

GENERATING IDEAS AND STRUCTURING A NARRATIVE

HOW CAN YOU PLAN A STORY?

In the exam, you may be asked to write a narrative or story. Planning what you are going to write before you start is a key skill.

Look at this question:

Write a story that involves a dangerous situation.

To start planning an answer to this question, you could create a spider diagram with the word 'danger' in the centre. You could then address the following questions:

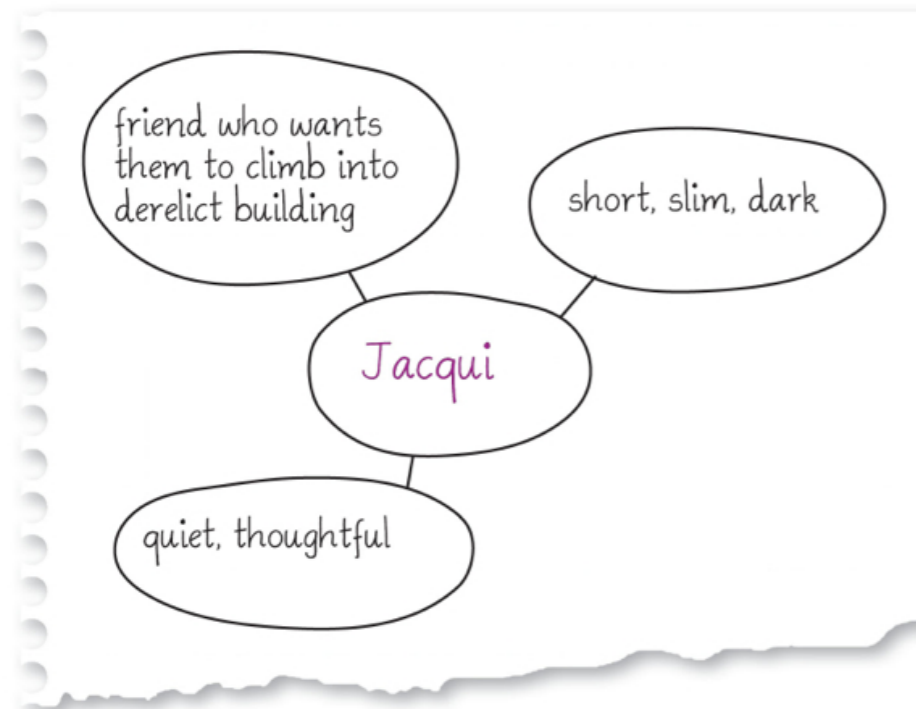
- Who is in danger?
- What is the danger?
- Where is it happening?

Or you could begin by sketching a quick mental image of your main character, including name, gender, one or two character traits, circumstances (who or what is putting them in danger), appearance. For example:

A05 A06
AQA
Paper 1,
Section B
Edexcel Paper 1,
Section B
Eduqas
Component 1,
Section B
OCR Component 2,
Section B

TOP TIP

Creative writing aids, such as word chains and spider diagrams, can be used for any form of imaginative writing: description, narrative, poetry, play scripts and other forms.



- 1 Copy the 'character' diagram above and complete it as if you were planning an answer to the question.
- 2 Keep the key word 'danger' in mind and think about **who** is in danger – the main character or someone else. Note down some thoughts to start developing your ideas.

CREATE A PLOT

When planning your plot, you need to think about:

- The start of your story (your main character's circumstances)
- Where your story will go (what does the character do, how does this affect the events?)
- How it will end (well or badly?)

Most stories follow a linear structure:

introduction → complication → crisis → resolution

Many narratives have more than one crisis or stage (see Freytag's pyramid on page 99), but you will have limited time in an exam so limit yourself to one key event where everything reaches a **climax**.

The opening should arouse the reader's curiosity, so they want to read on. The conclusion needs to have impact, too. You could end with a twist or a **cliffhanger**:

*He was caught now, completely and utterly. The prospect that he might stare Death in the face had never once occurred to him.
'Are we ready?' said a voice.*

OTHER NARRATIVE DECISIONS

When planning a narrative, you will also need to consider:

- What **point of view** will you write from – first person ('I') or third person ('he'/ 'she'/ 'it') or the unusual second person 'you' (see page 49)
- If you choose the **first person**, will this be the main character or someone else?
- What **tense** will you write in?
- How many other **characters** will you have? (Not too many.) What is their **relationship** to the main character?

- 3 Write down answers to these points for the story you are planning.

