

ENGLISH EXAM TIPS

EXAM SUCCESS



GCSEPod's Top Tips for Good English Exam Habits



GENERAL

TRY NOT TO WAFFLE

Avoid overly lengthy responses to the reading questions as you'll lose clarity and focus. Instead, think about the number of marks awarded for a question. A 20-mark question will need a lengthier response to an 8-mark question. An 8-mark question probably doesn't need a four-page response. Remember, clear writing equals a clear mark.

KNOW YOUR EXAM BOARD

It's important that you consider the Assessment Objectives (AOs) for each exam question - your teacher or tutor can help you with this. Generally, the highest marks come from discussing the effect of a certain piece of writing or technique. Pay attention to the specific things your exam board's AOs are looking for.

PLAN AND PROOF-READ

One reason people lose marks in the writing section is by failing to plan and proof-read their work effectively. It's vital you think about how you're going to structure your response. It's also important to set aside time to read through your work and catch any errors. Proof-reading also provides an opportunity to check the clarity of your work. Is it clear? Have you removed any unnecessary extras?

REMEMBER YOUR TIMING

Remember your timing. Try to attempt all of the questions. If you're running out of time, remember that answering one question well out of multiple will not be enough. It's better to try to finish off the question you're answering and to begin tackling the others. A castle isn't a castle because of a single tower - it takes a collection of towers and more! Every mark matters.



TACKLING QUESTIONS

PAY ATTENTION TO STRUCTURE

If you're asked to comment on a text's structure, remember that some boards will not award marks for discussing punctuation and sentence length unless you're making a very clear structural (and not language related) point. If you're asked to comment more generally upon the effects of a text, remember you can use language points to inform and develop your structural points!

COMPARING, AGREEING AND DISAGREEING

When you compare, remember to focus on comparing the feelings and perspectives of the writers - not just the techniques. It's not enough to note that one used a list where the other used a simile. When you agree or disagree, try to determine where each text would sit on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree.

ANSWER CLEARLY AND CONCISELY

There are a lot of ways to do this. Firstly, make sure you've read any text or extract at least twice before or during the exam (depending on whether or not the extract is 'unseen'). You need to understand what the text is about to answer any question well. Also make sure you're specific about the effects the text has upon the reader and avoid phrases which could be applied to any technique in the text, such as 'it has an effect' or 'it creates an image in the reader's mind'. Go into more specific detail than this!

AVOID SIMPLY LISTING TECHNIQUES

Always remember to go into detail about the effects and/or effectiveness of the techniques being used. Remember the focus of the text at all times and make sure you're commenting upon what the question wants you to explore. This may be the purpose or effectiveness of the text.

PLAN TO SUCCEED IN YOUR READING EXAMS

You need to show an awareness of what is happening within the text or extract. This means an understanding of what the writer intends and how they achieve it through structure, language and tone. This doesn't mean loads of technique spotting but it does mean noticing how the text starts and develops. If it changes, why? If it doesn't, why?

REMEMBER: PREPARE AND PRACTICE IN ADVANCE WILL PUT YOU IN A MUCH BETTER PLACE TO TACKLE YOUR READING AND WRITING EXAMS. GOOD LUCK!