

GCSE English Language

Model Answers · Graded Exemplars

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Graded Exemplars

5 entries

Grade-9 worked responses for the highest-tariff AQA English Language tasks (Paper 1 and Paper 2). Each entry gives the exam question, a full model answer, and a breakdown of the AO moves the examiner rewards - so you see not just WHAT to write but WHY it scores in the top band. Annotations name the specific skill (zooming on a single word, exploring connotations, tracking structural shifts, evaluating with a clear critical stance, controlling tone for purpose and audience). Quotations are short and illustrative; for your own answer always quote precisely from the insert in front of you.

Paper 1 Q2 · Language Analysis (8 marks)

How does the writer use language to describe the storm? [8 marks · AQA Paper 1, Question 2]

MODEL ANSWER. The writer first presents the storm as a living predator through the verb "clawing", which personifies the wind as an animal tearing at the house. The connotations of "clawing" - violence, desperation, instinct - suggest a force that is not merely strong but deliberately cruel, as though it intends harm. This is intensified by the sibilance of "hissing" and "slashing", whose harsh, drawn-out sounds mimic the relentless noise of the rain and force the reader to hear the storm as well as see it. The writer then shifts to a metaphor, calling the sky "a bruised wall". The adjective "bruised" carries connotations of injury and damage, implying that even the heavens have been beaten by the weather; the colour it evokes (purple-black) makes the menace feel physical and close. Finally, the short, blunt declarative "It would not stop" strips away description altogether, and this sudden plainness after such vivid imagery makes the storm feel exhausting and inescapable.

WHY IT HITS LEVEL 4 (7-8 marks). (1) *Analyses* rather than identifies - every device is tied to an EFFECT on the reader. (2) *Judicious short quotations* embedded in the sentence, never copied chunks. (3) *Zooms in on single words* ("clawing", "bruised") and unpicks *connotations* - the top-band discriminator. (4) Uses a precise *subject terminology* range (verb, personification, sibilance, metaphor, declarative) *accurately*. (5) Tracks the writer's *method changing* ("first... then... finally"), showing conscious crafting. AVOID: feature-spotting lists, "this makes it more interesting for the reader", or analysing content instead of language.

Paper 1 Q3 · Structure Analysis (8 marks)

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? [8 marks · AQA Paper 1, Question 3 · whole-source focus]

MODEL ANSWER. The writer opens at a wide focus, panning across "the empty platform" and the deserted station, which establishes isolation and makes the reader ask where everyone has gone. This long shot then narrows: the perspective zooms to a single "trembling hand" gripping a ticket, and this shift from external setting to one tiny human detail directs our attention onto the character's fear and pulls us into her experience. Midway, the writer introduces a flashback to "the morning it all began", and this temporal shift withholds the present danger, building suspense by making us wait. The contrast between the calm past and the tense present heightens our unease. Towards the end the focus pulls outward again to "the approaching lights", mirroring the opening but now charged with threat, so the cyclical structure gives a sense that the danger has finally arrived. The final one-line paragraph isolates "She ran", and ending on this abrupt action leaves the reader on a cliffhanger.

WHY IT HITS LEVEL 4 (7-8 marks). (1) Discusses STRUCTURE, not language - *focus, shifts, perspective, sequencing*, not word choice. (2) Tracks the text *across the whole source* (beginning / middle / end), the explicit Q3 requirement. (3) Uses structural terminology accurately: *narrative focus, zoom, flashback / temporal shift, contrast, cyclical structure, paragraph length*. (4) Always links the technique to a READER EFFECT (suspense, directing attention, cliffhanger). COMMON TRAP: drifting into language analysis - if you find yourself unpicking a single word's connotations, you are answering Q2, not Q3.

Paper 1 Q4 · Evaluation (20 marks)

A student said: 'The writer makes the reader feel the boy is in real danger.' To what extent do you agree? [20 marks · AQA Paper 1, Question 4]

MODEL PARAGRAPH (top-band opening + one developed point). I agree to a large extent that the writer makes us feel the boy is in genuine danger, and this conviction is built primarily through the contrast between his fragility and the indifference of his surroundings. When the writer describes him as "a speck against the cliff", the noun "speck" reduces the boy to something almost invisible, and this deliberate diminishment makes the reader fear how easily he could be lost or fall unnoticed. The danger is made more convincing because the environment is shown as utterly uncaring: the sea "did not pause", and this calm, personified indifference is more frightening than open violence would be, because it implies the world will not intervene to save him. The writer also manipulates pace - the clipped syntax of "He slipped. He grabbed. Nothing." enacts the suddenness of the moment, and the single-word sentence "Nothing" makes the reader's stomach drop with the boy. I am therefore convinced by the student's view, although the closing image of the "steadying ledge" introduces a flicker of hope that slightly tempers the sense of certain doom.

