

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Guide to AQA English Literature GCSE: Paper Two



Paper 2

Weightings, Timings and What's Assessed

The written exam takes **2 hours and 15 minutes** in total and is worth **60%** of your entire English Literature GCSE.

Section A

Modern texts (drama or prose)



Section A of paper 2 is worth **34 marks**

- **4 of these marks account for accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar (AO4).**

You will be given a **choice of two questions** to answer from your chosen text and you must pick **one** to respond to.

It is recommended that you spend **45 minutes** on this section, **including 5 to 10 minutes spent planning**, which leaves up to 50 minutes to write your essay.

Remember that **planning** is essential as examiners found that a plan frequently led to a well-constructed answer and **lack of planning proved an issue**.

Section B

Poetry



Section B of paper 2 is worth **30 marks** as **A03 and AO4 is not assessed** in this section of the exam.

You will be required to answer one **comparative question** on one **named poem** printed on the paper and one other poem from your **chosen anthology**.

In this case, as there are less marks to be gained here, we would recommend that you spend **45 minutes** on this section, **including 5 to 10 minutes spent planning**.

Section C

Unseen Poetry



Section C of paper is worth **32 marks**.

- You will be assessed on **AO1 and AO2** only as the poem is unseen.

Firstly, you will be given a question worth **24 marks** where you will be expected to write an essay about an **unseen poem**. You should spend around **30 minutes on this section**.

Then, you will be given **another unseen poem** that you will be asked to compare to the first unseen poem for **8 marks**, which you should spend about **10 minutes** on.



Assessment Objectives 4.2

Assessment objectives (AOs) are the **same across all GCSE English Literature exam boards**, they are used by the examiner to mark and **evaluate** how well you have constructed your essay.

Paper 2 will measure **how you have achieved the following AO's** in order to give you your final mark:

AO1 (22.5% of marks)

This will measure how you **read, understand and respond to texts** and includes your use of **quotations** to support and illustrate your interpretations.

Tip – to score highly in this AO students are expected to **maintain a critical and judicious writing style** throughout their whole essay. **DO NOT** just employ loads of quotes just because you have memorised them all, make sure that it is **relevant** and that you **analyse** it instead of just simply placing it there.

AO2 (27.5% of marks)

This will measure how well you **analyse language, form and structure** to create **meanings** and **effects** using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Tip - appropriate subject terminology identified by examiners are - **character, structure, contrast, image, speech, tone**. For top grades, examiners are looking for students to **avoid** identifying nouns or verbs used by the writer in an attempt to demonstrate an appreciation of their work but rather the top students are expected to demonstrate a **fluent and confident** discussion of the writer's methods.

AO3 (7.5% of marks)

This will measure how students understand the **relationships between the texts and the contexts** in which they were written. This includes relevant **historical, social and biographical** information. Note that the key word here is **RELEVANT**.

AO4 (2.5% of marks)

This will only be assessed in **Section A** of Paper 2. AO4 will measure how accurately you are able to **spell and use punctuation**. To reach the top marks in this AO students are expected to use a **range of vocabulary and sentence structures**.



Grade Boosters!

To reach the **top marks** for the most important AO's here are a few tips that will come in handy for Paper 2:

↑ AO1 GRADE BOOSTER ↑

DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

If you are looking to get a **grade 7 or above**, examiners are looking for you to show a **development in your ideas** as you write each paragraph.

You can **show this development through your argument**. For example, if the question you are given is about the theme **love**, you could state at the beginning of your second paragraph that the theme of love **develops** and becomes **increasingly potent** at a later stage in the text, and then in your final paragraph you could state that this particular section of the text is where love is **arguably the most potent**.

This clearly shows that you are writing about how the particular character or theme **develops** within the play by simply changing a few words at the beginning of each of your paragraphs!

