

GCSE (9–1)

Learner Guide

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

Learner guide to exam preparation

Version 2

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We want you to do as well as you possibly can in your GCSE English Language exams. As the course is assessed entirely by exam, it is very important that you focus on exam technique and that you approach the exams in a way that will let you show your strengths. This exam preparation guide is designed to help you do this.

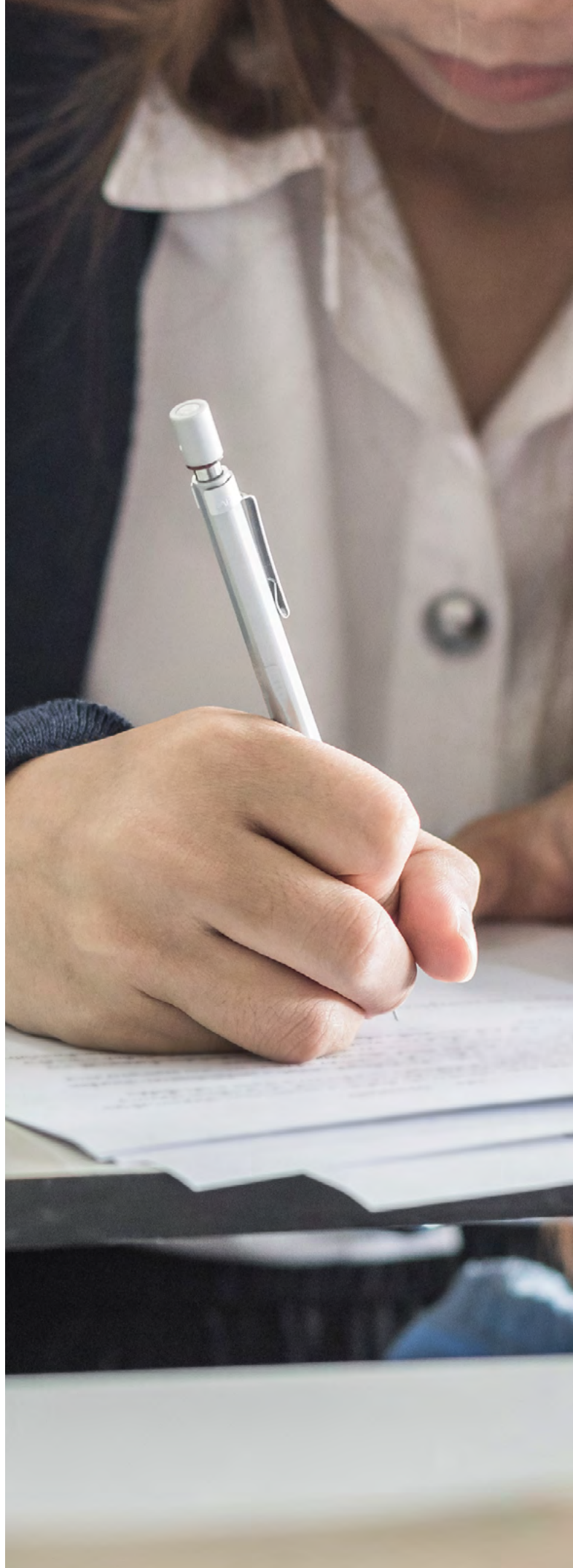
Managing your time during the exams

Each GCSE English Language exam is two hours long. In this time you will need to read the two texts that are printed in the Reading Booklet, answer four sets of reading questions which will test your understanding of these texts and answer one writing question, where you will produce a written piece of work. In the first exam (Component 01) you will write a piece of non-fiction (an article, report, speech etc.) and in the second exam (Component 02) this will be a piece of creative writing.

How you organise your time in the exam is very important as you need to give yourself enough time to read both of the texts carefully and to attempt every question. Timing in the exam is crucial in terms of your success. It seems obvious, but the examiner can only assess what you actually write on the exam paper, regardless of what you are able to do in the classroom. Your task in the exam is to show the examiner what you can do in the time that you have.

