

GCSE English and GCSE English Language:

Guidance for Parents / Carers

Preparing for GCSEs can be a challenging time for students, parents and carers. This guide is intended to give some information and practical tips to help your child revise for the English/English Language examination.

As a department, we feel it is important to dispel the myth that there is no revision which can be done for the English examination paper A680. It is true that the examination is a skills based paper and there are no texts to be revised. However, students need to be practising these skills outside the classroom if they are going to be successful.

GCSE English or GCSE English Language. What is the difference?

Your child will be taking English or English Language depending on which pathway they are on. English Language must be combined with English Literature, whereas the English course has responses to literature built in. Whether English or English Language, it is a subject that colleges and employers are looking for students to do well in. Students will complete controlled assessments in class that are worth 60% of the final mark and take an external examination which is worth 40%. The examination is common to English and English Language. It consists of one paper and contains two parts. In Section A, there are two pieces of previously unseen reading material. Students will be asked to summarise one text and analyse the language / layout in both. In Section B, they will need to produce an extended written response. By the time your child sits the examination, they will be very clear on the types of questions that they need to answer. The aim of this guide is to provide you with simple tips on how you can support your child.

Things you can do to support your child:

1. Encourage them to read newspaper reports and magazine articles regularly so that they understand the structure and tone of an article.
2. After reading a newspaper / internet article, ask them to identify five of the techniques (see attached document) used by writers and explain why they are effective.
3. After reading a newspaper / internet article, rewrite some of the paragraphs in their own words. This will help them to prepare for the summary task. The key skills here are: information retrieval of key points, synthesising, re-ordering and then writing using their own words.
4. Give real opportunities to write both formal and informal letters; for example, to a relative or even to the editor of a local newspaper.
5. Where possible, let them read formal letters which you have received.
6. Talk to them about areas of local interest – they may be asked to describe, advertise, or persuade someone to visit their local area.
7. Get them to think about their own personal qualities – for example, how would they persuade an employer to offer them a job?
8. Collect leaflets received in the post or picked up in health centres or tourist information centres – ask them to explore the layouts and the ways in which they are written.
9. Encourage your child to watch, listen to and read about the news. Talk to them about national and local issues – it is important to have lots of ideas and opinions on current affairs as the writing task may be a discursive essay.
10. Encourage them to discuss a film they've seen or a book they've read; they may be asked to write a review.
11. Encourage your child to utilise their hobbies as an opportunity to practise writing. For example, if they are a season ticket holder for a football team, they could write a match report after a game.
12. The sheet attached, 'Techniques used by writers to convey their views' is a useful piece of revision because it identifies the skills used by writers to be identified in the reading tasks and highlights the skills students should use in their own responses to the writing task.

Useful Websites

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/> A fantastic website for current affairs; it will provide students with endless materials to analyse on a vast array of topics and it is free!

<http://frog.kingswinford.dudley.sch.uk/user/74/147600.pdf> Students will be able to access this link via FROG. It is a resource designed for the Functional Skills qualification but it provides links to tutorials on reading and writing skills that are needed in the examination.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english/> A comprehensive website that contains numerous activities to help students improve their reading and writing skills.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/> This link is to the Bitesize homepage. It is useful because it will help students who struggle with spelling and punctuation. Students are often embarrassed to use it because the examples are aimed at younger children. They should not feel this way. It will help them to practise basic skills and make them better readers and writers.

Techniques used by writers to convey their views

How does a writer create tone and express a point-of-view? How does a writer engage a reader? How does a writer persuade a reader?

- Use of humour
- Use of puns
- Use of irony
- Use of ridicule
- Hyperbole / exaggeration
- Use of comparison
- Use of contrast
- Listing
- Rule of three
- Rhetorical questions
- Repetition – of key words or phrases
- Direct speech / quotations / personal anecdotes
- The language of experts
- Use of statistics
- Use of personal pronouns
- Informal / colloquial language
- Use of literary techniques – e.g. similes, metaphors, alliteration
- Empathetic vocabulary
- Emotive vocabulary
- Use of adjectives and adverbs
- Use of punctuation:
 - Exclamation marks for dramatic effect
 - Question marks
 - Speech marks for direct speech or to suggest irony e.g. his ‘witty’ remark
 - Dashes
 - Ellipsis
 - Multiple commas to slow the pace
 - Short sentences close together to quicken the pace
- Length of paragraphs
- Presentational devices:
 - Font – e.g. size, bold, colour, italics
 - Titles and sub-headings
 - Photographs
 - Cartoons
 - Tables / pie charts
 - Organisation of text on the page