↑ AO3 GRADE BOOSTER ↑

RELEVANT CONTEXT

The contextual factors that you employ must be **relevant!** Therefore, you must try to avoid bolting on **irrelevant contextual information** that does not correlate with your **argument** or the **question**, as this will decrease your essay's level of **sophistication**.

↑ AO1 GRADE BOOSTER ↑

RELEVANT QUOTES

Try to avoid remembering **large chunks of text** because not only does this **waste time**, but it also makes your writing look messy and decreases the fluidity of your essay.

Instead, examiners are looking for you to **employ relevant quotes** that are not **too lengthy** to increase the effectiveness of your response.

↑ AO2 GRADE BOOSTER ↑

AVOID IRRELEVANT TERMS

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** simply identifying the writer's nouns or verbs, as this may limit the effectiveness of your analysis. For example, the 2017 **examiner's report** urges students to compare:

*"Shakespeare **uses the verb** 'bite' in 'bite my thumb' to..."*

with

*"Shakespeare creates an **aggressive tone** through the insult 'bite my thumb' to..."*

The report states that it is the **quality of your explanation** which determines your level, rather than the inclusion of a 'term'.

↑ AO3 GRADE BOOSTER ↑

AVOID GENERALISATION

For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to **AVOID** making sweeping generalisations such as **"all Elizabethan women** were controlled by men".


Instead, examiners are seeking for students to make **sophisticated links** between **relevant contextual factors and the question**. For example, if you were speaking about Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet' you could say instead that **"it perhaps** wouldn't be surprising for Shakespeare's audience to see that Juliet's father attempts to gain control over her, as **usually** within Elizabethan England most women were seen as properties of their husbands and fathers".




Section A

Types of questions and how to approach them

In Section A, there are **four different types of questions** you could get asked in the exam:



CHARACTER




Example **character** question -
*'Explore how Priestley presents **Sheila Birling**'*




RELATIONSHIP




Example **relationship** question -
'Explore how Priestley presents the relationship between Mr Birling and the Inspector'




THEME



Example **theme** question -
*'Explore how Priestley presents the **theme of responsibility**'*



CONTEXT



Example **contextual** question -
*'Explore Priestley's attitudes towards **class and social hierarchy**'*



Alternative Interpretations



For the top grades, examiners are looking for students to be able to write their responses in a **sophisticated manner**, showing the examiner that they have **understood the text thoroughly** and that they are able to write about **multiple, alternative interpretations** in regard to expressing their thoughts about the writer's craft.

Alternative interpretations show the examiner that you are a top student who has really **engaged with the text** at hand as it shows that you have a **sophisticated and broad understanding** of the writer's **purpose**.

Some **example sentence starters** that you could use to show the examiner that you are engaging with multiple interpretations are:

"Alternatively..."

"On one level the writer could be revealing that...Yet, on another level it could be that the writer is trying to show the audience that..."

"In one way this could show... In another way this could also show..."

"Explicitly, the writer is trying to show us that...however implicitly the writer could be showing us that..."

