

A GUIDE TO

Leaving Cert English

Higher Level, 2025



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For lessons online on Leaving Cert English:



One: The Leaving Cert in Context



The CAO

Leaving cert students have an opportunity to apply for courses they would like to begin when they have finished their exams. The Central Applications Office (CAO) is the organisation that makes this possible; it processes applications for places at third level institutions in the Republic of Ireland. Applications can be made online or by post.

<https://www.cao.ie/>

Some LC Statistics

Between 55,000 and 60,000 students sit the leaving cert exams each year:

2024: 56,787

2023: 58,006

2022: 58,056

2021: 57,952

Statistics from the CAO show most students scoring from 400 to 499 points:

2024:

Points	Student Numbers	% Students
625	923	1.6
600 - 624	1,813	3.2
500 - 599	10,988	19.3
400 - 499	16,020	28.2
300 - 399	13,683	24.1
200 - 299	7,844	13.8
100 - 199	3,613	6.4
> 100	1,903	3.4

Total: **56,787**



2023:

Points	Student Numbers	% Students
625	952	1.6
600 - 624	1,848	3.2
500 - 599	11,378	19.6
400 - 499	15,852	27.3
300 - 399	13,902	24.0
200 - 299	8,233	14.2
100 - 199	4,022	6.9
> 100	1,819	3.1

Total: 58,006

2022:

Points	Student Numbers	% Students
625	1,122	1.9
600 - 624	2,083	3.6
500 - 599	11,353	19.6
400 - 499	15,367	26.5
300 - 399	13,667	23.5
200 - 299	8,466	14.6
100 - 199	4,083	7.0
> 100	1,915	3.3

Total: 58,056



How and When to Apply for a Third Level Course

To ensure that you will be considered for a place on a third level course, you need to make an application through the CAO by **1st February** (17:00) in the year of your LC exams. Late applications, in some circumstances, are accepted up to 1st May (17:00). You are not allowed to make more than one application in any given year. Applications open in **November** of the year before you do your LC exams. If you want to begin third level in 2025, then, you would need to submit your application between **November 2024** and **1st February, 2025**.

CAO Handbook with lists of available courses and information about the application process:

<https://www.cao.ie/handbook.php>

You can make your application on-line through the CAO website:

<https://www.cao.ie/>

Calculation of Grades from Marks in LC English

The grade you obtain in English in the Leaving Cert would be finalised by calculating the percentage of marks you scored over the two papers. English is allocated a total of 400 marks: 200 for Paper 1, and 200 for Paper 2. This percentage would then be valued in terms of the points system used to determine eligibility for third level courses.

Example:

If you scored 280 out of a possible 400 marks across both papers, you would have a score of 70 percentage marks $((280/400) \times 100)$. This would give you a H3 grade at higher level and a O3 grade at Ordinary level.

Grades are referred to in abbreviated form; Higher Level are prefixed with "H," and grades at Ordinary Level are prefixed with "O".



The grade in the example above is **highlighted** below on the table showing distribution according to percentage marks:

Grade	% Marks
H1/O1	90 - 100
H2/O2	80 < 90
H3/O3	70 < 80
H4/O4	60 < 70
H5/O5	50 < 60
H6/O6	40 < 50
H7/O7	30 < 40
H8/O8	0 < 30

Note: 70 < 80 means any score from 70 up to 79; more than 69 and less than 80.

Calculation of Points from Grades in LC Subjects

The CAO awards points by taking scores from the **six subjects** in which you have scored highest in your exams.

Points from Grades across Ordinary Level (OL) and Higher Level (HL) are shown on the table below. You will note that a maximum of **56 points** can be scored at Ordinary Level; an **O1** is equivalent to a **H5**.



HL Grade	Points	OL Grade	Points
H1	100		
H2	88		
H3	77		
H4	66		
H5	56	O1	56
H6	46	O2	46
H7	37	O3	37
H8	0	O4	28
		O5	20
		O6	12
		O7	0
		O8	0

You can calculate points from grades with the Qualifax points calculator:

<https://www.qualifax.ie/points-calculator>



Qualification Levels in the Irish Education System

There are 10 levels of qualification in Ireland. The scale they constitute is referred to as the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The kinds of qualifications in question include those rewarded at second level, such as the Leaving Cert. At third level, they are the qualifications awarded for courses completed successfully at recognised institutions.

The framework guarantees that qualifications are valued as they should be nationally and internationally.

Second Level; School Studies (1 to 5)

Junior Certificate:

- Level 1 Certificate
- Level 2 Certificate
- Level 3 Certificate

Leaving Certificate:

- Level 4 Certificate
- Level 5 Certificate

Third Level; Undergraduate Studies (6 to 8)

- Level 6: Advanced Certificate
- Level 7: Ordinary Bachelor Degree
- Level 8: Honours Bachelor Degree

Fourth Level; Postgraduate Studies (9 and 10)

- Level 9: Masters Degree or Postgraduate Diploma
- Level 10: Doctoral Degree or Higher Doctorate

Points Required for Degree (level 8) Courses in Ireland

The points for level 8 courses vary year by year according to the number of places available, and the number of applicants for those places.

Qualifax details how the points required to obtain a place in the degree (level 8) in Accounting & Finance at Dublin City University varied over a four year period:

- 2023: 509
- 2022: 529
- 2021: 544
- 2020: 510



It should be noted, also, that some courses will require higher scores than others in some subjects. You would need to have a high aptitude for mathematics to begin a degree in physics or engineering. If you were to study literature or history, on the other hand, that level would not be required but it would be an advantage or necessary to have scored well in LC English or History.

Taking some examples from Qualifax, here is a general idea of the kinds of points needed for a variety of level 8 courses in 2024:

Over 600:

Architecture, Technological University Dublin: 645
Interior Design, Technological University Dublin: 638
Dental Science, Trinity College Dublin: 625
Dentistry, University College Cork: 625
Pharmacy, University College Cork: 613

500 to 600:

Music, Cork School of Music: 600
Business Studies and French, Trinity College, Dublin: 564
Actuarial Mathematics, Dublin City University: 577
Business and Law, University College Dublin: 555
Art, ATU, Galway: 552
Computational Thinking, Maynooth University: 532
Mechanical Engineering, University of Galway: 532
Psychology, University of Galway: 531
Accounting and Finance, Dublin City University: 509
Architecture, University of Limerick: 511
Computer Science, University College Cork: 510
Philosophy, Trinity College, Dublin: 500

400 to 500:

AI and Machine Learning, University of Limerick: 498
Education (Primary Teaching), Mary Immaculate College: 497
Agricultural Science, University College Cork: 496
Biotechnology, University of Galway: 463
Law, Maynooth University: 462



Social Science, University College Cork: 445
Humanities, University College Dublin: 444
Applied Language & Translation Studies, Dublin City University: 442
Music, Trinity College Dublin: 442
Biotechnology, Maynooth University: 431
Journalism, University of Galway: 418
Languages, University of Limerick: 403
Communication Studies, Dublin City University: 400

300 to 400:

Journalism, Dublin City University: 388
Arts, English, University College Dublin: 378
IT Management, MTU Cork: 353
Business, TUS Limerick: 339
Architectural Technology, ATU Galway: 332
Agricultural Engineering, ATU Galway: 327
Hospitality Management, MTU Cork: 326
Creative Design, ATU Sligo: 323
Arts, English, Maynooth University : 310
Computer Science, ATU Donegal: 308
Architectural Technology, MTU Cork: 306
Agricultural Engineering, MTU Kerry: 301

200 to 300:

Veterinary Bioscience, MTU, Kerry: 300
Accounting, MTU, Cork: 293
Construction Management, Dundalk IT: 288
Business, ATU, Donegal: 282
Arts, Mary Immaculate College: 280
Sports Coaching and Performance, SETU, Waterford: 265
Business, SETU, Carlow: 260
Accounting and Finance, Griffith College, Dublin: 252
Community and Addiction Studies, TUS, Limerick: 235
Sports Science, TUC, Thurles: 219
Business, TU Dublin, Talaght: 211
Arts, SETU, Waterford: 210



The same degree at different institutions will not require the same points. Here are some comparisons in 2024:

A degree (level 8) in Early Childhood Care & Education:

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick: 390

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Athlone : 263

An Arts degree (level 8) in English:

University College Dublin: 378

Maynooth University: 310

An open Arts degree (level 8) :

Mary Immaculate College: 280

University College Cork: 300

Dundalk Institute of Technology: 228

A degree (level 8) in Mechanical Engineering:

University of Galway: 532

TUS, Athlone: 309

A degree (level 8) in General Nursing:

University of Limerick: 423

Dundalk Institute of Technology: 380

University College Dublin: 403



Two: Leaving Cert English



What Examiners are Looking for; PCLM

Every year, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) publishes an outline of how Leaving Cert English exam answers are awarded grades. They detail how, in their words, 'the tasks [specified in exam questions] set for candidates in both Paper 1 and Paper 2' are assessed. For both Ordinary and Higher levels, they specify 4 criteria which can be remembered using the initials of their key words, **PCLM**:

1: (P) Clarity of Purpose, 30% of the marks available for the task:
A student's answer must show 'a clear and purposeful engagement'.

The article from the SEC gives more detail on the criteria in Appendix A. Clarity of Purpose can mean the answer has any of the following:

relevance, focus, originality, freshness, evidence of critical literacy
(where appropriate), clear aim, understanding of genre

A summary of this criterion would observe that answers and essays must remain **clearly focussed on what is asked**. At any point in the answer/ essay, the reader should have a clear idea of how what he/ she is reading is **relevant**.

Critical literacy refers to the ability to speak or write critically about some subject, in particular, to uncover implicit meanings.

A student can demonstrate **critical literacy** effectively by using the terms established in the critical observation of that subject. In the case of **English studies**, this literacy will be evident in the language used in identifying, for example, genres of fiction (gothic novel, historical fiction...). In poetry, it would include the language used to analyse a text (stanza, end-rhyme, assonance...) in the critical process of bringing to light formal patterns in support of the observation of implicit meanings.

2: (C) Coherence of Delivery, 30% of the marks available for the task

This is described in the Appendix as follows:

Ability to sustain the response over the entire answer:
Where appropriate: continuity of argument, sequencing, management of ideas, choice of reference, use of examples, engagement with texts, control of register and shape, creative modelling

What examiners are looking for here is evidence that the student is able to 'sustain the response in an appropriate manner over the entire answer'.



If a piece of writing is coherent, it will have been well planned. As a result, it will be clear in detail and overall meaning, with **all of its parts fitting together**. In a coherent answer to a Leaving Cert question, all of its parts - from words to paragraphs - are clear, and can be understood to make sense together as a whole.

In other words, just as each sentence should be coherent, there should also be overall coherence. In the latter, careful attention to **the structure of your answer** - moving clearly from introduction, through distinct topics, to conclusion - is vital. To ensure coherence of delivery, your study strategy should include practising **prewriting**; putting a plan of an answer on paper before you begin to write on the exam sheet.

Answering questions in Section I (Comprehending) in Paper 1, and all sections in Paper 2, if a student's writing is coherent, the points made will make sense in the paragraphs they are in; they will follow one another logically. The paragraphs, in turn, will be coherent within the whole.

Answers that are coherent overall will have the following:

- an **introduction** with a clear **thesis statement (in an argumentative answer) or a statement of intent (in an essay question)**
- **transitional words/ phrases** within a paragraph that signpost the direction of the argument from point to point; Firstly...Secondly...; On the other hand...; As a result...
- clear **transitions** between paragraphs using **topic sentences**. Discussion of a topic could have a number of points within it. The topic itself, and why it is of interest, should be **clearly stated as an introductory sentence** in the first paragraph discussing it.
- answers on literary texts in Paper 2, should **refer to** and, if possible, **quote** from the text in support of the points being made. More detail on these components of an answer/ essay in [chapter 4](#).

In Section II - Composing, you will be asked to write a composition from a choice of options. The 6 most common ones are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1: Short story | 4: Newspaper/ Magazine Article |
| 2: Personal Essay | 5: Discursive Essay |
| 3: Speech/ Talk | 6: Descriptive Essay |

In writing any of these, **structural coherence** will be essential. In most essays, the same **introduction-body paragraphs-conclusion** structure will be the logical one.



Even the short story option will likely have a similar three-part structure; a character is introduced in a setting, his/her character is explored in relation to some circumstance/ issue they face, and some resolution is (or is not found) that brings the story to a close. For more guidance on both papers, see chapters five (Paper 1) and seven (Paper 2).

3: (L) Efficiency of Language Use, 30% of the marks available for the task:

The examiner will be focussed on the extent which you can 'manage and **control language** appropriate to the task'. The appendix of the SEC guide elaborates:

vocabulary, syntax, sentence patterns, punctuation appropriate to the register, use of lively interesting phrasing, energy, style, fluency appropriate to the task

An answer will need to be written according to **what kind of language** is appropriate to the task at hand. The English syllabus identifies **five genres of language use** that students must be aware of; informative, persuasive, argumentative, narrative, aesthetic; a detailed look at these in the next section.

4: (M) Accuracy of Mechanics, 10% of the marks available for accuracy in spelling and grammar.

Five Genres of Language Use; IPANA

The five genres of language that students must bear in mind can be memorised using the acronym, **IPANA**:

I: The language of INFORMATION: impersonal/ objective style; no "I"

P: The language of PERSUASION: "I" or "We"; a personal style can be used

A: The language of ARGUMENT: impersonal/objective style, little or no "I"

N: NARRATIVE Language: an objective (no "I") or subjective ('I') narrator

A: AESTHETIC use of language as an art form; used in poetry, fiction, drama, descriptive prose

Features/ Elements of IPANA:

For Paper 1, you will need to be able to identify any of these uses of language in the texts you are asked to comprehend in Section I. To answer question **A (iii)**, you must be able to point out '**features**' or '**elements**' of any one or more of the five.



We need to be familiar with these if we are to be able to identify when one or more of the genres of writing are present in a text, and to be able to apply the appropriate style when asked to write a composition in Question B of Section 1, and the composition question in Section II. We will look at these features in detail in chapter five.

Which of these styles of language (IPANA) will be 'appropriate' will depend on whether you are **answering a question or writing an essay**, and whether the question asks you to include how you *feel* about the topic.

If you want your reader to agree with your point of view, there are two options. You can **persuade** them by appealing to them on an emotional level; persuasion aims at the '**heart**'. Your own feelings can be included.

In Paper 1, the '**speech**' or '**talk**' option is an example where persuasion can be what is needed; you could also have elements of narrative or aesthetic language in that kind of composition. A speech or talk could also be informative and include an argumentative component. These would lend support to the persuasive thrust of the speech.

If you want to win an **argument**, you use logic and reason; you appeal to the '**head**'. If you are answering a question in Paper 2, you want to remove yourself personally from your answers because your feelings about the literary text you are discussing are not of value **unless** you are specifically asked for them. You will use language that is informative (**I**) and argumentative (**A**), and you will present evidence from the texts to support the points that build your overall argument.

More on persuasive and argumentative writing in chapter five.



Three: Prescribed Material, 2025



The Single Text; Section I of Paper 2 (60 marks)

Novel:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Bronte, Anne (1820-1849)	The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)	332	83,000	5 hrs, 32 mins
Doerr, Anthony (B. 1973)	All the Light We Cannot See (2014)	544	136,000	9 hrs, 4 mins
Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)	Frankenstein (1831)	352	88,000	5 hrs, 52 mins

Drama:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Miller, Arthur (1915-2005)	The Crucible (1953)	126	31,500	2 hrs
Shakespeare, William (1564-1616)	King Lear (early 17th century)	352	88,000	5hrs, 52 mins

I have included word counts and reading times as estimated by the website Reading Length, and where each page is given an average count of 250 words. Their numbers are based on a reading speed of 250 words per minute, though it should be borne in mind that this is quite a bit faster than most people read. They have a facility on their site which allows you to estimate your reading speed:

<https://www.readinglength.com/wpm>

The website offers three levels of difficulty to test your speed: Elementary, Moderate (suitable for second level students), and Collegiate (for third level readers).

Whatever your reading speed is, if you are rushing through the text, you are wasting time. There are a number of things you can do to ensure you use your reading time efficiently. I recommend a strategy in [chapter seven](#).

Realistically, since your attention will be quite focussed, and because you will be taking notes, your study time will be very much greater than your reading time. In planning study sessions, then, you should allow yourself **double the time** given in the reading times shown; 12 hours for *King Lear*, for example.



The Comparative Study; Section II of Paper 2 (70 marks)

Comparative Modes:

The three comparative modes chosen for the 2025 exam are:

- (i) Theme or issue
- (ii) Cultural Context
- (iii) General Vision and Viewpoint

Not included: Literary Genre

Novel:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi (b. 1977)	Purple Hibiscus (2003)	307	76, 750	5 hrs, 7 mins
Austen, Jane (1775-1817)	Pride and Prejudice (1813)	448	112,000	7 hrs, 28 mins
Barker, Pat (b. 1973)	The Silence of the Girls (2018)	336	84,000	5 hrs, 36 mins
Barrett, Colin (b. 1982)	Young Skins (2013)	224	56,000	3hrs, 40 mins
Barry, Sebastian (b. 1955)	Days Without End (2016)	272	68,000	4 hrs, 30 mins
Bronte, Anne (1820-1849)	The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)	332	83,000	5 hrs, 32 mins
Chandler, Raymond (1888-1959)	The Big Sleep (1939)	176	44,000	2 hrs, 56 mins
Doerr, Anthony (b. 1973)	All the Light We Cannot See (2014)	544	136,000	9 hrs, 4 mins
Du Maurier, Daphne (1907-1989)	Rebecca (1938)	380	95,000	6 hrs, 20mins



Novel:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Hardy, Thomas (1840-1929)	The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)	288	72,000	4hrs, 48 mins
Ishiguro, Kazuo (b. 1954)	Never Let Me Go (2005)	304	76,000	5 hrs, 4 mins
Keegan, Claire (b. 1958)	Small Things Like These (2021)	128	32,000	2 hrs, 8 mins
O'Connor, Nuala (b. 1970)	Miss Emily (2015)	350	87, 500	5hrs, 48 mins
O'Farrell, Maggie (b. 1972)	Hamnet (2020)	320	80,000	5 hrs, 20 mins
Owens, Delia (b. 1949)	Where the Crawdads Sing (2018)	385	96,250	6 hrs, 25 mins
Rash, Ron (1953)	The Cove (2012)	256	64,000	4 hrs 30 mins
Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)	Frankenstein (1831 version)	352	88,000	5 hrs, 52 mins
Whitehead, Colson (b. 1969)	The Underground Railroad (2016)	338	84,500	5hrs, 30 mins

Memoir:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Gregory, Tom	A Boy in the Water (2018)	192	48,000	3hrs, 12 mins
Westover, Tara (b. 1986)	Educated (2018)	352	88,000	5 hrs, 52 mins



Drama:

Author	Title	Pages	Words	Reading Time
Butterworth, Jez (b. 1969)	The Ferryman	160	40,000	2 hrs, 40 mins
Euripides (c.480 – c.406 BC)	Medea	72	18,000	1 hr, 12 mins
Hansberry, Lorraine (1930-1965)	A Raisin in the Sun (1959)	160	40,000	2 hrs 30 mins
Keane, John B. (1928-2002)	Sive (1959)	128	32,000	2 hrs, 8 mins
Mc Mahon, Phillip	Once before I go	120	30,000	2 hrs
Miller, Arthur (1915-2005)	The Crucible (1953)	126	31,500	2 hrs 6 mins
Samuels, Diane (b. 1960)	Kindertransport (1995)	96	24,000	1 hr, 36 mins
Shakespeare, William (1564-1616)	King Lear (early 17th century)	352	88,000	5hrs, 52 mins
	The Merry Wives of Windsor	112	28,000	1 hr, 52 mins

