

GCSE English



THE REVISION GUIDE

Unit 1 (Reading) and Unit 2 (Writing)



In a nutshell...

This test is designed to assess your reading skills. You'll be given 2 non-fiction texts, and you'll usually have to answer 4 questions, each worth 10 marks.

You should aim to write between ½ and 1 side per question.

Timing

Spend 15 minutes on each question. This includes your reading time. Be strict with your timing; you can always return to a question at the end if you have time.



**Total Time
1 hour**

EXAMINERS' HINTS

Don't forget the highlighter!
It'll make selecting relevant material from each text much easier.

*If the questions ask you to focus on particular sections of the texts, **draw lines between them**. This will prevent you from writing about the wrong section (or even the wrong text!).*

Sometimes there are more than 4 questions on the paper. *If this happens, aim to spend 1½ minutes per mark. For example, if there are two 5-mark questions instead of one 10-mark one, spend 7½ minutes on each.*

Start each question on a new side. *If you have some spare time at the end of the exam, you can always add to your answers.*

➤ What should I do first in the exam?

First things first, **look at the questions**. Questions 1 and 2 will usually focus on the first text, question 3 will likely be about the second text, and question 4 normally asks you to write about both.

Don't waste time reading the second text until you get to the questions on it. That way, you'll keep your mind focused on the text you have to write about first.

➤ What types of question will I be asked?

There are 6 types of question you could be asked, and you will be given 4 of these in your exam (see examiners' hints on the left).

- **Locating and Retrieving Information**
 - List reasons or details/Make a list of...
 - According to the writer, how or what or why...?
 - What evidence does the writer use...?
 - Explain how and/or why...
- **Impressions and Images**
 - What impressions do you get of the writer?
 - What impressions do you get of an organisation or people?
 - What impressions do you get of a place?
- **Viewpoint and Attitude**
 - What are the writer's attitudes to...?
 - What are the writer's opinions of...?
 - What are the writer's thoughts and feelings about...?
- **Intended Audience**
 - Who's the text aimed at?
- **Analysis of Persuasive Techniques**
 - How does this text try to persuade/influence/sell/show?
 - How does the writer try to encourage/interest/argue...?
- **Comparison of texts**
 - Compare and contrast these texts.
 - Using information from both of the texts, explain why...

➤ How should I approach each question?

Location and Retrieving Information ➔

If you're asked to make a list, then you should do exactly that. If asked for ten points, there's a mark for each one. Try to get 11 or 12 points down – that way, you have a safety net.

Impressions and Images

When asked what impression/image you have of a person/organisation, make sure that you use the P.E.E. model ➔. This will keep your answer focused, and will score you higher marks. However, remember to be **quick** and **to the point**.

Viewpoint and Attitude

You may be asked to comment on the writer's thoughts and feelings about a particular subject. To score high marks, you'll need to do some **inferring** (reading between the lines): what words has the writer used? What are the **connotations** ➔ of these words? Remember to work through the text **systematically**. The writer's viewpoint/attitude may change as the text progresses.

Intended Audience

If one of the texts you are given to write about is an advert, you may be asked about its intended audience. Avoid writing that texts are aimed at 'everyone'. This is almost never the case. Try to be as specific as possible when identifying a text's target audience. Consider age/gender/income/interests. Don't forget to back up your ideas with close reference to the text, and, whatever you do, avoid informality: "It's aimed at posh people" will get you no marks, and seems judgemental.

Analysis of Persuasive Techniques

You will almost definitely be asked about how a text tries to influence its audience. As always, it's best to track the text, taking each paragraph or section in turn. Ask yourself, as you're reading, 'What is the intention behind this detail?' and, 'What is the effect?' You could consider the text's **content**, its **language** ➔, its **structure**, its **tone**, any **headlines** and **titles**, any **pictures** used, and the **presentation**. If you don't understand what any of these terms mean, see your English teacher.

Comparison of Texts

The fourth question will usually ask you to refer to both texts. If you're asked to compare and contrast them, you need to look for specific similarities and differences. If you are given bullet-points to help you structure your answer, use them. A bullet-point equals a paragraph, so if there are 3 bullet-points, you need to be writing 3 paragraphs, comparing the texts as you go. Sometimes, the fourth question may ask you to use information from the two texts. If you get this kind of question, deal with each text in turn rather than alternating between them. The key thing is to **read the question** and **do what it says!**

EXAMINERS' HINTS

Make sure you track the text systematically. That means working through it chronologically. It'll make your life easier in the exam, and your answer will be better as a result.

P.E.E. is a great way of scoring highly in an exam. Look at the following extract from an A grade exam answer:

The children are described as 'notorious' and 'tearaways' – immediately suggesting they don't behave well, challenge authority and have a bad reputation.

Commenting on the connotations of particular words is a great way to impress the examiner. Why has a writer used a particular word? What does the word reveal about the writer's thoughts and feelings? Commenting on the impact of individual words will get you high marks, as it shows your ability to select evidence carefully.

Focusing on the language a writer uses is the key to top marks. Try not to focus too much on layout/presentation, unless you feel it's particularly significant. Avoid meaningless comments like, 'The headline is in bold to get the reader's attention'.

Do not feel the need to chip in with your own opinion: do only what the question asks.

UNIT 2 EXAM



In a nutshell...