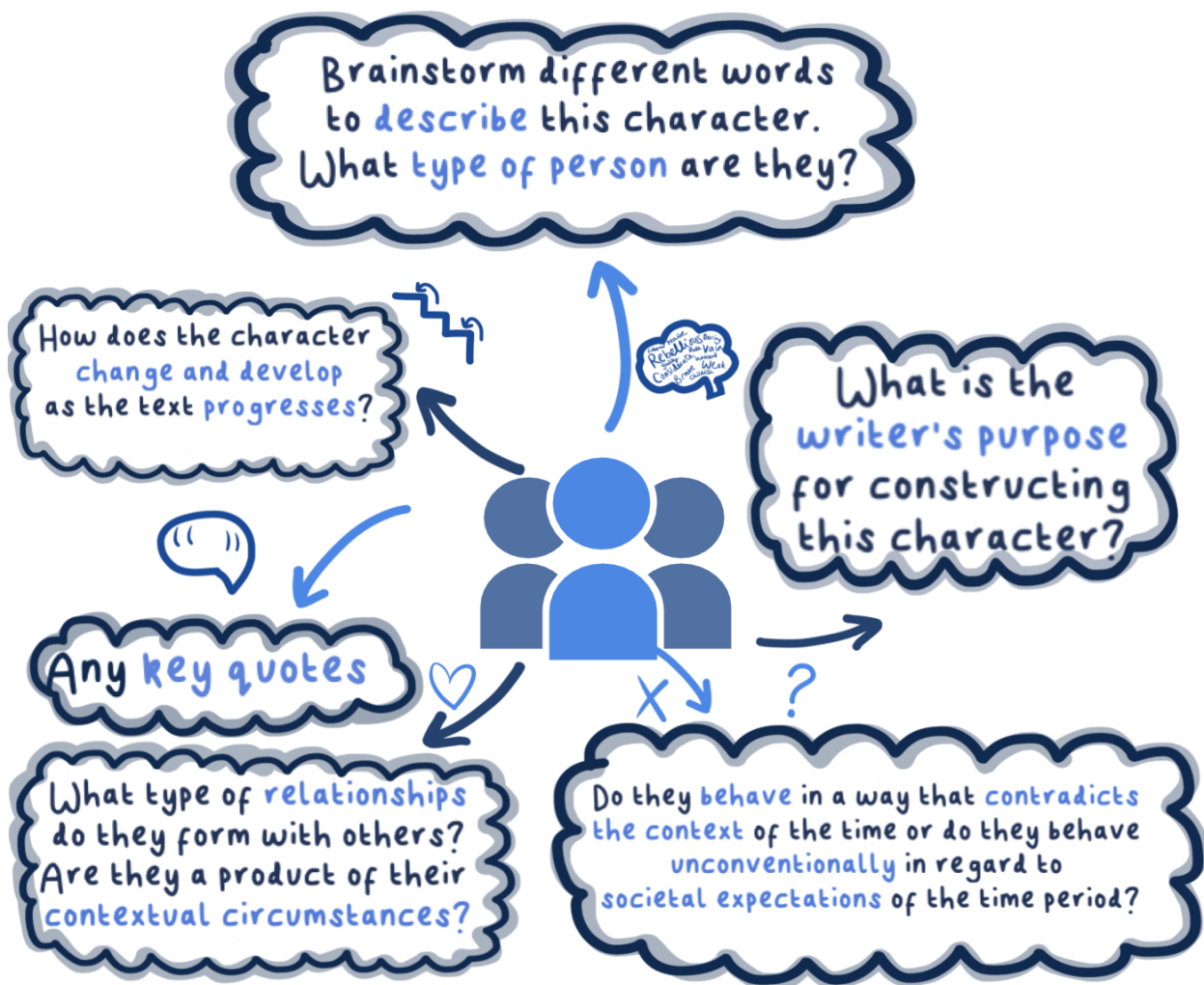




How to Plan Your Essays

When you've read the question, don't just **start writing**. You need to **PLAN** what you are going to write. The best way to do this is to **brainstorm ideas** then work out **which ideas you are going to use** and which **order** you are going to write them in. Here are some **questions to ask yourself** to help you do this, and some **example plans**.

What you should be thinking about when responding to a **character question**:



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this character.



Example of a character question - Sheila Birling



Main Argument

Priestley presents Sheila Birling as an individual who undergoes a catharsis; as the play progresses, she begins to understand the consequences of her actions.