Film:

Director	Title	Running Time
Anderson, Wes (b. 1969)	The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014)	1hr, 40 mins
Breathnach, Paddy (b. 1964)	Rosie (2018)	1hr, 26 mins
Darabont, Frank (b. 1959)	The Shawshank Redemption (1994)	2hrs, 22 mins
Gamze Ergüven, Deniz (b. 1978)	Mustang (2015)	1hr, 37 mins
Gerwig, Greta (b. 1983)	Ladybird (2017)	1hr, 34 mins
Johnson, Rian (b. 1973)	Knives Out (2019)	2hrs, 10 mins
Kapadia, Asif (b. 1972)	Diego Maradona (2019)	2hrs, 10 mins
Kazan, Elia (1909-2003)	On the Waterfront (1954)	1hr, 48 mins



Poetry; Section III of Paper 2 (70 marks)

Poet	Poems	Themes
<p>Boland, Eavan (1944-2020)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>The War House Child of Our Time The Famine Road The Shadow Doll White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland Outside History The Black Lace Fan my Mother Gave Me This Moment The Pomegranate Love</p>	<p>political Violence, motherhood, love, death, gender</p>
<p>Dickinson, Emily (1830-1886)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>"Hope" is the thing with feathers There's a certain Slant of light I felt a Funeral, in my Brain A Bird came down the Walk I Heard a fly buzz - when I died The Soul has Bandaged moments I could bring You Jewels - had I a mind to A narrow Fellow in the Grass I taste a liquor never brewed After great pain, a formal feeling comes</p>	<p>death/ mortality, psychological crisis, suffering, transcendence, spirituality, nature, society</p>
<p>Eliot, T.S. (1888-1965)</p> <p>8 Poems</p>	<p>The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock Preludes Aunt Helen <i>from</i> The Waste Land: II A Game of Chess Journey of the Magi <i>from</i> Landscapes: III Usk IV Rannoch, by Glencoe <i>from</i> Four Quartets: East Coker IV</p>	<p>modern society, spirituality, alienation, gender, death</p>
<p>Hopkins, Gerard Manley (1844-1889)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>God's Grandeur Spring As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame The Windhover Pied Beauty Felix Randal Inversnaid I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day No worst there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend</p>	<p>nature, God in nature, humankind's fallen state, death, crisis in faith, psychological suffering</p>



Poet	Poems	Themes
<p>Kavanagh, Patrick (1904-1967)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>Inniskeen Road: July Evening Shancoduff <i>from</i> The Great Hunger; Section I Advent A Christmas Childhood Epic Canal Bank Walk Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal The Hospital On Raglan Road</p>	<p>early 20th century Ireland, rural poverty, the creative life, childhood innocence, spirituality, unrequited love, death</p>
<p>Mahon, Derek (1941-2020)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>Grandfather Day Trip to Donegal Ecclesiastes After the Titanic As It Should Be A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford Rathlin The Chinese Restaurant in Portrush Kinsale Antarctica</p>	<p>modern/ global culture, 20th century Ireland, society, nature, multiculturalism, alienation, family</p>
<p>Plath, Sylvia (1932-1963)</p> <p>10 Poems</p>	<p>Black Rook in Rainy Weather The Times Are Tidy Morning Song Finisterre Mirror Pheasant Elm Poppies in July The Arrival of the Bee Box Child</p>	<p>women's experience, patriarchy, family, race, relationships, psychological suffering, childhood innocence</p>
<p>Smith, Tracy K (b. 1972)</p> <p>12 Poems</p>	<p>Joy (Elegy 1) Dominion over the beasts of the Earth The Searchers Letter to a Photojournalist Going In The Universe is a House Party The Museum of Obsolescence Don't you wonder, sometimes? It's Not The Universe as Primal Scream The Greatest Personal Privation I am 60 odd years of age - from I will tell you the truth about this, I will tell you all about it Ghazal</p>	<p>grief, adolescence, family, race</p>



Four: Studying for LC English Exams



Before looking specifically at studying for Papers 1 and 2, some important general understanding of what is required should be observed.

The learn-by-writing component of your studies:

Studying for any English exam, you must keep in mind that it is your **writing** that is going to determine what grade you get. Your study strategy, then, should be designed according to the need to learn, not simply by listening to your teacher, and through reading.

A crucial part of your study time should be dedicated to **the practise of writing**; answering **past exam questions** from Section I, Paper 1 (Comprehending) and Paper 2, and writing essays from Section II, Paper 1 (Composing). There must be, in other words, a **learn-by-writing** component to your strategy. This is why you are given assignments in school.

As much as time allows, however, you should also incorporate this practical component into your **personal study strategy**. Many students would prefer to think that when they have listened to their teacher explain a topic and/or have read about it in a book, they are ready to write about it. To some extent this is true, but if we want to be able to perfect something, we need to **practise** doing it as much as possible.

When we **practise writing**, we improve our ability to find the right words, to construct effective sentences, to organise coherent paragraphs. Overall, we become more efficient, more skilful writers, and when we sit down to take an exam, we are confident we are ready to answer any question.

The Importance of Prewriting:

Picture the moment your English exam begins. You look through the questions for a few minutes. The importance of what you do next cannot be overstated. You choose the first question you want to answer, and you begin to gather your thoughts together in an organised manner **on paper**. This is called **prewriting**.

In the exam scenario, prewriting is particularly crucial given that, apart from a word or two, you will not have the time to rewrite what you commit to your answer sheet. You need to have already **prewritten** your answer/ essay by



laying it out so that the structure and notes you have included in it are there to guide you through your writing. We need, then, a clear **method of prewriting**; of how to organise those notes we begin taking when we have chosen a question to answer. We will devise one here by looking at the basic structure we use **writing an essay**, and adapt it, not just to prewriting the essay we write in Section II of Paper 1, but also any answer on either of the two papers.

The Basic Structure of an Essay:

In Section II of **Paper 1**, you will be given a choice of writing one of a variety of kinds of essay which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. In **Paper 2**, most of what you will write in your answers to questions on fiction, plays, and poetry will necessarily be in **an argumentative style**; an objective (impersonal), formal style that seeks to **defend a thesis** (your point of view on the text) point-by-point through any combination of observation, explanation, analysis, reference/ quotation (if possible).

We will look here at the basic structure of an argumentative essay, and from it devise our method of **prewriting our answers** to any question in the LC exams. It will have **three parts**; an **introduction** in three parts, a **main section** or the "body" divided into paragraphs by topic, and a **conclusion** in two parts:

Introduction

- 1: Lead-in
- 2: Thesis Statement
- 3: Essay Map

Body Paragraphs

Each topic will have

- 1: A topic sentence
- 2: A coherent **defence** of the **thesis** point by point with supporting evidence, analysis, explanation, reference/ quotation

Conclusion

- 1: Summary Thesis Statement
- 2: Clincher



Three Parts of an Introduction

The Lead-in: As its name suggests, this part of an introduction **leads the reader into the essay** by giving some preliminary thoughts and/or information on the subject that are relevant to the subject.

In an essay on Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, the writer might give some background information; when they were written, what the main themes are, and so on. The **lead-in**, then, clarifies the direction in which the essay is going before it is made more specific in the **thesis statement** and **essay map**.

The Thesis Statement:

There needs to be **a clear statement in the introduction of what the essay is going to argue**. The argumentative essay is going to **defend** this **thesis**. The TS is usually a sentence or two but can be more.

It must **not be a statement of fact** since that is not something that can be argued. It must **not be something obvious or something that is common knowledge** like 'Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a great play' because there will be nothing to argue in such a statement. Another common error in this TS is that it is **not specific enough**. The play is 'great' in what way? What aspect of the play is to be discussed?

The Essay Map: the introduction should **inform the reader of what topics are going to be discussed** in the body paragraphs. This "map" will clarify where the essay will "go". An EM in an essay on the poetry of Emily Dickinson will identify which poems will be discussed and briefly state why they are of interest. You will see this in the sample provided below.

The Body Paragraphs

In a 5-paragraph essay, we will have a minimum of three paragraphs in the body of the essay. With three topics outlined in the EM, then, **one paragraph would be devoted to each**. When more lengthy discussion is required, of course, more than one paragraph can be used for a topic.

Unity: in order to preserve **a coherent argument**, only *one* topic is discussed at a time. Paragraphs on stated topics should not drift into other topics or discuss irrelevant details.



The topic sentence: Each topic should be introduced in a sentence or two. This usually will be the **first sentence or two in the first paragraph** on that topic. For the sake of unity, **new topics** should **not be introduced** at the end of the last paragraph on the previous topic; they should be clarified in a new paragraph.

As well as making clear that a new topic is about to be discussed, the topic sentence can serve as a general statement of what is to be argued in the paragraph(s); **a mini thesis statement**, as it were. For example, here is the 2016 question on the poetry of Emily Dickinson:

Dickinson's use of an innovative style to explore intense experiences can both intrigue and confuse." Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the poetry of Emily Dickinson on your course.

With this kind of "statement" question you are **given the thesis** that an answer is to **defend**; in this case, that the poetry can 'both intrigue and confuse' and that the poet does so in an 'innovative style'. You would also need to focus on how her poetry explores 'intense experiences'. This could be clarified as you defend the thesis.

In my sample answer below, because I have written it as an essay, I was able to devote a whole paragraph to introducing my first topic; the poem, 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain'. The first sentence I wrote, however, would serve as a the first of two topic sentences in an exam. I have put the key words from the question in bold: 'In 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' Dickinson presents us with a poetic description of a very **intense**, if not terrifying **experience**; the speaker's mental deterioration and collapse'.

I add clarification of what it is I am going to talk about in the poem with two more sentences: 'Her **innovative** use of form in the poem, as well as the ambiguity she exploits in the key word *sense*, means that we will inevitably find it difficult in our first readings. That **confusion**, however, is inseparable from the **intrigue** that draws us back to it, and it is through its clarification that much of our appreciation of the poem emerges'.

I can now plan to **defend** the claims made in these topic sentences. In an exam, I would take notes in my prewriting of what points I would make to defend what I have claimed about the poem in these topic sentences:

- 1: use of assonance underlines the **intensity** of the speaker's **experience**
- 2: **innovative** use of **punctuation** also intensifies the speaker's **experience**

3: the meaning of the word **sense** in stanza 1 causes a **confusion** that draws us **intriguingly** toward an understanding of how the poem ends

With **three topic sentences**, the poem is introduced and the reader is clear about what to expect. The defence of the thesis is constructed in the body paragraphs point by point. The topic sentences not only make clear what the topic will be, but also reiterate what the thesis of the essay/ answer is. Each of the three points will now be made in support of the thesis in a **point-quote-defend** manner.

You may be familiar with the point-quote-**explain** formula. I prefer to use the word **defend** for an **argumentative** essay/ answer because it denotes more accurately what we are doing; presenting evidence from the text in order to **defend the thesis** stated in our introduction.

The concluding sentence: a sentence at the end of a paragraph reiterating a topic's relevance to the defence of the thesis. This is optional.

The Point-Quote-Defend formula:

The discussion, above all else, needs to be **coherent**. We noted in chapter 2 that the State Examinations Commission specifies that 30% of the marks given will be for **Coherence of delivery**; that students must be able to 'sustain the response in an appropriate manner over the entire answer'.

You can help sustain coherence by applying the **point-quote-defend formula**:

1: make a point; in the answers to questions in Paper 2, this should be something you want to **argue** that will be part of your overall defence of your thesis as stated in your introduction.

This, for example, as in the sample essay below, could be that Emily Dickinson, in 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,' heightens our sense of the **intense experience** of the speaker through the rhyming of open vowel sounds. This would then be accompanied by evidence in the form of reference/ quotation, and brief discussion to **defend the point**.

2: Reference/ Quotation: you need to focus the reader's attention on the relevant part of **the text**. It is not always possible in an exam setting to quote, but that is not a problem; you are asked only for reference.

3: Defence: it is not enough to make your point; you must also **defend** the claim it makes. In the example of the Dickinson poem, you would discuss how the vowel sounds heighten the sense we have of the speaker's experience.



4: Repeat the formula: You might make two or three other points to complete the paragraph(s) on the topic being discussed. For a coherent argument, all of these together, such as three points about the poem, 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,' are components of your **defence of your thesis**. If you have made one point about Dickinson's **tone**, you could follow this up with an observation of some of the **imagery** she uses; a third point might highlight her use of **metaphor**.

Sometimes a question will ask you to **agree or disagree**, but the TS will be there in the question. It will be your job to answer by presenting evidence from **3 or 4 poems** using the **point-quote-defend formula** with 3 or 4 points on each poem preceded by one or more topic sentences.

Your **prewriting** for these answers will be based on the essay structure I am outlining here. Before you start writing on the answer sheet, **you can have your answer laid out in front of you**. Your prewriting will begin, then, by simply writing down **the headings** of these parts that make up a basic essay; Introduction with its three parts (Lead-in, TS, EM), Body Paragraphs, Conclusion (STS, Clincher).

This will give you a much better chance of maintaining coherence throughout your answer because you will have **thought it through** with notes taken under each heading beforehand.

Two Parts of a Conclusion

The Summary Thesis Statement: here we remind the reader what our thesis (overall argument) is, and we go through what topics have been discussed in its defence. This can be easily done by taking the TS and EM from the introduction and **rewriting them in new words**.

The Clincher: This is a **final thought** that should "clinch" the argument if it is an argumentative essay. Any non-argumentative answer or essay, however, will also read with greater coherence with a satisfying close; a call-to-action in a speech, perhaps; a resolution of a character's issues in a short story...



Sample Argumentative Essay:

The **2016** question on the poetry of Emily Dickinson:

"Dickinson's use of an innovative style to explore intense experiences can both intrigue and confuse."

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the poetry of Emily Dickinson on your course.

Notes:

1: The essay is written to a standard **above second level** so don't worry that it may seem more in-depth than you are used to.

2: This is an extract from **a longer essay** I have written on the four poems. I have included the analysis in the body paragraphs of **just two** of these.

3: I have included some **notes in parentheses** as a guide, and use of the letters **P**, **Q**, and **D** to indicate **P**oint, **Q**uotation, and **D**efence

4: **Key words** (or synonyms of them) from the question are highlighted to show how I am keeping the discussion focussed on what is asked; **innovative style**, **intense experiences**, **intrigue**, **confuse**.

5: The discussion proceeds by way of the **point-quote-defend** strategy.

INTRODUCTION

LEAD-IN:

[I am answering this question in *essay* form. In an *answer* in an exam setting, you would not need so much detail. Your lead-in could be just a couple of sentences.]

Emily Dickinson was a master of the lyric poem, most of what she wrote is shaped into regular rhyming patterns varied for effect, and short four-line stanzas that are, however, packed with dramatic energy. Of her almost 1,800 poems, many deal with difficult themes of pain, suffering, and death. Her settings, then, frequently present us with a speaker recalling **intense experiences**. Other poems are positive in theme and tone; quiet reflection on the human spirit, for example, and/or exuberant celebration of the natural world. I will explore examples of both here.



THESIS STATEMENT:

[A clear statement of what is to be argued (the thesis) is crucial to the essay's coherence]

So many of Dickinson's poems are likely to cause reader's some **confusion** given the eccentric style and complex use of language and imagery that makes the poetry so **intriguing**. We also see **striking innovation** in the use of form; dashes to pause her lines dramatically at key moments, for example, and her unusual use of capital letters have become signature features. In addition, we appreciate Dickinson's astute awareness of the sounds and rhythms of language to bring the **experiences** of her speaker to life with **great intensity**.

ESSAY MAP:

[The reader is told what poems will be discussed, each one identifying a topic; 4 topics in all in the original essay; two are included here; 1 and 4]

[**Topic 1**] 'I felt a Funeral, In my Brain' presents a speaker undergoing some form of mental breakdown. The poem, however, as I will read it, can be understood as an affirmative statement of a deeply spiritual poet, once we deal with **the confusion** of meaning its terms of expression can cause.

[...]

[**Topic 4**] Another uplifting poem I will explore here is 'I taste a liquor never brewed,' a paean to nature that is accompanied by a touch of satirical humour that gives it an **intriguing** edge. This poem can also cause the reader some **confusion**, in particular, the first line from which its title is taken, and its allusion to the figures referred to as 'Saints' in the final stanza.

TOPIC 1

[**Topic sentences for Topic 1:** the poem 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain'. A number of topic sentences introduce the poem below. You would not need this much in an exam answer but the objective would be the same; introduction to the topic and what is of interest in it; one or two sentences would be enough]

In 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' Dickinson presents us with a poetic description of the speaker's mental deterioration. As we see in the first line/ title, she equates this crisis poetically with the setting of a funeral. This metaphor demonstrates the **innovative** spark of her imagination. While it may strike us as incongruous, we discover that it is a very effective expression of the psychological foreboding being suffered by the speaker; an **intense**, if not terrifying, **experience** that ends with the collapse of [Q] 'Reason' after which,



however, the speaker is left somehow 'knowing' something. The question of what kind of knowledge could survive this "death" in the mind makes for a very **intriguing** poem. We can begin to observe this by looking at some of the prominent features of the poem's form.

[Analysis of form as an expression of theme/ tone/ setting; assonance, use of the dash and capitalisation as innovations **Point 1:** on the use of assonance in the rhyming patterns of the poem]

[P] On first reading, we will immediately note the formal properties that contribute to the impression of **intense experience**. We can see in her word choice, a use of language that serves the **foreboding** tone set by the imagery.

[D] The words that rhyme in the first three stanzas all have a long, ominous sound to them; [Q] 'fro' in half-rhyme with 'through,' 'Drum' rhyming with 'numb,' and 'Soul' with 'toll.' [D] The sombre metaphor of the funeral setting is given its aural counterpart in the overtones being registered through this use of assonance.

[**Point 2:** on D's punctuation; the use of dashes]

[P] We note also Dickinson's **innovative** use of punctuation as she works within the limits of the poem's form to **intensify** the drama of the speaker's psychological crisis in the short space of 5 quatrains. [D] Dashes are placed before the repetition of *treading* and *beating* in stanzas 1 and 2 respectively. In addition, these words deploy a trochaic measure of stressed syllable followed by unstressed syllable.

[D] These pauses and rhythms together give us a formal expression of contrary forces, as if the movement of the imagined funeral ceremony is pushing back against the more natural iambic flow of the first two lines; in stanza 1: [Q] '*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, / And Mourners to and fro*'. These formal registers contribute to our sense of the inexorable approach of the breakdown in [Q] 'Reason' that we learn, in the closing stanza, the speaker has suffered.

[**Point 3:** the confusion caused by the use of the word *sense*; when we resolve the confusion, we understand the poem]

[P] I want to turn now to the meaning of the key word *sense* used in stanza 1. **Confusion** would seem to be inevitable when we read that [Q] 'Sense was breaking through' in the context of the whole poem. [P] Although this, at first, is discouraging, it can be seen to be an essential element in the development of the poem's meaning. When we resolve the **confusion**, we understand the poem.



[D] In stanza 5, it seems reasonable to assume that the anticipation of some kind of breakthrough has been fulfilled. We are familiar with the use of the verbal phrase *breaking through* as a metaphor indicating a positive outcome; in this case, the recovery of clarity of mind in the idea of [Q] 'Sense...breaking through' in stanza 1. That meaning is suggested again in the metaphor to describe the speaker's experience. The breaking of a [Q] 'Plank' locates the moment that opens the speaker's way toward 'knowing' in the closing stanza.

The image might appear initially to be a fulfilment of what is anticipated in stanza 1. It is referring us, however, to the collapse of [Q] 'Reason,' the faculty without which the mind cannot be clear. Here, the reader is likely to be **confused**. Also, the speaker is pictured falling *down*, not the direction we associate with a positive mental breakthrough:

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

[P] We are encouraged now to resolve our feeling of **confusion** by reconsidering what *sense* can mean in this context. [D] It appears that the mind, not in its recovery, but in its failure, allowed the speaker access to some other kind of [Q] 'knowing'. It is not, however, a breakthrough of the light of reason that we are being referred to.

