

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**

Unseen texts



Reading



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 of this, 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. That said, try and **learn 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. The examiners have said that **Paper 2 will use slightly more literary non-fiction or fiction** whereas **Paper 1 will perhaps be more journalistic or informative** prose (as the papers' titles signal). 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.**

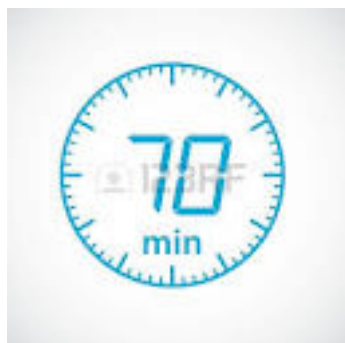
As you read this guide, pay attention to how Q2 differs between the papers in what objectives are tested. Questions 1, 3 and 4, however, follow an identical format and are just applied to different sorts of texts.

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), but the exam board isn't allowed to produce a set of possible genres. **Paper 2's writing tasks demand more open, expressive or creative writing**.

Timings

Each section of each paper is worth 40 marks. That might lead you to conclude that you should split your time equally between sections A and B, but the exam board strongly advises that you instead spend 1hr 10–15 minutes on section A (it is not allowed to print this advice on the paper). This will give you time to annotate the unseen texts, gain a deeper understanding of the themes and ideas and plan answers, which is strongly 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:

As a guideline, it is recommended that students spend approximately 15 minutes reading and annotating the unseen texts, although some may need a little less time than this. When reading through the unseen texts, students can use the guidance suggested below. This should guide students to formulate a reading method that works best for them individually.

Students should be considering the information given in the two texts, the ways they have been written and points of comparison between them. They could approach each text using the following bullets as guidance:

- **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 will be provided for words that are generally considered as unfamiliar, but may not include all words which students could potentially 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** (sometimes your answer will need to be based on a certain section and not the whole text) that the tasks are directing you towards.
- Finally go back to question 1 and plan your answers as you work through the question paper.

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

★ **The tasks in each component 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 just one text (so far, the sample papers have all used text 1) and is a **'warm up' question** worth 4 marks altogether. You are required to pull out some relevant information and do a very little bit of interpreting or explaining. You are unlikely to 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):

AO1i is assessed using short answer questions, offering low-tariff marks for straightforward responses, for example, asking for points or quotations taken directly from one of the unseen texts. You will need to be able to:

identify: retrieve data or facts: show what is explicit (openly communicated) as directed by the task;

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 required, of what the texts say about someone or something, will be clear from the question. 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 paragraph of no more than say ten lines (the space in the sample paper) 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.' (There are about five skills to be measured there.)

This is a medium-tariff question (the highest level is 3). It is not possible to put a figure on the number of points students should make. Do more points mean more marks? No, it doesn't work like that: marks are awarded based on the quality of the response and the ability to synthesise appropriate ideas and evidence from both texts.

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

This is the only question that takes a significantly different form on the second paper (Exploring Effects and Impacts). **For this paper, you are tested on your textual analytical skills (AO2).** It is worth the same number of marks as in Paper 1 (6 marks) but you are writing about **just one text** and **analysing its detail**. You will be given a section of the text to focus on so that your answer is concise and focused (again, ten lines are allocated in the answer booklet) and any points you make will have to be linked to a certain focus (e.g. what makes a part of a text entertaining or moving). It is time here to show that you can also use relevant subject terminology intelligently (so you might get a chance to analyse some hyperbole, or understatement (litotes), or a blend of the ordinary (prosaic) and the heroic, irony, alliteration, metaphor, emotive language, listing, asyndeton, tricolons, etc.) If you are unsure of any of those terms, look them up and practise using them.

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.

To remind you, AO2 is:

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.

So 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, critically, 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 xxxxxxxx. 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). You have to allocate this as the exam invigilators are not allowed to give you help with timings. **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 of the material used in previous tasks can be quite legitimately used here, if it is developed to suit this task. This is especially relevant for AO3 where the analysis developed for AO2 can be used as a basis for comparison.

You will need to show the skills to **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 (an idea or a person) and how their treatment of the subject shows this. You may be looking for evidence of the writer's 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 in the question will remind you that your answer has to be comparative** throughout.

You may find it helpful to look at these annotated marking descriptors for AO3:

Level 6:

- A **detailed, interwoven**¹ comparison which **explores**² writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed.

¹ The emphasis is on a detailed account of the texts which effectively compares (and contrasts) throughout.

² The learner's metaphorical journey through the texts and their response to them in comparative format. There is a strong suggestion that learners at this level and above can see more than one or two ideas and perspectives.

Level 5:

- A **sustained**¹ comparison of writers' ideas and perspectives and how they are conveyed.

¹ Consistent and detailed.

Level 4:

- A **developed**¹ comparison of writers' ideas and perspectives and **how they are conveyed**².

¹ This suggests a more straightforward format for comparison than above which is, nonetheless, fit for purpose and consistent.

² Communicated: this could include some AO2 elements that are developed and used as the basis for comparison; here, as in all the levels, the plural refers to the perspectives in both texts, rather than one or the other.

Level 3:

- A **clear**¹ comparison of writers' ideas and perspectives which **begins to consider**² how they are conveyed.

¹ May use a simple, straightforward comparative format.

² The response provides some suggestion of how ideas and perspectives are communicated in the texts.

Level 2:

- A response which **identifies** main points of comparison between writers' ideas and perspectives.

¹ 'Sees' some points of comparison between the texts but goes no further.

Level 1:

- A response which **makes simple points**¹ of comparison between writers' ideas and perspectives.

¹ As in Level 2, sees some simple points of comparison, these will be more obvious, surface level comparisons.