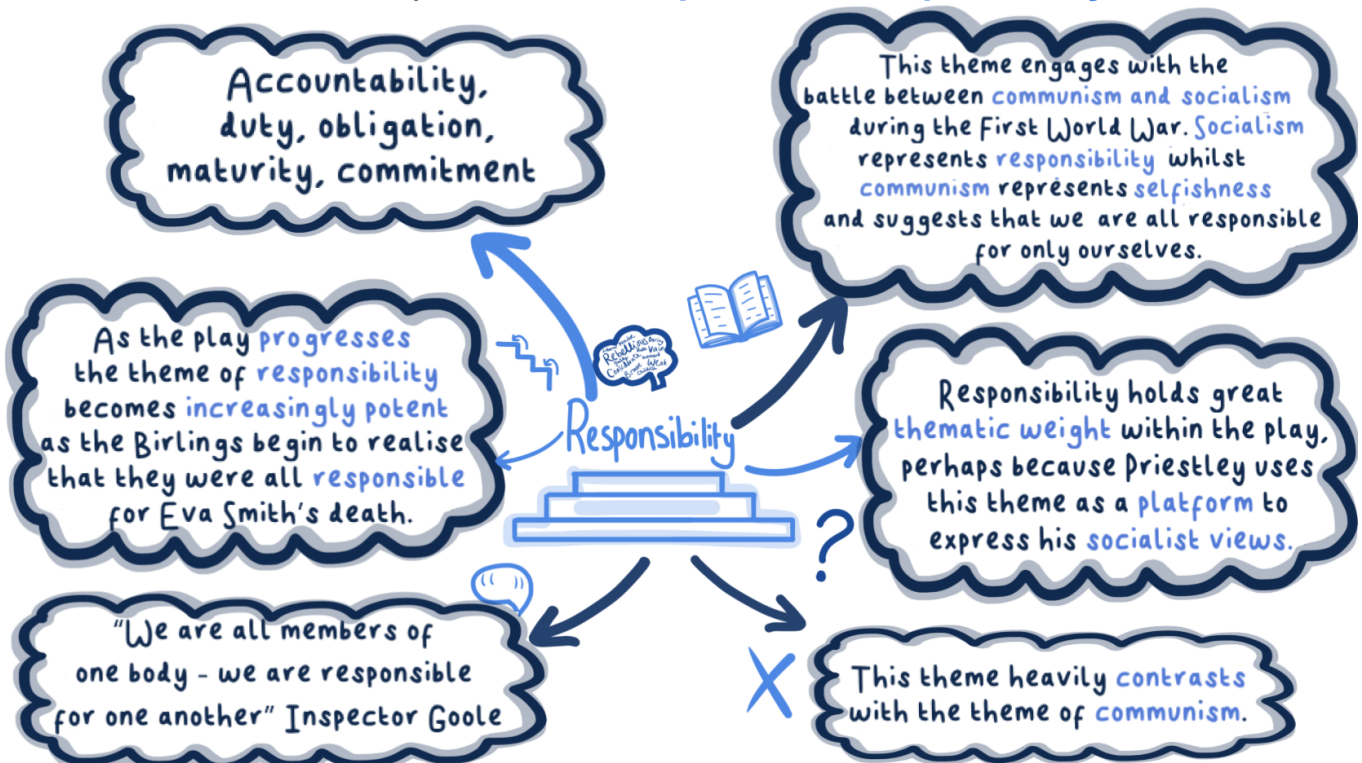


What you should be thinking about when responding to a **theme question**:



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this theme.

