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English Department

English Literature A Level Programme Handbook 2025

Contents

Welcome to A Level English Literature!

The study of language and literature is the **study of the human condition**: how we behave, think, feel, how we respond to political and social changes. As such, in English we can expect to come across **issues and themes which are complex, challenging, troubling and exciting**, and which speak to society and culture today as much as they did in a text's original context. In exploring these texts, we have an **opportunity** to **interrogate** the issues which affect us in society at large, and in English lessons we agree to **sit in the discomfort**, **pull apart these topics**, **search for ways of understanding** and ways to **engage with the world**, and **develop the language to speak about what affects us**. We know that these debates **resist easy answers** and that everyone gets things wrong sometimes, so English lessons are a **mutually respectful open space** to **explore**, **develop** new ways of looking at our society and culture, and finally to **create** and **enjoy** those texts which inspire us.

An excellent A Level English Literature student will:

- Read with maturity, open-mindedness, sensitivity, and curiosity
- Be interested in language and the way it works
- Always have an opinion on what they read
- Be evaluative and exploratory in approach
- Be keen to hone their essay-writing skills
- Be independent in their note-taking and record-keeping
- Be willing to spend time on wider and independent reading
- Make the most of co-curricular opportunities such as It's Critical

Your teachers will give you:

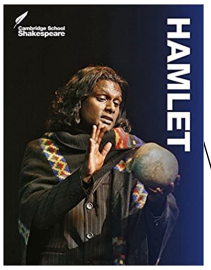
- Subject knowledge of the highest quality
- Detailed feedback and clear explanation of the mark schemes
- Co-curricular support and opportunities
- 1:1 consultation and support with essays when asked
- Variety of teaching and learning activities and styles, adapting lessons to help you make the most of your course
- Revision guidance and support

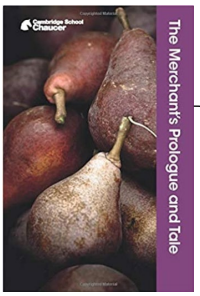
Practical tips for success are:

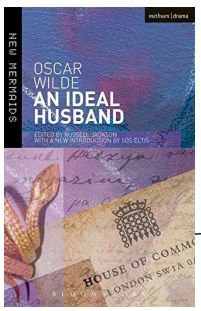
- Being diligent in meeting deadlines and catching up on work
- Using books, the Library and E-Library as well as online resources
- Contributing significantly to in-class discussion – be a driver, not a passenger!
- Consolidating your notes after the lesson
- Seeing essays as 'banking' knowledge and skills for examinations rather than one-off tasks to be completed
- Carefully acting on essay feedback in each new task
- Developing deep knowledge of texts
- Keeping a running record of your wider reading and research

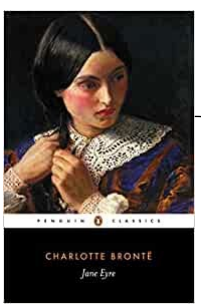
Two Year A Level Planner 2025-6

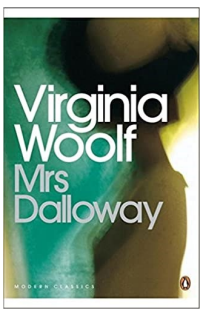
	Autumn 1		*Autumn 2*		*Spring 1*		*Spring 2*		*Summer 1*		*Summer 2*
YEAR 12											
Formal Assessments			November Assessment (Women in Literature and Hamlet part a)				February Assessment (Hamlet and WiL)		Streetcar Cwk draft 1 due in by end of Summer term. Yr 12 Exams in this half term		Final Streetcar Coursework handed in at start of Autumn Term
TEACHER 1	**Hamlet**	Oct half term	**Hamlet**	Xmas Hols	**Hamlet**	Feb half term	**Introduce A Streetcar Named Desire** Revision for internal Exams: Hamlet extract and essay question only: 1 hour 15 minute exam	Easter	**A Streetcar Named Desire** Coursework Text for Task 1	May half term	**A Streetcar Named Desire**
TEACHER 2	**Jane Eyre** Comparative and contextual novel Text 1 Introduce unseen extract question		**Jane Eyre** Practice/prep for qu.1 Critical appreciation passage		**Jane Eyre/Mrs Dalloway** Comparative and contextual novel Text 2 Unseen extract practice		**Mrs Dalloway** Unseen extract practice Revision for internal exams: WiL extract and discursive essay		**Mrs Dalloway**		**Mrs Dalloway** **Introduce Desai** Comparative Coursework
YEAR 13											
Formal Assessments			November Assessment – both sides of course		Year 13 Mock						
TEACHER 1	**An Ideal Husband** Drama Text (At least up to end of Act 2)		**The Merchant's Tale**		**Finish Merchant's Tale/An Ideal Husband**		**Revision lessons**		Study leave begins roughly third week back		FINAL EXAMS
TEACHER 2	Comparative Coursework **Desai & Nagra**		**Comparative and contextual novel Text 3:** **Nagra & Desai** (first draft due in before Christmas) **Jane Eyre/Mrs Dalloway revision**		**Oranges are Not the Only Fruit & comparative essays across all three texts**		**Revision lessons**		Study leave begins roughly third week back		FINAL EXAMS











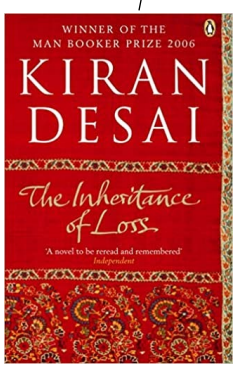
2 The specification overview

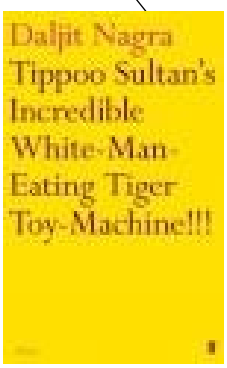
2a. Overview of A Level in English Literature (H472)

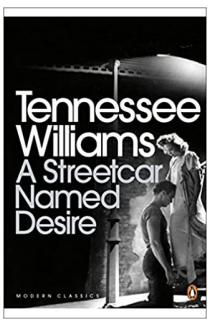
Learners must complete all components (01, 02 and 03) to be awarded the A Level in English Literature.

Content Overview	Assessment Overview	
Component 01 • Shakespeare • Drama and poetry pre-1900	Drama and poetry pre-1900 (01)* Written paper 60 marks Closed text 2 hours 30 minutes	**40%** of total A level
Component 02 • Close reading in chosen topic area • Comparative and contextual study from chosen topic area	Comparative and contextual study (02)* Written paper 60 marks Closed text 2 hours 30 minutes	**40%** of total A level
Component 03 • Close reading • Comparative essay*	Literature post-1900 (03)* 40 marks Non-exam assessment	**20%** of total A level

* Indicates synoptic assessment.







N.B. The cover images are linked to the Amazon page for the correct edition

Work Load and Assessment for A Level Literature

Work Commitment in Years 12/13

You are timetabled to have 13 periods per fortnight:

- 7 x Hamlet (Paper 1)
- 6 x Women in Lit (Paper 2)

In addition you are expected to do 5 hours of homework per week for English.

Your two teachers will liaise to ensure workable spread of tasks and deadlines. However, you can expect to hand in a written piece of work weekly.

Homework tasks you may be asked to do:

- Essays
- Critical responses to unprepared prose or drama extracts
- Completion of worksheets
- Preparing for next lesson by reading an making notes on a text (extract) to be discussed
- Preparing to do presentation in class (this may be formally assessed)
- Reading ahead in the text: annotating; note-making
- Reading literary criticism and evaluating arguments
- Selecting critical reading and opinions from your background reading read to present in class
- Creative writing designed to develop textual/contextual understanding
- Collaborative task
- Listening to podcasts/watching film versions
- Researching context

Marking of work

Essays will be marked using the relevant OCR assessment objectives and mark scheme. You will also be given written feedback so you know how to improve your work for next time.