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

The fact that the task **requires both engagement and involvement but also taking an overview from a critical distance** makes it tricky. It is made more so by having to remember to use textual references that are apt, convincing and persuasive to support the points made. In this context, **textual references can be both quotations and paraphrase**.

The question 4 tasks will come up with a **particular take on both texts**; it will most likely be put as a statement with a 'how far/' 'to what extent' phrase as a reminder to exercise your skills of evaluation. Whether you agree, disagree or to some extent 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.

The exam board has produced some model answers and sample answers. The best of these 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 substantially 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.

You may find it helpful to look at these annotated marking descriptors for AO4:

Level 6:

- A **sustained critical**¹ evaluation demonstrating a perceptive and **considered**² response to the statement and a **full** explanation of the impact of the texts on the reader.
- Comments are supported by **apt, skilfully selected and integrated** textual references.

¹ Learners look critically, and in detail, at both texts in light of the task: they more than likely weigh up alternative perspectives/ interpretations. The response is likely to be more lucid and systematic in the way it deals with the material.

² Attentive; contemplates a range of ideas/elements in the texts in order to reach a conclusion.

Level 5:

- An **informed critical evaluation**¹ showing a **thoughtful response**² to the statement and **clear consideration of the impact**³ of the texts on the reader.
- Comments are supported by persuasive textual references.

¹ Fully addresses the tasks with a balanced consideration of both texts.

² Learners provide personal readings/judgments that are well supported and consistently relevant.

³ Impact is securely addressed but perhaps not in as much detail as it could be – compare with 'full explanation' in Level 6.

Level 4:

- A response with **developed evaluative comments**¹ addressing the statement and **some comments**² about the impact on the reader.
- Comments are supported by **well-chosen**³ textual references

¹ Shows a good understanding of the task and judgments on the texts are well supported.

² The response considers the impact on the reader, but may not be consistent or fully explained.

³ Relevant and sensible in relation to the task.

Level 3:

- A response with **clear evaluative comments**¹ and **some** awareness of the impact on the reader.
- Comments are supported by **appropriate**² textual references.

¹ The task has been understood and there is a clear attempt to address all elements.

² These may not be fully explained.

Level 2:

- A response with **straightforward evaluative comments**¹ and **a little awareness** of the impact on the reader.
- Comments are supported by **some appropriate**² textual references.

¹ All in all, the task has been understood but is likely not to be fully or clearly addressed.

² Some references may be irrelevant; relevant references are likely not to be fully explained.

Level 1:

- A **limited description**¹ of content.
- Comments are supported by **copying or paraphrase**².

¹ There is little, if any, attempt to evaluate the texts in light of the task.

² Learners may go no further than lifting evidence from the texts. There will be limited, if any, exploration of the significance of the reference.

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 so is something to be taken really seriously. 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; I can do it really' manage to get out of this with a desirable 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

Over time, the writing tasks will ask students to write 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, you might expect to have the option of writing a letter or a speech in this section).

You should **consider spending about 45–50 minutes** of the two-hour exam time **on the writing section**; this includes the time taken to choose the task you will respond to and to plan. It is important that you take time to read through the requirements of both tasks so that you can decide which best suits you.

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

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 will rarely come with a specified audience but **you need to know/ 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 and will never know the student: 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 do not need to be 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, suffering an illness) can be imagined and developed in a personal way.

General writing guidance applicable to both papers:

Voice

Students may wish to construct an audience as an integral part of their work, '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 be fruitful. However, it also adds a layer of extra difficulty and so you should consider whether or not you will be able to keep this voice consistent and effective throughout the response. Other students are adept at constructing twin, overlapping narratives, which contrast narrative voices and this may be very effective.

The golden rules are that the **narrative voice should be clear, consistent and confident throughout** the piece. Whether the work is in the first person or the third, 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. The 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. This will be marked by the **use of paragraphs as the building blocks of the overall structure**. **Paragraphs of varied length, topic and linking sentences** are all marks of thoughtful, well-planned work. Remember the right-hand margin scanning technique examiners might use to gain a sense of your paragraph structure: 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 read on and 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 this needs to be very carefully planned, before the writing starts, and remain at the forefront of your mind as the piece develops.

Length is an important aspect of structure. **As a general guideline, an exam essay does not 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 half a side or less will more than likely be self-penalising as it is unlikely to include enough evidence of what the student can do in relation to the task. On the other hand, **lengthy 'sagas', excessive descriptions, unnecessary dialogue and irrelevance should all be avoided**. It is likely that those who produce overly long pieces of work will be unable to sustain effectively all the previously mentioned skills. Students who produce a pithy, controlled piece of writing are more likely to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme

Accurate use of language

You need to show off a confident and controlled command of English syntax (sentence organisation), grammar, spelling (particularly of commonly occurring words, both simple and complex), punctuation and sentence structure. To reach the highest levels of the mark schemes, you should be able to use all those constituents 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 the board has complained about before. Cure yourself of the habit if you have it. Try http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_07.htm

Much can be done in a fairly straightforward way with this aspect of writing, so long as the basics are in place. For example, a controlled change of tense or tone can be effective; the use of unusual/original vocabulary, and of short lists, often of synonyms

and/or antonyms can enhance an effect, as can some planned repetition of certain words. Varied sentence lengths and well judged use of direct/indirect speech (weak writers tend to use far too much speech) and commentary also tend to work well. The use of single sentence paragraphs can be an effective addition, as long as you are careful not to overdo it. Sometimes a sentence can be deliberately a fragment.

The best writing responses will be often marked by varied, fluent, confident use of a range of grammatical and syntactical structures; ambitious and aptly chosen vocabulary which may often signal effects subtly; and which has been chosen to suit and enhance an idea.

Marking the writing

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

