

A-Level English Literature

Model Answers · Graded Exemplars

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4 entries

Top-band A-Level exemplars showing the moves that separate a B from an A*: a CONCEPTUALISED argument (an interpretation, not a description), AO3 context woven into the analysis rather than bolted on, AO5 alternative critical readings handled with confidence, and - for comparative papers - a genuinely integrated comparative method. Each entry gives a model thesis or paragraph and then names the AOs being demonstrated. Aligned to AQA A-Level English Literature (A and B). Quotations are short and illustrative; build your own response from precise, memorised textual reference.

Conceptualised Argument · The Thesis That Scores AO1

'Othello is a tragedy of jealousy.' Examine this view. [Model thesis + framing - showing a conceptualised, argued line]

MODEL THESIS. While jealousy is the engine of Othello's destruction, to read the play as merely "a tragedy of jealousy" is reductive: Shakespeare presents jealousy not as a spontaneous emotion but as something deliberately MANUFACTURED by Iago, so that the true tragedy lies in the fragility of a noble identity built on insecurity - racial, marital and military. Jealousy is therefore the symptom; the disease is the ease with which self-possession can be dismantled.

HOW THE ARGUMENT DEVELOPS (signposted). (1) Jealousy is engineered, not innate - Iago's "I am not what I am" and the dramatic irony of "honest Iago". (2) Othello's vulnerability is rooted in OUTSIDER status - "these delicate creatures" / "haply for I am black" - so jealousy exploits an existing wound. (3) The collapse of his language (the controlled verse of "Keep up your bright swords" degrading into the fragmented prose of "Goats and monkeys!") dramatises the dismantling of the self.

AOs DEMONSTRATED. AO1: a precise, arguable thesis that ANSWERS and INTERROGATES the proposition ("reductive", "the symptom not the disease") rather than agreeing flatly - the marker of a conceptualised, top-band response. **AO2:** the line of argument is tracked through method (dramatic irony, the degradation of verse to prose). The discriminator at A-Level is the QUALITY of the conceptual frame, not the quantity of devices.

AO3 Woven In · Context as Argument, Not Decoration

Explore how Fitzgerald presents the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. [Model paragraph - showing AO3 integrated into analysis]

MODEL PARAGRAPH. Fitzgerald presents the American Dream as a corrupted ideal whose promise of self-reinvention has curdled into hollow materialism. Gatsby's shirts, thrown down in "soft rich heaps" until Daisy weeps, reduce the Dream's spiritual aspiration to a fetish of objects; the bathos of crying over fabric exposes how, by 1925, the Jazz Age had substituted consumption for meaning. This is sharpened by the novel's geography: the "valley of ashes" lying between West Egg and the city literalises the human cost of that wealth, the by-product of an economy of careless luxury - the very world the Wall Street boom would, within four years of publication, expose as a fiction. Crucially, Gatsby's reach toward "the green light" is presented through the language of religious longing ("orgastic future"), so Fitzgerald frames the Dream as a debased faith: aspiration with the transcendence removed and the money left in.

AOs DEMONSTRATED. AO3: context (1920s consumerism, the Jazz Age, the looming Crash) is FOLDED INTO the analysis to illuminate meaning - never a bolted-on "in the 1920s..." sentence. The history explains the WORDS. **AO2:** bathos, symbolism (green light, valley of ashes), religious register. **AO1:** the controlling idea ("a debased faith") governs the whole paragraph. **GOLDEN RULE:** context earns AO3 only when it changes how we read the language.

AO5 · Handling Alternative Critical Interpretations

Examine the view that the women in *Hamlet* are powerless. [Model paragraph - deploying AO5 critical readings with confidence]

MODEL PARAGRAPH. A traditional reading positions Ophelia as wholly powerless, circulated between father, brother and prince as an object of male instruction - Polonius's imperative "I would not... have you... give words or talk" reduces her to a body to be managed. A feminist critic such as Elaine Showalter, however, reframes Ophelia's madness not as defeat but as the only available LANGUAGE of female protest: her distribution of flowers and her bawdy songs ("Young men will do't") voice a sexual and political truth the court has silenced, so that her breakdown becomes a kind of grim agency. Yet this reading can be qualified: the fact that protest is only possible through madness, and ends in drowning, arguably confirms rather than overturns her powerlessness. The most persuasive interpretation is therefore dialectical - Shakespeare grants Ophelia a voice precisely at the moment the patriarchal order has destroyed her capacity to use it safely.

AOs DEMONSTRATED. AO5: a named critical lens (feminist / Showalter) is set AGAINST a traditional reading and then itself QUALIFIED - debate, not name-dropping. The student OWNS the disagreement and reaches a synthesised judgement. **AO1:** "dialectical", "qualified" signal a sophisticated, balanced argument. **AO2:** the imperative mood, the symbolism of flowers. **TIP:** a single, well-handled alternative reading you can EVALUATE beats three critics quoted and dropped.

Comparative Method · Integrating Two Texts (AO4)

Compare how two writers present the destructive nature of desire. [e.g. A Streetcar Named Desire / The Great Gatsby - model comparative paragraph]

MODEL COMPARATIVE PARAGRAPH. Both Williams and Fitzgerald present desire as a force that consumes the self it inhabits, yet they differ in where they locate the blame. For Blanche, desire is a compulsion she cannot master - "the opposite" of death, a frantic clinging to the "epic fornications" of her past - and Williams uses the expressionistic intrusion of the Varsouviana polka to stage desire as TRAUMA, something done to her by grief and a brutal social order. Gatsby's desire, by contrast, is willed and idealised: his longing for Daisy is, in Nick's narration, indistinguishable from his longing to remake himself, so that desire becomes ASPIRATION turned pathological. Where Williams's desire looks backward, a haunting, Fitzgerald's strains forward toward "the green light", a future that recedes. The comparison reveals a shared diagnosis through opposite symptoms: in both texts desire is destructive because it refuses the present - Blanche cannot leave the past, Gatsby cannot reach the future, and reality destroys them both.

AOs DEMONSTRATED. AO4: the texts are genuinely INTEGRATED - compared within a single argument ("both... yet", "where Williams... Fitzgerald"), not handled in separate blocks. The comparison itself generates the insight (backward vs forward desire). **AO2:** the Varsouviana motif, the green-light symbol, narrative framing. **AO1/AO5:** the conceptual link ("refuses the present") synthesises both. **KEY DISCRIMINATOR:** at A-Level the comparison must be the THINKING, not a paragraph on text A followed by a paragraph on text B.