[D] Our **confusion** clears away, then, if we consider that perhaps Dickinson is alluding to a knowledge available on the other side of a collapse of the cognitive faculties, one that is spiritual in nature. There is then a [Q] 'Sense' given in this 'breaking through' of the soul beyond the limited capacity of the mind; to a non-rational, spiritual sense of the self.

[...]

TOPIC 4

[Topic 4: Topic sentences introducing 'I taste a liquor never brewed']

In 'I taste a liquor never brewed,' we see Dickinson's dissatisfaction with the prevailing puritan ethic of her day, one that would have frowned upon the expression of joy that the speaker refuses to repress. The poem is a **veiled articulation** of the poet's determination to maintain a theological perspective



that finds spiritual significance in an “intoxicating” joy of the natural world. Its experience is presented with the kind of **intensity** we come to expect when reading these short **innovative** poems that are crammed with so much connotation that they are always **intriguing**. They are also, however, often **confusing**.

[Point 1: understanding the poem’s analogy is the key to the poem’s satire]

[P] What is **innovative** about much of Dickinson’s poetry can be seen in her use of language once again. The speaker’s exuberant celebration of the natural world is **intensely** felt. But the poem opens with the idea of drinking [Q] ‘a liquor never brewed’ to describe it. [P] Once we resolve any **confusion** this line might cause, this **intriguing** paradox becomes a memorable reference point for the satiric thrust of the poem.

[P] We understand that Dickinson has applied the metaphor of being intoxicated by nature in order to cast an ironic light on the kind of pious disdain that saw all pleasure as inherently sinful, and that she refused to subscribe to. We will likely remain **confused** about the meaning of the poem until we understand that Dickinson intends that we see the absurdity in the very analogy she establishes in her metaphor.

[Point 2: the historical context informs our understanding of the poem]

[D] The inspiration for the analogy that equates the consumption of alcohol with the indulgence of the natural world can be found in Dickinson’s native Massachusetts. In her day, temperance movements, generally organised by religious leaders, were common. Before her time – Dickinson was born in 1830 – for example, The Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance was founded (1813), an example of the move to curb the abuse of alcohol that would continue throughout the 19th century, and beyond.

[P] The poem expresses Dickinson’s refusal to apply the same values of temperance to the enjoyment of nature. It acts as a corrective to an over-zealous, and consequently indiscriminate, censure of the pleasure she found in the natural world.

[Point 3: the metaphor goes on to anthropomorphise the setting;]

[D] Extending the logic of the poem’s central metaphor, a variety of natural phenomena are transformed; the speaker becomes an [Q] ‘Inebriate of air/ ... And Debauchee of Dew’; the skies become ‘inns of molten Blue’; ‘Foxgloves’ become the same for ‘the drunken Bee’ who are thrown out by imaginary ‘Landlords’; ‘Butterflies’ vow to drink no more, to ‘renounce their “drams”’. These anthropomorphisms are an enchanting dramatisation of common



observation where these insects will indulge the nectar of flowers until summer ends and/or they have had their fill. The disorientation that their clumsy flight typically suggests fully complements the mischievous idea that they too are figuratively drunk on the beauty of nature. The central metaphor in these images becomes a vivid expression of the "intoxications" of nature that the speaker openly indulges. The **intensity of the experience** is made clear.

[Point 4: Dickinson uses an absurd analogy to equate drinking alcohol with enjoying nature; this absurdity reflects derisively on the idea that it is shameful behaviour; ironic tone]

[D] At the same time, there is great irony in the analogy which suggests that the speaker's joy is analogous to the abuse of alcohol. But, of course, whatever behaviour such an indulgence might inspire, could only be condemned from a perspective that misrepresents reality. There is nothing at all detrimental to one's physical, mental, or spiritual life in the sensational pleasures of the natural world. The idea of its over-indulgence does not satisfy common sense.

[Point 5: the question of who the 'Saints' are]

[P] Dickinson's analogy attributes the perspective that would disapprove of the speaker's "intoxication" to whoever the [Q] 'Saints' are in stanza 4. [D] In some puritan churches, members could be referred to as 'saints' which might be the inspiration for Dickinson's description. Otherwise, we are to understand it in more general terms; an ironic allusion to the puritan model of proper behaviour that forbids even the most natural expressions of emotion. These saints, furthermore, may be on the other side of [Q] 'windows' that look down from a celestial height which they share with the 'Seraphs' of the preceding line.

[Point 6: the perspective of the 'Saints' and its absurdity; the speaker's vow to continue, the irony of the censure of enjoying nature]

[D] We are told that, whoever and wherever these people are, they run to these windows and, of course, it is not to witness the speaker's actual drunken behaviour, but rather, her unrestrained *joie de vivre*. In their eyes, she is a shameless figure whose behaviour flouts the puritan model of restraint.



[D] With the natural setting imaginatively transformed, the incongruity of the analogy encourages the reader to see the absurdity of the self-repression they encourage. With these [Q] 'Saints' being drawn in hurried anticipation to spy on the apparent scandal, then, we suspect the gratification of a sanctimonious piety that Dickinson rejects. [P] The ironic tone of the poem registers, and any **confusion** we might have experienced about its meaning is resolved.

[D] The speaker declares that she will never "abstain" from her revelry. The irony is scathing as she dismisses the warning signs noted in relation to the [Q] 'drunken Bee' and the butterflies, and vows that she 'shall but drink the more!'. How **intensely** this is felt is underlined by the simple use of an exclamation mark.

[D] Ironically, the perfection of seraphs and saints means the loss of what the "intoxicating" experience of the world has to offer. [P] Rejecting this heavenly state, then, becomes a life-affirming embrace of the human condition that refuses to condemn the experience. Paradoxically, as a human being of flesh and blood, she enjoys the dubious gift of her imperfection. [P] Despite the **confusion** we may experience when reading so much from so few lines in Dickinson's invariably compact style, this discovery of meaning is very rewarding for the reader.

[Point 7: the poem is life-affirming; the 'Tippler' image]

[P] Any **confusion** about why Dickinson employed the poem's analogy is finally cleared away in the impression given of the innocuous figure that these people run to their windows to disparage. [D] In the final image, the speaker conceives of herself in diminutive terms; she is a [Q] 'little Tippler,' a description which suggests childlike innocence. This impression ridicules the gravity of the perspective on the speaker's apparently transgressive behaviour. Derogatory terms like *drunkard* have been avoided to this end. *Tippler* is today an archaic word for a habitual drinker but it would generally not have been used to connote heavy or abusive consumption.

[Point 8: the sun image; appears to approve of the behaviour of the 'Tippler']

[D] Also, in the final line, the sun, a vital source of all life, is personified and enjoys the company of the speaker who is pictured [Q] 'Leaning against' it as if in need of support in her state of intoxication. [P] The image articulates a final point of dissent that sees her indulgence approved by the cosmos itself.



[P] Also, it alludes to the analogy once again through which the absurdity of the puritan perspective is exposed in the poem. [D] What we might expect, as would be conventional, would be a drunken figure leaning on a lamppost or against a wall. [P] Dickinson demonstrates another **innovation** here by replacing this image with one suggesting an intimate relationship with the universe.

The expectation that the speaker should be presented in the degrading manner of a solitary drunk is frustrated. [P] [D] Also, we see in Dickinson's familiar use of punctuation a pause that underlines this point; a familiar dash suspends the moment before revealing this truth that what there is to be seen is not scandalous but life-affirming.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY THESIS STATEMENT:

[The TS and EM paraphrased]

These are poems that try to make poetic sense of often painful, **intense experience**; the collapse of [Q] 'Reason' in 'I felt a funeral,' for example. Our **confusion** in this poem encourages us to consider how we may have a spiritual *sense* of ourselves that is awoken beyond the limits of reason. In 'I taste a liquor never brewed' too, once we sift through the **confusions** that the central analogy and the allusion to saintly figures might generate, there is great satisfaction in seeing clearly what the poet's intended meaning is. The poem presents another **intriguing**, and **intensely** felt scenario, taken this time from the brighter side of common experience.

CLINCHER:

[A final thought summing up to leave the reader convinced of what has been argued about the poet]

If readers can accept these **confusions**, they will be rewarded with a deeply contemplative poetry that is remarkable for how its **innovative** short stanzas manage the complexity of thought and metaphor we have observed. If we can give these poems patient attention, we will find strength in the courage with which some of them approach very challenging realities. In others, we will be moved by Dickinson's affirmation of the spirit that struggles to transcend them.



A Prewriting Method for Essays and Exam Answers:

In the basic structure of an essay applied above, you have the basis of a **prewriting method** which you can also use in writing essays and in answering exam questions.

In, Paper 2, for example, once you are ready to answer a question, you can prepare by **writing down the headings** used above for the essay. These will help you to organise your thoughts. This **prewriting** will give you the best possible chance of fulfilling the first two criteria that examiners will look for in **PCLM**; clarity of **Purpose** (30%) and **Coherence** of delivery (30%).

You will manage efficiency of **Language** use (30%) by writing in a style appropriate to the task. In this case; impersonal (unless otherwise specified), analytical, **argumentative**, with supporting evidence in the form of reference/quotation. If your spelling and grammar are good you shouldn't lose any points for the 4th criterion: accuracy of **Mechanics** (10%).

You can begin prewriting your answer by taking notes for the various parts that you will use to write it: thesis statement, essay map... In an exam I would begin by **prewriting an answer** with something like the following for the 2016 question answered in essay form above:

INTRO

Lead-in:

- D wrote almost 1800 poems
- many very dark but some celebrate life
- deeply spiritual poet

TS:

key words: innovative style, intense experiences, intrigue, confuse.

The thesis:

- the poems can **confuse** but they are also **intriguing**
- the poems convey **intense experiences**
- D was an **innovative** poet; the form of the poems; use of dashes

EM:

Topics:

1: I felt a funeral...: very dark, but also positive perhaps; 'Sense' and 'knowing'

2: 'I heard a fly buzz...' dark too but transcendence of the soul

3: 'Hope is the thing...' the human capacity for hope is celebrated

4: 'I taste a liquor...' celebrates the pleasure of the natural world; ironic, satirical perspective on contemporary Puritan view that pleasure is sinful



BODY PARAS

TOPIC 1: 'I felt a funeral...'

- Point 1: rhyme scheme with open vowel sounds
- Point 2: use of dashes is innovative; dramatises the intense experience
- Point 3: confusion caused by the word *sense*
- Point 4: the collapse of 'Reason'
- Point 5: the 'knowing' at the end of the poem cant be rational; confusion can be resolved

[...]

TOPIC 4: 'I taste a liquor...'

Point 1: intensely felt but positive experience; joy of nature; confusion in first line; intriguing

Point 2: historical context: the temperance movement in 19th century USA

Point 3: anthropomorphism; 'the drunken Bee' etc.

Point 4: the central metaphor: 'inebriate of air' and so on; intoxication suggests an intense enjoyment of nature; irony in the analogy suggests satire of saintly figures

Point 5: who might these 'Saints' be?; absurd to censure enjoyment of nature/ life

Point 6: the perspective of the 'Saints' v the speaker who vows: 'I shall but drink the more'

Point 7: the 'little Tippler' is an endearing term

Point 8: the sun image; the little tippler is 'Leaning against' it

CONCLUSION

Summary TS and EM:

- rewrite the TS and EM; confusion but intriguing poetry; rewarding; intensely felt experiences of the speaker; innovations in form
- 'I felt a funeral...'; in particular the confusion about meaning of *sense*
- 'I taste a liquor...'; confusion about tone; who are the saints? becomes clear that the poem challenges pious withdrawal from experience

Clincher:

- although confusing, always an intriguing poet
- a poetry that rewards our patience with its innovations of the short poem form
- doesn't flinch from the darker themes; sees light in 'I felt a funeral...'
- exuberant celebration of life in other poems



How to Organise your Study with Prewriting and Writing Past Questions:

You can now organise your study around the objective of being able to write and essay/ exam answer where the initial step will be **prewriting** using the structure of an essay. Here are a number of recommendations for developing **a strategy for studying**:

1: buy yourself a physical **calendar** (or two) for 2024 and 2025 rather than using one on your phone which is too easy to ignore. Hang it on your wall so that the schedule you outline on it is **always visible to you**

2: in relation to your other subjects, **plan weekly study sessions** and mark them in on your calendar. For example, you might allocate two or three sessions of 2 hours each for studying a text like *King Lear* for Paper 2

3: be aware of when studying a text is to be completed as you proceed, and push yourself to get it done by that **deadline**. If you need more time, just push sessions forward but try to **be disciplined**

4: once you have studied a text for **Paper 2** with the guidance of your classes and textbooks, make a similar plan to answer **past LC questions**

5: in each practise session **prewrite your answers** using the essay outline: Intro (3 parts), body paras, conclusion (2 parts)

6: write your answers as fully as you can. This means, reading over your paragraphs to ensure you maintain **coherence**

7: do the same for past questions from **Paper 1**

8: keep marking off your sessions so you can see your **progress on your calendar**

9: **reschedule** any sessions you may have missed and get them done so as not to fall too far behind; do your best to meet your **deadlines**



Five: Studying for Paper 1



With the **Prewriting Method** outlined in the previous chapter in mind, this chapter will look at Sections I and II of Paper 1, and recommend how best to study for them. We will start by looking at what kind of questions you will be given in Section I, and what options you have for answering them.

Section I - Comprehending:

In Section I of Paper 1, you will be given three texts on a theme which will be stated at the top of the paper. In 2024, for example: 'The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **CONNECTIONS**'. The texts will be numbered simply TEXT 1, TEXT 2, TEXT 3.

Each text will be a piece of writing on the **specified theme**, and will be presented with a **summary**. In 2024, then, student's were given two edited articles from newspapers, and an extract from a novel. Here is how the texts were introduced. I have highlighted the genre:

TEXT 1 - FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

This text is an edited **article** from *The Irish Times*, by Fintan O'Toole entitled, 'We have taken flight from our deep link with birds.' It was published in January 2023.

TEXT 2 - FRIENDSHIP, THE HUMAN CONNECTION

TEXT 2 is an edited extract from the opening of Paul Murray's **novel**, *The Bee Sting*, shortlisted for the 2023 Booker Prize. The novel tells the tragi-comic story of the Barnes family, set in contemporary Ireland. In this extract we meet the teenage daughter, Cass, and her best friend, Elaine.

TEXT 3 - CONNECTING THROUGH TRAVEL

TEXT 3 is an edited **article** from the travel section of the *Financial Times* by Monisha Rajesh, journalist and travel writer, entitled *To Istanbul by Train*. It was published in March 2023.

You will be advised to '**familiarise**' yourself with all three of the texts before choosing which ones you are going to answer questions on. This doesn't mean that you need to read all three, but that you spend some time looking them over as you make your decision. A strategy for this, based on what essay you would like to write for Section II, is given below and it ensures that you do not have to read a third text.



The Questions:

Each text is followed by two questions; **A and B**. You have to answer **ONE** of **each** but **NOT** on the same text; one question A on one text and one question B on another text. For example, if you chose TEXT 2 and TEXT 3, you would have two options:

Answer question **A** on TEXT **2** and question **B** on TEXT **3**

OR

Answer question **A** on TEXT **3** and question **B** on TEXT **2**

You will, then, be answering questions on **TWO** texts. Only answers on two texts will be considered. If you answer on a third text, you will be wasting your time.

Question A Format:

As a general rule, your answers to the questions should be structured by making **a point, referring and/or quoting from the text, and defending your point**.

Question A is in **three parts**. In **A(i)** and **A(ii)** you may be asked explicitly to make **three points** or 'explain **three insights**'. These first two questions focus attention on the **themes** of the texts; **what** they are about.

Below are some of the **A(i)** and **A(ii)** questions given over five years with the key phrases like 'three insights' and 'agree or disagree' highlighted.

The **A(i)** questions are interested to see if you can **observe what the texts say** accurately and reproduce its insights in your own words.

In the **A(ii)** questions, you are being asked to take up a position on the theme or issue. You may be asked to '**agree or disagree**' with a point of view as in 2022; you may be asked for '**your view**,' to give your '**personal response**'. You will often be asked for '**three points**' in your answer.

Whatever way it is articulated, you will be asked to write an answer in a **persuasive or argumentative style**, or a **combination** of both. However you approach your answer, you will be **defending a thesis**; the perspective you take.

You would lean more toward the **persuasive** strategy if the subject centres on some **moral issue**. This was the case in one of the 2022 questions below where the subject is 'diversity of youthful voices'.



This is open to an argument that it would be unfair if young people from all backgrounds did not have an equal voice in society. You could appeal, then, **persuasively**, to the reader's conscience in order to write a compelling answer.

In a 2023 question, however, students were asked whether a particular title for a photograph would be a good one or not. This does not lend itself to a direct appeal to the reader morally. An **argumentative** style would be best.

Your answers will not be essays but should have the basic introduction-body-conclusion structure. You should **prewrite your answers** using this outline.

2020:

A(i) Based on your reading of the written element of TEXT 3, explain **three insights** you gain into the character of Ariadne O'Neill. Support your response with **reference to the text**. (15)

A(ii) Both elements of TEXT 3 belong to the genre, science fiction. **Explain why you think** this genre has a wide and enduring appeal. Make **three points** in your response. (15)

2021:

A(i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2, explain **three insights** you gained into what links the past and the present in the writer's life. Support your answer with **reference to the text**. (10)

A(ii) In paragraph 5, Doireann Ní Ghríofa observes, "We may imagine that we can imagine the past, but this is an impossibility." Give your **personal response** to this observation by the writer. (10)

2022:

A(i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain **three insights** you gain into the power of poetry. Support your answer with **reference to the text**. (10)

A(ii) Amanda Gorman's status as a powerful young voice was bolstered by her performance at the US presidential inauguration. Discuss the extent to which you **agree or disagree** that a diversity of youthful voices should be represented in public debate on all important issues in Irish society. (10)



2023:

A(i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2 on page 4, explain **three insights** you gain, from Henry Eliot, into how reading novels can be an enriching experience. Support your answer with **reference to the text**. (15)

A(ii) Do you think that Between Two Worlds (the theme for this paper) would be a good title for Alfred Stieglitz's photograph above? Develop **three points** to support your response. In your response you should consider **the subject matter and visual aspects of the photograph**.

2024:

A(i) What, **in your opinion**, does the writer reveal about the unique experience of "slow travel" in TEXT 3? Make **three points**, supporting your response with **reference to the text**. (15)

A(ii) One of Monisha Rajesh's fellow travellers, Charles, was wearing a T-shirt saying Green against the Machine. **What are your views** on the different ways open to young people to protest, or demonstrate their views, on important issues? Develop **three points** in your response. (15)

A(iii) is generally a question about **how the text is written**, and each text will have a question that is a variation of the same. You are being tested on your knowledge of **the five genres of language** the syllabus specifies. We have outlined these in chapter two and are using the acronym, IPANA, to help us remember them. Here are extracts from past papers showing their focus on features/ elements of the genres:

2023:

Text 1: '**Features** of both **narrative** writing and **descriptive** writing are used effectively...'

Text 2: '**Features** of both **personal** writing and **informative** writing are used effectively...'

Text 3: '**Features** of both **persuasive** writing and **informative** writing are used effectively...'

2024:

Text 1: 'Identify **four elements** of the writer's style, evident in TEXT 1, and discuss...'

Text 2: 'Identify **four elements** of the writer's style, evident in TEXT 2, and discuss...'

Text 3: 'Identify **four elements** of the writer's style, evident in TEXT 3, and discuss...'