Example of a **theme question** - **Responsibility**

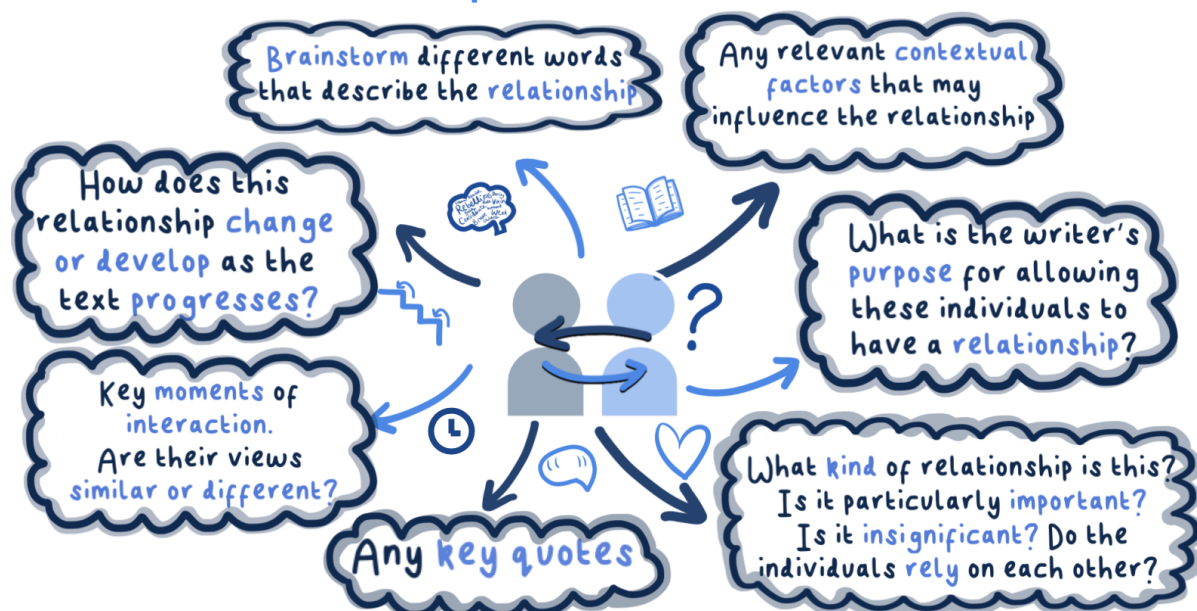


Main Argument

Responsibility holds great **thematic weight** within the play so that Priestley can use the Inspector's views on shared accountability as a mouthpiece to express **his own socialist views** and thus he **criticises communist views**.