Formal presentations will be marked against OCR's assessment objectives, as well as for the quality of the delivery.

	Assessment Objective
AO1	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.
AO2	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.
AO3	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
AO4	Explore connections across literary texts.
AO5	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

Course Set Texts

Please purchase your own copies of the Year 12 set texts

A Streetcar Named Desire – Tennessee Williams

Methuen: ISBN 1408106043 or Penguin: ISBN 0141190272

Hamlet – William Shakespeare

Cambridge School Shakespeare: ISBN 1107615488

Jane Eyre – Charlotte Bronte

Penguin: ISBN 0141441143

Mrs Dalloway – Virginia Woolf

Penguin: ISBN-13 978-0141182490

The Inheritance of Loss – Kiran Desai

Penguin: ISBN 978-0141027289

Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White-Man-Eating Tiger Toy-Machine – Daljit Nagra

Faber: ISBN 978-0571264919

We highly recommend Connell Study Guides which can be found for a range of our set texts: https://www.connellguides.com/

Where can I find my wider reading?

There is an absolute wealth of resources, both online and in physical form. Make sure you visit the Library to make the most of what we have in school. If there is something you would like but we don't have, ask! Chances are we can get a copy for the school Library.

The beautiful Library at Trinity College, Dublin

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- York Notes Advanced – these are more straightforward but are useful for revision and key contextual information.
- Cambridge Companions https://www.cambridge.org/core/what-we-publish/collections/cambridge-companions - these are extremely good quality guides, and there is one for most of the topics you will be studying. They are also available through the E-Library
- English Review – hard copies available in the Library
- Emag – this is also available digitally through the E-Library

Online resources – follow the QR code or visit https://whs.fireflycloud.net/library/e-library for login details

- JSTOR www.jstor.org is an archive of peer-reviewed journal articles
- Victorian Web www.victorianweb.org – this is an amazing website, with a huge range of articles about Victorian novels. This will be particularly useful for your Women in Literature course.
- The British Library https://www.bl.uk/learning/online-resources - a range of articles published by some of the most renowned literary scholars are available here free of cost, on a range of topics. Immensely useful!
- Shakespeare Online http://www.shakespeare-online.com/ - this website has not only all the plays in full, but also a number of articles on a range of topics.
- Internet Shakespeare Editions https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/m/index.html - high quality resources on Shakespeare's life and times and the plays in performance.
- Oxplore https://oxplore.org/ – an Oxford University platform for A Level students to pose and answer 'big questions'
- Emag https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine – the English and Media Centre's excellent magazine especially designed and written for, and often by (!) A Level English students.

Summer Preparation 1: Women in Literature

Task 1: *Jane Eyre*

- Read *Jane Eyre* by the start of the autumn term.
- Make notes / spider diagrams / mind-maps consisting of quotations and notes about the main characters (Jane Eyre, Mr Rochester, Helen Burns, Bertha Mason and St John Rivers) and brief bullet point notes on the minor characters (Aunt Reed, John Reed, Georgiana and Eliza, Mr Brocklehurst, Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax, Grace Poole, Blanche Ingram, the Rivers sisters, Rosamund Oliver).

Be prepared to show your teacher your notes and discuss your first impressions of the novel in the first lessons of the course.

Task 2: Wider reading

Half of your exam for Women in Literature involves analysing an extract from a novel, and linking it contextually to a range of other literary texts you have read independently as part of the course.

So, during the summer, you should:

1. Choose a minimum of one novel from the Women in Literature Wider Reading. recommended texts to read before September (see below).
2. Read and make notes on this text, in your wider reading journal (see end of booklet for log).
3. Bookmark or make a note of any passages you think would be particularly interesting to analyse as extracts (up to about 2 pages long).
4. Write a 300-400 word summary (avoiding 'spoilers') and recommendation about the text to share with your A Level class, detailing:
    - Key characters, events, ideas and issues explored in the novel, which relate to the topic of Women in Literature.
    - What you found interesting about the writer's techniques.
    - What you enjoyed about the novel.
    - Why other students should read it as part of their study of Women in Literature.

Recommended Women in Literature wider reading

***Emma* – Jane Austen (1815)**

Beautiful, clever, rich – and single – Emma Woodhouse is perfectly content with her life and sees no need for either love or marriage. Nothing, however, delights her more than interfering in the romantic lives of others. But when she ignores the warnings of her good friend Mr Knightley and attempts to arrange a suitable march for her protegee Harriet Smith, her carefully laid plans soon unravel and have consequences that she never expected.

***Wuthering Heights* – Emily Bronte (1847)**

Heathcliff, an orphan, is raised by Mr Earnshaw as one of his own children. Hindley despises him but wild Cathy becomes his constant companion, and he falls deeply in love with her. But when she will not marry him, Heathcliff's terrible vengeance ruins them all. Yet still his and Cathy's love will not die.

***The Bell Jar* – Sylvia Plath (1963)**

When Esther Greenwood wins an internship on a New York fashion magazine in 1953, she is elated, believing she will finally realise her dream to become a writer. But in between the cocktail parties and piles of manuscripts, Esther's life begins to slide out of control. She finds herself spiralling into serious depression as she grapples with difficult relationships and a society which refuses to take her aspirations seriously.

***Wide Sargasso Sea* – Jean Rhys (1966)**

Born into the oppressive, colonialist society of 1930s Jamaica, white Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway meets a young Englishman who is drawn to her innocent beauty and sensuality. After their marriage, however, disturbing rumours begin to circulate which poison her husband against her. A response to *Jane Eyre*, this classic study of betrayal, a seminal work of postcolonial literature, is Jean Rhys's brief, beautiful masterpiece.

***The Women's Room* – Marilyn French (1977)**

A landmark in feminist literature, *The Women's Room* is a biting social commentary of a world gone silently haywire. Written in the 1970s but with profound resonance today, this is a modern allegory that offers piercing insight into the social norms accepted blindly and revered so completely. It follows the transformation of Mira Ward and her circle as the women's movement begins to have an impact on their lives.

***The Color Purple* – Alice Walker (1982)**

Set in the deep American South between the wars, *The Color Purple* is the classic tale of Celie, a young black girl born into poverty and segregation. Raped repeatedly by the man she calls 'father', she has two children taken away from, is separated from her beloved sister Nettie and is trapped into an ugly marriage. But then she meets the glamorous Shug Avery, singer and magic-maker – woman who has taken charge of her own destiny…

***The Handmaid's Tale* – Margaret Atwood (1985)**

Offred lives in The Republic of Gilead. To some, it is a utopian vision of the future, a place of safety, a place where everyone has a purpose, a function. But The Republic of Gilead offers Offred only one function: to breed. If she deviates, she will, like dissenters, be hanged at the wall or sent out to die slowly of radiation sickness. But even a repressive state cannot obliterate desire – neither Offred's nor that of the two men on which her future hangs.

Summer Preparation 2: Hamlet

TASK ONE: Read and watch *Hamlet* in full. We recommend the RSC adaptation starring David Tennant from 2009, which is available on Planet Estream or in the Library on DVD. **Read actively**, finding key quotations as you read and making notes about the director's choices as you watch the film. If you would like support getting to grips with the play's themes, we recommend Connell Guides.

TASK TWO: Writing task, to hand in to your teacher in the first lesson.

In this extract from Act 1 Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, the soldiers on watch are changing guard ready for the next shift, and discuss a ghostly vision that they have seen. The old king, Old Hamlet, has recently died, and the country is just getting used to the rule of the new king, Claudius.

Write a short analytical piece (max 1000 words) in response to this question:

How does Shakespeare use this scene to introduce an atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia in 'Hamlet'?

