

# GCSE English Literature



## THE REVISION GUIDE

**Unit 1 (*Of Mice and Men* & Unseen Poetry)**

**on Monday 23rd May in the morning**

**Unit 2 (Novel & Play)**

**on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May in the morning**

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **How many exams do I have in Literature?**

You have **2 exams** in English Literature, and you'll sit them both within a few days of each other. Exciting!

- **How long are they and what are they worth?**

You can't ask two questions at once! Oh – you did. Each exam lasts 2 hours. Unit 1 is worth 35% of your GCSE grade; Unit 2 is worth 40%. They're a big deal.

## Unit 1

### *Of Mice and Men* and unseen poetry

The exam has **two sections**, and you should spend **an hour on each**.

#### **What should I do first in the exam?**

First things first: **ignore the texts you've not studied**. You'd think this was obvious; you'd be wrong. Turn straight to the section on *Of Mice and Men*.

#### **What do I have to do on *Of Mice and Men*?**

You have to complete **2 tasks**: an **extract analysis**, and a **longer-writing task**.

For the **extract analysis**, you'll be asked to **analyse a short extract** from the novel. There are 10 marks available, and you should aim to write between 1 and 2 sides. You should spend **20 minutes** on this.

For the **longer-writing task**, you'll be given a **choice** of 2 questions. You will pick **one** to answer, and should aim to write between 2 and 3 sides. There are 20 marks available, so you should spend **40 minutes** on this.

#### **What about the unseen poetry?**

For the second part of the exam, you'll be given **two short poems** that are connected in some way. You'll be asked to write about the poems, and their **effects** on you. This task is worth 20 marks, and you should aim to write between 3 and 5 sides.

## Unit 2

### Play and Novel

The exam also has **two sections**, and you should spend **an hour on each**.

#### **What do I have to do?**

Remember the section in Unit 1 on *Of Mice and Men*? Well, this paper will be very familiar to you, as it follows exactly the same structure.

Do not attempt to answer questions on texts you've not studied. Turn straight to the section on the play you studied.

For the sections on the play **and** the novel, you'll be doing the same thing: an **extract analysis** and a **longer-writing task**.

The **extract analysis** is the same as before: you'll be given a short extract from the text and asked to **analyse it**. There are 10 marks for the extract analysis, and you should be writing between 1 and 2 sides for it. Remember to spend no longer than **20 minutes** on one of these.

You'll then have a **choice** of 2 questions for the **longer-writing task**. Pick **one** to answer, and aim to write between 2 and 3 sides. There are 20 marks for a longer-writing task, so you should spend **40 minutes** on one.

# HOW TO DO AN EXTRACT ANALYSIS



## In a nutshell...

The extract analysis questions are designed to test your close-reading skills. You should aim to write 1½ sides on an extract analysis (or ¾ side on each part of the question if it's divided into two 5-mark parts.)

## Timing

The extract analyses are only worth 10 marks, so spend no longer than 20 minutes on one. This includes 2-3 minutes of reading time.



Total Time  
**20 minutes**

## EXAMINERS' HINTS

### **Don't forget the highlighter!**

Use it to highlight the words/lines in the extract that you want to write about.

**When referring to the writer, use only their last name.** E.g. 'Steinbeck suggests that...' It will save you time, and it makes your writing seem more sophisticated.

**Write formally.** Remember – you're writing for an examiner, not your friend. Compare the two examples below. Which do you think is better?

*Example #1:* 'Crooks enjoys tormenting Lennie by suggesting that George might never return.'

*Example #2:* 'Crooks gets a kick out of bullying Lennie by making out that George has gone AWOL.'

*Let's hope you've not picked Example #2!*

**Try to embed quotes in your sentences** – it's a quick and efficient way to write. Have a look at the example below:

*'When Cormier describes the soldier's head exploding like a 'ripe tomato', he emphasises the horror of Francis' nightmare...'*

**Don't think you have to mention everything in the extract** – you don't have the time. Focus on the most significant parts.

## DO

**Keep focused on the question.** As you're reading the extract, highlight anything that you think will help you to answer the question. Avoid going off on tangents: you don't have the time.

**Think carefully about why this particular extract has been chosen.** It might be because it's a turning point in the text, or it may reveal something new or significant about a character. This could be a starting point for your answer.

