

## Ten Steps to Success in English Exams

Follow these **top ten tips** from the English Faculty to help you do your very best and **achieve** the very best grade for yourself:

### **1. Put it in paragraphs**

The easiest thing to raise your score is to remember to use paragraphs. You'd be surprised how many people forget because of exam nerves! If you're aiming above level 4, you *have* to do this. Start a new paragraph when you change the topic, time or viewpoint. If you forget, go back and put in a paragraph punctuation mark (/). You will still get the credit.

### **2. Justify your answers with evidence**

Nearly everyone manages to give an opinion, but do you remember to back it up with evidence? Double your marks in the reading paper by giving evidence for each of your points.

- Mention an example or incident.
- Point out some hints or clues in the passage.
- Quote a few words as evidence.

### **3. Pick out revealing words and phrases**

Pick up points by pinpointing significant words and phrases. Pick out the words that give a strong impression, for example:

The landlady is presented as a witchlike creature with her "pale pinched cheeks", "hands like claws" and "grasping her broom".

A good way to find the words is to hunt them down with a highlighter pen.

### **4. Find a few good words to sum up what you think at the end of each bit**

If you're asked about a character, think of the best word you can to sum him or her up. Then think of some other words that mean the same sort of thing:

*witchlike – sinister, malign, brooding, malevolent, evil, inhuman*

Use them to sum up:

*Mia is a sinister and inhuman character, with an air of brooding evil*

What's good about this is that you put your finger on just what she is like.

### **5. The big DON'T DO IT!**

The biggest of all the big DON'T DO ITs is:

*Don't just say what happened.*

It will really bore the examiner. You can safely assume that the examiner has heard the story once and doesn't want to hear it again. The idea is to show off how well you understand the way the writer worked his or her magic.

### **6. Re-read the passage with a pen in your hand**

1. Scan the passage quickly to get the gist.
2. Read the questions.
3. Pick up your pen and start re-reading.
4. As you read, highlight any relevant bits, and make a special mark against words you might be able to quote.
5. Use the key words of the question as headings in your plan. Then use them in your answer.

This saves a lot of time when you come to write your answer. It also helps you to look closely and pay attention.

## 7. Invest five minutes in preparing your original writing

- Take 1 minute to think of some dazzling key words to use.
- Take 3 minutes to plan in a diagram such as a flow chart or spider diagram.
- Take 1 minute to think up some paragraph starters to structure your writing.

Here's an example, based on the idea of a ***Polar landscape***:

### *Words*

white, blanket, powder, drifts, snow hills, blizzard, jewelled, snow dunes, ice desert, polar waste, silence, bitter, midnight sun

### *Plan*

- a. Snow drifts moving and piling up
- b. Sky and wind
- c. Movement – seal, polar bear – not deserted after all
- d. Glint of sun – rising over horizon – blinding white
- e. End of polar night, life awakening

### *Paragraph starters*

Snow and silence. That is all ...

A flurry of wind lifts the ...

A sudden splash and spray ...

Squeezing over the horizon ...

A corner of the night has given way to ...

## 8. Vary your sentences

Here's how. Instead of starting in the same old way with the noun and then saying what happened, try starting with:

- a preposition, for example: *In the lounge, Lisa was ...*
- a verb, for example: *Feeling sleepy, Matt lay down and ...*
- an adverb, for example: *Instantly, the cats jumped onto ...*
- an adjective, for example: *Cold and weary, the climbers pitched into ...*

This extends your sentences and makes them sound more sophisticated.

*Did you know ...?* The most common way for novelists to start a sentence is with a phrase that says where the action begins.

## 9. Weed out your weaknesses

So you've tried and tried but you still forget to put in paragraphs, mix up there and their, and you can't tell your *-ables* from *your -ibles*.

Here's what to do:

Make up a way of remembering your own worst habits, for example:

*Their parables* = their/there + paragraphs = able & ible

Write it at the top of your answer booklet in pencil.

At the end, go back and check for those things in the last five minutes.

## 10. Zap yourself with the video

Hire the video and watch that scene from Shakespeare over and over again. Keep the text by you and read along. It really helps to be familiar with the language and have a grasp of what's going on.

<b>Ten tricky spellings to learn <i>right</i> now!</b>		onomatopoeia
rhythm	rhyme	scene
playwright	author	character
soliloquy	theatre	simile

<b><i>Here's a quick recap</i></b>	
Paper 1	You will be asked to read and analyse some texts, and then you will have to write a fiction or non-fiction piece of your own.
Paper 2	This is where you will be asked to write in detail about one of two passages from the Shakespeare play you have been studying.
Both papers test your reading and writing skills. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are important.	
<p>To get level 5 or above, you should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· use commas, speech marks and apostrophes accurately</li> <li>· use paragraphs</li> <li>· spell some difficult words correctly</li> <li>· use some complex (longer and more detailed/descriptive) sentences</li> <li>· use a wide range of vocabulary</li> <li>· give reasons and explanation, backed up by evidence, in your answers</li> </ul>	

<b><i>GOOD LUCK FROM EVERYONE IN THE ENGLISH FACULTY!</i></b>
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