You might like to think about:

- The way the soldiers introduce themselves to each other and declare their loyalties
- The different attitudes towards the ghost – scepticism versus superstition
- The language, form and structure e.g. dialogue, proxemics, potential staging
- Other parts of the play that you can make connections with

ACT I SCENE I *Elsinore. A platform before the castle.*

[FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO]

BERNARDO Who's there?
FRANCISCO Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.
BERNARDO Long live the king!
FRANCISCO Bernardo?
BERNARDO He.
FRANCISCO You come most carefully upon your hour.
BERNARDO 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.
FRANCISCO For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.
BERNARDO Have you had quiet guard?
FRANCISCO Not a mouse stirring.
BERNARDO Well, good night.
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
FRANCISCO I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

[Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS]

HORATIO Friends to this ground.
MARCELLUS And liegemen to the Dane.
FRANCISCO Give you good night.
MARCELLUS O, farewell, honest soldier:
Who hath relieved you?
FRANCISCO Bernardo has my place.
Give you good night.
[Exit]
MARCELLUS Holla! Bernardo!
BERNARDO Say,
What, is Horatio there?
HORATIO A piece of him.
BERNARDO Welcome, Horatio: welcome, good Marcellus.
MARCELLUS What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?
BERNARDO I have seen nothing.
MARCELLUS Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us:
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night;
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.
HORATIO Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.
BERNARDO Sit down awhile;
And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story
What we have two nights seen.
HORATIO Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.
BERNARDO Last night of all,
When yond same star that's westward from the pole
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one,-- *[Enter Ghost]*
MARCELLUS Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!
BERNARDO In the same figure, like the king that's dead.
MARCELLUS Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.
BERNARDO Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.
HORATIO Most like: it harrows me with fear and wonder.
BERNARDO It would be spoke to.
MARCELLUS Question it, Horatio.
HORATIO What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!
MARCELLUS It is offended.
BERNARDO See, it stalks away!
HORATIO Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!
[Exit Ghost]

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- English Review – hard copies available in the Library
- Emag – this is also available digitally through the E-Library

Online resources – follow the QR code or visit https://whs.fireflycloud.net/library/e-library **for login details**

- JSTOR www.jstor.org is an archive of peer-reviewed journal articles
- Victorian Web www.victorianweb.org – this is an amazing website, with a huge range of articles about Victorian novels. This will be particularly useful for your Women in Literature course.
- The British Library https://www.bl.uk/learning/online-resources - a range of articles published by some of the most renowned literary scholars are available here free of cost, on a range of topics. Immensely useful!
- Shakespeare Online http://www.shakespeare-online.com/ - this website has not only all the plays in full, but also a number of articles on a range of topics.
- Internet Shakespeare Editions https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/m/index.html - high quality resources on Shakespeare's life and times and the plays in performance.
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- Emag https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine – the English and Media Centre's excellent magazine especially designed and written for, and often by (!) A Level English students.

Historical Context is the most important Assessment Objective for the Women in Lit side of the course. Get a head start with context for *Jane Eyre* by reading and making notes on the below:

CONTEXT for *Jane Eyre*: Historical, political and social overview

The nineteenth century was a time of great change:

There were intense debates about religious issues, not least the question of who should hold authority in matters of religion.

It was also a time of social reorganisation and the transfer of power as a new wealthy middle class, created by the Industrial Revolution, emerged to challenge the dominance of the traditional landowners.

It was a time of heated controversy over ideas of democracy and political rights, fuelled by such significant events in the world as American Independence with its Declaration of Human Rights, and the French Revolution with its ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

There was growing unrest among the working classes, who demanded relief from the appalling conditions in which they had to live and work, and this gradually became a matter of concern among higher classes.

The government, fearing that revolution would break out in Britain as well as abroad, responded with repressive legislation rather than trying to improve matters. Several times the government suspended Habeas Corpus, which is the right not to be imprisoned without trial. There was a determination to protect and defend the landed interest, which was the basis of the government's political power. Common land on which people used to have the right to graze their animals was enclosed. Corn Laws were introduced to keep the price of grain high for landowners and to prevent the import of cheap grain from abroad, which kept the price of bread high. Game Laws were passed, meaning that anyone catching a rabbit, for example, to feed a starving family, could be transported for seven years. The government brought in the military to suppress civil rights demonstrations. The most widely known example of this is popularly called the Peterloo Massacre, in which it is estimated that 18 people were killed and 500 wounded when the yeomanry used sabres to break up a meeting on St Peter's Fields near Manchester.

Nevertheless, pressure for reform grew and the first Reform Act was passed in 1832. This effected some minor improvements, but ordinary working men were still without a vote. The demand for universal male suffrage and a secret ballot acted as a rallying standard for working class agitation throughout the country. Marches, rallies, speeches and petitions were organised in support of it. Eventually, in 1884, the Third Reform Act was passed, giving the vote to male householders and lodgers who had been resident for 12 months.
This still left a third of all men (including soldiers in barracks, policemen and domestic servants) without the vote. It was not until 1918 that Britain achieved universal male suffrage, and women were not given the vote until 1928.The nineteenth century was not a

time of change for women, although there was much debate on the Woman Question. The role of women in society had been questioned in the eighteenth century by, among others,

Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued that women were not naturally submissive but taught to be so, confined to 'snarling under the lash at which [they] dare not snarl' (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*). Whereas, thanks to industrialisation and the growth of the servant class, more working-class women than ever before worked outside the home, middle-class women in the nineteenth century were allowed no economically productive careers. They were not permitted to go to university, to enter the learned professions or to engage in business. They were permitted to teach, but teachers and governesses were poorly paid and looked down upon by society.

Industrial Revolution

In the early eighteenth century, the British textile industry was based largely on wool, which was spun and woven by outworkers in their own homes. Spinning wheels and handlooms can produce only a limited amount, and the quality is not always consistent, so new technology was invented to improve efficiency. As large, powered machines were developed that led to a dramatic increase in production, it was more efficient to house them in mills, and so, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the whole textile industry was revolutionised.

The increased demand for wool led landowners to evict their tenants so they could rear sheep. The outworkers found themselves unemployed, and many weavers, calling themselves Luddites after Ned Ludd, the Leicestershire man who had led the first rioters in the destruction of machinery, took out their resentment on the machines. Many people moved to the towns in search of work. There was famine in Ireland, and desperately hungry people flocked to England looking for work and prepared to take very low wages. Thomas Carlyle wrote in his essay, *Chartism*, that because of them wages were brought down to the equivalent of 'thirty weeks of third rate potatoes', which was a man's yearly salary in Ireland. This meant that whole families had to work to earn enough to keep them alive. The poor mill workers had no hope of changing the system through the political process, since only landowners had the right to vote, so a movement arose to bring about change by other, more direct, means. These people drew up a six-point charter and became known as the Chartists. Gradually the industry became regulated. In 1833 and 1844, for instance, the first laws concerning child labour were passed. The 'improvements' were that no child under the age of nine years was permitted to work in factories, children were no longer allowed to work at night, nor were they allowed to work longer than 12 hours a day.

Haworth

The Brontës' home, Haworth, was a comparatively small town in the middle of the West Riding woollen industry, but it was an important one because it lay on one of the main routes between Yorkshire and Lancashire. Raw wool would be transported through Haworth to Bradford to be treated and then taken to Halifax or Huddersfield to be made into cloth. Haworth is situated in the hills above Keighley and Bradford, with an ample supply of water, so it was an ideal place to site factories. When the Brontës moved to Haworth in 1820, it already had 13 small textile mills, as well as a large number of handloom weavers working in their own homes and a substantial cottage industry of wool combing.

With the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the industrial movement from the rural districts to the town, the population was rising sharply, bringing unemployment, misery and revolt.

