



Revision Guide

**How To
Write Essays
& Understand
the Mark Scheme**

CAIE IGCSE Literature

Scrbblly.

Writing an excellent essay

When I was at school, they never taught us to write an essay. I actually just ignored essays most of the time and spent my energy on enjoying the books and texts that we were given. Big mistake. When it came to exams, I hadn't a clue how to structure my answer and I just sort of threw everything I knew at the question in the hope that some of it were somehow useful. I didn't plan because I didn't know how, so I started writing and I would write almost infinite ideas, pages, and pages of thoughts organised into random, small paragraphs. This is exactly how not to write an essay.

Essay writing, like reading poetry, is an art, a skill, and a craft. You aren't just magically born with the ability to write an amazing essay, you have to work hard at it and you learn it, just like anything else. If you're really not sure about essays, I would recommend far more than just reading this short section on them. We have Scrbly courses on Essay Writing and Academic Writing, so those are a really good place to start. You may also want to buy a book or two on the subject.

I can't stress enough how important it is to learn to write essays. The older you get, the more important it becomes. Every English Literature question you do requires you to write an essay. Many English Language questions are also essay-based, or analysis based - and a paragraph of analysis is the same as a middle paragraph in a full essay. If you take or are planning to take humanities subjects - history, law, politics, classics, classical civilisation, sociology, film, art, music, drama, dance, architecture, geography, archaeology, religious studies, and more — **these all require you to write essays** as a main form of assessment. You need them more and more the older you get, and the more you specialise — A Levels are mostly essay based on these subjects, and universities will be almost completely essay based. Plus the type of essay you need to write gets harder and more complex as you go along, so there really is no better time to start learning essays than right now.



Even if you're maths or science-minded, the higher levels of study (A-Level, University, Postgraduate) increasingly require you to write essays. Being a scientist that can write essays and communicate well is a very rare skill set to have, so it will make you more employable and advance your career much further than if you just ignore that part of it and focus on learning formulas and processes. I have a student at the moment who's on track for a First Class degree in Engineering at university, except he's got to do an 8000 word essay dissertation and he hasn't got a clue where to start! So hopefully you can see that no matter what kind of person you are if you're aiming for good grades now and higher education in the future then you absolutely have to learn to write essays.

Right, now I've convinced you we can actually get down to what essays are and how to do them. Every essay has a beginning, middle, and end. These are typically referred to as the following:

INTRODUCTION

MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS

CONCLUSION

Over the next few pages, I'll break down below what each one should do for you.

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce your ideas on the question.
- Don't introduce the book or spend ages introducing the context.
- Perhaps set up a debate by looking at different angles.
- Present a THESIS (very important!). Your thesis is a one-sentence answer to the question that summarises all your main thoughts and ideas. It is the main argument of your essay, the whole point of an essay is to develop a thesis, and then to explore and prove your thesis correct as you go through your middle paragraphs.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS

- To start with, master the PEE structure and get used to that.
- For students aiming for higher grades (B and above), you need to work on expanding that PEE structure — try a more advanced structure such as PETAL paragraphs. I personally do mine like this:

Point

Evidence

Technique / Device

Analysis

Development — alternative interpretation, extra evidence, and analysis, or context analysis

Link — link back to but expand upon your original point, you could also link to the thesis

CONCLUSION

- Don't skip this — it is important!
- The purpose of a conclusion is to summarise all of your main points and ideas again — go back over your essay, find what you're most proud of, and put it here.
- You should also repeat but ideally develop or slightly modify your thesis here.

These are the basics of essay writing. You can see the example essays at the end of the book for more ideas and thoughts on what makes a good essay. The best thing to do is practise a lot and receive feedback, if you keep going that way you'll end up at a point where you're writing great essays.





How will my work be marked?