Features (or Elements) of the Five Genres of Language Use:

You can see in the examples above that the questions refer to 'features' or 'elements' of the style of the language used in the texts. These will describe the **five genres of language** use that are commonly observed in writing (IPANA). In order to be able to answer **A(iii)**, then, it is essential you are familiar with these. They will be **what you are looking for** in the texts when answering the question you choose.

Features of Informative Language:

When we want to communicate information, our language needs to focus clearly on just that; information. We do not want to distract from this objective with any of the other four uses of language.

We can identify informative language when we observe any number of the following features in a text, and it will be these that **A (iii)** will be asking us to point out in the text we chose in Section I.

- there is information present; for example, biographical detail (dates, places, names); instructions or a guide on how to do something
- the language is objective/ impersonal; no "I" (first person perspective);
- none of the motives of the other genres (persuasion, argumentation, narration, aesthetic) are present in this style. These would be irrelevant and/or obscure/ distract from the clear communication of information.
- the language is precise; devoid of adverbs and adjectives; it doesn't describe people, place, or things; it gives information about them
- the text can contain lists that present the information

Where do we find informative language?

Typically, we find informative language in instructional texts, guidebooks like this one, reports, educational textbooks...

The language of information, however, can be found in texts employing the other genres but the communication of information would not be the text's primary objective. You could have passages in a historical work of fiction that will clarify context with facts about the period in question.



Features of Persuasive Language:

In this use of language, as we have observed, the writer is interested in having readers agree with his/her perspective on some subject by appealing to them on some **emotional** level.

It is often used in a **call-to-action** essay that is written on an issue that has moral implications. We will be able to identify any of the following features in a text that is primarily persuasive in style:

- a direct appeal to the reader **emotionally** will be the most obvious strategy
- less emphasis on using **reason and logic** (argumentation)
- **addresses the reader/ listener directly**; ‘Do *you* really want to live in a world where *you* cannot tell the difference between real and fake news?’
- use of **rhetorical questions** as in previous example to persuade
- use of **personal experience** (“I”) to impress the validity of what is being expressed. For example, you are much more likely to want to listen to and believe someone speaking about how crime does not pay if they are a reformed criminal who has been in prison
- direct appeal to the reader **morally** in a **call-to-action**; in a speech about homelessness, for example, you could have a clincher like this: ‘You know as well as I do that homelessness in the 21st century should not be a reality. Something must be done’.
- the writer can use any number of **tones**: solemn, indignant, humorous, light-hearted, outraged...

Where do we find persuasive language?

Typically, we find persuasive language in **speeches** (in particular, political speeches), some newspaper articles, advertising....

The language of persuasion, however, can be **combined** with any other. It is likely that it will be accompanied by some use of **argumentative language** to support the appeal with a more objective, rational articulation of the subject; there could also be **informative language**; in the example above, perhaps statistics on homelessness.



Features of Argumentative Language:

This is the style of language you will be using most of the time in answering questions in Paper 2. It is language that aims to **defend a thesis** (one side of an argument) by relying on the **evidence** it presents to support each point made. It appeals to the reader **rationally, logically, and with supporting evidence**, rather than emotionally. The features to expect to find in this kind of text:

- a **neutral, detached, objective language** and tone; no emotion as in the persuasive style
- **little or no** use of the **first person pronoun** ("I") in order to maintain the impression that what is being argued is not simply the writer's opinion
- if personal pronouns are to be used, then **"we" rather than "I"**; this implicitly locates the reader on the writer's side of the argument
- relies on **supporting evidence** to prove a number of points and construct a defence of a thesis (the argument/ point of view)
- may refer and/ or quote **respected sources** on the subject
- use of the **language of information**; facts, objective analysis (such as the formal properties of a poem) to support the argument
- presentation of **a contrary argument** in order to point out how it is flawed in an attempt to strengthen the thesis

Where do we find argumentative language?

Typically, we find argumentative language in **critical analysis** (such as in the analysis of a poem, play, novel), a newspaper article that argues for one side such as an editorial where the editor expresses his/her opinion on a topic

The language of argumentation, however, **can be combined** with **informative** language. If a writer is aiming for the objective, reasoned defence of a thesis that defines argumentative language, he/she **should not include persuasive appeals** to the reader; nor should it indulge recollections of the writer's personal experience. These weaken **the impression of objectivity** that is essential to the success of an argumentative text.



Features of Narrative Language:

A narrative use of language **tells a story**. The most common use of narrative is in a work of **fiction** such as the novels prescribed for the LC. In Section II of Paper 1, students are given the option of writing a short story. This will require **a narrator** telling the story from either a first person ("I/ We") or a third person ("He/ She/ they") point of view.

We can have narrative also in **non-fictional** accounts of the past; historical documentary films will reconstruct the story of the past using narrative language that usually takes the listener from one event to the next chronologically. A biography or autobiography will do the same. Features to look for in narrative uses of language:

- an **imaginative** piece of writing that tells a story; **a fiction**
- the text **narrates real events** of the past (non-fiction) in a **story format**
- there is **an identifiable narrator** who is part of the story; the first person, subjective point of view ("I/ We")
- there is **an anonymous narrator** who is not part of the story; the third person objective point of view ("He/ She/ they")
- vivid use of **descriptive and/or aesthetic** language
- use of **dialogue** where the words of characters (fiction) or real people (non-fiction) are quoted
- the development of **believable characters** through realistic descriptions of their experiences
- a **dramatic structure** building toward climactic moments and their outcome
- an **open style** where sentence structure is not limited by the demand to communicate information, persuade, or argue
- use of **metaphor/ symbolism** to communicate meanings implicitly

Where do we find narrative language?

Obviously, we find narrative language in any text that tells **a fictional or true story**; novels, short stories, film scripts, plays, narrative poems, biographies and auto-biographies, history books...



Features of Aesthetic Language:

Aesthetic language **draws attention to itself** rather than serving only as a medium of communication. We are made aware of **how** meaning is signified rather than just **what** is signified. To say a text has aesthetic value, is to say we can appreciate it as **an artistic "object"**.

Poetry is the most concentrated use of aesthetic language. A work of fiction will also be appreciable aesthetically; in how the writer uses language to describe a scene, a dialogue, depict a character and so on. Features of this kind of language:

- **the presentation of the text** in conventional form on the page; **14 lines** shortened to accommodate the rhythms of iambic pentameter in the Shakespearean **sonnet**, for example
- syntax following **a pattern for an aesthetic impression**; the repeated rhythms of lines of iambic pentameter, for example, in a sonnet
- **aural registers** used in any of the ways we are familiar with in poetry; end-rhyme, internal rhyme, half-rhyme, assonance, consonance, alliteration...
- **linguistic devices** used in poetry to register meaning indirectly; hyperbole, metaphor, symbol, allusion, onomatopoeia...
- **vocabulary**: careful choice of words for their sound within a rhyme scheme
- the choice of **images** to suggest these implicit meanings; for example, the inclusion of the image of a raven, a traditional symbol of death
- in **prose**; similar uses of **image** for their symbolic or metaphoric value in a narrative
- in **prose**; evocative use of **descriptive passages** for settings, characters, and events
- in **prose**; the use of **sentence length** to accompany the tone; long meandering sentences might be employed to register a slow and easy progress; shorter, clipped sentences could be used to mirror an urgent movement within a scene

Where do we find aesthetic language?

Aesthetic language is the substance of **literary art**; poetry, drama, and fiction.

We also find aesthetic language in **non-fictional genres**; in any piece of writing where **how** it is written has features that are appreciable in addition to **what** it says. Use of any of the features above in a persuasive or argumentative piece of writing **may lend it aesthetic value** in addition to the thesis being defended.



Genres Combined:

While either the **rhetoric** of the **persuasive** style or the **detached objectivity** of the **argumentative** style will dominate a text, in the former, more often than not, there will also be a rational appeal to the reader.

This combination of persuasive and argumentative language is the focus of question **A(iii)** in the 2019 exam. The student is asked to observe one of them:

Identify **four** elements of **argumentative** or **persuasive language**, evident in TEXT 1, and explain why their use might encourage readers to agree with the views expressed by the writer in the article. You may include any combination of **elements** of the language of argument or the language of persuasion in your response. Support your answer with reference to the text. (20)

If the student chose to point out instances of **argumentative** language, their explanation would find **four of the 'elements'** (the features we have looked at above) of that use of language in TEXT 1. Showing these to be present point by point, would construct the answer's argument that together they 'encourage readers to agree with the views expressed by the writer'.

If the student chose to point out instances of **persuasive** language, their explanation would find **four of the 'elements'** of that use of language in TEXT 1. Showing these to be present point by point, would construct the answer's argument that together they 'encourage readers to agree with the views expressed by the writer'.

Question B Format:

In question B, you will be asked to write a short composition. Some examples from past papers:

- an open letter
- a personal letter
- a personal reflection
- an article
- a proposal
- the text for a podcast
- an editorial
- a verbal pitch (a spoken promotional presentation)
- a dialogue
- diary entries

Examples of all of these are shown in exam questions (2021 to 2024) below.



In this question, you have to decide which of the **genres of language** (IPANA) will be appropriate; which of the features we have looked at above you should employ. For example, if the topic centres on a moral issue, as does the text 2 question from 2021, **persuasive language** that includes something of your own feelings about the subject will be appropriate. In contrast, we note in 2023 that the text 1 question does *not* ask for persuasion or argumentation of a point of view. It asks for **personal reflection** incorporating elements of narrative and aesthetic language.

You will see that, most of the time, **one genre** will dominate the task, but some of the others will also be required to some extent.

Included below, I have suggested what the best use of language would be in each case. Key words and topics are **highlighted**.

Note: The total marks for Paper 1 changed from 140 to 200 in 2023. You will see that reflected in the marks below; a change from 40 to 50 for the question.

2021:

Text 2:

An assertion that other creatures' lives are somehow lesser than human life has prompted extensive **debate** on social media. In order to join in this online debate, write **an open letter** to be shared on social media, in which you: state **your position** in relation to **animal rights**, explore some of the issues associated with our current engagement with animals and outline what you see as the major challenges we face as we share the planet with animals in the future. (40)

Genres to use:

The topic is emotive. It can be argued effectively using features of the **persuasive style** to appeal to the reader on an **emotional/ moral level**. It could also present a **rational argument** to strengthen the position stated.

Text 3:

You have decided to apply for the position of **editor** of your school's Graduation Yearbook. Each year, the Yearbook has a different theme, chosen by the editor. An article by a celebrity contributor is also included annually. To be considered for the post, you must make **a verbal pitch** to the



graduation committee members in which you: **promote** your preferred theme for the 2021 Graduation Yearbook, **impress** the committee with your ideas for its content, and nominate your ideal celebrity contributor, **explaining** your choice to the committee members. Write the text for the verbal pitch that you would make. (40)

Genres to use:

Here you can mix **persuasive** and **argumentative**. You are writing the text of a presentation you would make to such a committee. Since part of what you would be speaking about would be the theme for the yearbook, it will explore how you think the school and its students should be celebrated. Since this will appeal to them on an emotional level, **persuasive** language would be appropriate. On who the celebrity should be, you could also use **argumentative**, and **informative** language.

2022:

Text 3:

It is 2033 and you are **the editor** of an internationally distributed newspaper. A **book burning** event, similar to that described in TEXT 3, has occurred in a major American city. You believe that **respect for books** of all kinds is vital to democracy and are **horrified** by this assault on them. Write an editorial in which you: give **your response** to this incident, **warn** your readers of the dangers inherent in attacking books in this way and urge them to engage in peaceful protest against this and any other form of censorship. (40)

Genres to use:

The burning of books is a symbolic act that conveys a message of intolerance of ideas, and registers a threat to freedom of speech. As an editor in this fictional scenario, you can write of your feelings about such an act. This would be primarily **a persuasive piece of writing**; a warning and call-to-action to readers. It could also include **argumentative** and **informative** language. It could speak of the threat to democracy by citing the burning of books in Nazi Germany.

2023:

Text 1:

Imagine you are Salim and you have been in London for over a year. Write a **new personal letter** to your mother in which you: **describe** a number of experiences you have had that you believe will **fascinate** your mother, reflect on both the positive and negative insights you have gained into human nature as **an outsider** in London, and consider some of the ways you believe your experience in this city has altered you as a person. (50)



Genres to use:

As a **personal letter**, that is going to **reflect** on positives and negatives rather than persuade or argue for something. It will, then, be **discursive** rather than persuasive or argumentative. It must appear to '**fascinate**' the character's mother. It will demand features of **narrative/ aesthetic** language to describe the experience. A **discursive essay**, as we will observe in the next section, presents different perspectives on a subject without arguing for either one.

Text 2:

You have been asked to write a **personal reflection** for an educational history magazine. The reflection should recall an experience you had of visiting a place of historic interest. In the reflection you should: **outline** the expectations you had before your visit to the **place of historic interest**, describe some of the thoughts and feelings you had in response to this place during the visit and, **argue the case** for making trips to historic places compulsory for students in Irish schools today. (50)

Genres to use:

While primarily **persuasive** in style, this personal reflection is not on an emotive issue; it asks the student to '**argue the case**' for visiting historic sites. It will not be overly emotional or urgent in its appeal; it will be an informative recommendation rather than a call-to-action. It could have elements of **narrative** in the descriptions of these places; it should be **informative** on the history of the places visited; it can include how these places can make the visitor **feel**.

Text 3:

It is Science Week and you have been asked to write **an article** for your school's website about the **increasing role played by technology in schools**. In your article you should: **describe** some of the positive ways technology is utilised in schools today, **discuss** whether or not, **in your view**, technology can be a negative influence in schools, and **speculate** about the role you think technology will play in schools in the future. Your article may be **serious** or **humorous** or both. (50)

Genres to use:

This style here should be primarily **discursive**, a style which considers a topic **but does not seek to persuade or argue for a particular perspective on it**. It is not argumentative; it asks for it to be considered ('discuss' and 'speculate') but does not construct a defence of what should be done about it. Also, it is an **article** rather than an **editorial**, and there is no obvious moral or emotional component.



It asks for some **descriptive language** to accompany **discussion** of and **speculation** about the topic. The tone can be 'humorous' as stipulated. It should, however, still aim to present **a particular perspective** on the role of technology in schools, and this is to be focussed on whether or not there are any negatives.

2024:

Text 1:

In TEXT 1 Fintan O'Toole refers to how different generations can have differing views on issues. Write the text of **a dialogue** between an adult and a young person who have **opposing viewpoints** about a contentious issue of your choice. In the dialogue you should: develop the arguments of both sides, and conclude the dialogue in a convincing manner, with one side conceding to the other in some way. (50)

Genres to use:

Essentially, this question asks the student to write a piece of **fiction**; a dialogue between 'an adult and a young person' that dramatises generational difference on a subject of the student's choosing. It is also, however, to incorporate elements of **argumentation**. It can include **informative** language, depending on what the characters arguments are. In it, also, **persuasive language** can be used and will be particularly effective because the topic is likely to be an emotive one.

Text 2:

Certain aspects of the area where you live have become run down and neglected. Write **a proposal** to your local Tidy Towns Committee in which you: **outline** your key concerns in relation to the problems you have identified, propose a project that you believe would improve the situation, and **suggest** how the committee could encourage more members of the local community to become active in improving the local area. (50)

Genres to use:

This has a **personal component** to it, and so it can include some **persuasive language**. It is a call-to-action in the form of a 'proposal'. It can be expressed in terms of the impact on the writer as a member of a community, but it should be backed up by a reasoned argument for action.

This means some convincing **argumentative language**. It needs, also, to be **informative** in its 'outline' of 'key concerns'. The 'project' **argument** for what should be done should make sense as a 'proposal'.



Text 3:

Write a series of **reflective diary entries** of a person returning to their homeplace after travelling for a whole year in different countries. In your diary you should: consider your feelings on returning home, recall and analyse some significant moments and events that stand out for you from your travels, and reflect on how the experience of travel has influenced your overall worldview now. (50)

Genres to use:

The student is asked to imaginatively write a number of 'reflective diary entries'. These will, then, be written in a **personal style** that recalls moments from a year of travel. An important theme of 'returning home' is to include 'feelings'. There is **no argument** to be constructed here; nor position to **persuade** the reader to take. Instead, this question is asking for elements of **narrative**; descriptive passages detailing different places, and the experience of returning home. It is likely to have some **aesthetic** use of language in how it expresses feelings and/or describes the experiences of other countries.



Section II - Composing:

In Section II of Paper 1, you will be asked to write an essay. You can give yourself up to 1 hour and 20 mins (80 mins) to complete it. There are usually 7 essay questions to choose from.

We have noted that, for this exam, you need to bear in mind the **4 kinds of language use** being focussed on. We have detailed these in [chapter 2](#) and used the acronym, **IPANA**, to remember them. You will be given a reminder of these in the exam. The same sentence is used every year: 'The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.'

Looking at exam papers over 10 years, as you can see below, there are five **genres of essay** that are almost always options; **short story, personal essay, article, speech/ talk, and discursive**. There are two more that are options less frequently; **descriptive essay** and **persuasive essay**.

There are some others that have been given but not in the past 10 years: **letter** (2003), **competition entry** (2005), **opinion piece** (2009), **practical guide** (2010).

Paper 1, Section II Essay Questions, 2015 to 2024:

Year	Short Story/ Dialogue	Personal Essay	Article	Speech/ Talk	Discursive Essay	Descriptive Essay	Persuasive Essay
2024	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2023	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2022	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2021	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2020	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
2019	2	2	0	1	1	1	0
2018	2	2	0	1	1	1	0
2017	2	1	1	1	1	1	0
2016	2	1	0	2	0	1	1
2015	2	1	1	1	1	1	0



1: Persuasive and Argumentative Essays:

Although Leaving Cert, Paper 1 exams do not ask specifically for an **argumentative** essay, it is important here to make the distinction between it and the **persuasive** essay clear. This is because, as we have noted, one of the five uses of language (IPANA) identified in LC English is the **language of argument**. Also, it would be clear that you are to use the persuasive style if you were explicitly asked for a 'persuasive essay'. This, however, is unlikely. As the table shows, the option has been given only once (2016) in ten years.

The **speech option**, however, will often encourage you to use the persuasive style. In 2024, it is implicit in the language ('for or against') and because the topic is one that would encourage an emotional appeal to the reader:

Write a **speech for or against** the motion that: "The accelerated pace of modern life detracts from our enjoyment of it."

We see the same in the 2023 question:

You are taking part in an international debating competition where the motion is: "Society today lacks ethics (morality), decency and respect for the law." Write your **speech for or against** this motion.

As is obvious from its name, in the **persuasive** essay, you are trying to persuade the reader of one side of a debatable issue. As we have observed earlier, however, you are doing so, not primarily with supporting evidence but by appealing to the reader on an **emotional** level; there is an appeal to the '**heart**'. Only potentially emotive subjects will be appropriate to the style; those from the speech examples above, for example.

The reader is to agree with you mostly because of **the feelings** you evoke in them. This doesn't mean that there is to be no **reasoned** support of the perspective being defended. On the contrary, this will be crucial. Essentially, however, it will **not be an argumentative essay** which is similar in one important respect; it will also focus attention on a **debatable point of view** on the subject it discusses. An argumentative essay, however, as we have outlined it, will appeal to the reader's reason/ logic in an impersonal, unemotional style; to the '**head**'.

One person might argue that saving the planet is not our responsibility, while another person will argue it is. In the discussion of literary texts, one person might interpret Emily Dickinson's poem, 'I felt a funeral, in my Brain,' as a morbid reflection on suffering and death; another person might see it



ultimately as an observation of the transcendence of suffering.

In both cases, the reader is given debatable subjects. An essay on the first, however, is engaging the reader with **a moral issue**. We can debate what should be done about climate change **persuasively** because it is naturally of great concern to the lives of so many people. Its **emotive potential** encourages the writer to appeal to the reader accordingly.

