

How to get an A/A* in GCSE English Language

Section A: Reading

The skills targeted in this part of the paper are students ability to:

- o Read and understand texts, selecting material appropriate to purpose, collating from different sources and making comparisons and cross-references as appropriate.
- o Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.
- o Where a question is seeking retrieval, Students are expected to locate the necessary detail and do not have to make an interpretation.
- o Where students are required to infer, they will need to go beyond retrieval and will need to interpret how details tell us more.
- o Where questions ask specifically about language or presentation features, students will have to select details that support the writer's intention and be able to explain their effect.
- o Comparison questions will expect students to consider what is the same or different about the writers' intentions and to select evidence that supports their interpretation.

Difference between a C/B grade answer and an A grade answer

- o **At C grade**, students will show that they understand a text and can sometimes comment on language choices and how these meet the writer's intention.
- o **An A/A*** response will be an informed, critical response to the text and the language devices used to appeal to a particular readership. They will offer their own interpretation of the writer's ideas, selecting supporting detail imaginatively.
- o **At B and C**, indicators of achievement is explanation that leads to exploration.
- o **At A and A***, examiners are looking for perceptive, sustained and sophisticated analysis; a real ownership and control of the analysis.

Section A: Ways to Revise

- o **Read a range of newspapers at home:** identify PAT, (**P**urpose, **A**udience, **T**one) highlight the techniques, facts, opinions, layout and presentation used etc. www.bbc.co.uk/news
- o Look at the **number of marks** and plan out response

- o **Use mnemonics** to remember techniques: AFOREST (alliteration, fact, opinion, rhetorical question, emotive language, statistic, triplet/rule of three etc.)
- o **Practise** writing paragraphs on authors' use of language; presentational devices; fact and opinion...
- o **Past papers** (available in school and from AQA website)

Reading Skills

Demonstrate reading skills

We become better readers simply by reading more... both fiction (teachers and school library are happy to recommend) and non-fiction (e.g. newspapers, magazines, leaflets, cornflake packets)

- o **Struggling** readers find it difficult to decode texts.
- o **Competent** readers understand texts they can identify the "**what**" of reading).
- o **High-level** readers can respond to implied meanings and hints; distinguish between fact and opinion; follow and comment upon an argument; and comment on writers' style and use of language (this is the "**how**" of reading)

Section B: Writing

Two compulsory tasks:

- 1) Writing to describe
- 2) Writing to argue or persuade

Students are assessed on:

- o Writing ability: spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- o Ability to write to suit purpose and audience
- o Paragraphing
- o Range of vocabulary

Q 5) Writing to describe

Students are being assessed on: effective use of paragraphs, use of interesting and appropriate vocabulary, matching style and tone to the reader (specified in the question), accuracy of spelling and punctuation.

Ways to revise:

- o write a description of a variety of people, places and things using all 5 senses
- o use a thesaurus to develop vocabulary
- o practise spellings: look, cover, write, check
- o practise writing for different forms: newspaper articles, letters, speeches
- o look at past answers from lesson and redraft and improve them
- o

Q5) Writing to argue or persuade

- o Students are being assessed on: effective use of paragraphs, use of interesting and appropriate vocabulary, matching style and tone to the reader (specified in the question), accuracy of spelling and punctuation.

Ways to revise:

- o memorise a list of connective words and phrases
- o Practise spellings: look, cover, write, check
- o Use AFOREST techniques in exam answers – when revising, ask someone for an issue or opinion then invent an argument which includes these techniques.
- o Look at past answers from lessons and redraft and improve them.

A/A* Grade - Sentencing

- o Variety of sentence types
- o Variety of sentence structures
- o Variety of sentence lengths
- o Confident punctuation to assist the reader's understanding

A/A* Grade – Word Level

- o Lively, often unexpected, but not over-elaborate
- o Well-chosen verbs, rather than heavy use of adverbs
- o Confident use of abstract nouns, when appropriate
- o Not excessive use of modification
- o Correctly spelt

Writing: So what is A*?

- 1) A* writers are fluent, assured, confident and often quirky. They take risks in their writing.
- 2) Most importantly, A* writers use a variety of simple and complex sentences. Sentence variety is the key. They may start a paragraph with a short, simple sentence. They may use some sentences which coordinate ideas with “and”, “but” or “or”. They will also use complex sentences. But the key is variety – no single style dominates.
- 3) A* writers use vocabulary which is descriptive (but not too flowery), precise, visual and occasionally unexpected. They use simple, familiar words as well as more complex ones. Their writing helps us to see what they are describing or to understand the ideas they are explaining

8 Ways of Adding Pzazz to Your Writing For an A* at GCSE

- 1) Start with descriptive detail
- 2) Use eye-catching similes/metaphors
- 3) Use vivid but not over-the-top vocabulary
- 4) Play around with point-of-view
- 5) Use sentence variety (short & long)
- 6) Start some sentences with a phrase

- 7) Use a mix of statements, questions, dialogue, statistics, quotations
- 8) Show that you understand how punctuation works

Section B: Key Tips

- o Always plan your response (by paragraphs to ensure you use them)
- o Spend less time on the first writing task than on the second
- o Always proof read your work: check for spelling, capital letters and punctuation.
- o Who is your target audience? Make sure your writing suits them.
- o Avoid slang and 'ordinary' vocabulary.
- o Practise writing timed responses so that you can work under pressure.

English Language: A/A* Writing Checklist

Text-level

- o Confident appropriate tone
- o Formal and informal styles, as appropriate
- o Understanding of genre (eg newspapers, ghost stories)
- o Clearly organised – eg layout, and sophisticated discourse markers (eg however, although, despite this)

Sentence-level

- o Variety of sentence types
- o Short sentences used more than in C and F work
- o Confident punctuation to assist the reader's understanding – esp parenthetical commas, colons, semi-colons. No use of the comma splice

Word-level

- o Lively, often unexpected, but not over-elaborate
- o Well-chosen verbs, rather than heavy use of adverbs
- o Confident use of abstract nouns, when appropriate
- o Not excessive use of modification
- o Correctly spelt

To summarise: A/A* students need to:

- o consider alternative interpretations in language analysis
- o evaluate the writer's techniques
- o use technical vocabulary to describe language
- o independently analyse texts and be original in their interpretations
- o use sophisticated vocabulary
- o experiment with language for effect
- o be original and varied in their writing