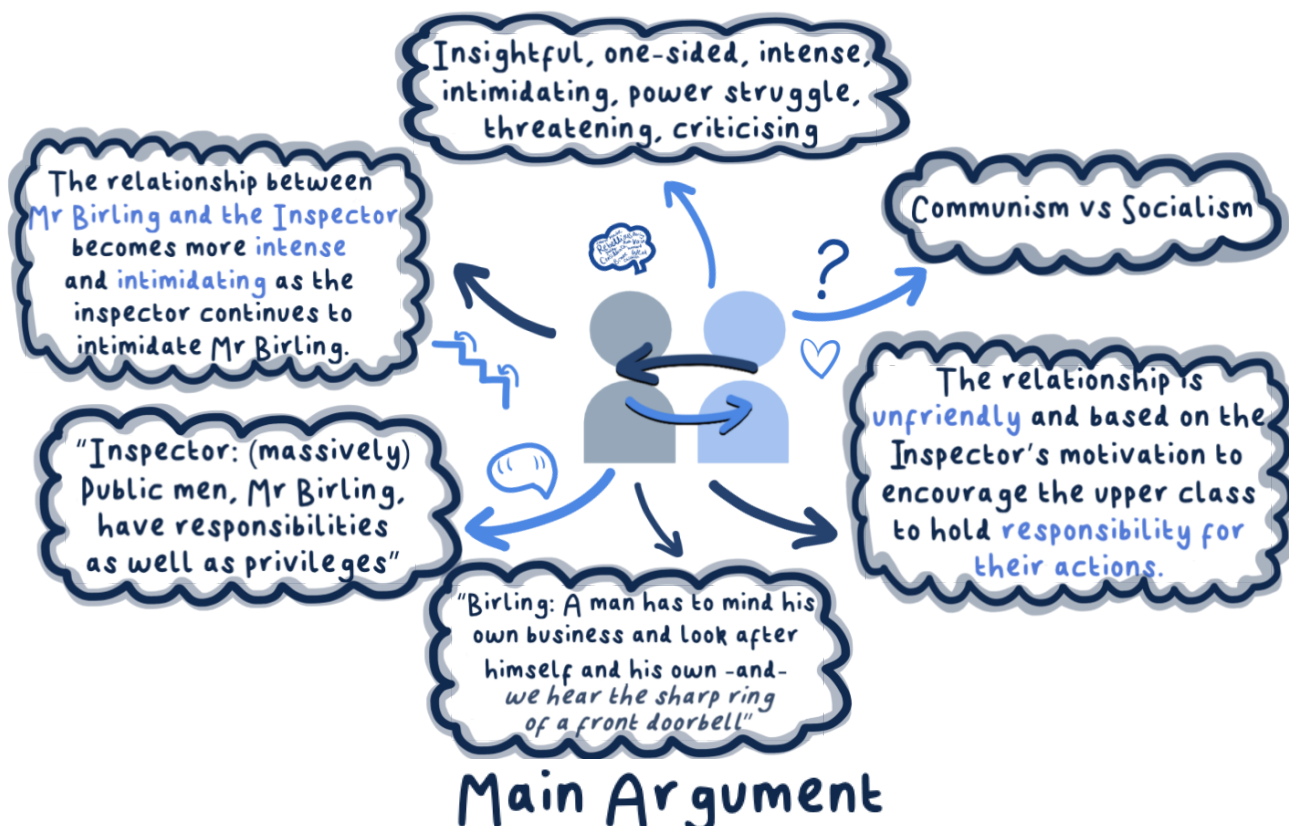


What you should be thinking about when responding to a question on the **relationship between two characters**.



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this relationship.

Example of a **relationship** question - **Mr Birling and The Inspector**



Priestley allows these individuals to have a relationship to show a clear **juxtaposition** between the pair's views. He uses their relationship as a platform to criticise Mr Birling's **communist views**.