This exam, unsurprisingly, tests your writing skills. You'll have two writing tasks to complete: one to argue/persuade/advise, the other to analyse/review/comment. Both tasks are worth 20 marks. You should be aiming to write 1½–2½ sides per task.

Timing

You should spend 30 minutes on each task, making sure that you factor in planning and checking time.



Total Time
1 hour

EXAMINERS' HINTS

Don't forget to leave some time to check your work.

Every year, students throw away marks because they either (a) can't be bothered to check their work or (b) run out of time. Remember, 7 of the 20 marks available for each task are for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The conventions of a genre are its **typical features**. So, with a formal letter, a convention might be that the address of the sender goes in the top right hand corner. (And it's always best to use your own address: 'funny' addresses might make you laugh, but don't bet on the examiner sharing your sense of humour.)

➤ What types of text might I be asked to write?

You will be asked to write **two** of the following:

A letter	A report	An article
A leaflet	A speech	A review

You will **not** have a **choice** of tasks.

➤ How do I approach the exam?

First things first: read the tasks *carefully*. Every year, students lose valuable marks because they don't pay attention to the wording of the question – and write something completely different to what is asked of them. Don't make the same mistake.

Allow some time to plan what you're going to write. This need not be more than a few minutes, but it will help keep your writing focused. ←

➤ Use the GASP model when writing your pieces.

GENRE ⇨ AUDIENCE ⇨ SUBJECT ⇨ PURPOSE

Genre

What type of text have you been asked to write? What are its **conventions**? ← Make sure that you use these conventions in your own writing.

Audience

Who are you writing for? Make sure that your writing style is adapted to your particular audience. For instance, while you might start a letter to a friend with 'Alright mate!', that's not going to go down well with the Principal!

Subject

Keep on it! If you're asked to create a leaflet for a charity, avoid waffling on about anything else. Think about what information you need to include, and what information can be left out.

Purpose

Nearly all writing has an aim. Figure out what yours is (is it to persuade? To advise?) and make sure that you achieve it.

➤ Some key tips for writing for different purposes/audiences

Letters

If you're asked to write a letter to a friend/family member, you'll still be expected to format your letter properly – though feel free to adopt a more chatty tone. Avoid language that would make your grandmother blush. If you're asked to write a formal letter, try to write in a suitably formal register. Never forget **who** you're writing for and **why** you're writing. ➔

Reports

The purpose of a report is to inform, advise or persuade a person or a group of people. It is normally written after something has been investigated/thought about. Reports usually comprise: (1) a **heading**; (2) an **introduction**, in which you outline the background and purpose of your report; (3) **various sub-headed sections** covering the key areas of the subject; and (4) a **conclusion** in which you briefly draw together your findings and make recommendations ➔.

Articles for magazines/newspapers

An effective article is carefully written, interests its readers, informs them, make them think and causes them to react. Choose a subject that is interesting and topical. If it's close to your heart, even better. Don't try to cover everything – your article will only be 400 – 500 words. Never lose sight of your intended audience ➔: how can you hook them in to your article, and ensure that they'll want to keep reading?

Leaflets

Do *not*, under any circumstances, spend your 30 minutes cutting and sticking together the most beautiful leaflet you've ever seen. You will be given credit for what you write, not your skill as an artist. A good leaflet should have a heading that makes it clear what it's about. Sub-headings or sections should be used so that information can be easily located. Bullet points can be used for variety/to sum up key information. You should indicate *where* you'd like pictures, but you do *not* need to draw them – a simple sentence explaining that 'This box will contain a picture of a dolphin' is enough.

Speeches

Open with a welcome/greeting. Outline what your speech is about. Make three or four key points, and expand on them. Write a conclusion that will hopefully have an impact on your audience. End with an acknowledgement of them (e.g. 'Thanks for your time...').

Reviews

A good review will include (1) a heading ➔, (2) a short introduction, in which you give the CD/book/film some context, (3) several paragraphs discussing what the reader/listener/viewer can expect, and your opinion, and (4) a short conclusion in which you make (or not) a recommendation.

EXAMINERS' HINTS

Yours sincerely or Yours faithfully? Every year, this trips students up. If you know the name of the recipient of your letter, it's **sincerely**. If not, it's **faithfully**. Got it? If you can't remember, stick with 'Yours' – it's an acceptable alternative to either.

Presenting recommendations as a list of bullet points can be effective.

Write in the style of your intended publication: an article on pollution for *The Times* is going to be different to an article on the same subject for *Cosmo Girl*!

Don't worry about laying out articles in columns – it's your writing that's being assessed, not your design skills!

Your heading could be the name of the film/CD/book, but it could also be a quirky summary: 'Lord of the boRings', anyone?

NEED EXTRA HELP?



Use the VLE

Our VLE courses contain a wealth of useful revision material – especially the ActiveTeach resource that talks you through the exams in detail.



Follow the English Faculty on *Twitter*

Follow *@EnglishatLC* on Twitter for revision tips and links, and to ask any questions.



Keep your eyes on the blog

You can find our blog at englishatlc.wordpress.com. It's regularly updated with links and useful bits and bobs.



And finally – *come and see your English teacher!*

If you have any questions/worries about the exams, don't hesitate to come and see your teacher. That's what we're here for!