WHY IT HITS LEVEL 4 (16-20 marks). (1) Takes a *clear critical stance* on the statement ("I agree to a large extent") and SUSTAINS it - evaluation, not just analysis. (2) *Evaluates the writer's METHODS* and judges how successfully they create the effect. (3) Embeds precise short quotations and analyses connotations AND structure (pace, syntax). (4) Shows a *conceptualised, perceptive* response - e.g. that indifference frightens more than violence. (5) The qualifying final clause ("although...") shows a *nuanced, evaluative judgement* rather than blanket agreement. The whole answer would repeat this method across 3-4 points. KEY DISCRIMINATOR: every paragraph must JUDGE the effect, not merely describe it.

Paper 1 Q5 · Creative / Descriptive Writing (40 marks)

Write a description suggested by this picture, OR write the opening of a story about an unexpected arrival. [40 marks · 24 for content/organisation, 16 for technical accuracy]

MODEL OPENING (first paragraph of a Grade-9 response). The fog arrived before the stranger did. It crept along the harbour wall like a slow grey tide, swallowing the lamp posts one by one until only their haloes remained, smudged and uncertain. Salt hung in the air. Somewhere out in the white, a bell tolled - once, twice - and then thought better of it. Mrs Abara pressed her palm against the cold glass of the window and watched her own breath bloom and fade against it, bloom and fade, like something trying to speak. She had lived in this town for forty winters and had never once seen the sea so quiet. That was how she knew. When the silence is this complete, she thought, it is not peace. It is waiting.

WHY IT HITS THE TOP BAND. (1) *Crafted, controlled opening* - the first line is a hook ("before the stranger did") that creates intrigue without explaining. (2) *Varied, deliberate sentence forms*: long flowing sentence, then the two-word "Salt hung in the air", then the dash-punctuated bell - sentence variety is heavily rewarded in AO6. (3) *Ambitious vocabulary used precisely* ("haloes", "smudged", "bloom and fade") - never thesaurus-stuffed. (4) *Sustained imagery and motif*: fog / breath / waiting all build one atmosphere of dread. (5) *Repetition for effect* ("bloom and fade, bloom and fade") and a *structural pay-off* in the final two short sentences. (6) *Accurate, varied punctuation* (dashes, full stops, italicised free indirect thought) earns the AO6 marks. **PLANNING TIP**: pick ONE atmosphere and ONE motif, withhold the obvious, and end the paragraph on a deliberate line - examiners reward shape, not plot.

Paper 2 Q5 · Viewpoint / Transactional Writing (40 marks)

'Mobile phones should be banned in all schools.' Write a letter to your headteacher arguing for or against this statement. [40 marks · AQA Paper 2, Question 5]

MODEL OPENING + DEVELOPED PARAGRAPH (against the ban). Dear Mrs Okonkwo, I am writing to urge you, with respect but also with real urgency, to reconsider the proposed ban on mobile phones. We are told the ban will protect our learning. I would argue it does the opposite: it treats a tool as a threat, and in doing so it punishes the responsible many for the mistakes of the few.

Consider what a phone actually is in the hands of a student who wants to succeed. It is a dictionary, a calculator, a library and a calendar, folded into a single device that fits in a blazer pocket. When I revised for my mock examinations last term, it was not a textbook that explained quadratic equations to me at eleven o'clock at night - it was a video, watched quietly, on the very device this policy would confiscate. Are we really to believe that taking this away will make us learn more? A ban does not teach self-control; it simply removes the chance to practise it. Surely a school that claims to prepare us for adult life should be teaching us to manage distraction, not pretending we can be sealed away from it.

WHY IT HITS THE TOP BAND. (1) *Register and convention* matched to FORM (letter), AUDIENCE (headteacher - respectful but assertive) and PURPOSE (persuade) - the AO5 "tone, style and register" requirement. (2) *Clear, sustained line of argument* with a thesis ("treats a tool as a threat"). (3) *Rhetorical devices used purposefully*: tricolon ("dictionary, calculator, library"), rhetorical questions, anecdote, direct address, antithesis ("protect... the opposite"). (4) *Discourse markers and paragraphing* structure the persuasion. (5) *Varied, accurate sentences and punctuation* for AO6 - the colon, the dash, the embedded clause. **EXAM TIP**: open with a counter-position you then demolish, anchor one paragraph in a personal anecdote, and end on a memorable, quotable line.