

English Language Paper 1:

Explorations in creative reading and writing

1 hour and 45 minutes



Note the title on the exam paper – about **exploring or analysing fiction**, the ‘creative reading’ – and then exploring or **producing your own ‘creative writing’**.

How to answer questions in Section A (Reading)

Questions 1-4 in Section A are the reading questions. Spend a total of 1 hour on this section of the paper, including your reading time.

First, spend **10 minutes reading** Source A and all the questions on the paper. Annotate 3-4 striking quotations for Q2/ prepare for Q2 as you do this.

Question 1: 4 marks, 5 minutes

- Read Question 1 carefully. Circle or highlight the **focus** of the question – you must ensure you answer what the question has asked you. Draw a line around the relevant section of the text.
- **Use quotations or your own words to answer the question briefly. Just the key words on their own are enough.**
- Spend no more than 5 minutes on this question.

Question 2: 8 marks, 10 minutes

- Write about how language is used for a particular purpose or function – stated in the question, so read the question carefully. The emphasis is on the last words of the question.
- This exam uses an extract from a piece of twentieth or twenty-first century **fiction**. The purpose could be how the writer: describes a setting, presents a character, narrates an event, conveys the narrator’s attitude to a situation.... The purposes are the ‘literary’ purposes of fiction writers.
- Annotation – Highlight 3-4 striking quotations to comment on – where language is used in a striking or interesting way for the purpose in the question.
- Do use subject terminology to explain **effects** of words/ phrases/ language techniques, linking these effects to the purpose in the question. Techniques/ terms to consider include: images/ imagery, similes/ metaphors, pathetic fallacy, the narrator, connotations of the vocabulary, sentence forms, but there are a wide range of literary effects that writers could achieve.
- The question states that you ‘could’ comment on: ‘words and phrases’, ‘language features and techniques’ and ‘sentence forms’; the question does not say you ‘must’. Respond to whatever is most relevant; you don’t have to deal with each bullet point *for this question*. ‘Sentence forms’ are often the least worthwhile aspect to write about.
- Remember this question focuses only on language, not structure, and asks you to refer to a specific section of the source.

- Write **3 PEE paragraphs**.
- Use short quotations from the text to support your points. Embed quotations.
- No introduction or conclusion needed. 'Straight in, straight out.'

Question 3: 8 marks, 10 minutes

- You must focus only on STRUCTURE, not language, in this question. Refer to the **whole** of the source. This question is always going to be the same question.
- Students often think of 'structure' in terms of sentence structure, but you need to think of structure as how the 'content' of a whole text is organized or shaped through the text. This makes structure a more significant concept.
- This question is about narrative structure in a short extract of fiction. Think of comic strips or film sequence storyboards. What is the 'focus' (a metaphor from film for the way a film camera works) at the start? What are the SHIFTS in 'focus' through the extract? You need to track the shifts in sequence – at the beginning, in the middle, towards the end – in your 3 PEE paragraphs to answer this question.
- Annotation – Next to each paragraph or couple of paragraphs, write a few words to sum up the focus of the paragraph/ section of the source. This enables you understand how the focus/action changes throughout the source.
- Write **3 PEE paragraphs**, focusing on 3 different aspects of structure.
- No introduction or conclusion needed. 'Straight in, straight out.'
- You could write about these structural features:
 - For bullet point 1 ("*what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning*"):
 - ❖ how character/ setting are introduced
 - ❖ how the mood is established at the start (e.g. tense, ominous, depressing, optimistic)
 - ❖ the narrative perspective (from whose point of view we see the action)
 - For bullet point 2 ("*how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops*"):
 - ❖ how a character's feelings or actions change through the source
 - ❖ how setting changes (e.g. does the narrative move from outside to inside, or from general to specific?)
 - ❖ how the mood changes
 - ❖ how the narrative perspective changes (e.g. do we see a scene through another character's eyes?)
 - The best answers will consider structure in sequence through the source. Bullet point 3 ("*any other structural features that interest you*") draws attention to other structural features such as: repeated patterns of words/ phrases; the building and release of tension; narrative 'hooks' that draw you into the story; and links between sentences or paragraphs, or the ways they are used.