In contrast, in an essay on Dickinson's poem or an answer to a question in Paper 2, feelings are irrelevant *unless* specifically asked for. Even then, it will achieve its objective by referring the reader to the text for **supporting evidence** and through the clarity of its reasoning or logic; it will appeal to the 'head'.

Persuading and Arguing :

In the climate change example, we could seek to *persuade* somebody that it is **morally right** to support clean energy in a bid to halt the advance of global warming. Subjects like this necessarily engage the reader **morally**; others would be war, poverty, crime. Persuasive essays written on these kinds of subjects often take the form of a 'call-to-action'.

An essay on climate change, then, in an attempt to encourage the reader to reflect upon their personal responsibility, might end with **a rhetorical question** that appeals to their sympathies for those who will come after them: 'Are we really going to leave a dying planet to our children?'

We would not adopt this persuasive strategy if we were discussing what a poem by Emily Dickinson is about in Paper 2. Instead, we would seek to **convince** the reader by presenting **supporting evidence** from the text in the form of reference/ quotation, and by explaining the point being made clearly.

In the former, then, we would appeal to **the reader's emotions** but would also present supporting evidence. In the latter, evidence from the text(s) in question would support **an impersonal, objective style** which would engage the reader **intellectually/ rationally**.

The **argumentative** essay, then, necessarily **excludes** the **persuasive** appeal to the reader's feelings. In fact, a substantial measure of its success will depend on how it sustains the impression that the truth of its argument does *not* depend on feelings which, being **subjective**, weaken the impression of objectivity it aims for.



What is asked for in Section II - Composing:

In order to know how to approach the composition question, you must have a clear idea of the **essay you are being asked to write**. We can ask whether it will be **argumentative** or **persuasive** in style, or whether it will be a **combination** of these, by looking at some examples from past papers, and by noting which of the **features of the various genres of writing** should be used in each option. As we have observed earlier, there are 6 that are most often offered:

- 1: the short story
- 2: the personal essay
- 3: the speech/ talk
- 4: the newspaper/ magazine article
- 5: the discursive essay
- 6: the descriptive essay

We have noted that there are other options that are rarely given but which you should be aware of; diary, letter, competition entry, opinion piece, practical guide.

Essential to your study preparation will be **practising writing** the kind you prefer by answering past paper questions. Below is a guide to styles required for the six genres.

1: Writing Style for a Short Story:

If we are writing a piece that **tells a story (a fiction)**, it is *not* our intention to construct an argument to defend our position directly, if at all. The story may have a message in it. We might want it to reflect on a theme or issue, but this will be done **indirectly**. Here are the questions over the past 5 years.

2020: The general theme of the exam was 'exploring genre'

3. In TEXT 2, the extract from Arthur Conan Doyle's short story ends with a dramatic arrival.

Write a short story, in which **a crime or mystery** is solved, that begins with a **dramatic** arrival. You may set your short story in any era and may choose to **include or not include the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes**.



5. The theme of TEXTS 1, 2 and 3 is “EXPLORING GENRE”.

Write a short story which features the **three characters** that appear on the magazine cover on Page 7 of this examination paper. You are free to write your story in **any genre** you choose.

2021: The general theme of the exam was ‘reflections on time’

3. In TEXT 1, John Banville recalls seeing, “blear-eyed passengers off the overnight ferry from Fishguard in Wales” as he waited at the railway station.

Write a short story, **set in a railway station**, in which a passenger off the overnight ferry from Fishguard in Wales plays an important role. Your short story may be **amusing** or **menacing** in tone.

5. In TEXT 2, Doireann Ní Ghríofa alludes to the importance of bees in medieval Ireland.

Write a fable or **fairy-tale, set in ancient Ireland**, in which **a bee or bees** feature prominently.

2022: The general theme of the exam was ‘powerful voices’

3. In TEXT 3, a student, Dieter Knecht, undertakes the perilous rescue of Joseph Roth’s novel, *Rebellion*, from destruction in the Nazi book burning in Berlin in 1933.

Write a short story in which the student featured in TEXT 3, Dieter Knecht, has a **life changing experience** as he attempts to **rescue** Joseph Roth’s denounced novel, *Rebellion*, **from the Nazi supporters** who wish to see it destroyed.

7. In TEXT 2, Ben Okri talks about, “the story at the plaintive heart of the music.”

Write a short story in which **a piece of music or the lyrics of a song** (or songs) play(s) an important part in the narrative.

2023: The general theme of the exam was ‘between two worlds’

1. In TEXT 2, Henry Eliot describes Prague as “mysterious and impenetrable”. Write a short story which features **a confused character** in a **mysterious** setting.

5. In TEXT 1, Salim tells us that he did not have the courage to challenge his uncle’s plans for him.

Write a short story that features **a complex relationship between two characters**, where one character **disagrees completely** with the views of the other.



2024: The general theme of the exam was 'connections'

1. In TEXT 2, we see a complicated relationship between friends and family. Write a short story focusing on **tensions either in a family or in a group of friends** in which a connection between the **past and the present** is important.

6. TEXT 3, describes the writer's experience of a train journey to Istanbul. Write a short story **set among strangers** on an eventful **train journey**.

If you choose to write a short story, you must include within it the narrative elements that the question specifies. These are **highlighted** above.

For example, then, in **2023**, an answer to question 1 would have to include a '**confused character**' and it should describe a '**mysterious setting**'. In **2024**, question 1 specifies a **family setting** that is troubled in some way. A theme of **time** (the 'past and the present') is also a required as an element in the story the student writes.

Practise Writing Short Stories:

In order to begin writing a short story, there are a number of important elements to consider. These you should take notes on in your **prewriting** so you have a clear outline before you as you begin to write.

1: setting; where and when the story takes place

This is sometimes determined by the question, as in the 2024 example above. Most questions, however, allow you to set your story as you choose. 2020, for example: 'You may set your short story in any era...';

2: Narrative point of view (pov): subjective or objective

In any work of fiction, there are two basic perspectives that can be given to the narrator.

There is the **first person ("I" / "we") pov**. In this option, the narrator is part of the story; a character like any others that might be in it. He/she may be the principle character or not. This pov means that anything that happens in the story is limited to it. The narrator can't know everything about other characters. It is a good option if the narrator is the principle character.

There is also the **third person pov ("he" / "she" / "they")**. Here, the narrator is anonymous, telling the story without being involved in it, a voice, as it were,



hovering above the setting, describing what is happening. One of the advantages of this pov is that the narrator can be given **omniscient** (all-knowing) access to the characters; he/she can not only see everything that happens, but can also describe how the character's feel and report what they are thinking.

3: Tone: often, the question will allow you to choose what the tone of your story will be; it could be humorous, dark, tragic, uplifting.... In question 6 above from 2024, for example, students were asked to write a short story 'set among strangers on an eventful train journey'. It would be entirely up to the student to decide what the overall tone should be. Some questions, however, will demand a particular tone. In question 3 from 2022 above, for example, a serious tone is demanded because the story is to focus historically on the bid to resist censorship in Nazi Germany at the time of World War II.

4: Plot and key moments: in your prewriting you should outline how your short story is going to unfold. Because it is necessarily short, however, there will not be many events within its narrative structure. In fact, a short story may not have a plot. It could be limited to two people speaking together in a room or outdoors. Usually, however, there will be a setting and some sense of progress in time, and there will be at least one key moment/ event when something is revealed and/or some issue resolved.

5: Descriptive language and imagery: as you prewrite your short story, this heading will prompt you to make an effort to bring your setting, key moments, and characters to life. You may decide on particular descriptive words or phrases that come to mind; you might think of a striking image you would like to include...



2: Writing Style for a Personal Essay:

In this is the kind of essay, you will note from the past questions below that students are asked to **'reflect on'** the theme developed in the text they have read in Section I. You can see that these are all themes that students are likely to be able to write about from **their own point of view**, and in the context of their **own experience**:

2020: things you are proud of **OR** unique and diverse personalities of your friends

2021: the significance of birthdays **OR** the role of humour, fun and laughter in life

2022: items or objects that have become "faithful companions" in your life **OR** the value of engaging in all kinds of learning

2023: an occasion or occasions when you made a resolution **OR** the things that bring excitement and wonder into your life

2024: aspects of life you find puzzling **OR** your relationship with the natural world

The style; how you would write the personal essay:

- an engaging exploration of the theme from **a first person perspective** ("I"). The language used makes this clear; students are asked to *celebrate, reflect on, share their thoughts, describe*,
- *not* argumentative
- *not* persuasive
- this essay will demand elements of **narrative** and **aesthetic** language in the form of descriptive prose

2020: The general theme of the exam was 'exploring genre'

1: In TEXT 3, flight engineer, Ariadne O'Neill, explains how she takes pride in her work.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** what you are **proud of** in your life.



7: In TEXT 2, we see that Sherlock Holmes and his friend, Watson, are very different characters.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **celebrate friendship**, and **reflect on** how you have been influenced by the unique and diverse personalities of your friends.

2021: The general theme of the exam was 'reflections on time'

1. In TEXT 1, John Banville tells us of the annual childhood trip to Dublin to celebrate his birthday.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** the significance of birthdays, your own and those of others, sharing your thoughts on this annual personal milestone.

4. In TEXT 3, Muhammad Ali's security personnel play along with a joke between the boxer and Chadwick Boseman.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** the role of humour, fun and laughter in life.

2022: The general theme of the exam was 'powerful voices'

1: In TEXT 2, Tom Gatti suggests that albums can become "faithful companions" in our lives.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **identify** some of the items or objects that have become "faithful companions" in your life and **reflect on** the importance of these items or objects to you.

6. In TEXT 3, the students in the story are described as "unlearning everything but the spirit of the nation".

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** the value of engaging in all kinds of **learning** and the pleasure, satisfaction and **personal growth** that can be derived from doing so.

2023: The general theme of the exam was 'between two worlds'

3. In TEXT 1, Salim makes a resolution and refuses to be discouraged.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** an occasion or occasions when you **made a resolution** and **refused to be discouraged**.

6. In TEXT 2, Henry Eliot describes how he gets, "a particular thrill from visiting literary locations".

Write a **personal essay** in which you **describe and reflect on** some of the things that bring **excitement and wonder** into your life.



2024: The general theme of the exam was 'connections'

4. In TEXT 2 Cass describes people who, "would stare at her a moment as if trying to solve a puzzle."

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** some of the aspects of life you find puzzling.

7. In TEXT 1 the writer reveals his interest in nature to us.

Write a **personal essay** in which you **reflect on** your relationship with the natural world.

3: Writing Style for a Speech/ Talk:

From the past questions shown below, you can see that the speech/ talk you are asked to write will be one in which you are **defending** a particular perspective on some subject:

2020: you argue **for or against** the motion: "Contemporary Irish society is both tolerant and progressive"

2021: speaking **against** stereotyping

2022: a speech **outlining** the social and cultural values you would **promote**

2023: a speech **for or against** the motion that "Society today lacks ethics (morality), decency and respect for the law."

2024: a speech **for or against** the motion that: "The accelerated pace of modern life detracts from our enjoyment of it."

In this essay, you need to use strong **persuasive** and/or **argumentative** language. You may also use other genres; informative and descriptive language may be useful at times.

The style; how you would answer the speech question:

- an engaging defence of your position on the given topic
- can have personal reflection ("I")
- needs to be persuasive and/or argumentative
- can benefit from informative language
- can benefit from descriptive language



2020: The general theme of the exam was 'exploring genre'

6. In TEXT 3, Ariadne O'Neill observes that on Aecor, "... nobody cared about status or money, who was in power, who was kissing or killing whom."

Write a **speech** in which you argue **for or against** the motion: Contemporary Irish society is both tolerant and progressive.

2021: The general theme of the exam was 'reflections on time'

7. In TEXT 3, Chadwick Boseman draws attention to the dangers of stereotyping.

You have been asked to **speak, as a representative** of a national youth organisation, at the launch of a major campaign **against stereotyping**. Write the speech you would deliver.

2022: The general theme of the exam was 'powerful voices'

2. In TEXT 1, we learn that Amanda Gorman may be a candidate in the American presidential election in 2036.

You are a candidate in the next election for the presidency of Ireland. Write a **speech** to be delivered during the **election campaign**, in which you outline the social and cultural **values** you would promote if elected and **explain** the perception of Ireland you would cultivate abroad, given the opportunity to do so.

2023: The general theme of the exam was 'between two worlds'

4. TEXT 3 expresses concern about a world that, "has no knowledge of ethics (morality), of decency, of the law".

You are taking part in an **international debating competition** where the motion is: "Society today lacks ethics (morality), decency and respect for the law." Write your **speech for or against** this motion.

2024: The general theme of the exam was 'connections'

3. In TEXT 1, the writer is appreciative of the "gift of time and love".

Write a **speech for or against** the motion that: "The accelerated pace of modern life detracts from our enjoyment of it."



4: Writing Style for a Newspaper/ Magazine Article:

Generally speaking, in **newspaper articles**, the emphasis is on being **objective**, reporting in an **impersonal** style, presenting **facts**, being **informative**. This style of writing is not asked for in LC exams. If newspapers are specified, it will be a **feature article** that is asked for. This is because, in an exam setting, it isn't reasonable that a student could write a factual, informative news story.

As you will see, in the past 5 exam papers, the questions have asked for **magazine articles**. In three of these, a '**feature article**' is specified. You have to go back to 2012 to find any mention of a newspaper and you will note that it also gives the choice of a magazine article:

Write a **feature article for a newspaper or magazine** on the role played by memory and the past in our lives.

A feature article deals with a single topic in depth but can include the writer's **personal** experience, should be **entertaining** more than informative, and can incorporate **narrative** elements and/or **aesthetic/ descriptive** language. If it is in a newspaper, it will be written in the same style.

Whether the question clarifies that it should be a feature article or not, you can write with this style in mind because it is used for many articles in magazines; a **creative piece of writing** on some **topical issue** that appeals to its readers **aesthetically** and/or on some **emotional** level. We can see in the questions over 5 years that all are for magazines, and that they ask for or encourage **personal reflection**:

2020: ...ideas for new inventions and discoveries **you think** would improve your life or make the world a better place.

2021: ...the many and varied colours and sounds that punctuate and surround **our daily lives** and the impact they have **on us**.



2022: ...**reflect on** our fascination with all things fashionable and explore the stories **we tell about ourselves**...through our fashion choices.

2023: ...describing **your hometown**, city, village or area

2024: ...you **explore** some of the connections that you believe enrich teenagers' lives.

2020: The general theme of the exam was 'exploring genre'

2. In TEXT 1, Alan McMonagle writes about allowing room for, among other things, discovery, invention and re-invention in life.

Write **a feature article**, suitable for publication in **a popular magazine**, offering **some ideas** for new inventions and discoveries you think would improve your life or make the world a better place. Your article may be **serious or humorous** or both.

2021: The general theme of the exam was 'reflections on time'

6. In TEXT 2, Doireann Ní Ghríofa celebrates the colours in her garden, the sounds of the past and the "purring" of bees.

Write **an article**, for publication in **a popular magazine**, about the many and varied colours and sounds that punctuate and surround our daily lives and the impact they have on us.

2022: The general theme of the exam was 'powerful voices'

4. In TEXT 1, we learn that Amanda Gorman recognises that fashion is itself a storytelling device.

Write **a feature article**, for the **magazine** section of a weekend newspaper, in which you **reflect on our fascination** with all things fashionable and explore the stories we tell about ourselves, intentionally or unintentionally, through our fashion choices.

2023: The general theme of the exam was 'between two worlds'

2. TEXT 1 gives us the protagonist's view of the city of London as he encountered it.

Write **a feature article**, for **a popular magazine**, describing your hometown, city, village or area, in which you consider some of the following: the place, its people, values, atmosphere and general way of life.

2024: The general theme of the exam was 'connections'

2. The theme of this examination is "Connections".

Write **an article** for **a popular magazine** in which you explore some of the connections that you believe enrich teenagers' lives.



The style; how you would write a (feature) article:

- an engaging exploration of the topic that can include **personal reflection**
The language used makes this clear; students are asked to *celebrate, reflect on, share their thoughts, describe,*
- *not* argumentative
- *not* persuasive
- it can have a discursive element

5: Writing Style for a Discursive Essay:

The Discursive Essay:

The discursive essay will employ the same **objective tone** of an argumentative essay. However, it will **not** be defending a thesis; it will not favour one point of view over another. A discursive essay doesn't try to **persuade or convince**, though it may do so inadvertently. It aims, instead, **to leave any conclusions up to the reader**.

A key word in some of the exam questions that illustrates the neutral position can be seen in how they ask you to **consider** the topic. You are not asked if you **agree** or **disagree** as in some of the essays that will require persuasive and/or argumentative styles.

A discursive essay will present **any number of perspectives** without seeking to convince the reader that any one of them is superior to any other. It seeks to **inform/ educate** a reader on an issue that could be the focus of debate. It may, then, incidentally, convince the reader of one side of the related argument. The essay will **not**, however, use persuasive language to do so. It will begin with **a statement of intent, not** a thesis statement.

It may help you to remember how a discursive essay works if you think of a review of some product across a range of brands; the kind we see on some YouTube channels. An **objective review** of televisions, for example, will look at many different products in the same way. It will not conclude that one is better than all the rest because it will allow for a variety of customer needs. One television may be better than all the others in sound quality, but not good value for money.

With this discursive strategy, **the viewer is left to decide** which product is best **for them**. They will not be drawn in any particular direction by the presentation. By analogy, a discursive essay, will seek to **inform and educate** rather than **persuade or convince**.



2020: The general theme of the exam was 'exploring genre'

4. In TEXT 3, we read about a range of advanced technology such as TEVA suits and inflatable habitat modules.

Write **a discursive essay** about our changing relationship with machines and the rise of artificial intelligence.

2021: The general theme of the exam was 'reflections on time'

2. Bees, whose lives depend on the community of the hive, feature prominently in Text 2.

Write **a discursive essay** in which you **consider** the meaning and importance of community.

2022: The general theme of the exam was 'powerful voices'

5. The theme of this examination paper is "Powerful Voices".

Write **a discursive essay** in which you **identify** some of the powerful voices in modern life and discuss their influence on society.

2023: The general theme of the exam was 'between two worlds'

7. TEXT 3 refers to George Orwell and Roald Dahl who were, in different ways, influential writers in the twentieth century.

Write **a discursive essay** about the impact of influential individuals in today's world. Your chosen individuals may have positive or negative impacts or a combination of both.

2024: The general theme of the exam was 'connections'

5. The writer in TEXT 3 regrets losing her anonymity by engaging with social media.

Write **a discursive essay** in which you **consider** whether or not it is possible, or even desirable, to maintain privacy in today's world.

The style; how you would write the discursive essay:

- a neutral *consideration* of any number of views on a given topic; a statement of **intent** is given in the introduction
- you are *not* trying to persuade the reader of any one perspective on the topic
- *not* argumentative; **no thesis statement**
- *not* persuasive; **doesn't** appeal to the reader emotionally or morally
- informative and descriptive language will be required



6: Writing Style for a Descriptive Essay:

The Descriptive Essay:

As the name suggests, this is an essay which provides **detailed description** of any or all of the following: **people, places, and things**. The past five questions, however, have been devoted to **settings**. Any description of people in these would be incidental to the overall objective.

The **settings** are to be brought to life through **vivid descriptive passages**. What will **not be included**; the objective of developing a fictional character within a narrative context; persuasion or argumentation.

As in the first example below, these essays ask you to use your **imagination** to provide captivating descriptions of the given setting. The objective is to make it possible for the reader to **enter imaginatively into an appreciation of a time and place** :

2015: 'life in Ireland in 2015'

2016: an 'urban journey'

2017: a 'Night Scene'

2018: the landscape reflecting 'the transition of the seasons'

2019: 'the difference between dawn and dusk'

2015: The general theme of the exam was 'challenges'

5. In TEXT 3, Penelope Lively writes that she sometimes feels like an "observant time-traveller".

Write **a descriptive essay** which captures **life in Ireland in 2015** from the point of view of an observant time-traveller. The time-traveller may be from the past or from the future.