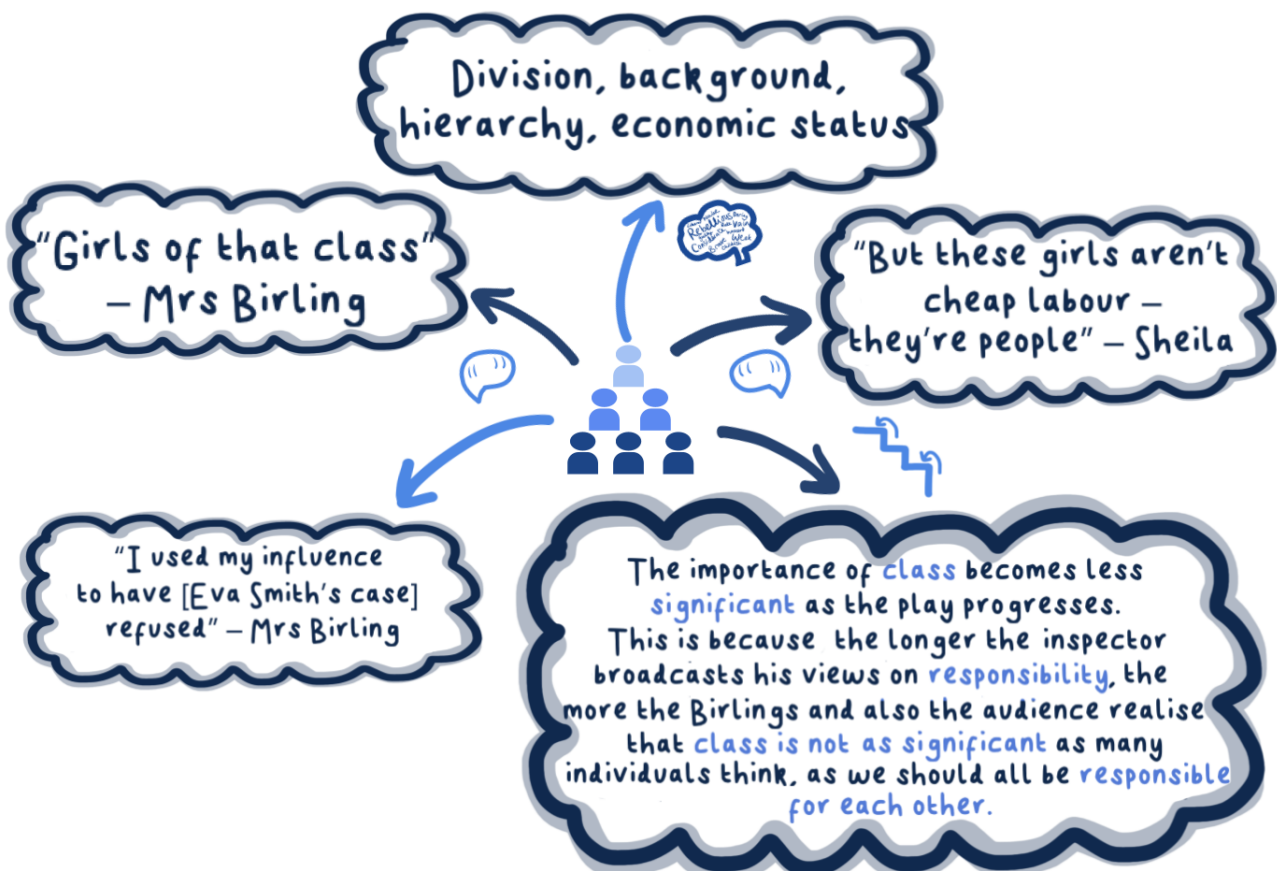


What you should be thinking about when responding to a question based upon **context**.



Lastly, you should construct your main argument for this contextual theme.

Example of a **context** question - **Priestley's Attitudes Towards Class**



Main Argument

Clearly, **Priestley** highlights the **theme of class** within his play to show his audiences the **tragic consequences** of living within a **communist society**.