**Use the wording of the question to begin your answer.** If the question is, 'How is the character of Larry developed in this extract?', begin with something like, 'In this extract, Larry is developed in...' Make a great point in your first sentence; it'll make the examiner think you're high grade material from the get-go.

**Remember the significance of the text's historical context.** For example, if you're dealing with an extract involving Crooks, you'll probably touch upon the issue of racism in 1930s America. An extract on Arthur and Gerald might mean that you mention the class system.

## DON'T

**Waffle.** There's no need to retell the story, or to waste time writing about other parts of the text that aren't directly relevant to the extract. You'll need to make points quickly.

**Quote long passages of text.** The examiner has read the text. They don't need to read it again. Keep your quotes short and relevant. Commenting on the connotations of particular words is a great way to impress the examiner. It shows your ability to select evidence carefully.

**Spend so long on the beginning of the extract that you miss the stuff at the end.** This is a common examiner complaint. There will be a reason why the extract starts and ends where it does.

**Focus so much on the language of the extract that you forget to write about what's going on.** It's as important to analyse *what* happens in the extract as it is to explore how it's written.

# HOW TO DO A LONGER-WRITING TASK



## In a nutshell...

You will have a choice of two questions for the longer-writing task. The tasks are designed to allow you to show off your knowledge of the whole text. You should be aiming to write 2 – 3 sides at least.

## Timing

We recommend spending 5 minutes planning your answer and 35 minutes writing it and checking it.



Total Time  
**40 minutes**

## EXAMINERS' HINTS

**REMEMBER:** You will not be allowed to take your copies of the texts into the exam.

You should be making sure that you know them inside out, as you won't be able to double-check a quote once you're in the exam.

**There will always be a character-focused question.**

All of the texts you've studied have only a few central characters, so why not plan answers to questions on all of them in advance?

**Choose a question quickly.**

Don't waste time agonising over which one to do. If in doubt, go with your gut feeling.

**Some good connectives to use:**

Yet... However... Despite this... Nevertheless... Nonetheless... On the other hand... By contrast... Similarly... Another example... In addition...

**If one of the longer-writing tasks asks you to imagine you are a character:**

- Keep in mind the actual events of the text. What would a character know/not know?
- Try to write in the 'voice' of the character. This will show the examiner that you understand the events of the text, and the way the character would think/feel about them.
- Keep focused on the task in hand. Remember – this is a test of your knowledge and understanding of the novel/play, not your creative writing skills.

## DO

**Answer the question.** Underline the key words. Figure out *what* the question is asking you, and make sure your introduction directly addresses the question.

**Plan your answer.** Examiners like to see evidence of planning on your answer booklet, as it shows you've thought through your work. If you're taking the Foundation paper, you'll have some bulletpoints to help in the planning of your answer. Use them!

**Structure your argument.** Make sure that your points flow from one to the next. Use **connectives** to signpost your ideas, giving the examiner an idea as to where your essay's going.

**Refer to the text to back up your points.** If you can't remember a quotation, it's fine to paraphrase (e.g. 'When Carlson calls Curley a coward...').

**Know the texts inside out.** Try to re-read them during the week before the exams. You should be able to refer confidently to characters, events and themes. You should *certainly* know how to spell the characters' names!

## DON'T

**Retell the story.** Assume that the examiner knows the text as well as, if not better than, you.

**Forget to give your own opinion.** As long as you can back up your ideas, the examiner will be pleased to read them.

**Spend more than 40 minutes on your answer.** Keep your eye on the clock so that you don't eat into the rest of your time.

**Forget to write about the text's social/historical context.**

Where you can, make links between the text and its context – but don't overdo it. For example, a question on Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men* would allow you to mention what Steinbeck is saying about life for women in 1930s America. A question on heroism in *Heroes* might mean you briefly discuss Cormier's attitudes toward war.

# HOW TO WRITE ABOUT THE UNSEEN POETRY



## In a nutshell...

For this section (which is only in the Unit 1 exam) you'll be given two poems you've not studied. You'll have to write an

essay in which you analyse each poem and discuss their similarities and differences.

## Timing

As you'll not know the poems, you should spend 10 minutes reading them and planning your answer before using the rest of the time writing/checking.



Total Time  
**60 minutes**

## EXAMINERS' HINTS

**Pay attention to the titles of the poems.** They may be perfectly self-explanatory, or have a deeper meaning. Either way, the title can offer a great way in to a poem.