IGCSEs are marked by examiners, who are employed by the Cambridge exam board. For several years I've been an examiner myself, although for a different board - AQA. As examiners, we're sent a ton of papers and we get paid almost nothing and we have to mark them and send them back very quickly — it's a tough job! People really only do it because it makes them better teachers, not for money or anything like that.

So, if you think about the person marking your work (such as poor old me with my stacks of 300-400 papers that have to be returned within 2-3 weeks!), there are things you can do to make our lives easier, and if we can read and understand your work easily then we are likely to mark you kindly. Be clear about your ideas, and structure properly — always use a short plan before you write. Use an academic, formal essay style and show an awareness of assessment objectives — these are the boxes we have to tick in order to justify giving you your grade. Learn the mark schemes. Read that again. Learn the mark schemes! Some schools — especially top schools - teach their students how to understand mark schemes, because then they can adapt their writing to exactly what the examiners are looking for, and get a higher grade. Other schools don't bother (unfortunately my own school was in this category, which is why I used to write such weird essays because I had no idea what they were looking for!). Don't leave your grade up to your school or your teacher, teach yourself all the gaps and what you need to know. If you understand mark schemes and work backward from there, the essay writing process will be much easier.

Here's a breakdown of the assessment objectives and **what they look for at a mid-grade and top-grade level:**

AO1

“Show detailed knowledge of the content of literary texts in the three main forms (drama, poetry, and prose), supported by reference to the text.”

In plain words: show a detailed understanding of your texts, and understanding of your form — in this case, poetry. Use quotations and references clearly and effectively to back up your ideas.

AO2

“Understand the meanings of literary texts and their contexts, and explore texts beyond surface meanings to show deeper awareness of ideas and attitudes.”

In plain words: Understand the deeper meaning and background meaning of your texts - such as the themes, ideas, attitudes, and messages. Make sure to learn context — the time period and circumstances surrounding the moment when the text was written. For the poems, each one has its own context — be sure to learn them and be comfortable with analysing them.

AO3

“Recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure, and form to create and shape meanings and effects.”

In plain words: Understand how language techniques, structural features, and poetic forms enhance and underscore the main messages, themes, and meanings of the poems. Have a confident and equal focus on form, structure, and language.

AO4

“Communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to literary texts.”

In plain words: Develop your own ideas on the poem with confidence, after clearly learning about the poems in depth-first. Make sure you have your own opinions about the themes and attitudes presented in each poem.

Each objective is worth 25% of your overall grade, so they are equally weighted. For a mid-level and top-level essay, here's what examiners are looking for. I've translated the mark scheme into my own words here so it will be clear for you:

MID BAND (high C / low B grade)

AO1 — good knowledge of the text and thorough use of quotations throughout the essay, well-selected quotations that prove your point well.

AO2 — understanding the surface meaning of the text completely, and some of the deeper meanings.

AO3 — a good understanding of language techniques and the way they are used.

AO4 — some personal response, starting to be developed — a sense of deeper thoughts and interpretations being explored.

TOP BAND (A* grade)

AO1 — well-selected evidence and references, skilfully integrated into the text with 'flair' (a creative, confident, and personal essay style).

AO2 — an excellent understanding of surface and deeper meanings, including a critical exploration (looking at different angles of interpretation) and creative insights into the themes, attitudes, and ideas.

AO3 — sensitive, detailed, and thorough exploration of form, structure, and language — as well as a detailed understanding of how and why these create specific meanings.

AO4 — personal and evaluative engagement with the question — not just the poem but responding properly at the moment to the focus and keywords of the question, having complex and sensitive thoughts about it and how it relates to the poem.

Hopefully, that's useful for you and you're starting to feel more confident with essays, exams, and poetry in general. In the next section we'll be looking at the poems themselves and what to say or think about them.

Well done for making it this far! Let's keep going.

If you're looking for more help and support with this poetry collection, with Literature, English or essay writing in general, you can find recorded video lessons and downloadable content at **www.scrbbly.com**

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