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3.1 WRITING EFFECTIVE SHORT AND LONGER ANSWERS

The different forms, styles and lengths of writing you will produce for GCSE require different skills. It is vital to work efficiently in the time allotted.

SHORT ANSWERS

Some questions in your GCSE English Language exam are worth a small number of marks. This means you must write only what you need to write.

For example, read the following extract from a fictional account of one child's life, and then look at the question that follows it.

At breakfast a visitor foolish enough to enter the house and go to the kitchen would have been witness to the pile of tottering unwashed pots, the grimy pans and cutlery flung across the table, and the corners of crusts of bread chewed and discarded on the floor. If he had been stupid enough to remain at the doorway, he would have further witnessed the madness of school bus time with a tribe of seven children catapulting their dishes into the sink and knocking over chairs as they trampled over him into the narrow hallway.

As eighth child – and not of school age, Joseph was in effect an invisible child who was perpetually hungry, something he remembered later in life when looking back at his childhood. How awful it had been!

In many ways, Joseph's family has been lucky; there was food, albeit meagre, and they did make it to school, though often without the correct uniform or with ill-fitting shoes or ones with holes in. The toilet was a 'privvy' in the back yard, and the only heating was the coal fire in the parlour. Life was tough.

1 List four ways in which the kitchen is in a confused state in the morning.

EFFECTIVE, SHORT RESPONSES

One of the responses might be:

It is full of dirty cooking vessels.

Here, there is no need to mention the word 'kitchen' and you can sum up the items as 'dirty cooking vessels' – in other words by using **paraphrase**.

Or you could use **direct quotation**:

It is full of 'unwashed pots', 'grimy pans' and 'crusts of bread'.

There is no need to mention the visitor passing the door as it is not relevant to the question.

1 Write a short response answer to each of the following tasks. Either use direct quotation or paraphrase your answers:

- Note down one way a visitor would have been in danger if they had stood in or near the kitchen.*
- In what two ways could Joseph's family be considered lucky?*

LONGER RESPONSES TO TEXTS

Longer responses to reading will range from writing about extracts or short, but complete texts in GCSE English Language to writing about extracts, whole plays, novels and poems in GCSE English Literature. For example, a GCSE English Language task might read:

How does the writer use language here to describe Joseph's home life? In your answer you could include the writer's choice of:

- *words and phrases*
- *language features and techniques*
- *sentence forms.*

For these sorts of question it is important that you:

- Include a **range of ideas** – here, the three bullets suggest what you should cover
- Develop your points **fully** – this means you should not only identify language features, but also comment on their effects
- Draw **overall conclusions**, where appropriate, taking into account the different points you have made

Read the opening paragraph of this response to the question above. Then answer the question that follows it.

The writer paints a convincing picture of a poor household which is both chaotic and without basic amenities. Adjectives such as 'grimy' and 'unwashed' convey the unclean state of the kitchen, while the reference to 'meagre' food adds to the sense of deprivation. The overall picture is of a tough, uncompromising life in which Joseph seems to suffer more than most.



2 Evaluate the effectiveness of this response:

- Does it tackle any of the three bullets in the question? If so, which?
- Are there any other points that could have been made?
- Does it simply identify uses of language – or does it analyse?
- Does it draw any overall conclusion about Joseph's life?

APPLYING YOUR SKILLS

A05 A06

3 Now complete the response adding further points related to the language features and sentence forms. Make sure you write a paragraph on each of these.

Remember:

- Include succinct, direct quotation as evidence.
- Alternatively, paraphrase concisely and efficiently.

4.9 WRITING TO EXPRESS A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

Many of the skills you have learned about also apply to writing tasks when you are asked to express a particular view, but there are some specific ones worth using.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE PIECE OF VIEWPOINT WRITING?

When you are asked to give your views on a topic or idea, or to explain how much you agree or disagree with a statement, you are expressing a viewpoint or an opinion. It is something you probably do without thinking every day, but in an exam situation you will need to think carefully about your choice of words and how you structure your response.

Effective viewpoint writing should:

- Ensure the reader **fully understands your viewpoint** by the end of the text
- Use the most suitable **register** and **style** for the **form**, **purpose** and **audience**
- Have a **consistent argument**, that is **sustained** throughout the text
- Use a range of **appropriate evidence** or **points** to support the overall view
- Use a range of **persuasive techniques** appropriate to the task
- **End strongly** in order to make sure the reader is persuaded by your argument

EXAM FOCUS

Read how one student has planned a response for this task. Note how she has highlighted and annotated the key words in the task.

Establishes the reader/audience

Your school's head teacher has asked students to submit ideas for ways in which the health and well-being of students can be improved. Write a letter to him/her proposing ideas which you believe will help.

Identifies the form or type of text

You could include:

- examples of changes that could be made to the school environment
- ideas to persuade students to exercise more and eat healthily.

Signals the purpose and content

- 1 What ideas do you have? Use a spider diagram like the one on page 63 to jot down as many ideas as possible in a minute. Refer to the two bullets at the end of the task to help you.

REGISTER AND STYLE

Knowing who you are writing for (reader/audience), and the form (letter), will influence the **register** and **style** of your response.

EXAM FOCUS

Here is the opening to the task written by the same student.

Uses suitably formal tone/style

Dear Mrs Stockdale,

As you requested, I am writing to provide some ideas to improve the general physical and mental health of students. I believe the ideas I am offering will make a significant change to the school, and all who spend time here.

Neatly paraphrases the task wording which includes 'well-being' not just physical 'wellness'

Makes it clear that physical health will be addressed first with this topic sentence

Firstly, I want to address the issue of physical health. Studies have shown that it is important to get the heart rate up, and the best way of doing that is exercise.

Provides evidence or background support for point

Uses similar wording ('proposal') to the task to introduce the key idea clearly

Unfortunately, the school fields are completely unusable for much of the Autumn and Spring terms: they are muddy, soaked and dangerously bumpy, so my main proposal is to create more all weather pitches for football, netball, hockey, and so on...

- 2 What specific evidence does the student use to support the idea of 'all-weather pitches'?



- 3 What strong **adverb-adjective** combinations does she use to describe the state of the school playing-fields in the second paragraph?

- 4 What **pattern of three** adjectives is used to describe the pitches? What effect is created?

TOP TIP

Adverb-adjective combinations are often used to express strong feelings as writers use **intensifiers** to make an argument more powerful. For example, 'totally unacceptable', 'utterly wrong', 'incredibly foolish'.