2016: The general theme of the exam was 'journeys'

3. Sara Baume takes her readers on a journey through the countryside in her novel, *spill simmer falter wither*, featured in TEXT 2.

Write **a descriptive essay** in which you take your readers on an **urban journey**.

2017: The general theme of the exam was 'different worlds'

2. In TEXT 3, Paul Auster describes the stars as, "benign and beautiful presences hovering in the night."

Write **a descriptive essay** entitled Night Scene.



2018: The general theme of the exam was 'young writers'

1. In TEXT 2 Fiona Mozley writes "it was during this summer in the woods, that Daddy told us these stories".

Write **a descriptive essay** in which you **capture how** the landscape reflects the transition of the seasons. You may choose to include some or all of the seasons in your essay.

2019: The general theme of the exam was 'feeding our imaginations'

1. In TEXT 2, Tom expresses the view that people favour photographs that feature sunsets.

Write **a descriptive essay** which **captures a sense of** the difference between dawn and dusk and celebrates both the beginning and the end of the day.

The style; how you would write a descriptive essay:

- vivid use of language to bring people, places, and things to life realistically
- elements of fiction writing but adapted to non-fictional topics; *not* a narrative with fictional characters



Six: Answering Paper 1



Paper 1 Marking Scheme and Recommended Timing:

Section I - Comprehending	Section II - Composing
Question A (3 parts) 50 marks (15 + 15 + 20)	One composition chosen from 7 questions 100 Marks
Question B 50 marks	
Total: 200 marks	
Exam Time: 2 hrs, 50 mins (170 mins)	
Timing: 1 hr, 15 mins (75 mins)	Timing: 1 hr, 15 mins (75 mins)
Preparation (reading and selecting questions): 10 mins Reading over answers: 10 mins	

English **Paper 1** is the first Leaving Cert exam and is held in the **morning**; **Paper 2** is held the day after in the **afternoon**. The exams begin in the first or second week of June.

In 2024:

Paper 1, June 5th; 09:30 to 12:20

Paper 2, June 6th; 14:00 to 17:20



Choosing your Questions, Section I - Comprehending:

If you have been practising writing essays for the question you will answer in Section II, you will probably have decided what kind of essay you will write in the exam. This, then, gives you a strategy for choosing **what texts you will read in Section I**.

The essay choice you make in Section II will determine which text in Section I you will read in relation to it. Here are the two questions for writing a personal essay in the 2023 exam:

2023: The general theme of the exam was 'between two worlds'

3. In **TEXT 1**, Salim makes a resolution and refuses to be discouraged.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on an occasion or occasions when you made a resolution and refused to be discouraged.

6. In **TEXT 2**, Henry Eliot describes how he gets, "a particular thrill from visiting literary locations".

Write a personal essay in which you describe and reflect on some of the things that bring excitement and wonder into your life.

As you can see, if you wanted to write a personal essay in this exam, you would be **committed to reading** either TEXT 1 or TEXT 2 in Section I.

If you have already made a decision that you will be writing one kind of essay in your answer to Section II, you have **a strategy for starting Section I**:

- take note of what **the theme of the exam** is; this will be written at the top of the exam paper; this will be the general theme you will be writing about in Section II
- **go straight to Section II** and read the question(s) for the essay you would like to answer.
- if you have a choice of two questions, you might choose to read the two texts in section I related to them. There will likely be two questions for the personal essay and the short story options.
- read the essay question you have chosen carefully to begin thinking about what topics you might be able to include in writing your essay
- on roughwork paper, **write down the headings for your prewriting notes** (Intro (3 parts), Body Paragraphs, Conclusion (two parts)) so that you can take notes for writing your essay as you read the texts in Section I
- **go to the text in Section I** relevant to the essay you will answer in Section II and begin reading



Answering A(i):

As noted in the previous section, this question asks you to focus on **what** the text says. **A (i)** will ask you to **explain three insights** or give **three points** regarding the text to support **your opinion** about it in some way.

1: don't begin to read the text until you have read **A (i)** and **A (ii)** so that, as you read, you will be able to highlight **key moments** that you can use in your answers

2: you are looking for **3 insights or points** to write about; number them as you read but read all of the text. If you find more than three, choose the ones you think you can write most about

3: begin your answer with a simple introduction of one or two sentences that outline the **three insights or points** you are going to write about. As you would write the introduction to an argumentative essay, think of your intro as having a **thesis statement** and **essay map**.

4: Construct your answer with **each insight/ point**; refer to the text and **quote** where possible even though the questions do not ask for it

5: make your answer **coherent as a whole** by using transitional words or phrases to introduce each point in a new paragraph:

In the opening paragraph, ...

Another insight...

We also see some insightful reflection in paragraph 5...

Finally, in the closing passage of the extract...

6: finish your answer with a simple summary concluding on how the text was insightful or on the points you have made



Answering A(ii):

A(ii) asks you to **defend a thesis**; a position on the theme or issue developed in the text; to **'agree or disagree'** with a point of view as in 2022; you may be asked for **'your view,'** to give your **'personal response'**. You will often be asked for **'three points'** in your answer.

You will be required to answer in a **persuasive** and/or **argumentative** style, and to articulate your answer through three points.

1: having answered A (i) you will have **read the text already**. It should not be too difficult to find the part(s) of it that the question directs you to; highlight them

2: prewrite your answer as you would a persuasive/ argumentative essay by writing down the relevant headings; Intro (in 3 parts), Body of answer (3 points), Conclusion

3: write down what it is you are going to argue; **the thesis**. This will be given to you in the question; it will be what you are asked to **agree or disagree** with

4: in your **prewriting**, decide on the **three points** you are going to develop as you answer the question

5: begin your answer with a simple introduction of one or two sentences that outline the **three points** you are going to present to support your perspective. This will be preceded by your **thesis statement**; the perspective you are going to **defend** in the answer either **persuasively, argumentatively, or through a combination of the two**

6: Construct your answer with **each insight/ point**; refer to the text and **quote** where possible even though the questions do not ask for it

7: make your answer **coherent as a whole** by using **transitional** words or phrases to introduce each point: First of all/ Firstly...Secondly... Also, we should consider...

6: finish your answer with a simple summary of your thesis and the points you made in defending it



Answering A (iii):

As we have observed, this question is going to ask you to focus on **how** the text is written. It will ask you to find **features** or **elements** of the genres of writing being used in the text.

TEXT 1 from the 2023 exam, for example, is an extract from the novel, *Gravel Heart* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. The question asks students to look for features of **narrative writing** and/or **descriptive writing**.

Answering A (iii), you should...

1: write down on roughwork paper, the **features** or **elements** you remember that you will be looking for. Having a list before you as you read will be helpful.

2: as you read, **highlight** parts of the text where you find the relevant features/ elements

3: begin your answer with a simple introduction of one or two sentences:

'As an accomplished novelist, we see how effectively, in this extract from *Gravel Heart*, Abdulrazak Gurnah uses both narrative and descriptive writing to create a very engaging work of fiction.'

4: Construct your answer with **each feature as a point**; refer to/ quote the text for each one

5: make your points coherent within the whole by using **transitional** words or phrases to introduce each point:

In the opening paragraph, ...

Another effective use of narrative can be seen in...

Once more, in the fifth paragraph, we see the skill with which Gurnah evokes the scene using descriptive language.

Finally, in the closing passage of the extract...

6: finish your answer with a simple summary concluding on what it is you have shown in your observations



'Gurnah's descriptions present us with a vivid sketch of how difficult life can be for a young immigrant in an alienating multi-cultural environment like London...'

Answering Question B:

As we have observed in the previous chapter, to answer question B you will be required to write a **short composition**; an open letter, a personal letter...an article...

1: Any such composition will be best prepared for in **prewriting**. On roughwork paper, you should **prewrite** your composition by laying it out and adding notes using the usual structure: Introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion.

2: take note of what **genres** you will use where the principle decision is whether you will use **persuasive** language, **argumentative** language, or a **combination** of both. In most reflective pieces, the style will be more **discursive**; it may consider different perspectives but it will *not* be arguing for one over another. Some, however, such as the question for TEXT 2 in 2023, could also ask you to 'argue the case'.

Some compositions, will allow you to include **narrative** elements and **aesthetic** uses of language or will ask you directly to compose a fictional piece; for example, the dialogue students were asked to write for the question on TEXT 1 in 2024.

3: in your prewriting, **brainstorm as many topics** as you can; choose up to 5 to include in your composition

4: write an introduction that includes what you are arguing (a **thesis statement**) if that is what you are doing and outline the topics you ant to cover (an **essay map**)

5: Construct your answer by discussing each topic with a paragraph for each if it is not a question that asks for a fictional composition.



Writing Your Essay, Section II - Composing

1: If you have followed the strategy recommended previously, you will have chosen your essay before you start Section I, and, unless you have decided to write a short story, you will have written down the **prewriting headings** for it on roughwork paper:

Introduction (3 parts):

- 1: Lead-in
- 2: Thesis statement/ statement of intent
- 3: Essay map

Body Paragraphs:

- Topic 1:
Topic 2:
Topic 3:
Topic 4:

Conclusion:

- Summary TS and EM:
Clincher:

You will probably have some notes under these headings from things that have occurred to you while answering Section I.

2: think through **each component** of your essay above before starting to write, adding more notes to them

- write out a preliminary thesis statement if it is an essay in which you will be arguing a point of view; in the speech or talk option, for example
- if you are not writing a persuasive/ argumentative essay you will need a statement in your introduction that tells the reader what it is you are going to be writing about; a statement of intent

3: as you begin, keep in mind what genres of language use you are going to use in your essay; IPANA.



Seven: Studying for Paper 2



The Single Text

Planning Your Study of the Single Text:

1: Plan sessions for studying the text:

In chapter three, I have included in the lists of prescribed material the reading times estimated at the website [Reading Length](#). In order to find a realistic estimate of the time you will need to devote to your texts, you should **double their reading time** because studying means pausing on key moments and taking notes.

For *King Lear*, then, since the website gives a reading time of almost 6 hours, you should plan study sessions with a total of 12 hours in mind. You could plan to study in 2-hour sessions. This could then be completed in 2 weeks in 6 sessions; 3 in each week.

2: Use a physical calendar:

In order to stay on track, I would recommend using a **physical calendar** (rather than one on your phone) that you can have on your wall. At a glance, you will be able to remind yourself of where you are in the study of the text.

3: Be methodical:

You need to develop the habits that work best for developing knowledge of the text. I would recommend, as previously, that you give **titles** to chapters/acts and scenes, and take **notes about the key moments** as you come to them. I would also recommend that your notes have an **outline** like the one shown in the [next section](#) for Act I of *King Lear*. On the first page of your notes, this will allow you an overview of the text's key moments.

What you are looking for in the text:

(i) Plot:

Having a clear idea of the **sequence of events** through which the narrative of a novel or a play develops its themes and characters is important.

(ii) Dramatic structure:

This refers to how a play will progress in terms of key moments; its principle character(s) will be **introduced** (exposition); they then will be seen to face **issues and/or a trial of some sort**; as they struggle to reach **resolution**, the play will advance toward some **climactic moment** (rising action); there will be a climactic moment after which the play will present some kind of **outcome and end** (falling action).



(iii) Theme:

Themes identify **what a work of literature is about**; love, friendship, death, suffering, gender... As you study the text, you must bring these forward when **key moments** relating to them emerge. Focusing your study on these key moments will make the themes memorable.

(iv) Key Moments:

These will be the moments in the play that focus our attention on one or more of the themes developed in it. They will also have to be noted in relation to **character development** and the **formal properties** of the text.

(v) Character Development:

As we read the text, we should be alert to how **aspects of the characters' personalities** are revealed. Again, you need to find any number of key moments that would show **consistency of character**. Edmund, in *King Lear*, for example, is clearly an unscrupulous manipulator of trust when we see him plot against his father and brother at the start of the play. Because we see no redeeming qualities in him throughout the play, we conclude that he is one of Shakespeare's **villains**.

We may, however, also be looking at how a character has been **changed by experience**; they may have appeared to be admirable or not at the start of the play or novel but the reader's opinion about this may be complicated by how they are shown to behave. In Shakespeare's plays, for example, characters such as King Lear will often fall somewhere between the poles of hero and villain giving us the more complex category of **tragic-hero**.

(vi) The Form of the Text:

A novelist or playwright will use any number of **aesthetic and/or literary devices** in the text; symbolic imagery, visual or verbal metaphor, descriptive language, dialogue... You should try to take note of the most significant of these as you read.

Studying the Single Text:

1: Watch a film adaptation if available:

If you are studying a play, try to find a film adaptation of it to watch. Some may also be available for novels. Your teacher will have introduced the text for you, so you will have an idea of its principle themes. Watching a film version of it will mean the **plot and key moments** will begin to be memorable to you. You should note that film versions do not always accurately reflect novels or plays; they are **adaptations**. It is the text itself that is your primary source.



Here are adaptations of the 5 prescribed texts that you might be able to find copies of:

Brontë, Anne	The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)	1996, BBC TV Series
Doerr, Anthony	All the Light We Cannot See (2014)	2019, Netflix Series
Miller, Arthur	The Crucible (1953)	1996, Film
Shakespeare, William	King Lear (early 17th century)	2008, BBC Film
Shelley, Mary	Frankenstein (1831)	1994, Film

2: Don't read "blind":

Even if you have watched a screen adaptation of a play or novel you are studying, familiarise yourself with the text by reading a **plot summary**. Become familiar also with the areas of study noted above; theme, character, and so on. Otherwise you will be reading "blind"; it may be difficult for you to recognise **key moments** because you are not alerted to what to look for. You could follow a plot outline of the novel or play as you read.

You should read about the author; **biography and the writer's historical and cultural context** will provide insight into the text. For example, the idea of the 'love test' in the opening scene of King Lear comes from the culture of Shakespeare's time.

3: Take notes on key moments:

Before you begin reading, prepare to **summarise** each chapter of the novel or act of the play by writing notes on key moments. Keep these notes clear by organising what you take note of with headings that specify themes, character development, language, imagery...



4: Make chapters/ Scenes Memorable:

Most novels will not have titles for their chapters. In order to make your notes memorable, give them **titles and brief summaries** that will remind you of key moments in them.

The same applies to drama. For *King Lear*, for example, you can write memorable outlines of each scene in which a key moment is found, and give titles and/or summaries to those notes. The opening scene might be given the title 'The Love Test,' and summary notes added:

ACT 1:

Scene 1: The Love Test:

- characters introduced; Goneril, Regan revealed as manipulative
- Cordelia, the exception, is disinherited and banished for defying the patriarchal Lear
- Kent is banished
- Edmund introduced as the neglected, and embittered son of Gloucester
- Lear is presented as an intolerant ruler who reduces love to the status of something that can be bought

Though you will find them in textbooks, writing **your own summaries of chapters or scenes** will make the whole text more memorable. You will be able to place the titles at the start of your notes as **a chronology of key moments** that you can refer to at a glance. For Act I of *King Lear*, for example:

King Lear

ACT I (5 scenes)

- 1.1: The Love Test
- 1.2: Edmund plots against his brother and father
- 1.3: Goneril plots against her father
- 1.4: Kent in disguise; the Fool introduced
- 1.5: Lear's "madness" begins to emerge

As you take notes on key moments, you will also need to highlight particular lines that would support a discussion in **quotation**. You may remember some in your exam but you are asked only to **refer** to the text.

You could write down some **quotes** or underline them in your text. For example, the question Lear asks and around which the drama of scene 1 centres is worth noting: 'Which of you shall we say doth love us most'.



5: Practise writing about what you have learned:

Practise answering **past exam questions**. This is the best way to consolidate all you have learned. What you know is going to be **graded according to how you write** about it in an exam setting. You need to practise being in that setting using **the prewriting method** outlined in chapter four.

The Comparative Study

Planning your Study of the Comparative Study Texts:

You should plan your study of each of the three texts of the comparative study as you would the single text:

1: Schedule study sessions by calculating a realistic estimate of the time you will need.

2: Use a calendar to plan study sessions

3: Be methodical:

- give titles to chapters/ acts and scenes
- take **notes about the key moments** as you come to them.

What you are looking for in the texts:

The single text strategy also applies to the three texts for the comparative study except that you do not need to pay attention to them in so much detail. You will be able to **narrow your focus** by looking for moments that are significant in relation to **the three** (out of four) **comparative modes** prescribed for 2025:

- (i) Theme or issue
- (ii) Cultural Context
- (iii) General Vision and Viewpoint

Not prescribed: Literary Genre

As with the study of the single text, you will be looking for **key moments**. Now, however, you will be taking notes when they reveal something on any of these **three areas of interest**. When you write your summaries for these texts, the key moments you find will be explored under the headings of these three comparative modes.



(i) Theme or Issue:

The novel, play, or film you are studying will explore themes. Themes, in themselves, are not specific to the text; they identify **kinds of events, relationships, feelings, experiences, ideas**...anything that is recognised can happen in any time and place; they collectively define all that can be good and bad about the human experience. We can relate to themes whether or not we have personally experienced what they observe; war, love, family, friendship, evil, desire...

All of these are themes because they can be developed in a narrative in any given context; they are **universal**.

Issues are more specific but closely related. In the theme of gender, for example, a writer may seek to highlight **the issues faced by women** in a patriarchal society where their freedom is unjustly limited because of their gender.

(ii) Cultural Context:

Any novel, play, or film will have a **setting in time and place**. Specific to that orientation will be a number of things that together define **the culture**. In Shakespeare's plays, for example, we see a lot of superstitious belief such as will attach significance to unusual occurrences in nature. Such beliefs were much more common in 16th and 17th century England. He knew, then, that his audience would respond to them well. Compared to today, then, we see that Shakespeare, and his characters, lived in **different cultural contexts**.

This mode is closely related to **theme or issue** since the perspectives that define a culture will be focussed on themes; superstitious belief in Shakespeare's time compared to ours, for example. There will be a number of such themes defining a culture that will likely be important in the texts you read:

- **belief system/ religion** and associated values
- the status of individuals according to **gender**; is it a patriarchal society? how are women valued?
- **family relationships**; how important are they? On this theme we can tell a lot about the cultural context in *King Lear* when we see how Gloucester refuses to recognise Edmund as his son



- **power/ political system;** what kind of power system is established? Shakespeare's plays were written in non-democratic times when societies were governed by monarchs appointed according to birth. These were the cultural elites, and this feudal system carried with it particular rituals such as the coronation of a king; the use of a throne and a crown as symbols of regal power...
- **identity and social class;** in any narrative we can ask if the setting is defined by a difference in wealth between communities. This will have a bearing on the cultural identity of the principle characters.
- **identity and race;** if it is a multi-cultural context, is there a shared space for different cultural traditions and/or elements of conflict?
- **customs, habits, and the arts;** clothing, food, music, literature, popular culture...

(iii) General Vision or Viewpoint:

In this area, as the title suggests, we are interested to clarify what general vision or viewpoint can be seen to be articulated through the text that can be attributed to **the author**. Again, this is closely related to the themes developed.

Writing in the 19th century, for example, in the novel, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley is responding to what she saw as the dangers of advancing scientific knowledge into areas relating to the origins of life. Her **viewpoint**, as it emerges in the narrative, is wary of the consequences that might follow, and her **general vision** is of a world in which human beings understand they must not assume the authority of a god over life.

Since we are exploring the text's articulation of the author's vision/ viewpoint, biographical detail can be very helpful. We saw this also in an interpretation of the poem 'I taste a liquor never brewed' by Emily Dickinson in chapter 4.