Living conditions were primitive. The workers and their families lived in small houses in cramped streets. We know from the Babbage Report that, even in 1850, there was no sanitation at all, no sewers and few covered drains. The liquid waste, including that from privies, ran along open channels and gutters down the streets, and solid waste, including the refuse from privies, was thrown into walled enclosures in the backyards, known as middensteads. These were emptied by farmers and used to manure their fields, but sometimes the middensteads would overflow, creating an even worse health hazard. There were no water closets in Haworth and only 69 privies, one of which was at the rectory. With most households sharing a privy with up to 23 other families, it is not surprising that the mortality rates were among the highest in the country. There was no running water in Haworth, so people had to fetch it from one of the few pumps, and in summer the pumps ran so slowly that people had to start queuing in the middle of the night to get water for the morning. The rectory was lucky enough to have its own pump in the kitchen, and in his diary for September 1847 Patrick Brontë notes: 'Had the well cleaned out. It had not been cleaned for 20 years. The water was tinged yellow by eight tin cans in a state of decomposition.' If this was the state of a private well, it is horrifying to imagine the state of public ones. As a result of these insanitary conditions, four out of ten children died before reaching their sixth birthday, and the average age at death was 25. Whenever the wool trade was struggling, conditions grew even worse for the poor.

In May 1830, for example, when Charlotte was 14, about two-thirds of the workers of Haworth were unemployed and the rest on short weeks. Patrick Brontë's strenuous efforts to raise public subscription for the relief of the poor always failed because it was felt that relief should be given from public rates and not private charity.

On 14 August 1842, about 10,000 people gathered at a Chartists' rally on Lees Moor, within sight and sound of Haworth. The military was called out to disperse the meeting, arresting and even shooting some of the demonstrators. A couple of weeks later, desperate mill workers sabotaged machinery by removing the plugs that powered the looms, which led to the formation of the Anti-Plug Dragoon Regiment. In Chapter XXXI of *Jane Eyre,* Charlotte Brontë mentions the demonstrations when Rosamond Oliver tells St John that she has been dancing with the officers of the —th regiment, brought in to suppress the riots.

Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was surrounded by misery and she could not have stepped out of her front door without seeing the suffering of the poor. Windows in the rectory looked out onto the graveyard, where she would see the frequent burials. She may even have heard the Haworth Chartist, Abraham Lighton, address the crowds, or seen the military brought in to keep the riots under control. After demonstrations in 1848, she wrote in a letter that the Government should 'examine carefully into their causes of complaint and make such concessions as justice and humanity dictate'. Nevertheless, she was not a revolutionary. In the same year she wrote to her former headmistress: 'convulsive revolutions put back the world in all that is good, check civilisation, bring the dregs of society to the surface…That

England may be spared the spasms, cramps, and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent and threatening Ireland, I earnestly pray!'

Class consciousness

However, the social effects of the Industrial Revolution were not all negative. For the energetic and enterprising few it offered opportunities for wealth that lifted former working-class men up to a new middle class. From here they could socialise with and marry into the old-established landed gentry and aristocracy.

Charlotte Brontë illustrates this through Mr Oliver, whose father had been a journeyman needlemaker but who was now able to boast that his daughter, Rosamond, had married the grandson and heir to the aristocrat, Sir Frederick Granby. The tension created by these two sets of values is central to *Jane Eyre*. On the one hand there are rationality, rebellion and individualism; on the other hand are tradition, conservatism and piety. Class consciousness pervades every part of the story. Jane's mother was from landed gentry, but she married beneath her, a poor clergyman, so Jane struggles against her poverty to maintain the status she believes is her right. Mr Rochester, 'an avowed republican', is a member of the landed gentry, and he now scorns a marriage for social reasons. Jane rightly imagines his 'haughty disavowal of any necessity on [his] part to augment [his] wealth, or elevate [his] standing by marrying either a purse or a coronet' (Chapter XXV).

Charlotte's own position was even more precarious than that of her heroine, as her father came from Irish peasantry. Perhaps this is why she portrays Jane as reluctant to fall back, in social terms. Jane seems snobbish when she confides in her readers that, in her new position as schoolmistress, 'I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence' (Chapter XXXI). She has to remind herself that 'I must not forget that these coarsely clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy'. It is interesting that, ten years after the event, when she supposedly writes her autobiography, Jane is still writing in the present tense: 'Let me not despise myself too much for these feelings. I know them to be wrong — that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them.' The use of the future tense may suggest that the conflict in Jane's mind is one that Charlotte herself had not fully resolved. It seems that, rationally, Charlotte believed in equality, but all her life she had been striving to lift herself out of the social position into which she had been born, and she had not managed to reconcile the conflict between the deeply embedded traditional social mores and the radical views she had acquired.

Governesses

As wealth shifted from the traditional landowners to the owners of industrial and mercantile enterprise, the latter not only began to challenge the privileges and superior social status of the upper class but also to consolidate their position against the threat from the working classes. They used institutions such as the Church and the school to keep those whom they regarded as social inferiors in their place. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr Brocklehurst and Mrs Reed work together to keep the poor orphan downtrodden, and to try to instil humility, obedience and respect. The new industrial middle classes also exploited the offspring of the

impoverished gentry by employing them as tutors or governesses in order to lift their own children up above the class into which their parents had been born.

A governess was in a lonely position because she was superior in class and education to the other servants, and she felt culturally superior to her employer. However, she was treated as a servant, required not only to teach the children and to keep them occupied but also to perform other jobs that her employer might give her. It is Mr Rochester who voices Brontë's opinion of this 'governessing slavery (Chapter XXIV)'. On the one hand, Charlotte was a realist, recognising the need to earn her own living and wanting independence by whatever means she could gain it. On the other hand, she had a creative imagination, which gave her a feeling of superiority over those with less intellect than herself. Charlotte reveals how difficult she herself found it to reconcile the two, as her heroine finds herself torn between reason and feeling, realism and imagination.

The position of women in Victorian society

When the novel was published in 1847, there was a queen on the throne of England, but this made no difference to the legal and economic position of other women. They had little more power or standing than children. No woman could vote and the law ignored them. Legally, a woman belonged to her nearest male relative. When a woman married, any property she had became her husband's and, if she earned any money, that was her husband's also. If she did not marry, after her father's death she became a dependant of her nearest male relative, and, as Bessie tells Jane, to be a dependant was to be 'less than a servant for you do nothing for your keep' (Chapter II). Working-class women could work on farms or in factories, but wages were too low for them to achieve any independence. A middle-class woman was expected to stay at home until she married and then spend the rest of her life looking after her family. If, like Charlotte Brontë and her heroine, a woman did not come from a wealthy family, and circumstances meant that she had to earn her own living, she could either be a governess in a family or a teacher in a school.

Education

There was usually no opportunity for working-class girls to gain any formal education, but Charlotte Brontë shows in Rosamond Oliver's school that this situation was beginning to change. Middle-class girls were usually educated by governesses, while their brothers went to boarding school or had a more highly educated tutor. Girls were taught various social accomplishments to impress prospective suitors and to occupy their time, but their minds were not stretched and they were not expected to take these pursuits seriously. Bessie tells Jane 'of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by [the young ladies] executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate' (Chapter III). When the poet laureate, Robert Southey, discouraged Charlotte from attempting a literary career, as it would take her away from her womanly duties, he was voicing the prejudice of the time. Charlotte's rejection of this view can be seen not only in her own published works, but also in the fact that Jane paints to express her imagination and individuality rather than to create a portfolio to impress an employer. However, when Jane chooses a school for Adèle, she conforms by selecting one that made

her ‘a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled’ (Chapter XXXVIII).

There were a few boarding schools, usually to educate poor children to become governesses, but the education they offered was far below the standard expected at boys’ schools. In 1847, Queen’s College for women was opened, offering the possibility of higher education for a few, but this was connected with the Governess Institution and aimed to train young women to teach. Nevertheless, it did make young women aware of their potential, and it provoked them to question and challenge the restrictions placed on their lives in a male-dominated society.