DIFFERENT NARRATIVE APPROACHES

Some narratives begin at a point in the plot when some or even all of the action has already taken place. This is referred to as **in media res** (Latin for 'in the middle of things'). For example:

I peered through a small gap in the fence. I couldn't believe it! There was nothing but rubble with grass growing between the debris. I'd only been away three weeks. Where was the school?

The events that lead to this moment are revealed throughout the story in various ways, such as description, **dialogue** or **flashback**.

TOP TIP

Try to include some direct speech, to 'show' rather than 'tell' what the characters are doing and thinking. Make sure it fits naturally with your story.



UNSEEN POETRY

You will be given poems you have not studied before (unseen poems) printed on the exam papers. The questions will focus on how the poet presents certain feelings or ideas. The stages below explain how to approach these questions.

STAGE 1: READ THE POEM AND THE QUESTION

- First read the poem through and try to understand what it is broadly about (such as conflict, relationships or a poem related to time and place).
- Read the poem again, keeping the exam question in mind.
- Reread any part of the poem (for example, a particular phrase, line or verse) if you are uncertain about its meaning. Try to understand it in relation to what the poem is broadly about.

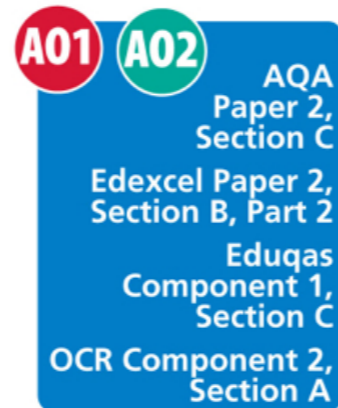
STAGE 2: MAKE NOTES AND ANNOTATIONS ON THE PAGE

- Underline key words, phrases or lines in the poem, particularly in relation to the focus of the task.
- Identify the main **theme** or themes.
- Underline any images or techniques that might help you answer the question.
- Note any special features (layout or repeating patterns, such as recurring words or sounds) that enhance the meaning in relation to the question.
- Note what form (type of poem) it is where possible (such as **sonnet**, free verse) and whether this aids understanding (is there a change in **tone** or perspective after the first eight lines, as in a sonnet?)
- Note down some short questions or notes to help you. For example: *'alliteration stresses the stormy sea?'* or *'Image of a lost love, means honesty is important.'*

STAGE 3: WRITE YOUR RESPONSE

Organise your answer into six or seven paragraphs, referring to the main points from your annotations.

- Discuss (briefly) what happens in the poem; the 'story' and the context (setting, location, etc.) (Introduction).
- Explain what the speaker's feelings are in relation to the focus/theme of the question.
- Discuss images in the poem that relate to the focus or theme of the question.
- Describe the techniques the poet uses to enhance or elaborate on the key ideas, theme or focus of the question.
- Discuss the form and structure of the poem, and the effect each of these has on the reader.



- Sum up (concisely) what ideas the poet presents to the reader. (Conclusion)

For example, you might be asked:

How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about love and marriage in the poem?

This suggests you should be looking for:

- What **sort of 'story'** the poet tells about love and marriage
- The **viewpoint** or **emotions** that suggest an attitude to love and marriage
- Positive or negative language or descriptions
- The effect of the poet's choices

Study the poem 'Postponement' below, and the annotations written in response to the question above:

GET IT RIGHT!

Remember that the poet is not necessarily speaking about their own feelings or situation in a poem, so it is safer to refer to 'the speaker'.

'Postponement' by Thomas Hardy

*Snow-bound in woodland, a mournful word,
Dropt now and then from the bill of a bird,
Reached me on wind-wafts; and thus I heard,
Wearily waiting:*

*'I planned her a nest in a leafless tree,
But the passers eyed and twitted me,
And said: 'How reckless a bird is he
Cheerily mating!'*

*'Fear-filled, I stayed me till summer-tide,
In lewth¹ of leaves to throne her bride;
But alas! her love for me waned and died,
Wearily waiting.*

*'Ah, had I been like some I see,
Born to an evergreen nesting-tree,
None had eyed and twitted me,
Cheerily mating!'*

lewth¹ – what was left

Image of winter landscape, when nothing grows. Speaker trapped by circumstance?

Hopes mocked by others

Alliteration stresses dread of losing a loved one – sad.

Downward sound

Foreshadows sorrow; feels gloomy

Bird motif – represents speaker's situation (has no means to support a wife)

Marriage

She waited pointlessly

Believes lack of a comfortable nesting place is cause of mockery