(iv) Literary Genre (not prescribed for the 2025 exam):

Although not prescribed, it is worth noting what is meant by *literary genre* because it will help you to grasp what kind of texts you are dealing with in comparison to one another.

We have come across the word *genre* when discussing the five genres of language use (IPANA) in chapter two. The word generally refers us to a **style or category** of art, music, or literature. In popular music we have genres like reggae, rock, heavy metal, country, folk... We are familiar with genres of film such as action, adventure, drama, horror, romance, science fiction, thriller...



A **literary genre** can be broad or narrow. A novel is a genre of fiction; others would be myth, fairytale, allegory. But when we are describing a particular novel, we can be more specific. Here are genre descriptions of five of the texts prescribed for the comparative study:

Author	Title	Genre
Austen, Jane (1775-1817)	Pride and Prejudice (1813)	romance novel, novel of manners
Barry, Sebastian (b. 1955)	Days Without End (2016)	historic fiction, colonial fiction
Ishiguro, Kazuo (b. 1954)	Never Let Me Go (2005)	science fiction, speculative fiction
Owens, Delia (b. 1949)	Where the Crawdads Sing (2018)	coming-of-age murder mystery
Shelley, Mary (1775-1851)	Frankenstein (1831)	gothic novel, horror fiction

Bringing the three texts together:

A crucial part of the comparative study is obviously the comparison itself which means pointing out **similarities and differences** in the texts in terms of how they engage the reader in relation to one of the three modes.

When you have taken notes on the texts, you need some way to **bring together the key moments** from all three; something that will allow you to glance over your comparisons without having to read all your notes again.

From your notes on each text, you could highlight **key moments from each text** side by side on tables, one for each mode. This would give you at least three tables as shown on the next page where I have chosen three texts (two novels and one film) from the prescribed material for 2025.

You would identify each key moment and add a short note to remind you of the significance of each in relation to the mode. I have shown just one theme below but you might do this for three or more.



Key Moments on the theme of Gender		
Days Without End	Frankenstein	On the Waterfront
Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1
Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2
Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3

Key Moments on Cultural Context		
Days Without End	Frankenstein	On the Waterfront
Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1
Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2
Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3

Key Moments on General Vision or Viewpoint		
Days Without End	Frankenstein	On the Waterfront
Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1	Key Moment 1
Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2	Key Moment 2
Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3	Key Moment 3



The Comparative Study Question:

Since 2021, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, questions on all three prescribed modes have been given. If a return to pre-pandemic format comes into effect in 2025, there would be questions on **just two** of the three modes. That would mean it would be necessary to study the texts in relation to **at least two modes**. This should not be too much more work given that these modes are **naturally connected to one another**. If you are considering a text in terms of **cultural context**, for example, you will inevitably be engaged in understanding its **themes or issues** also.

Question 2 also allowed students to discuss just **two of the texts** prescribed. This may or may not change in 2025. It is better, in any case, to study three texts.

The Format of the Questions:

You have a choice of answering ONE of two questions. Question 1 is split into two parts; question 2 is a single question.

2020:

A CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. (a) Identify and discuss **two aspects of cultural context** which you believe make a significant contribution to the level of social division or the level of social unity evident in **one text** on your comparative course. Develop your response with reference to the text. (30)

(b) Compare the extent to which **social division** is evident in each of **two other** comparative texts you have studied. Develop your response with reference to the **aspect or aspects of cultural context** that you believe contribute(s) to the level of social division evident in these texts.

In your answer you may refer to **the same aspect or different aspects** of cultural context in each of the texts that you have studied. (40)



OR

2. Choose one **central character** from each of **three texts** on your comparative course. Compare the factors, **related to cultural context**, that affect the extent to which these characters are **accepted or rejected as members of their societies**. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts.

In your answer you should refer to at least one relevant factor related to cultural context in each of your three comparative texts. You may refer to the same factor or different factors in each of your chosen texts. (70)

2021:

A THEME OR ISSUE

1. (a) Identify **a theme or issue** you studied on your comparative course. Discuss the various reasons why you did or did not find the exploration of this theme or issue **emotionally engaging in one text** on your comparative course. Support your response with reference to the text. (30)

(b) Compare the reasons why you found the exploration of the same theme or issue discussed above, more, less or equally **emotionally engaging in each of two other texts** you studied on your comparative course. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

OR

2. Compare **the insights** you gained into **the same theme or issue** through understanding what influences or motivates one central character, from each of **at least two texts** on your comparative course, when making one or more **key decisions**. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. The insight or insights you gain into the same theme or issue from different texts may be similar or different. (70)

2021:

C GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT

1. (a) Discuss the extent to which a character that you found inspiring in **one text** on your comparative course influenced your sense of the general vision and viewpoint of this text. Develop your response with reference to your chosen text. (30)



(b) In relation to **two other texts** on your comparative course, compare the extent to which a character that you found inspiring influenced your sense of the general vision and viewpoint of each of these texts. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

OR

2. "The aspects of a text that we find unsettling or disturbing often influence our sense of the general vision and viewpoint."

In relation to at least **two texts** on your comparative course, compare the extent to which an aspect or **aspects of your chosen texts**, that you found unsettling or disturbing, influenced your sense of the general vision and viewpoint of these texts. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (70)

Question 1:

The first question breaks your knowledge of the texts down as follows: a non-comparative answer to (a) on **one text**, and a **comparative** answer on '**two other texts**' to (b). You are comparing only two texts in the second question. If you choose question 1, then, you must be able to apply your knowledge of **all three** texts to your answers.

Question 2:

Unless the format is changed for the exam in 2025, question 2 gives you the option of answering on only **two of the prescribed texts**. You would be writing an answer like part (b) of question 1 but it would need to be longer.

Prewriting Answers to the Comparative Study Question:

It is important to practise writing answers for the comparative question because you need to know how to **prewrite** your answer, in particular, how it is to be structured for a given question.

There are **two ways to structure a comparative essay/ answer** and it will be one of these that you will use in the exam. One is more difficult than the other, but is more conducive to coherent discussion.

1: The text-by-text method:

This is an easier way of writing your comparison because you **discuss one text and move on to the next**. The disadvantage is that your answers will demand of the reader that they remember the points you have made about one text as they read your discussion of another.



You will still be linking the texts together with topic sentences like, 'We see the development of the same theme in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*...', but, necessarily, the answer will not be as coherent as it could be. This is why it is better to choose the second method which develops **discussion of all texts together**.

2: Feature-by-Feature:

The more difficult but more coherent method is to discuss the two or three texts you have chosen **each time** there is a new topic. With this structure, your topic sentences will bring the two or three texts you are discussing together **under the topic to be discussed**; some feature of the mode you have chosen to explore; a theme or issue, a feature of cultural context, a feature of general vision and viewpoint.

You will structure your answer, then, **not** by taking the texts themselves as your topics but by comparing them once your topic sentence has introduced **some feature of the mode of comparison** you are discussing. The answer will now develop, not by discussing one text and then moving on to another, but by discussing them all **each time a new topic is introduced**.

For example, in the 2021 theme or issue question above, students were asked to 'compare the insights' they gained into a theme or issue. This was to be focussed on moments when 'one central character' made one or more 'key decisions'.

A student might be tempted to structure an answer by writing about the principle characters one at a time; the **text-by-text** method. To be able to bring the texts closer together, however, it would be better to discuss the texts together with a number of themes being the topics.

For each topic, then, in your **prewriting**, you would note the key moments from each text you would be referring to in the discussion of each theme. For the 2021 question, on the theme of nature/ the natural order, then, for the novel's *Days Without End* and *Frankenstein*, you might plan the first topic of your answer as follows:

Topic 1: the theme of nature/ the natural order as established culturally Comparison/ Contrast:

Key decision in **Days Without End**: in Thomas McNulty's transition to identifying as a woman, he and John Cole adopt Winona; transgresses



traditional conceptions of what constitutes a family.

Insight: parental care/ motherhood does not have to be determined by biological gender

Key decision in **Frankenstein**: the creation of “new” life from dead bodies transgresses the traditional view of man’s limited role in the natural order

Insight: the dangers of modern man’s scientific thinking

The contrast: in *Days Without End*, transgression of cultural boundaries is a positive

v
in *Frankenstein*, transgression of cultural boundaries is a positive



The Prescribed Poetry

1: Choosing Which Poets to Study:

In the exam, you will be given one question on each of five of the poets prescribed for 2025. There are 8 altogether as noted in chapter three.

Up to 2021, 4 questions, each on one of the poets had been given. This meant that, in order to guarantee being able to answer a question on a students had studied, they had to study a minimum of 5 poets.

Due to Covid-19, in 2021 the number of questions went up to **five**. This has meant that the minimum went down to **4 poets**. It is yet to be confirmed that there will be 5 questions on the 2025 exam but there is no suggestion so far that there will be any change.

It is worth trying to **predict** what poets might be included. Looking at past papers **from 2007** onward below, I have shown the years that each of the poets have been prescribed. When a question on them was also given, I have **highlighted** that year:

BOLAND, Eavan: 2008, 2010, **2011**, 2012, **2017**, 2018, **2020**, **2021**

DICKINSON, Emily: **2011**, **2014**, **2016**, **2020**, **2022**, 2023, **2024**

ELIOT, T.S.: **2007**, **2010**, **2016**, 2017

HOPKINS, Gerard Manley: 2011, **2013**, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2024

KAVANAGH, Patrick: 2007, **2010**, 2011, **2012**, **2023**

MAHON, Derek: **2008**, 2009, **2013**, 2014, 2023

PLATH, Sylvia: **2007**, 2008, 2012, **2013**, **2014**, 2015, 2016, 2017, **2019**, **2021**, **2024**

SMITH, Tracy K: new poet



Five Poets for 2025:

We can **eliminate Dickinson** and **Plath** from our selection. Both were prescribed for 2024 and both were included. Questions on poets are rarely given in consecutive years. We can see only two instance above; Boland (2020 and 2021) and Plath (2013 and 2014). Since it is unlikely, then, that a poet who was on the paper in 2024 will come up again, we can reduce the number of poets to choose from to 6, and **pick 5** as follows:

4 Poets most likely to be included in 2025:

ELIOT: not prescribed since 2017, and when prescribed is most often included

BOLAND: not prescribed since 2021 and popular

HOPKINS: prescribed 7 times over the years but only included once

MAHON: Prescribed in 2023 but KAVANAGH came up; not included since 2013

To Pick 5, choose one of the two left:

KAVANAGH: on the paper in 2023 so less likely than MAHON;

SMITH: newly prescribed poets may or may not be included; no easy way of predicting

Choosing a fifth poet you might just have a read of some of the poems by Kavanagh and Smith and choose the poet you prefer. Of course, you could do that to choose all your poets. Also, you may just go with whatever poets your teacher chooses.

2: Getting to Know the Poems:

A poem is a text, a use of language, and so it must communicate meaning. But it is considered **poetry** because it does so in a way that makes it distinct from a **non-poetic** text. It doesn't just communicate a meaning where the language used is **throwaway**, in the sense that it doesn't matter what words are used, and how they are used, as long as the meaning gets from A to B.

We can, to some extent, put the meaning of a poem in our own words; we can **paraphrase** it. A good poem, however, makes us feel that in doing so we lose an essential part of its meaning; the **experience** of reading it. We feel that **the specific words** the poet used, and the **specific way** they **arranged them on the page** make for something unique. We feel that **only those words** in that order give us an experience that is part of the text's overall meaning.

The meaning of a poem, we understand, cannot be reduced simply to what it says. As an **aesthetic** use of language, as we described it in chapter five, part of its meaning is the experience we have of reading it.



Metaphorically speaking, it is language shaped into an artistic “object”. If we want to fully understand it, then, we need to look, not just at **what** it says, but pay close attention also to **how** it says it.

When we analyse a poem, then, we break it down into the **two parts** which together make it a meaningful whole:

1: the **WHAT**; the meaning we talk about in terms of theme, sometimes referred to as its **content**

2: the **HOW**; how this meaning is communicated; we look at things like imagery, the rhythm of the lines, rhyming patterns...This is sometimes referred to as the poem’s **form**.

The meaning of a poem, then, is the **sum** of these two parts; a **whole** that is greater than either one by itself.

The Argument of a Poem:

Poems do not use **argumentative** language, but they have an “**argument**”; they say something about a theme. There may be a **persuasive** element to them if they present us with a moral issue but they will, more often than not, develop a perspective on a theme or issue **indirectly**. Poems, more than any other genre of literature, will **show** us what they mean more than **tell** us. However, **a perspective on a theme or issue** will emerge through what it says and/or through what is expressed through its form (rhyme, rhythm, and so on), the language used (metaphor, personification...), and the imagery.

Showing and Telling in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 60:

Sometimes we get **a little bit of both**; the indirect *showing* and the direct *telling*. In Shakespeare’s, ‘Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore’ (Sonnet 60), for example, this first line begins the articulation of something we could say in plain language without images of waves and pebbles; namely, that time, by small but inexorable increments, compels us forward until we reach the end of our lives. The poet **shows** us this meaning in the imagery. The next line, which completes the simile, however, also **tells** us how the imagery is to be understood: ‘So do our minutes hasten to their end’.

There is a sense in which, through the analogy with waves washing on a shore with pebbles, that we “see” and “hear” this truth about existence. Shakespeare chose a very powerful image to **show** us what he also **tells** us.

He is also careful with his choice of **words**. If the waves ‘make’ toward the shore, we are given the impression that time advances purposefully.



We sense that it is being personified. Later in the poem, in fact, we see that this is precisely what Shakespeare had in mind; we are referred to time as a giver and taker: 'Time that gave doth now his gift confound'.

When we make the poems **content** and its **form** distinct from one another, we see that there is a whole lot more to it than its "argument". We show that our paraphrase of it cannot be a substitute for the articulation of the poem itself. The **expression** of that argument becomes part of the poem's meaning; **form** becomes inseparable from **content**.

The poem has an implicit **argument** (what it is saying about a theme such as time and mortality in Sonnet 60) that we can put in our own words as a preliminary to appreciating the whole the poet has composed by making that **WHAT** inseparable from the **HOW**.

The **argument of Shakespeare's sonnet** can be observed in relation to its principle theme of mortality. It "argues" that, although we cannot stop the progress of time which take us to the end of our lives, there is some kind of immortality in literature; his 'verse'. That 'hope,' at least, is expressed in the closing couplet of the poem which is addressed to someone the speaker cares deeply for:

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Studying the LC Poetry:

You will find interpretations of the poems in your textbooks but in order to deepen your understanding of them, you should write your own **summaries**. These should not be too long so that you can look them over when you need to refresh your memory. These summaries can be divided into the **WHAT** and **HOW** categories. Below, is an example; a summary of Patrick Kavanagh's poem 'Canal Bank Walk'. I have located the poem, according to the period of its publication, in the context of the other poems prescribed.

'Canal Bank Walk' by Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967)

Summary: The What and the How

1929 to 1938:

Iniskeen road
Shancoduff

1939 to 1946:

A Christmas Childhood
On Raglan Road
Advent
The Great Hunger (Section I)



1947 to 1955:

Epic

1956 to 1959:

Canal Bank Walk

Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin

The Hospital

Biographical Context: Kavanagh's convalescence from cancer brought with it a renewed spiritual sense of the world. He tells us he can now [Q] 'Grow with nature again' as he had in childhood.

Themes: spiritual renewal/ 'redemption'; religious faith; God as manifest in nature; nature as a spiritual and creative inspiration; the purpose of poetry.

The Argument Of The Poem

WHAT it says, asks, implies about a chosen theme

In the poet's **pantheistic vision**, divinity has become visible in nature; for example in the work of a bird [Q] 'gathering materials for the nest for the Word [the eternal truth of God]'.

This transformation of the [Q] 'habitual, the banal' conveys the poet's appreciation of how, once again, he can experience the ordinary world as a place of **spiritual wonder and inspiration to him as a poet**. He prays to God, manifest as the 'unworn world,' to 'enrapture' and 'encapture' him. His wish is that his soul should be expressed in [Q] 'arguments that cannot be proven,' that is, through the non-rational, pre-reflective appeal of poetic form.

The poem attributes **the poet's [Q] 'redemption'** to the 'will of God' and refers to the manifestation of the 'Word' (the eternal truth of God) in nature; it alludes to the Christian sacrament of baptism in its water imagery; and it is the poet's [Q] 'soul' that he is concerned should be expressed in 'arguments that cannot be proven,' which suggests the non-rational terms of religious faith.

We can equate his plea to be able to [Q] 'pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech' (12) with **what kind of poetry he believes he can now write**. His poetry is to attempt to do the same. Having regained the childlike wonder he once had, he prays he will be able, in his poetry, to subdue his adult inclination to rationalise his experiences of the world.



HOW Kavanagh means what he means, says what he says...

Setting

The **ordinariness** of the location in **Dublin city by a canal** gives Kavanagh the kind of setting he needs to suggest that its experience can be extraordinary/ spiritual.

Tone

The poem has the **solemn** but **joyful** tone of a prayer or invocation: he implores God, as he is manifest in the [Q] 'unworn world,' to 'enrapture' and 'encapture' him.

The poem becomes a **vocational pledge** to make of his poetry a prayer that is 'unselfconscious'. There is to be a release of the spiritual/ emotional impulse otherwise restrained by **reason's authority over the imagination**.

Use of Language

Neologism: 'Leafy-with-love'

Use of the continuous present tense:

The poem's transfigures the ordinary world into something extraordinary. The feeling we have of the emergence of this involuntarily in an "overflowing" of experience is underlined by Kavanagh's use of the **continuous present tense**.

Nature's spiritual dimension is to be realised within the "flow" of experience as the [Q] '**pouring**' of the water suggests metaphorically. [Q] The self or 'soul' is realised there in the continuous present, and we note that the poem is set accordingly; [Q] 'Pouring...adding...kissing...gathering'. This is engaging for the reader who is given an impression of the scene **unfolding in the present moment**. The present continuous tense also gives us a sense of the eternal terms of the experience; these things are happening now but they always have and always will happen.

'wallow in the habitual, the banal': The poet can now, 'wallow' in what would normally appear unremarkable: [Q] 'the habitual, the banal'. While *to wallow* means literally to roll about in mud or water, Kavanagh intends the more common metaphorical use to signify **unrestrained indulgence**. The external world now appears to him with a significance he had lost in adulthood. The line has, then, a striking paradox in it that underlines how **the ordinary becomes extraordinary**. There is a transformation which is essentially spiritual in nature.



Water Symbolism: connotations specific to the ritual of **baptismal** purification are implied. Baptism is a sacrament in the Catholic church; understood by the faithful to save the child from the state of sinfulness that he is born into. The baptismal water purifies the infants soul by "cleaning" or "washing away" what is referred to in Christian doctrine as 'original sin'.

We see in the ritual **the symbolic value of the pouring of water** that Kavanagh assigns to his setting: [Q] 'the green waters of the canal/ Pouring redemption for me'. The waters represent the symbolic baptism through which the prelapsarian **wonder of the child is returned to him**. He is now saved from that corruption of the soul which, in 'A Christmas Childhood,' is characterised in terms of the biblical Fall, and where the world is personified as 'Eve'.

Colour Symbolism: The poet sees the [Q] 'green waters' of the Grand Canal in Dublin as sacramental. The colour of the water describes how it appeared naturally on that day in July. **Green** can also, however, have symbolic value suggesting renewal, new life, abundance, fertility. The regrowth referred to in line 4, then, associates these with **the poet's spiritual rebirth**. He tells us that he now grows [Q] 'with nature again'; as he did, presumably, first time round, as a child.

Paradox/ Contradiction: he implores God, as he is manifest in the [Q] 'unworn world,' to 'enrapture' and 'encapture' him. There is a contradiction in these terms that compliments the idea with which the poem closes; that his soul should be expressed in [Q] 'arguments that cannot be proven,' that is, in poetic terms, through the pre-reflective appeal of form. He is to be emotionally and spiritually engaged with the world.