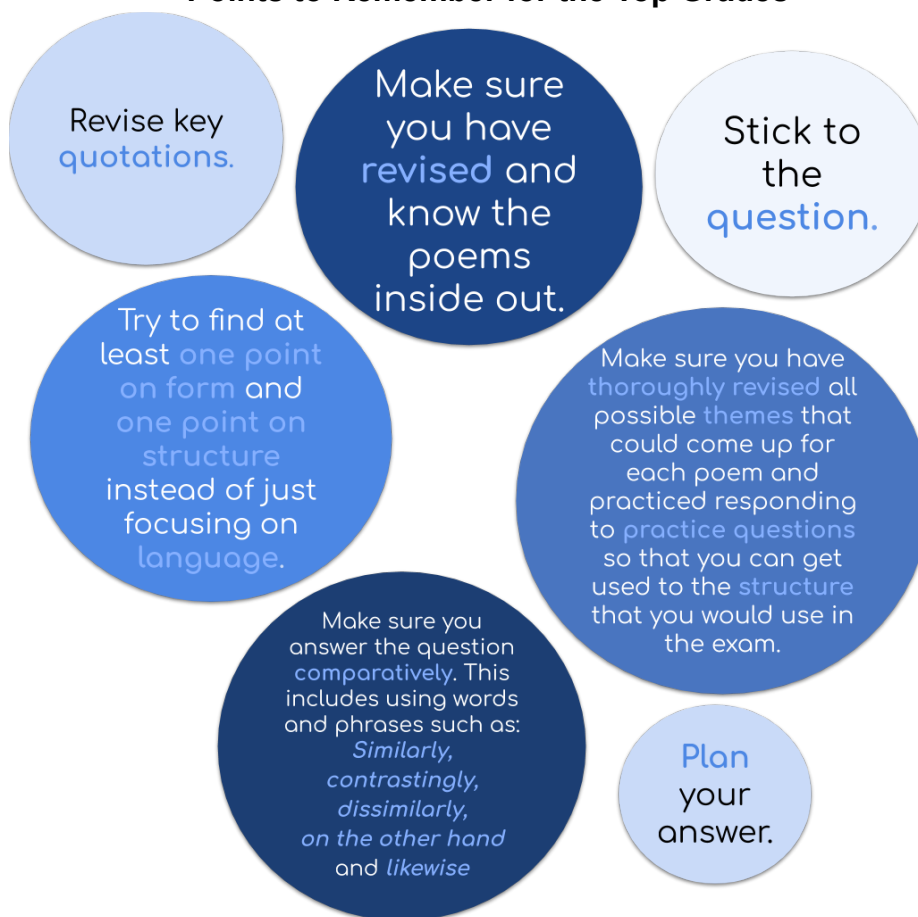
Section B

How to Effectively Compare Two Poems

How to Write a Top Grade Response

Section B is worth **30 marks**. You should aim to write: an **introduction**, at least **two comparative paragraphs**, and a **conclusion**.

Points to Remember for the Top Grades



Writer's Techniques



To achieve the highest grade, students will be expected to comment on the poet's use of **language, structure and form** to craft a **conceptualised** response to the question.

However, students must **avoid simply stating the technique** that is being used, as this will **not be credited by the examiner**. What **will** be credited by the examiner is the level of **sophistication** that the comment has; you must write about how the technique used by the poet **links to the question**.

For example, if the question was about how the writer explores the theme of **power**, a student would **not be credited** for simply stating '**Ferrara's poem 'My Last Duchess' is in the form of a dramatic monologue**'. Yet, students **would** be credited if they said '**Ferrara cleverly implements the dramatic monologue form as this conveys the narrator's sense of power and control**', as this relates to the question.



Section C

How to Approach the Unseen Poem

What you should be thinking about when you read the Unseen Poems

In the exam you should make sure you read the unseen poem **at least two times** to make sure that you are really understanding the **literal meaning of the poem**, and begin to think about the **hidden, implicit meanings** as well. You should approach the unseen poem in a stepwise manner as such -

- step 1** Read the poem the first time to engage with the **literal meaning** and jot this down on your paper roughly.
- step 2** Then, highlight any **poetic devices** used by the poet that you think may **relate to the question**. Jot these down also.
- step 3** After this, look closely at **structure and form** and jot down these techniques as well.
- step 4** Next you should read the poem again, this time looking for **subtleties and irregularities** in the poem as this is what will really increase the **sophistication** of your response.
- step 5** You should now read through the points that you have jotted down and **construct your main argument** to include in your thesis/introduction statement.
- step 6** Finally, respond to the question!

How to Compare Two Unseen Poems

- step 1** Read the **new poem**.
- step 2** Pick out any **methods** used by the writer and see if they are **similar** or **dissimilar** to the **first unseen poem**.
- step 3** Look for a deeper **meaning**.
- step 4** Respond to the question!



This question does not require a lot - to **structure your answer** you could do three paragraphs that look like this (this is only a basic template):

1. **Comparative topic sentence**

Both poems convey the theme of _____ through their respective implementations of linguistic features.

2. **Comparing writer's method**

In '[Poem A]' the poet employs the metaphor "_____" to convey the theme of _____ whereas in '[Poem B]' the poet implements the oxymoron "_____" to convey the same theme.

3. **Link both points made back to your topic sentence**



Hidden Meanings



To achieve the **highest marks in Section C**, it is recommended that students look at the deeper, **hidden meaning** of the unseen poems as this will really increase the sophistication of your response.

For both questions you should identify both the **literal meaning** and the **hidden meaning** of the poem in your thesis statement and then explore both meanings throughout your analysis paragraphs. Look out for the tip about **alternative interpretations** to help you with this!