At the time Charlotte Brontë started to write, some middle-class women were writing novels of what were deemed to be appropriately feminine genres: Gothic romances, society novels and moral tales. The Victorians, however, considered women’s intellects to be weak, and their experience of life narrow, so women’s writing was not valued highly. Brontë blended these genres with the Romantic, satirical and social reformist novels that the men were writing to produce *Jane Eyre*, a novel which was unique, challenging and controversial. To avoid the inevitable condescension and shock, she and her sisters adopted the male sounding pseudonyms Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne) Bell.

Expectations of women’s behaviour

In Chapter XII, there is a strongly worded demand for equality with men that reveals the social expectations of women’s behaviour in the middle of the nineteenth century. A woman was supposed to be passive, quiet and obedient, entirely subject to the authority of her male protector. She would have been expected to address her husband by his full title rather than his Christian name, at least in front of other people. A woman’s intellect was presumed to be inferior to a man’s, and she was not supposed to be ambitious or to aspire to anything more than being a wife and mother. English women were not expected to show any strong emotion such as anger or love, and it was most definitely assumed that they did not feel any sexual desire. Foreign women, however, were considered to be more highly sexed, and it is significant that Mr Rochester’s mistresses were all foreign.

In the Victorian age, women were idealised as the custodians of family values. While men could go out and ‘enjoy’ themselves, women stayed at home, upholding morality and truth, remaining uncontaminated by male desire, providing a calm and virtuous refuge for the men to return to. A poem by Coventry Palmore entitled ‘The Angel in the House’ was immensely popular for its description of this ideal of womanhood: passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious and, above all, pure. Naturally the more moral sex, women were supposed to nurture the nation’s values. However, men feared falling in love because that gave women power over them, and they blamed women for bewitching them. Mr Rochester suspects that Jane may have ‘bewitched’ his horse to make him stumble, and he accuses her of being a ‘malicious elf’, ‘sprite’ and ‘witch’ because of the way she keeps him at bay during their month’s courtship, and because of the insights she has gained into his character. Through Jane, Charlotte

Brontë challenges these nineteenth-century assumptions about women by offering a heroine who asserts her independence, who is at least as intelligent and passionate as Mr Rochester, and who seems to surpass him in intellectual and artistic aspirations.

Religious context

The early chapters of *Jane Eyre* give a clear impression of the intimidating way religion was taught in the nineteenth century. After Jane's passionate outburst, Miss Abbott tells Bessie: 'God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums', and to Jane she says: 'if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away.' Jane has been well indoctrinated; she tells Mr Brocklehurst that hellis 'a pit full of fire' into which the wicked fall and where they burn for ever (Chapter II).

The nineteenth-century Church taught that 'Every soul that has ever lived must appear before the High Court of Heaven to be judged' (Ecclesiastes 12:14, Romans 14:12, Hebrews 9:27). 'Every motive, thought, word and deed will be under close scrutiny in the Day of Judgement' (Matthew 12:36, Revelation 20:12). Although God was deemed to be merciful, in the interest of universal justice He was still expected to punish every unrepentant sinner on the Day of Judgement. For the obedient believer, it was promised that this day would usher in eternal glory , but the unbeliever was warned that it would be a day of anguish and annihilation.

For people living in the first half of the nineteenth century, death was an integral part of life. They never knew where it would strike, nor how quickly, so it was important to them to prepare for the afterlife. The Church exploited this fear in an attempt to make people submissive and uncomplaining. For the majority, life in this world was hard and unrewarding, but the Church promised them their reward after death: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5).

Life and death

Life expectancy was low, especially for the working classes. Overcrowding, poor housing, lack of sanitation, no running water, low wages, poor standards of nutrition, ignorance and lack of effective medical treatment all contributed to the spread of disease. It is estimated that tuberculosis accounted for a quarter of all deaths. Other major killers were typhus, cholera and influenza, which were more or less endemic, but reached epidemic proportions frequently. Other diseases such as measles, whooping cough and diphtheria were also endemic. In Haworth, 'wool-sorter's disease', which we now know as anthrax, was virulent.

As well as disease, bad living conditions and ignorance led to food poisoning, and bad diet led to rickets, which could cause contracted pelvises, making childbirth difficult and even dangerous. Death in childbirth was not uncommon due to puerperal fever spread by the unwashed hands of the doctor or midwife. By the age of ten, 11% of children had lost a father, and 11% had lost a mother by the same age. Among the poor, 30% of children died before they reached their first birthday.

In Haworth, 41.6% of children died before they reached the age of six, and the average life expectancy was only 24 years. Reverend Brontë worked tirelessly to relieve the suffering of the poor, and he repeatedly petitioned the General Board of Health to improve sanitation. Eventually, in 1850 when the overcrowded graveyard was contaminating the already unhealthy water supply, the Board commissioned the Babbage Report and, as a result of this, conditions began to improve.

Reverend Brontë could not raise public subscription for the relief of the poor because the poor were regarded as an underclass whose degradation was largely their own fault. It was frequently asserted that God had made them poor, and that He wished them to remain poor. Society regarded widows, orphans, old people and the chronically sick as 'deserving' and so they could receive help through the degrading system of the Poor House. Anyone else was regarded as 'undeserving' and refused any help. With no unemployment benefit, no sick pay and no pensions, people needed children to support them through illness and old age, so families were large and children were sent out to work from the age of five or six.

This led to another common cause of death or crippling injury in children. Children earned only 10% of an adult wage so mill owners liked to employ them as cheap labour. They were forced to work long hours without breaks, and tiredness and hunger frequently led to accidents with the machinery. The smallest children were employed as 'scavengers' to creep under the machines while they were still in operation, to gather up bits of loose cotton or wool.

'Self-righteousness is not religion'

Established religion was used as a form of social control to keep the poor in their place and prevent them from rebelling against the establishment. At Lowood, the daughters of impoverished gentlemen are taught humility and self-sacrifice, supposedly for the good of their souls. The established Church was firmly committed to supporting the government in preserving the existing class divisions. Significantly, it was the bishops in the House of Lords who were responsible for defeating the first Reform Bill.

When the novel was criticised for being 'an insult to piety', Charlotte Brontë replied in her preface to the second edition: 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns…narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world redeeming creed of Christ.'

Charlotte would have been familiar with these 'narrow human doctrines' throughout her life. Reverend Patrick Brontë was a broad-minded and tolerant man with an optimistic and cheerful view of religion. As a theological student at Cambridge he had come under the influence of the nonconformist evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. This movement was born out of a new sense of urgency and personal commitment to spreading the new doctrines of Christianity, and in its early days it was responsible for the reform of a number of social abuses, such as the abolition of the slave trade. However, the children's aunt, Miss

Branwell, was a strict Calvinist believing in predestination and damnation, and so, even at the family dinner table, there would have been lively discussions on religious matters.

The debates would have included:
_ the challenge to faith posed by new scientific discoveries

_ the problems posed by a more historical approach to biblical criticism

_ whether God's omnipotent power and knowledge meant that he had already, before the Creation, predestined the salvation of individuals, leading to an elect few who are saved, or whether Christ died for all and so everyone is capable of being born again

_ whether God had no direct involvement with the individual destinies of human beings, or whether each individual can make direct contact with God through prayer

The danger of certainty
These religious questions are central to *Jane Eyre*. The rigidities of institutionalised religion are criticised in St John Rivers and satirised in the hypocritical Mr Brocklehurst. St John's sermons convey 'a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinist doctrines — election, predestination, reprobation — were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom' (Chapter XXX). St John represses his natural instinct because he is convinced that he has to choose between religion and earthly love. St John's certainty that he will win 'his incorruptible crown' leads to his early death. A religion that excludes human affections is fit for heroes, but Brontë demonstrates that it is not a creed to live by.