To make the most of your exam time, make sure you are:

- a) Allowing 15 minutes to read through the two texts and to think about what each text is saying. In each exam, the two texts will follow a theme so try to think about how each text relates to that theme and how the writers are presenting their ideas. During this time you should make notes or annotations to help you when you come to answering the questions. You can make notes straight onto the Reading Booklet if it's easier
- b) Aware of the number of marks available for each question. The more marks that are available for a question, the longer you should spend on that question. The Writing question and Questions 3 and 4 in the Reading sections have a larger number of marks available, and so you should aim to spend longer on these.



- c) Spending enough time on the Writing section, both planning and writing your answer. Remember that you only answer one question in this section. Try to write as much as you can in the time you have, but remember to think carefully about the quality and accuracy of your writing
 - d) Ensuring that everything you write is fully focused on the question. Read each question carefully - you may find it helpful to highlight the key words in each question to help keep you focused.
- Read carefully through the text from beginning to end. Look at the closing section of each text carefully and go back to the title: see if you can make some links between the two
 - Now consider the text as a whole: what do you think the text is about? What points is the writer wanting to get across and how do they try to do this?
 - Look at the links between the sections/paragraphs in each text and think about how they relate to the title and the conclusion.
 - When you have read through both texts, make sure you have thought about what they have in common, as well as any differences. Think carefully about the viewpoints and perspectives of the two writers.

Reading and annotating unseen texts

The two texts in each exam are 'unseen' texts. This means that you won't have read them before. Both of the texts in each exam paper will be linked through a theme. When reading through both texts, try to get an idea of what the theme is and of what each text is saying. Each text may offer a different opinion or viewpoint, for example.

When reading both texts:

- Look carefully at the title and the introduction to the text. The introduction is given in italics before the text begins and tells you what the text is and when it was written. This should help you to think about the writer's viewpoint.

For each question in the Reading section of the exam, you will need to use the texts in different ways. It is very important that you focus on what each question is asking you to do so that you can look carefully at specific elements of each text. As well as highlighting and making notes on the texts in the Reading Booklet, you may also find it helpful to highlight and annotate the exam paper to help you focus your answer to each question. It can be helpful to use different colour highlighter pens.

As a guide, this is what you will need to think about when annotating in the Reading section of each exam:



Component 01: Communicating information and ideas

Question 1:

- identify information
- carefully select short quotes/phrases/examples
- check they are relevant to the question.

Question 2:

- identify information (similarities or differences) in both texts
- carefully select short quotes/phrases/examples from both texts
- check they are relevant to the question.

Question 3:

- annotate significant language features, e.g. metaphors, similes, hyperbole
- annotate significant structural features, e.g. sentence structure, repetition, listing
- think about what the effect of each feature is and how this links to the question.

Question 4:

- annotate parts of each text which link to the focus given in the question (both in the statement and bullet points)
- annotate parts of each text that show the writers' ideas and views in relation to the question
- think about your own reading of the texts – would you agree, disagree, or to some extent agree/disagree with the statement? Why?

Component 02: Exploring effects and impact

Question 1:

- identify information
- carefully select short quotes/phrases/examples
- check they are relevant to the question.

Questions 2 and 3:

- annotate significant language features, e.g. metaphors, similes, hyperbole
- annotate significant structural features, e.g. sentence structure, repetition, listing
- think about what the effect of each feature is and how this links to the question.

Question 4:

- annotate parts of each text which link to the focus given in the question (both in the statement and bullet points)
- annotate parts of each text which show the writers' ideas and views in relation to the question
- think about your own reading of the texts – would you agree, disagree, or to some extent agree/disagree with the statement? Why?



Marks vs answer length

In the exam, you need to match the amount you write to the number of marks available for the question – the larger the number of marks, the more you should write.

A very common mistake is to write more than is needed for the early questions, which carry fewer marks, and to then run out of time on the later questions. The first set of Reading questions only need a brief response, such as a sentence or even a word or phrase – make sure you read each question carefully so that you know what is expected. If a question asks you to give word or phrase, make sure you do that in your answer.