Question 4: 20 marks, 25 minutes

- **This question is worth the same marks as the three previous questions put together! You must ensure you spend the full amount of time on this question.**

- Read the statement in the question carefully several times. You need to ‘**unpack**’ what is in the statement, so highlight the key words. There might be two parts to the statement, so what is each part of the statement claiming? You must make sure you understand exactly what the question is asking you to write about: you could be asked to write about character, relationships, themes, settings or the narrator’s viewpoint, for example.
- Aim to **agree with the statement**. We can assume that the examiners have created a statement that fits quite well with the extract. This question requires you to make a case in response to the statement. You need to **EXPLORE** how the statement applies to the extract. ‘To what extent do you agree?’ – is about inviting you into a debate; the question wants your opinion, inviting you to explore.... **Developing a convincing response to the statement is therefore one important part of Question 4.** Hence the title of the exam paper: ‘Explorations in creative reading’.
- The first bullet point reminds you about the content of the question – your impressions of characters, or relationships, or setting, or themes.... This bullet point is therefore useful help to tell you what to write about. The third bullet point is a reminder that you must base your answer closely on the text, using quotations. You must explain the language/ techniques, using subject terminology, as you write about the quotations. Some students could easily stray into very general writing for this question that is quite distant from the extract; the third bullet point is a warning against this.
- The second bullet point in the question – ‘evaluate how the writer has created these impressions’ – is central to what is being assessed in Question 4. You are expected to evaluate the writer’s language or methods used to create the impressions or effects about character or setting for instance. **Aim to show how effectively/ successfully/ powerfully/ convincingly/ vividly the writer achieves these impressions or effects.** ‘Evaluate’ means assessing the value of something or judging how well something is done, but we can assume that the examiners have chosen an extract where the writer writes well!
- Reread the relevant section of the source and draw a box around this section. Annotate the extract, identifying short quotations relevant to the question.
- You should spend 5-10 minutes unpacking the question and annotating the extract, then planning a number of points to make in response to the statement.
- Aim to write **5 PEE paragraphs** over 15 or so minutes.
- No introduction or conclusion needed. ‘Straight in, straight out.

How to answer the question in Section B (Writing)

Question 5 is the writing question. Spend 45 minutes on this section of the paper, including planning.

Question 5: 40 marks, 45 minutes

(24 for content and organisation; 16 for accuracy)

The **final** question is worth **the most marks**. You must ensure you give yourself the full amount of time for this question.

This Writing Section is ‘creative writing’. In the Reading Section, you analysed a piece of fiction or creative writing, and now Section B is your own ‘exploration in creative writing’....

There are two questions and you answer **one** question. One question is a **description** task. The other question is typically a **story**. A picture is used as a stimulus for one of the questions.

Writing description – some advice:

Powerful description is created by:

- using very precise detail, typically physical detail
- describing through the senses – sights, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations
- using imagery/ metaphors/ similes/ personification
- using powerful vocabulary – especially concrete nouns and dynamic verbs
- creating an attitude towards what is being described – by using feelings/ emotion (pathetic fallacy could be part of this)
- thinking of an interesting perspective or structure for the writing

Writing a story – some advice:

Focus on one scene. Build up lots of descriptive detail to create this one scene. Start *in medias res* and finish with an open ending or cliff-hanger. One or two characters are usually enough. 'Show' rather than 'tell'. Storyline drives story writing; you are writing one very short part of the story though. **Beware of overloading your 'plot' with too much action! A list of events is not story writing!** Better to focus on one moment in the story and to make this as real as possible. The best writers develop implicit meaning or subtexts; they create narrative 'hooks' or foreshadowing, which help to draw in their reader. Use imagery/ metaphor/ simile....

What about creating a powerful voice as the narrator for your story? How could the perspective of this first-person narrator colour the story writing?

Remember that 'description' will be used in your story; or if you choose the description, that there could be elements of a 'story' (or 'back-story'). The best 'answers' will see the 'imaginative potential' in the task, not writing as a 16-year old student answering a question in an exam hall, but writing as a great creative writer – as the next J.K. Rowling or Robert Louis Stevenson! The best writing will be compelling and a pleasure to read.

- Spend 5-10 minutes planning your answer before you begin. First of all, 'brainstorm' ideas, (which could mean thinking about the bigger story structure for the story task), then shape these ideas into some sort of paragraph plan. Give your writing a whole text shape or whole text structure; the quality of the overall structure of your writing helps to get the most marks.
- Shape or craft your writing 'for effect'. (e.g. Use varied sentence lengths, including short sentences for effect. Ensure your opening sentence has impact and interest – avoid clichés. Use a variety of structural features including varied paragraph lengths like a single-sentence paragraph for effect.)
- Section B of the English Language Papers is where your writing itself is under the spotlight – the vocabulary, every sentence structure and each transition between paragraphs. Pay great attention to the accuracy of your Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG).
- Spend 5 minutes checking your writing at the end.