

AQA GCSE English and English Language

Exam Practice: Unit 1

(sample pages)

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This resource should be viewed in print layout view. If editing, note that all page breaks are set as 'hard' breaks. This means that adding a substantial amount of text to the page will create an 'overflow' page rather than changing the layout of the whole resource.

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1 Overview

This resource will help you to prepare for GCSE English Language and give you hints on how to tackle the exam. To do well in exams, you need a combination of perspiration and inspiration and this guide will help you to put in a bit of both so that you can dazzle the examiner with your knowledge and exam expertise.

So let's start off with a brief overview of Unit 1. Words **in bold** will be explained in the glossary at the end of this resource.

Both Foundation and Higher Papers consist of Section A (marked for reading only) and Section B (marked for writing only), with equal marks for each section. There is no choice in either Section A (i.e. you must answer all the questions).

The time allowed (2 ¼ hours) is on the front of both papers, along with advice on how long to spend on each section. Take note of these guidelines: they are there to help you.

Section A

Section A is the Reading section of the paper. In both Foundation and Higher, you are advised to spend about 15 minutes reading the texts provided and an hour writing your answers for this section. You will be given three pieces of non-fiction or a media text. These could consist of:

- newspaper articles
- items from the Internet
- letters
- extracts from a biography
- travel writing
- an advertisement
- a charity appeal
- a leaflet
- an encyclopaedia entry

You may be given a visual stimulus – a photograph, cartoon, etc.– and be asked to comment on that too. The questions in Section A are designed to test your understanding of what you have read. You need to show that you understand how **form** and **style** help writers to get their ideas across, and that you understand how writers use different techniques to persuade us that their ideas are valid.

Section B

Section B is the Writing section of the paper. You should spend an hour on this section. There are two questions – a shorter one and a longer one, and you must answer both of them. Follow the timing advice on the paper: about 25 minutes for the shorter task, and 35 minutes for the longer one. The questions will ask you to write for a particular **purpose** – normally to **inform, explain, argue or persuade**. You will also be told to write for a particular **form**, such as:



- a newspaper or magazine article
- a letter – formal or informal
- a webpage
- a leaflet, concentrating on the text
- a report
- a speech

I have a dream ...

You will also be given an **audience**, for example, 'fellow students'. Section B assesses your ability to write fluently and accurately, with an awareness of **purpose, audience** and **form**. Aim to write 2–3 pages in your exam book for the two answers – depending on the size of your writing.

2 Exam techniques for both sections



Exams are a bit like football tournaments.

Does the best team win the European Championship or the World Cup?

Probably not always, but somehow by a mixture of preparation, technique and performing well on the day, they come out on top and get to hoist the trophy. Exams are similar – it's not always the best students who get the best marks. How often do you come out of an exam feeling that you haven't done yourself justice? You've run out of time or you just haven't planned your game properly? Worst

case scenario – almost into injury time ten minutes before the end of the exam, you realise that you've made a mistake!

This section will help you to avoid those problems by preparing you with the right equipment, mental attitude and skills to tackle this exam. Nothing takes the place of hard work through your GCSE years and some solid revision before the exam. But read the notes below and you should be able to perform on the day and get the result you deserve.

Top tips

- Bring the right equipment for the exam.
- Manage your time properly.
- Make sure you know how to get Reading marks in Section A and Writing marks in Section B

Essential exam equipment

- ✓ pens – in the plural just in case one runs out
- ✓ pencils
- ✓ a ruler
- ✓ a watch
- ✓ highlighter pen(s) – for annotating the text

Remember: you can't take a dictionary into the exam – a good reason to work on your spelling!

Time management

- 1 Examiners are kind to you: believe it or not, they want to give you marks. The exam board helps by telling you on each paper exactly how long to spend on each section. Use that information as your guideline.
- 2 Use the time when you are being seated in the exam to read the information on the front of the paper. There is useful time information (and other information) on the front of the paper.
- 3 Make use of your watch. Be strict with yourself. Don't let yourself go over time on one section of the paper. Once your time is up, finish that section quickly and move on to the next one.
- 4 In both sections, do a quick calculation to make sure that you're spending more time on the questions with more marks.
- 5 Allow yourself as much as ten minutes for checking your work at the end. It is not a good idea to write up to the deadline – you'll pick up more marks in ten minutes checking through your work than you will in ten minutes of writing.
- 6 If you run out of time to check your work (and you won't if you've followed all of the advice above), concentrate on Section B rather than on Section A, because that's where the writing marks are.



Activity 1: Time management



Look at the list above and try to remember one word which sums up the advice in each point. Then visualise it as an object. For example, you might choose a clock for point 3. Now imagine those six objects on a tray in front of you. Then see if you can remember them – and if this helps to bring back the exam tip being made. It may help you to make a sentence using the first letters of each word. This really works for some students.

Answering Reading questions

You will get reading marks by showing that you –

- understand the **implicit** as well as the **explicit** meaning of a text
- can to pick out the main points
- understand how writers use different techniques to get their ideas across
- realise that graphics – photographs, illustrations, etc. – can tell a story
- can compare two pieces of writing, identifying similarities and differences
- can answer the question, the whole question and nothing but the question
- can support answers with textual reference.

You can demonstrate all of the above by using the following technique:

- Read through the material quickly once.
- Read the questions.
- Highlight information relevant to the answer. You could colour-code different questions.

- Use the mark scheme as a guide to how much to write. For eight marks, for example, you need to make eight valid points.
- Use information under the questions as subheads in your answers to help you answer all parts of the question – especially for Foundation.
- Include exactly what has been requested, and nothing else.
- Quote evidence from the text *selectively*: copy a word or phrase to illustrate your point, inside quote marks ('...'). Quoting chunks of text, hoping that the answer will be in there somewhere, wastes time and shows that you don't know the answer.
- Make the point once: don't say it again in different ways. You only get the marks once.
- There are no writing marks for Section A: don't waste time on your style. A list may work as well as full sentences.

Activity 2: Quick quiz



Read all the advice on Section A and then answer the questions below:

- 1 What percentage of the marks on Section A are for writing?
- 2 Why should you only use a word or short phrase to illustrate your answers?
- 3 How many times should you read through the text?
- 4 What does 'comparing' two texts mean?
- 5 How many times should you make the same point in your answer?

Answering Writing questions

- **KEY MESSAGE – The marks will be awarded for content, organisation and accuracy**

You will get the writing marks by –

- answering both questions
- writing the right amount
- using information from Section A to answer the questions in Section B when appropriate
- planning your work carefully
- writing in the correct **format**
- being aware of **audience** and **purpose**.

You should do the following:

- Read the instructions very carefully
- Write at least 1½ pages in the answer book for each question – but more for question 6 than question 5: it carries more marks.
- You also need to spend more time on question 6 – for the same reason

- Make sensible use of the information in Section A. If the examiner writes on the paper, 'You *may* use some of the information from Section A,' it's a coded way of saying that you *should* do so. But you won't gain marks by copying lengthy passages. Adapt the information for your own purposes.
- Plan – this is so important that it is dealt with in its own section below.
- Write a letter if you've been asked for a letter, a speech if asked for a speech, and so on. The layout and format of types of writing is dealt with in Section 6, page 16.
- Check that you understand '**audience** and **purpose**' – see Section 5, page 14.