Nevertheless, St John is a man to be admired, but who can take Mr Brocklehurst seriously when, after his pious lecture against vanity and the lusts of the flesh, his wife and daughters enter. With well-targeted humour, Jane notes 'They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress.' Not only are they 'splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs', but their hair is elaborately curled and Mrs Brocklehurst even 'wore a false front of French curls'. As Jane is placed on the stool, 'a spread of shot orange and purple silk pelisses and a cloud of silvery plumage extended and waved below me' (Chapter VII). The word 'satire' comes from the same Latin root as 'saturate', and surely theses three females are saturated in too much extravagant and gaudy dress.

Another devout character who dies prematurely is Helen Burns. Helen teaches Jane a 'creed which no one ever taught me', and which 'extends hope to all' (Chapter VI). She is certain that her suffering on this earth will gain its reward in heaven, and so she teaches forgiveness of one's tormentors and acceptance of one's lot. Jane is influenced by Helen's faith so that she is able to forgive Mrs Reed on her deathbed, even though she knows that this will not change her aunt's feelings for her, but she does not have Helen's absolute faith in heaven, and she cannot accept that life is merely a brief time of suffering before the better life to come.

The prodigal son

Mr Rochester is a good example of the evangelical belief in individual regeneration. He finds faith after passing 'through the valley of the shadow of death' (Chapter XXXVII). His Byronic cynicism gives way to religious acceptance and an acknowledgement of his individual responsibility for his troubles. As soon as he turns back to God, he is rewarded because Jane hears his voice and returns to him.

Jane's own religious position is not so easy to classify. As a child she has a very pragmatic attitude that to avoid going to hell she must keep in good health and not die. A realist, she questions the very idea of heaven: 'Where is that region? Does it exist?' (Chapter IX). At Thornfield, she falls into the trap of idolatry: 'I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol' (Chapter XXIV). As she journeys through life, her faith develops into one based on individual conscience and the guiding influence of nature. For her, the proof of God's existence is in her natural surroundings: 'We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence' (Chapter XXVIII).

Charlotte Brontë manages to combine the **Romanticism** of many of her literary influences (e.g. Wordsworth, Scott and Byron) with a strong religious faith. Jane tells St John, 'I owe to their [Diana's and Mary's] spontaneous, genuine, genial compassion as large a debt as to your evangelical charity' (Chapter XXIX). The central theme of the novel is that Jane has learned the importance of a balance between reason and feeling.

Putting pen to paper - advice on planning an essay

Does the very word 'essay' strike terror into your heart? Do you launch yourself blindly into writing? Or do you struggle to get anything down on paper? Never fear! Eileen Tracy is here with down-to-earth advice.

So you've got an English essay to write and you don't know how to go about it? It really doesn't have to take all week. With a little strategy, you'll find your piece practically writes itself. Honest.

But there is bad news. In order not to have to sweat over your essay-writing, you need to do some planning. Planning involves thinking. And thinking hurts. That's why so many students prefer to skip this vital stage. You might have got away with it at GCSE level but once the complexity of material that you're handling starts to increase, the I'll-just-start-writing-and-see-how-it-goes-style essay usually falls flat on its face. How? Well, it misinterprets the question and wanders off the topic. It forgets crucial main points or it makes them in the wrong order and doesn't ever analyse them. It ignores the text. It answers everything but the question. Paragraphs collapse under irrelevant detail. I could go on, but I'm sure you're now completely convinced.

Understanding the question

So how do you plan, exactly? Step one involves making sure you understand the question and all its parts. That involves being clear about your definitions, as questions in English often contain terms that are subject to debate. For instance, if you're being asked whether Othello is a tyrant, decide what you are going to mean in your essay by 'tyrant' or you risk changing your goalposts half-way through the essay. For instance, in your view, can a tyrant be tyrannised by others and still be called a tyrant?

Your introduction

Offer your interpretation of key terms in your introduction. In addition, you can fill in this often perplexing first paragraph by asking yourself why you're bothering to write this essay in the first place. Why did you pick that particular question? What's interesting or important about it? The answer to that usually makes a rich start. Why consider whether Othello might be a tyrant? One answer might be that it affects our judgment of him: the question asks us to analyse his tyranny and consider whether he could in any way be considered a victim. The answer to that question affects, amongst other issues in the play, the degree and type of sympathy we feel for him and for his entourage.

By the way, you don't have to start with the introduction in your plan. Once you've defined your terms, you can tackle any part of the question and sort out the order later. Otherwise, writing the introduction can torment you since you've no idea yet what main themes your essay will touch upon.

Points and evidence

Often the easiest place to start is with the first point that strikes you. Before you jot down your thoughts on it, I suggest that you divide your page into two columns. Make the left-hand column narrow and call it 'Main points'. The wider right-hand column gives you space to develop your ideas on each point. Call it 'Development' or 'Analysis'. You've guessed it: this vital second column gives you space to analyse, expand, develop, illustrate, back up, quote or give textual evidence, offer examples, and so on. It's by thrashing out that part of your plan that you get the most marks - first, because you give your essay depth, but also because you will find that this thinking process triggers more main points in your mind, making your essay more comprehensive.

As you fill your columns, aim for balance: questions like 'Discuss' or 'How far do you agree that ...' request that you develop both sides of the argument. And sometimes, for instance where you have to compare and contrast two texts, you have a choice between two approaches: block or theme. 'Block' means going through text A point by point, then going through B to show similarities and differences.

'Theme' means picking out one theme at a time to show the differences and similarities between A and B. As a general guideline, 'block' boasts greater simplicity than 'theme' unless the texts have many points in common. For the more ambitious student, however, 'theme' has the most panache.

If all this sounds complicated, here's a simple essay-planning approach. On the most basic level, your aim is to make a point (Othello tyrannises Desdemona) and find something in the text that backs up that idea. Then refer to it or quote it and then for goodness' sake don't stop: analyse it. The examiner will say, thank you, thank you - at last, here's a student who's prepared to scrutinise the sentiment, the language, or whatever else strikes them about this passage they've picked. So when you're filling in your second column, open up your emotions and offer your personal reactions. Your personal response to the text gives your essay a unique touch that will help to catch your marker's imagination.

Conclusions

How to conclude? Answer the question and consider the implications of your answer. If Othello is indeed a tyrant, then perhaps that softens our view of Iago's behaviour. You might decide that the question has no clear answer - after all, perhaps you have shown in the bulk of your essay that Othello is both tyrant and tyrannised. That's good, because it shows you can hold two apparently contradictory ideas in mind and offer more than one interpretation of your text. Your conclusion can also consider the themes from a wider perspective. If you've read Shakespeare's other tragedies, for instance, you might want to qualify, with reference to a character like Macbeth, what kind of tyranny Othello exercises that defines him as a character. Then again, state why that changes your judgment of him. Perhaps Othello seems a greater victim of circumstance than Macbeth. Again, describe how that affects your reaction to Othello, or indeed your reaction to the play as a whole. Perhaps it gives you an insight into one or two of Shakespeare's aims in fashioning this particular tragedy.

And finally ...

Bear in mind that the examiner has a mark scheme with clear and stated priorities, a.k.a. the famous 'Assessment Objectives'. Memorise them if you like, because you'll have to check your plan over to ensure they're all covered in sufficient depth. I know, it's a rather tedious way to go about writing an essay but you do need to look at your work from the marker's point of view.

If you're wondering how you're going to manage to put so much information into your plans without running out of time, rest assured you just need to practice key-wording your ideas. Planning also saves essay-writing time because it eliminates hesitations. Your essays will also make more sense - so though they might possibly be shorter, they should score more points. You can allow up to one part planning to three parts writing: over one hour, spend about 10 minutes planning a 45-minute essay, which leaves you five minutes checking time.