**Get that highlighter out!** Pick out key words/phrases that stand out as significant in each poem. Try to avoid highlighting more than a few words at a time – say **a lot about a little** rather than a little about a lot.

**If you find analysing poetry hard, don't panic.** It may help to track through the poem systematically, reading from punctuation mark to punctuation mark rather than line by line.

**Think about the voice of each poem.** Is the poet writing as him or herself, or as a different character? What is the effect either way?

**Think about who each poem is addressed to.** Love poems, for example, sometimes use the second person ('you') which can make them feel very intimate.

**Pay attention to the end of each poem,** as the poet's key message often comes here.

**Examiners love to read about your personal response to the poems.** Do they connect with any of your own experiences, or anything else you've read or seen?

Luckily enough, the exam question on the unseen poems is always the same:

**Write about both poems and their effect on you. Show how they are similar and how they are different.**

## DO

**Read the poems carefully.** Don't rush into writing your answer until you've read the poems at least **three times**. The meaning of a poem might not be obvious on the first read.

**Use your time wisely.** After you've spent 10 minutes reading and planning, we suggest one of these two approaches:

1. Briefly introduce both poems, then write about the first poem for 20 minutes, the second one for another 20 minutes, and finish by spending 10 minutes comparing and contrasting.
2. Briefly introduce both poems, then write about the first one for 20 minutes, before writing about the second one for 30 minutes, linking it to the first as you go.

**Think carefully about the aim(s) of each poem.** Does it, for example, describe an experience, or protest about something, or describe a place? Ask yourself why the poet wrote the poem.

**Back up your points with quotations.** Remember – there are no right and wrong answers. Don't be worried if you're not sure your interpretation of a poem is the same as everyone else's. As long as you can justify your ideas by referring to the text, the examiner will reward you.

## DON'T

**Write about poetic techniques unless you can say why they're effective.** Every year, the exam board report that too many students are 'feature-spotting' in the exam ('There's a metaphor! And it rhymes! And there's onomatopoeia!'). You get **no marks** for pointing out a poetic technique, unless you can comment on why it's effective

**Panic if you find comparing hard.** You'll get marks for writing about which poem you prefer and why.

If you'd like to practise your analytical skills, why not have a go with one of the pairings below? Your teacher will be happy to mark your work, or you can email it to your teacher.

### Pairing 1

#### Lessons

*Danny Martin*

Do away with medals  
Poppies and remembrance parades  
Those boys were brave, we know  
But look where it got them

Reduced to line after perfect line  
Of white stones  
Immobile, but glorious; exciting  
To kids who haven't yet learned  
That bullets don't make little red holes

They rip and smash and gouge  
And drag the world's dirt behind them  
Remember lads, you won't get laid  
No matter how good your war stories  
If you're dead

So melt down the medals  
Fuel the fire with paper poppies, war books and Arnie films  
Stop playing the pipes, stop banging the drums  
And stop writing bloody poems about it.

#### Invasion

*Choman Hardi*

Soon they will come. First we will hear  
the sound of their boots approaching at dawn  
then they'll appear through the mist.

In their death-bringing uniforms  
they will march towards our homes  
their guns and tanks pointing forward.

They will be confronted by young men  
with rusty guns and boiling blood.  
These are our young men  
who took their short-lived freedom for granted.

We will lose this war, and blood  
will cover our roads, mix with our  
drinking water, it will creep into our dreams.

Keep your head down and stay indoors –  
we've lost this war before it has begun.

### Pairing 2

#### Stop All The Clocks

*WH Auden*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

#### Human Interest

*Carol Ann Duffy*

Fifteen years minimum, banged up inside  
for what took thirty seconds to complete.  
She turned away. I stabbed. I felt this heat  
burn through my skull until reason had died.

I'd slogged my guts out for her, but she lied  
when I knew different. She used to meet  
some prick after work. She stank of deceit.

I loved her. When I accused her, she cried  
and denied it. Straight up, she tore me apart.  
On the Monday, I found the other bloke  
had bought her a chain with a silver heart.

When I think about her now, I near choke  
with grief. My baby. She wasn't a tart  
or nothing. I wouldn't harm a fly, no joke.

## NOTES



## NEED EXTRA HELP?



### Use the revision guides

You can buy revision guides for most of the set texts from the library at discounted prices.



### 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](http://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!