To be *enraptured* suggests an ecstatic indulgence of the natural beauty before him; to be *encaptured*, however, suggests he will surrender himself to the [Q] 'will of God'.

The words are the same in all but one letter giving us an expression in the near **repetition of sound and meaning** with variation of how he understands that these are two sides of the one commitment. He will take a spiritual leap of faith that trusts in what is [Q] 'proven' through the experience of the natural world. The experience itself will be his argument, rather than its rationalisation.

The poet's wish is that the dominance of reason give way to **the lived moment**, exemplified in the child he was in 'A Christmas Childhood', so that



in the freedom given to the imagination, the will of God can be done. The self-consciousness of the ego is to be abandoned to a prayer that, like the waters of the canal, is [Q] 'overflowing'.

Symbolism, quatrain 2:

The image of **the stick**, suggesting resistance to the flow of experience, is symbolic of **the rational mind** which sees what is only objectively verifiable. It demands [Q] 'arguments' that have to be 'proven'. This is an obstacle to the will of God as it is manifest as an '**overflowing, a transcending of reason**' that he has been opened to once again. The poet is willing to let go of thought so that he can see **the extraordinary in the ordinary world**. He reproduces such experience, then, in descriptions that attempt to do justice to it for the reader. He sees that a bird building a nest is [Q] 'gathering materials... for the Word' by which he means the eternal truth of God; he sees the grass as [Q] 'fabulous,' and can hear [Q] 'eternal voices by a beech'.

Biblical allusion:

- the water imagery and specification of 'redemption' alludes to the Christian sacrament of **baptism**
- the 'Word' alludes to the of eternal truth of God

Imagery

Bird image: In the poet's pantheistic vision, divinity has become visible in nature; for example in the work of a bird [Q] 'gathering materials for the nest for the Word [the eternal truth of God]' (7). His poetry is to attempt to do the same.

Water image; see above

Trapped Stick image v Flow of water: see above

Seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary:

The image of **the stick**, suggesting resistance to the flow of experience, is symbolic of the rational mind which sees what is only objectively verifiable. It demands '**arguments that have to be proven**'. This is an obstacle to the will of God as it is manifest as an 'overflowing,' a transcending of reason that he has been opened to once again.

The poet is willing to let go of thought so that he can see **the extraordinary in the ordinary world**. He reproduces such experience, then, in descriptions that attempt to do justice to it for the reader.



He sees that **a bird** building a nest is 'gathering materials... for the Word' by which he means the eternal truth of God; he sees **the grass as 'fabulous,'** and can **hear 'eternal voices by a beech'.**

The poem becomes a vocational pledge to make of his poetry **a prayer** that is **unselfconscious**. There is to be a release of the spiritual/ emotional impulse otherwise **restrained by reason's authority** over the imagination. His experience on this walk by the canal brings to him a renewed spiritual sense of the natural world expressed in the imaginative freedom to state, as a matter of fact, that the grass is [Q] 'fabulous' and that one can hear 'eternal voices by a beech'.

Imagery of quatrain 2:

In this series of images of things seen and unseen, pantheistically, the poet sees one spiritual element. This includes human relations. The love expressed between two people is identical with the love that has strewn the banks of the canal with leaves. This ubiquitous divinity is also suggested in the image of the bird [Q] 'gathering materials for the nest'. Couples also build their "nests" together. There is also a suggestion of the timeless reality of this love. The couple are together on an 'old seat' (emphasis added) where many couples through the generations have sat and kissed.

Use of Form

Form: Sonnet; 14 lines rhyming in alternately in quatrains, ending in a rhyming couplet; abab, cdcd, efef, gg

The principle of **flowing water** as a model for poetic composition is demonstrated in quatrain 2. The fluid momentum of the whole scene is expressed in the water image, and is underlined by its opposite in the image of a [Q] '**bright stick trapped**'.

These **three stressed syllables** at the start of line 5 formally compliment this sense of **resistance to the flow of experience** that the image suggests metaphorically. This registers **a release point** for the image that follows. Mid-line there is also a formal release, with a moment of **caesura**, that compliments the introduction of the detail of a [Q] 'breeze'.

The **narrow vowel sound** of this word, and its tapering off into **the sibilant "z"** sound heightens the sense of movement beyond limitation.



Template for Studying a Poem:

The analysis of Kavanagh's poem gives us a **template** which we can apply to any poem. To begin studying a new one, we can write down the headings which we will then begin to write notes under and/or brief discussions on significant points of interest:

1: The WHAT of the POEM; its "argument", themes

2: The HOW of the Poem

Setting

Tone

Use of Language

Imagery

Use of Form

As we will see in the next section, this template will be what we use to organise our prewriting in the **Unseen Poem** question of Paper 2.

The Format of the Prescribed Poetry Question:

In the Prescribed Poetry section of the exam paper, you will be given **5 questions**; one on five of the poets prescribed for 2025. You will be required to answer one question and each one has a single question format.

Once again, your objective is to incorporate into your answer a strong impression of your understanding of how the two components of the poems you are familiar with work together; the **WHAT** and the **HOW**. Below, in the five questions from 2024, I have indicated where the questions direct the students to each of these.

1. W.B. Yeats

"Yeats utilises powerful imagery (**HOW**) to explore fascinating contradictions (**WHAT**) that are central to his poetry."

Discuss this statement developing your response with reference to the poetry by W.B. Yeats on your Leaving Certificate English course.

2. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

"Ní Chuilleanáin uses evocative imagery (**HOW**) to produce poems that often reveal meaningful insights about the nature of life (**WHAT**)."

Discuss this statement developing your response with reference to the poetry by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin on your Leaving Certificate English course.



3. Emily Dickinson

"Dickinson's style (**HOW**) allows her to explore the complexity of a variety of abstract ideas (**WHAT**) in a concrete and accessible manner."

Discuss this statement developing your response with reference to the poetry by Emily Dickinson on your Leaving Certificate English course.

4. Sylvia Plath

"The dramatic imagery (**HOW**) we encounter in Plath's poetry reveals her to be an insightful social (**WHAT**) commentator."

Discuss this statement developing your response with reference to the poetry by Sylvia Plath on your Leaving Certificate English course.

5. Seamus Heaney

"Heaney uses a deceptively simple style (**HOW**) to convey profound observations about people and places (**WHAT**)."

Discuss this statement developing your response with reference to the poetry by Seamus Heaney on your Leaving Certificate English course.

As you can see, most of the time, the prescribed poetry question takes the form of a **statement**, followed by instructions for the student to 'discuss' it with reference to it. You should think in terms of an **argumentative** essay when preparing your answer; you want to **defend** the **thesis** given in the statement. In fact the question is giving you the most important component of the introduction to such an essay; the **thesis statement**.

On Yeats in 2024 above, **the thesis** is that 'fascinating contradictions' are a prominent feature of the the poetry, and that Yeats uses 'powerful imagery' to 'explore' them.

This is not always the format. In 2023, for example, the question on Patrick Kavanagh took the form of a **question**:

How successfully, in your opinion, does Kavanagh employ both a lyrical style and a celebratory tone (**HOW**) to elevate the mundane realism of life (**WHAT**) in his work?

Develop your response with reference to the poetry by Patrick Kavanagh on your Leaving Certificate English course.



In this **question format**, you are also given a thesis to defend; that Kavanagh is or is not 'successful' in his use of 'a lyrical style and a celebratory tone to elevate the mundane realism of life in his work'

Answering either of these, you would choose **up to five poems** as your topics, and in each case you would **defend the thesis** using the **point-quote-defend formula**.

In other question format examples, you might be asked to **agree or disagree** with a perspective on one the poets; an example from 2023 on the poetry of Adrienne Rich:

To what extent do you **agree or disagree** that Adrienne Rich makes effective use of a diverse range of imagery and an engaging style (**HOW**) to explore structures and values in society which she considers to be negative or destructive (**WHAT**)?

Develop your response with reference to the poems by Adrienne Rich on your Leaving Certificate English course.



The Unseen Poem

Prewriting the Unseen Poem Answer:

The only way to study for the Unseen Poem question is to practise answering **past exam questions**. We can develop a strategy for analysing a poem we have never read before ('unseen') by organising our **prewriting**. What we do in our practise will be what we will do in the exam:

1: on roughwork paper, write down the headings that will organise our observations of the poem into two components; the **WHAT** and the **HOW** of poems we have looked at in the prescribed poetry previously

2: take notes as you read the poem on the **WHAT**; what its "argument" is in your own words; what it says about the main themes

3: take notes on the **HOW** of the Poem under the following headings:

Setting

Tone

Use of Language

Imagery

Use of Form

4: structure your answer in the exam using the **three parts of an essay**; introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion

5: take notes under the relevant headings; (thesis statement, essay map (of points you will include), conclusion), choosing your points from your summary.

The Unseen Poem Questions:

You are given a choice of two questions; you must answer either question 1 or question 2.

Question 1 Format:

As you will see, from the examples below from past papers, **question 1 is in two parts**. In most cases, one of these will be quite a **general question** such as asking you for your '**impression**' of someone or something, to point out '**characteristics**' of something or someone, or something similar; the other question will ask you to **focus specifically on some formal aspect** of the poem; imagery, language, tone... Note, however, that in some questions, as in 2021, both questions focus on the **HOW** of the poem; its form.



2024:

(a) Do you think the poet uses **tone** in an effective way in this poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) In your view, what **characteristics** of the grandfather emerge during the course of this poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

2023:

(a) What **impression** do you form of the daughter in this poem? (10)

(b) Did the poet's **use of language** in the above poem add to its impact on you? Develop two points with reference to the poem in your response. (10)

2022:

(a) How **accurately** do you think the poet describes the process of silent reading in the first seventeen lines of the above poem? Support your response with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) In your opinion, does the poet make effective use of **the word 'barn'** to explain how our experiences shape our understanding when we read? Explain your response with reference to the poem. (10)

2021:

(a) Do you find **the language** used by the poet in the above poem appealing? Explain your response with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) The poet has not placed **a punctuation mark** at the end of the above poem. In your opinion, what is the effect of this decision on the poem? Explain your response with reference to the poem. (10)

2020:

(a) Based on your reading of the above poem, discuss the **impact** and suitability of its title. Develop your response with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) Discuss how the poet brings the above poem to life by **appealing to the senses**. Develop your response with reference to the poem. (10)



Question 2 Format:

Question 2 will focus primarily on either theme (2023) or form (2024) but you will be always aiming to answer by making clear how these are two parts of the whole; the **WHAT** and the **HOW**. You are reminded about this in the stipulation about how to 'develop' or 'support' your 'answer' or 'response'.

2024:

To what extent do you believe that the poet's **use of language** is clever and creative in this poem? Make detailed reference to the poem in support of your answer.

2023:

"Guest Room is a fascinating exploration of the complex relationship between mother and daughter." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Develop your response with reference to both the **subject matter** and **style** of the poem.

2022:

"Thomas Lux makes effective use of simple **language** and concrete **imagery** to explore complex, abstract **ideas** throughout the above poem."

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the above statement. Support your discussion with reference to both the content and language of the poem.

2021:

Based on your reading of the above poem, explain the reasons **why you find it** to be serious or amusing or both. Support your response with reference to the poet's **use of language** and **the subject matter** of the poem.

2020:

Discuss the poet's **use of language** in the above poem to convey various aspects of his experience with the crow. Develop your response with reference to the poem.



Eight: Answering Paper 2



Marking Scheme and Recommended Timing:

Section I: The Single Text	Section II: The Comparative Study	Section III: Poetry
<p>One question on one text; novel or play</p> <p>60 marks</p>	<p>One question on one of comparative modes: Theme or Issue, Cultural Context, General Vision and Viewpoint</p> <p>Question 1 (two parts): 70 marks (30 + 40)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Question 2: 70 Marks</p>	<p>Two Questions:</p> <p>A: Unseen Poem: Question 1 (two parts) 20 marks</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Question 2 20 marks</p> <p>B: Prescribed Poetry One question: 50 marks</p> <p>Total: 70 marks</p>
Total: 200 marks		
Exam Time: 3 hrs, 20 mins (200 mins)		
Timing: 55 mins	Timing: 1 hour	Timing: 20 + 45: 1 hour 5 mins
<p>Preparation (reading over/ selecting questions): 15 mins</p> <p>Reading over answers: 5 mins</p>		

English **Paper 1** is the first Leaving Cert exam, and is held in the morning; **Paper 2** is held the day after in the afternoon. The exams begin in the first or second week of June.

In 2024:

Paper 1, June 5th; 09:30 to 12:20

Paper 2, June 6th; 14:00 to 17:20



Argumentation/ Objectivity in Paper 2:

The general rule for answering questions in Paper 2 is that you should always be aiming to write in **an objective, impersonal** (argumentative rather than persuasive) style in discussing the prescribed material. This should be your aim even when asked for your personal response; see example in the comparative question from 2021 [below](#).

The simplest way to remember this is, if you want to sustain an objective, argumentative style, don't emphasise the first person perspective ('I'); don't use phrases that make it sound like it is just your opinion; 'In my opinion...', 'I believe...', 'I think that...'. Even if this kind of language is used in the question, as in the 2021 example, it only weakens your argument to use it too often, and if it can be avoided, it is better.

A carefully written answer on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, then, would use the first of these sentences as a thesis statement in the introduction:

The final act of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is nihilistic.

I think the final act of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is nihilistic.

Since it is **debatable** and not fact, the thesis of the first sentence is just as much **an opinion** as the second. It reads, however, *like* an observation of objective fact because it doesn't draw attention to itself as an opinion as does the second by including the **first person perspective** ('I think...'). With this style giving this impression of objectivity, your answers will be stronger than if you repeatedly remind the examiner that you are giving an opinion.

In Section II, the comparative study questions can ask for your personal response. How the text made you **feel**, however, will be of no critical value if its articulation is not part of a discussion of the relative comparative mode.

It will only be an adequate answer if you have presented evidence based on your **knowledge and understanding of texts**. Only then will your personal response have critical value. The reader will be convinced that it reflects the experience of most readers.



Section I, The Single Text:

None of the questions in Section I will ask you to express your **feelings** about the novel or play you have studied. Below are some questions from past papers on Shakespeare's *King Lear*. You will see that they ask if you **agree** or **disagree**; for *opinions* and *reasons* for them; for your *insights* (not feelings); for you to *discuss statements/ reasons* you give. It is always essential that you provide *support* for your discussion points through *reference* to the text. The key words are **highlighted**.

2016:

(i) "Throughout the course of the play, both Lear and Gloucester are tragic characters, but Lear develops into the more heroic figure."

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with this statement? **Support** your answer with **reference** to the play, *King Lear*.

OR

(ii) "Shakespeare explores both the destructive and the redemptive power of love throughout the play, *King Lear*."

Discuss this **statement**, **supporting** your answer with **reference** to the play.

2018:

(i) "Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*, provides moments of riveting drama that offer thought-provoking insights into the human condition."

Identify three moments of riveting drama in the play that, in your **opinion**, provide thought-provoking insights into the human condition. Give **reasons** why you find these moments dramatically riveting and **discuss** the thought-provoking **insights** they provide. **Support** your response with **reference** to the play.

OR

(ii) "Cordelia plays a more significant role than Goneril or Regan in the play, *King Lear*."

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the above **statement**? In your response you should consider the roles played by all three sisters. **Support** your answer with **reference** to the text.



2021:

(i) "Chaos and confusion are used to great effect throughout Shakespeare's play, King Lear." **Discuss** the above **statement**, developing your response with **reference** to the text.

OR

(ii) A production of Shakespeare's play, King Lear, in which the characters of Kent and the Fool do not appear has been proposed. **Discuss** the **reasons** why, in your **opinion**, the removal of each of these characters would or would not diminish Shakespeare's play, King Lear. Develop your response with **reference** to the text.

The Single Text Answer:

We have noted in the previous chapter that it is crucial to organise your thoughts before beginning to write an answer. You will be best prepared to do this if you have practised the **prewriting method** as part of your study strategy. You will be ready, then, to begin prewriting in the exam by taking notes under the headings we have noted:

Introduction

1: Lead-in

2: Thesis statement (given in question)

3: Essay Map (the topics/ poems you will explore)

Body Paragraphs

Topic 1 (notes on what you will write using the point-quote-defend formula)

Topic 2...

[...]

Topic 5

Conclusion

Summary Thesis Statement (a rewriting of the TS and EM from your introduction)

Clincher: a summing up/ final thought on the poems and thesis

Your prewriting outline is your guide as you proceed to write your answer. As such, you should keep glancing back at it, and add to it as things about the text come to mind.



Section II, The Comparative Study:

Questions in Section II, may encourage you to write in the first person but, again, what is crucial is that you articulate a **discussion**. In one question of Section II (The Comparative Study) in 2021, students were asked to 'discuss' whether or not they found a theme or issue 'emotionally engaging'.

Even though an answer to this question would detail the student's personal response, it still has to be **argumentative** rather than **persuasive**; appealing to the reader by **discussion** of and **reference** to the texts rather than dwelling on how they were emotionally engaging.

As we have observed in the previous chapter, we need to bring the three texts together in the comparative study answer by comparing **key moments** in them in relation to the mode we have chosen. In 2025: theme or issue, cultural context, or General Vision and Viewpoint.

The prewriting for the answer, then, will require that you remind yourself of what these moments are and take notes accordingly using **a simple table** as shown previously.

With this table in mind, you should also use the **outline of an essay**, as applied also in the answer to the single text, to prewrite your answer and have a representation of it in notes at hand for guidance.

Prewriting the Comparative Study Answer:

1: write down the headings you would use to write an essay based on the question: Introduction (in 3 parts), body paragraphs...

Begin by prewriting your introduction in notes under the relevant headings

2: with the **feature-by-feature** structure in mind as we have described it previously, prewrite the answer by writing down notes on the features of the mode you have chosen. You will have up to five topics, each being one of your chosen features; for example, five themes that allow you to compare the texts if you have chosen the theme or issue mode.

3: take notes on how the two or three texts will be compared on the relevant topic (a feature of the comparative mode) for each topic you have chosen

4: prewrite components of your answer such as thesis statement, topic sentences, clincher



Section III, Question 1; The Unseen Poem:

Answering the Unseen Poem will be precisely what you have **practised** answering past LC questions as we have observed in the previous chapter:

1: analysing the poem with prewriting notes to clarify the **WHAT** and the **HOW** as discussed in the previous chapter

2: **prewriting** an answer by taking notes on **introduction**, **body paragraphs**, and **conclusion**; the basic structure of an essay as discussed in chapter four

Section III, Question 2, The Prescribed Poetry:

As noted of the questions in Section I, the prescribed poetry question you choose will give you the thesis statement you are asked to 'discuss'; most questions are in the 'statement' format but can also be questions.

As with the answer to the single text question, your **feelings** about the poems you have studied will be of no critical value unless they are supported using the point-quote-defend strategy. Moreover, you should not be expressing how you feel about the poems unless explicitly asked to do so.

Your strategy for answering the prescribed poetry question, then, will be the same as that applied to the single text. Begin by **prewriting** your answer by taking notes under the headings we have noted:

Introduction

1:Lead-in

2: Thesis statement (given in question)

3: Essay Map (the topics/ poems you will explore)

Body Paragraphs

Topic 1/ Poem 1: notes on what you will write using the point-quote-defend formula)

Topic 2/ Poem 2...

[...]

Topic 5/ Poem 5...



Conclusion

Summary Thesis Statement: a rewrite of the TS and EM from your introduction

Clincher: a summing up/ final thought on the poems and thesis

Your **prewriting outline** is your guide as you proceed to write your answer. As such, you should keep glancing back at it, and add to it as things about the poems come to mind.



