response before you begin writing. This will help to make your writing coherent and to give it a clear paragraph structure. It also gives you some space to consider the language techniques you may use to meet the purpose of the task.

You are advised to write no more than three sides as styling is vital.

Question 5 or 6 on Communicating Information and ideas: Writing for audience, impact and purpose

The non-fiction writing task will always specify an audience, for example peers, a headteacher, parents, readers of a particular newspaper, magazine or blog. You may be asked to write an article, report, talk, speech, letter, blog post.

Question 5 or 6 on Exploring Effects and Impacts: Writing imaginatively and creatively

Creative writing won't come with a specified audience but **you need to imagine who you are addressing to maintain coherence and consistency**. In an exam, the audience at one level is the examiner. This should be seen an advantage: the examiner does not know you: the work is totally anonymous and so is the school it has been produced in. This may have a liberating effect. Of course, anonymity is not available in mock exams, but you may still feel free to explore ideas, and anyway you

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do not need to be autobiographical; you can be pretend-autobiographical.

Content

***Settings and characters that are exotic/ criminal /very violent/ psychologically disturbed/ extra-terrestrial (to name but a few) are less likely to convince than those that are closer to home.** This specification encourages learners to use wide reading to inform their writing: what is meant here is that learners will consider what is effective in the texts they have read, and take this on board to achieve impact in their own writing, rather than suggesting that learners try to copy content or ideas which are not their own. **(THIS IS DIRECTLY TAKEN FROM OCR'S GUIDE. TAKE IT SERIOUSLY PLEASE.)*

Students who transpose a real experience into narrative fiction tend to be more successful: if you see the word 'imagine(d)' in the first task option, think of it as a prompt suggesting 'what if that had happened to me' or 'what if I had some experience of that', so that something that has been understood (for example the break-up of a friend's family, a sibling's success) can be imagined and developed in a personal way.

General writing guidance applicable to both papers:

Voice

Students may wish to construct a pretend audience as an integral part of their work, e.g. 'My granddad asked me to explain...', 'My five-year-old sister asked me what it was like when I started school...', 'the police sergeant looked very forbidding when I said that...'. This can be a good approach so long as you are able to sustain the voice in relation to this audience throughout your writing.

Many writers like to adopt a persona other than their own and this can work well if you maintain this voice effectively. Other students are adept at constructing twin, overlapping narratives, which contrast narrative voices and this may be high impact. The golden rule is that the **narrative voice should be clear, consistent and confident throughout**. Whether you use the first or third person voice, careful attention needs to be paid to the tone of voice (of the narrator and the characters); their accent, vocabulary and points of view.

Structure

A **clear overall structure and links between parts** enhance work hugely. Use of flashback, flash forward, starting at the end and working back to the beginning, twists and surprises, can all bring **creative originality** to straightforward content. **Use paragraphs as the building blocks of the overall structure. Paragraphs of varied length, topic and linking sentences** are all marks of thoughtful work. Remember the right-hand margin scanning technique examiners might use to gain a sense of your paragraph structure before they read properly: give them reasons to feel favourably about what they are about to read.

Also **important is the opening of the writing**; it should be one that engages the reader and prompts them to want to find out what happens next. **Equally important is the conclusion**, which can be suggested earlier in the writing, of course. The end of the piece is where the writer and reader have been heading throughout and it should be carefully considered and stay at the forefront of your mind as the writing develops.

Length is an important aspect of structure. **As a guideline, an essay doesn't need to be more than two and a half sides of the answer booklet.** Indeed, much can be accomplished, including the highest marks, in less. As always, the quality of the response is all-important. Work of a side or less will be self-penalising as it won't include enough evidence of what the student can do. On the other hand, **lengthy stories, excessive descriptions and a lot of dialogue should be avoided.** Students producing a pithy, controlled text are far likely to reach the top levels of the mark scheme.

Accurate use of language

You need to show off a confident and controlled command of syntax (sentence organisation), grammar, spelling (particularly of commonly occurring words, both simple and complex), punctuation and sentence structure. To get the highest marks, you should be able to use all those ingredients to enhance your writing and give it an impact. Correct comma and apostrophe use is vital so ensure you focus on learning how to use these correctly if this has been flagged up before. Comma splicing is a problem OCR has noted before. Cure yourself of the habit if you have it. Try http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_07.htm

So long as the basics are in place, much can be done with simple style choices. For example, a controlled change of tone can be effective; the use of unusual/original vocabulary, and of short lists, perhaps of synonyms and/or antonyms, can enhance, as can some planned repetition of certain words, or a running motif. Varied sentence lengths and well judged use of direct/indirect speech (weak writers tend to use too much speech) and commentary also work well. The use of single-sentence paragraphs can have impact, as long as you don't overdo it. Sometimes a sentence can be deliberately a fragment.

Marking the writing

For this task, 24 marks are available for AO5 and the highest band is a level 6, 16 marks for AO6, and the highest band is a level 4.

AO5: *Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.*

AO5: *Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.*

AO5 Level 6 (21–24 marks, i.e. the top band)

- The form is deliberately adapted to position the reader, showing a sophisticated control of purpose and effect.
- Tone, style and register are ambitiously selected and deployed to enhance the purpose of the task.
- There is a skilfully controlled overall structure, with paragraphs and grammatical features used to support coherence and cohesion and achieve a range of effects.

AO6 Level 4 (13–16 marks, i.e. the top band)

- An ambitious range of sentence structures is used to shape meaning and create impact. Accurate punctuation is used to enhance clarity and achieve particular effects.
- Vocabulary is precise and subtle, expressing complex ideas with clarity. Spelling of irregular and ambitious words is accurate, with very occasional lapses.

Aim to be distinctive, polished and controlled: a carefully crafted shorter piece of writing will score more highly than a long piece that loses its way.