Although it may be tempting to give longer answers to questions that may seem easier, you won't get any more marks for doing so, and it may mean that you will have to write less for the later Reading questions, where there are more marks available, and/or that you have to rush the Writing section. Remember to use the answer space given under each question as an indication of how much you should write – if only one or two lines are given, a short answer is needed.

On the exam paper you will be advised to split your time equally between the Reading and Writing sections because each section has an equal amount of marks available. However, it is very important that you give yourself the time you need to read through both texts properly, if you don't, you will find it harder to answer all the reading questions. The time needed to read and annotate the texts, as well as the speed of writing, will be different for each learner.

Below is some suggested guidance for managing your time in the exam but you should practise and experiment with timings way ahead of the exam so that you know what works best for you. Ask for feedback from your teacher about whether any of your responses – and the time you have spent on them – seem to be too short or too long.

Reading section

Reading and annotating the two unseen texts -
15 minutes

Question 1 – 5 minutes

Question 2 – 10 minutes

Question 3 – 15 minutes

Question 4 – 25 minutes

Writing section

Question 5 or 6

Planning and proofreading - 5-10 minutes

Writing - 40 minutes

You should know the date and time of your GCSE English Language exams weeks before they take place. This means that long before the day of your exam you have time to plan and practise writing to specific time frames. Try to treat all the exam practice you do as a real exam, and make the most of all feedback opportunities you are offered -that way, you'll get the most out of it.

When you have found a way of managing your time that works best for you, you should stick with it and use it to ensure you stay on track. Imagine your exam starts at 9.15 am and you know that you need 15 minutes to read the texts and about an hour to get through all the reading questions. Based on this, you know that you should start the writing section by 10.30 am. During the first hour of the exam you should be checking to make sure you are on track to finish the reading section by then.

This assumes that you will start with the reading section and then move on to the writing section. Sometimes students prefer to start with the writing section first. There is no real reason why you shouldn't do this, but you should bear in mind that the exam paper was designed with reading first, then writing because many students benefit from using their understanding of the texts in the reading section to help them in their writing. You should take the approach that works best for you.

If in the exam, you spend longer on a question than you had planned, or you are stuck on a question and you still have others left to answer, you should consider leaving that question for now and moving on to the others, especially if the other questions carry more marks. You can always come back to that question if you have time at the end. In these exams, you should try hard to attempt every question and to give the best response you can.

If you finish the exam early, you can use the time you have left to check your answers, for instance in the writing section, for effective paragraphing and accurate spelling, or to add to your answers, for instance you may have forgotten to illustrate a point with examples in the reading section.

Planning in the exams

Planning in an exam is very different to planning in class and you need to be aware of the time you have available – most students will only have room for five to ten minutes planning time in the exam and so you need to plan as fast and as efficiently as you can. Planning is particularly important in the writing section, where you choose the question you are going to answer.

Planning helps you check that you have enough to write about. If you start one of the task options (there will always be a choice of two questions in the writing section) and then you run out of ideas and want to try the other task option, you will have wasted a significant amount of time. It may also leave you feeling stressed and panicky, and you will be more likely not to perform as well as you are able to. You should always come up with a plan before you start writing. The plan could contain five or six ideas that you can develop into paragraphs. This will reassure you, and will help ensure that you have enough material to write about and a clear structure to follow.

Content and cohesion

The sequencing of your paragraphs, and the links between them, are important. You need to think about the relationship between the different elements of your writing, on both papers, whichever of the two writing questions you choose to answer.

As well as identifying the main topics for your paragraphs, you should number the paragraphs in a clear and logical order so that you can present them fluently to the reader. You should try to be clear about which sequences of ideas, scenes, events and/or experiences you are going to write about so that you don't repeat ideas – pay attention to these to ensure that you are not being under or over-ambitious in terms of the time available.

Remember to make use of the bullet points given in the writing question. They are there to support you and give you pointers as to what to include in your writing.

Proofreading

Marks are available in the exam for the quality and accuracy of your writing. Once you finish your answer to the Writing question, you should try to spend at least five minutes reading it through and checking for paragraphs, spelling and punctuation.



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