My last word on essay planning is a French one. 'Essayer' means 'to try'. Accept that essays, with their linear, unwieldy format, don't always offer the perfect medium for communication. One day, I'm sure it will be possible to beam the contents of your brain to your examiner or teacher. But until that lucky (or frightening) day, you're stuck with a task that may dissatisfy you more often than not. If your thought processes are well developed and well connected, you'll realise that writing an essay involves just trying to do a good job. It will never, ever be perfect. But at least it will have been well planned.

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The art of effective essay writing

Malcolm Hebron suggests simplicity, clarity and saying what you mean are at the heart of good writing.

Whatever English course you are doing, it is likely that all examiners will ever see of you is a few pieces of writing. They will not hear your brilliant conversation, or have access to the fine thoughts you had, that somehow never found their way onto the page. Clearly, your writing is what you will be judged on, and two candidates saying similar things may get different grades, because one expresses the points better than the other. We take up so much time with set texts that we do not think about writing it as much as we should. This article is an attempt to pause, and think, about the craft of the essay.

From skill to art

What sort of thing is essay writing? It is often described as a skill, and to a large extent this is true. The skills of mechanical accuracy (grammar, spelling and punctuation) and logic (the ordering of sentences and paragraphs) are vital. Yet one can possess these verbal skills, and both write in a way that is leaden and unattractive and find writing a chore. Let us, then, think of writing not just as a skill but as an art, and a good essay as something that, in addition to knowledge and technical mastery, has an extra ingredient: style.

Style

What is style? Style is notoriously difficult to define, but easy to recognise. You can quickly pick up the style of a fashion designer, or cricketer: that dress is obviously by X, you might say. Only Y could have played that shot! What we are noticing is not just technical ability, thrillingly impressive though that might be. Style seems to go beyond that and have something to do with attitude. The way a singer delivers a song can convey a whole approach to the world - languid yet sensitive, perhaps, or courageous and attacking. The personality of top tennis players is there in their strokes and their approach to a game, making a match an absorbing human drama. A really good writer can do the same: Jane Austen's voice doesn't just tell us a story. It invites us into a whole way of looking at life and her prose has a set of features that are recognisably hers.

The principle of minimum waste

This talk of attitudes to life may sound far away from the grind of essay writing. But it needn't be. An exam essay on Austen can convey a style of thinking, a way of seeing things. And the appropriate style for this kind of writing is one which shows we can perceive things clearly, at a reflective distance: we demonstrate that we can consider a text in a calm, measured way, noticing both its particular and general aspects. The attitude we are conveying involves taking things in a cool and steady manner, always staying in control. At a certain level, this becomes a style of grace and elegance. The essential elements are precision, clarity, and economy. We follow the principle of minimum waste. Just as great sports performers or composers (for example) only produce moves or notes which are absolutely necessary, so we will focus our writing with the aim of only using words which are strictly necessary for the job in hand. Nothing should be wasted.

The art of simplicity

This clear, minimalist style is difficult to achieve. In writing we often want to impress our reader and make the mistake of thinking that it is impressive to use long words, phrases and sentences where short ones would do. Sometimes this is an attempt to fool the reader, and ourselves, into thinking we have more to say than we really do.

An important stage in learning to write well is recognising that what really impresses is properly thought-through ideas and arguments expressed simply and clearly. Ask yourself, 'What do I want to

say?' Then answer it - simply. For example in an essay on the opening of King Lear we might want to say Cordelia's reply angers the King. Then that is what we should write. There is no point dressing it up as:

> *The response which Cordelia produces in her speech to her father has the effect of making King Lear become very irritated.*

Bold, clear and economical writing impresses far more than verbal padding.

Here are some practical suggestions for thinking in a clear style, and expressing that thought in lucid and economical prose.

1. Choose the right subject

Sentences should start with a coherent subject which indicates what the sentence is dealing with. Consider the following:

> *One of the aspects of Wordsworth's poetry which we see at once in these lines is his love of nature.*

The subject here is long and vague, because we are 'dressing up' something to make it bigger. Better would be:

> *Wordsworth's love of nature is immediately apparent in these lines.*

Now the subject is more focused, more coherent.

In the following example, uncertainty over what the subject should be has led to an awkward construction.

> *An erotic atmosphere is built up by the poet by means of imagery of sensual pleasure.*

We are really talking about the imagery, so we should make that the subject:

> *Images of sensual pleasure create an erotic atmosphere.*

2. Find the right verb

There is a tendency to avoid active verbs and use the verb 'to be' too often. This is characteristic of writing which wants to sound formal and important, like this:

> *The decision of the committee is that the park should close.*

Here the real action - the decision - has been drained of life and turned into a noun. If we make it the verb we get something that is lively rather than rigid:

> *The committee has decided that the park should close.*

The verb is the engine of a sentence, and proper use of active verbs indicates a thought process which is active, not static.

3. End the sentence strongly

A good sentence often reaches towards its main point at the end. Don't start with the main point, and then trail off into a bland second half to pad the sentence out. To end strongly we can often arrange a sentence so the subject does not come first:
In Wordsworth's philosophy, our emotional responses to Nature form our moral character.

4. Open paragraphs with a topic sentence

A topic sentence indicates what the paragraph is going to be about. A clear topic sentence helps us, and the reader, to see where the discussion is going. Once we write it, or read it, we know what idea is about to be developed:

> *Although he is the villain of the play, Edmund has some admirable traits.*

Topic sentences can also work as a chain. From them we can see what the last paragraph was about, and what the next one will be about, rather like signs on a post pointing in opposite directions. This gives a satisfying 'seamless' feel to a piece of writing:

> *Macbeth is not the only character to display his conscience.*

5. End paragraphs strongly

The 'end strongly' principle works for paragraphs as well. Keep a special 'hit' for the end of an essay: a telling quotation, or a strong suggestion, perhaps.

6. Once you have an appropriate subject, stick with it

Explore a point in detail rather than just saying it and moving straight on.

7. Quotations

Quotations can usually be kept short and integrated into the sentence but need following up with analysis and exploration.

Conclusion

These tips will help you begin to develop a style of writing which is clear, strong, persuasive - and a pleasure to read. The main thing is to care about your writing, and to see it as part of yourself, your own style of seeing and living. And look at how others do it: when we read George Orwell and Bertrand Russell we see that it is possible to be economical while having a strong individual voice. Language is commonly used today, very skillfully, to muddle and mislead. Against this background, a bit of honest and exact speech has never been more welcome.

Article Written By: Malcolm Hebron teaches English at Winchester College. He is the author of Mastering the Language of Literature and Key Concepts in Renaissance Literature, both published by Palgrave. This article first appeared in emagazine 44, March 2009.

Women in Literature Mark Scheme – Critical Appreciation

Level 6: 26–30 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Well-developed and consistently detailed discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Excellent and consistently effective use of analytical methods. • Consistently effective use of quotations and references to text, critically addressed, blended into discussion.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Consistently developed and consistently detailed understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Excellent and consistently detailed understanding of text and question; well-structured, coherent and detailed argument consistently developed; consistently fluent and accurate writing in appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used accurately and consistently.

Level 5: 21–25 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Developed and good level of detail in discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Good use of analytical methods. • Good use of quotations and references to text, generally critically addressed.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Good, clear evaluation of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Good and secure understanding of text and question; well-structured argument with clear line of development; good level of coherence and accuracy of writing, in appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used accurately.

Level 4: 16–20 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Generally developed discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Competent use of analytical methods. • Competent use of illustrative quotations and references to support discussion.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Competent understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Competent understanding of text and question; straightforward arguments competently structured; clear writing in generally appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used appropriately.

Level 3: 11–15 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Some attempt to develop discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Some attempt at using analytical methods. • Some use of quotations/references as illustration.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Some understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Some understanding of text and main elements of question; some structured argument evident, lacking development and/or full illustration; some clear writing, some inconsistencies in register; some appropriate use of critical concepts and terminology.

Level 2: 6–10 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Limited discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Description or narrative comment; limited use of analytical methods. • Limited or inconsistent use of quotations, uncritically presented.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Limited understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Limited understanding of text and partial attempt at question; limited attempt to structure discussion; tendency to lose track of argument; inconsistent writing, frequent instances of technical error, limited use of appropriate register; limited use of critical concepts and terminology.

Level 1: 1–5 marks

AO2 (75%)	• Very little or no relevant discussion of effects of language, form and structure. • Only very infrequent phrases of commentary; very little or no use of analytical methods. • Very few quotations (e.g. one or two) used (and likely to be incorrect), or no quotations used.
AO3 (12.5%)	• Very little reference to (and likely to be irrelevant) or no understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written **and** received, as appropriate to the question.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Very little or no connection with text; question disregarded; undeveloped, very fragmentary discussion; persistent serious writing errors inhibit communication of meaning; very little or no use of appropriate register; persistently inaccurate or no use of critical concepts and terminology.

0 marks = No response, or no response worthy of credit.

Women in Literature Comparative Question Mark Scheme

Level 6: 26–30 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Consistently developed and consistently detailed understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question. • Consistently developed and consistently detailed understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Excellent and consistently detailed comparative analysis of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Excellent and consistently detailed understanding of texts and question; well-structured, coherent and detailed argument consistently developed; consistently fluent and accurate writing in appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used accurately and consistently.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Judgement consistently informed by exploration of different interpretations of texts.

Level 5: 21–25 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Good, clear evaluation of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question. • Good, clear evaluation of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Good, clear comparative analysis of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Good and secure understanding of texts and question; well-structured argument with clear line of development; good level of coherence and accuracy of writing, in appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used accurately.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Good level of recognition and exploration of different interpretations of texts.

Level 4: 16–20 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Competent understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question. • Competent understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Competent comparative discussion of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Competent understanding of texts and question; straightforward arguments generally competently structured; clear writing in generally appropriate register; critical concepts and terminology used appropriately.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Answer informed by some reference to different interpretations of texts.

Level 3: 11–15 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Some understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question • Some understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Some attempt to develop comparative discussion of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Some understanding of texts and main elements of question; some structured argument evident, lacking development and/or full illustration; some clear writing, some inconsistencies in register; some appropriate use of critical concepts and terminology.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Some awareness of different interpretations of texts.

Level 2: 6–10 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Limited understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question. • Limited understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Limited attempt to develop comparative discussion of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Limited understanding of text and partial attempt at question; limited attempt to structure discussion; tendency to lose track of argument; inconsistent writing, frequent instances of technical error, limited use of appropriate register; limited use of critical concepts and terminology.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Limited awareness of different interpretations of the text.

Level 1: 1–5 marks

AO3 (50%)	• Very little reference (and likely to be irrelevant) or no understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written, as appropriate to the question. • Very little reference (and likely to be irrelevant) or no understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received, as appropriate to the question.
AO4 (25%)	• Very little or no relevant comparative discussion of relationships between texts.
AO1 (12.5%)	• Very little or no connection with text, question disregarded; undeveloped, very fragmentary discussion; persistent serious writing errors inhibit communication of meaning; very little or no use of appropriate register; persistently inaccurate or no use of critical concepts and terminology.
AO5 (12.5%)	• Very little or no awareness of different interpretations of the text.

0 marks = No response, or no response worthy of credit.

Hamlet Part A Mark Scheme			Hamlet Part B Mark Scheme		
Marks	**AOs**	**Criteria**	**Marks**	**AOs**	**Criteria**
6 *13-15*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Well-developed and consistently detailed discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Excellent and consistently effective use of analytical methods. • Consistently effective use of quotations and references to text, critically addressed, blended into discussion	*6* *13-15*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Excellent and consistently detailed understanding of text and question with consistently well-structured, coherent and detailed argument consistently developed. • Consistently fluent and accurate writing in appropriate register with critical concepts and terminology used accurately.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Excellent and consistently detailed understanding of text and question with critical concepts and terminology used accurately and consistently. • Well-structured, coherent and detailed argument consistently developed with consistently fluent and accurate writing inappropriate register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Judgement consistently informed by exploration of different interpretations of the text. • Judgement consistently informed by changing critical views of the text over time.
5 *11-12*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Developed and good level of detail in discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Good use of analytical methods. • Good use of quotations and references to text, generally critically addressed.	*5* *11-12*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Good and secure understanding of text and question and well-structured argument with clear line of development. • Good level of coherence and accuracy of writing, in appropriate register with critical concepts and terminology used accurately.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Good and secure understanding of text and question with critical concepts and terminology used accurately. • Well-structured argument with clear line of development and a good level of coherence and accuracy of writing in appropriate register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Good level of recognition and exploration of different interpretations of the text. • Good level of recognition and exploration of changing critical views of the text over time.
4 *8-10*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Generally developed discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Competent use of analytical methods. • Competent use of illustrative quotations and references to support discussion.	*4* *8-10*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Competent understanding of text and question with straightforward arguments competently structured. • Clear writing in generally appropriate register with critical concepts and terminology used appropriately.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Competent understanding of text and question with critical concepts and terminology used appropriately. • Straightforward arguments competently structured with clear writing in generally appropriate register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Competent level of recognition and exploration of different interpretations of the text. • Competent level of recognition and exploration of changing critical views of the text over time.
3 *6-7*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Some attempt to develop discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Some attempt at using analytical methods. • Some use of quotations/references as illustration.	*3* *6-7*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Some understanding of text and main elements of question with some structured argument evident, lacking development and/or full illustration. • Some clear writing, some inconsistencies in register and some appropriate use of critical concepts and terminology.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Some understanding of text and main elements of question with some appropriate use of critical concepts and terminology. • Some structured argument evident, lacking development and/or full illustration with some clear writing, some inconsistencies in register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Some awareness of different interpretations of the text. • Some awareness of changing critical views of the text over time.
2 *3-5*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Limited discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Description or narrative comment; limited use of analytical methods. • Limited or inconsistent use of quotations, uncritically presented.	*2* *3-5*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Limited understanding of text and partial attempt at question with limited attempt to structure discussion; tendency to lose track of argument. • Inconsistent writing, frequent instances of technical error, limited use of appropriate register and limited use of critical concepts and terminology.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Limited understanding of text and partial attempt at question with limited use of critical concepts and terminology. • Inconsistent writing, frequent instances of technical error with limited use of appropriate register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Limited awareness of different interpretations of the text. • Limited awareness of changing critical views of the text over time.
1 *1-2*	*AO2* *(75%)*	• Very little or no relevant discussion of effects (including dramatic effects) of language, form and structure. • Only very infrequent phrases of commentary; very little or no use of analytical methods. • Very few quotations (e.g. one or two) used (and likely to be incorrect), or no quotations used.	*1* *1-2*	*AO1* *(50%)*	• Very little or no connection with text; question disregarded with undeveloped, very fragmentary discussion. • Persistent serious writing errors inhibit communication of meaning; very little or no use of appropriate register and persistently inaccurate (or no use) of critical concepts and terminology.
	AO1 *(25%)*	• Very little or no connection with text; question disregarded with persistently inaccurate or no use of critical concepts and terminology. • Undeveloped, very fragmentary discussion with persistent serious writing errors that inhibit communication of meaning; very little or no use of appropriate register.		*AO5* *(50%)*	• Very little or no awareness of different interpretations of the text. • Very little or no awareness of changing critical views of the text over time.

Women in Literature wider reading log form

Text _____ Author _____

Date of publication _____

Plot summary

Biographical details about author

Key concerns of the novel

Think about how the writer portrays women; evaluate the attitudes and values.

Women in Literature wider reading log form

Important quotations

Notes from academic research (JStor, VictorianWeb, Emag, English Review)