

# GCSE ENGLISH

## GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

There are certain things that you can do in your writing for the English examination that will boost your grade without a great deal of effort.

You need to sound like the intelligent, thoughtful and creative person that you really are.

Remember- the English examination is as much a test of writing skills as it is of imagination, so don't just write as you would normally – you need to **SHOW** the examiner what you can do. One of the biggest mistakes students make is to just write. **STOP** and **THINK** about what you are writing and more importantly **HOW** you are writing it.

So, some basics first. You need to know what the different parts of speech are and be able to talk about them in reference to the reading materials on the English exam and also any analysis of literature you do. Once you understand what each bit does in a sentence it will make you sound much more intelligent and get you marks from Mr. or Mrs. Examiner-Person.

### PARAGRAPHS

Yes, I know, you've been putting these into your writing since you were in Year 6. However, when was the last time you actually consciously thought about why you are changing to a new paragraph? For many students, they produce what the examiners call 'mechanical' paragraphs – that is, they change paragraph without thinking every 8 or so lines - well, great, but not C grade! The examiner wants to see some variation in the length of your paragraph. That is not to say do a side of writing as just one paragraph because, obviously that is just plain wrong. What you can do, however is tinker with shorter paragraphs to create impact in your writing. A one word or sentence paragraph has real dramatic impact, both in terms of reading and visually. Get one of these into your writing if you want to get high marks. You may also want to think about some other shorter paragraphs scattered amongst the longer ones. **THINK** about **WHY** you are actually beginning a new paragraph – a change in time, place or event should trigger a new paragraph, but just as not all events last the same amount of time, not all paragraphs should be the same length – **IT'S BORING SO DON'T DO IT!**

## SENTENCE STRUCTURE

This is something the examiners bang on about a lot and most students don't have a clue what they're actually talking about. Here is how to get it right without necessarily understanding it: follow this simple advice and you will get high marks. As with paragraphs the length of your sentences is probably not something that keeps you awake at night. However, to the English teacher this is incredibly important, and prevents us from getting our full eight hours of beauty sleep – you need to vary the length of your sentences – it will save us from Botox. If you do this you will get marks for all sorts of things, and the Examiner will think you are brilliant. It's fine to have some sentences that are of an average length and uses a full stop and a comma, however you are not going to set the world alight with them – it's DULL. So, we need some sentences that are really long and some that are really short. By long, I'm talking between 20 and 30 words; and by short I mean 1, 2 or 3 words. Pick some random numbers including between these and you are making progress: 17, 12, 7, 26, 3, 3, 3 – these are numbers of words to have in your sentences in one paragraph. In the longer sentences you are forced to use adjectives and adverbs that make you writing more interesting and you will also be forced to use a semi-colon or colon so that the sentence is punctuated correctly. You will get more marks for both of these things. With the really short sentences it is good to use the same number of words three times – you know how much English teachers like the rule of three! You will be forced to be really imaginative in the words you use if you only have a limited number and you will probably use an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. Job done: Varied sentence lengths and extra marks for punctuation.

## PESSY PARTS OF SPEECH

Not the most exciting topic I've ever written about, but it always amazes me how many adults don't know this. It will make you sound intelligent and get you marks, so just learn it.

### NOUNS

These lovely words can be separated into four distinct categories:

COMMON NOUNS – name of a person, place or thing – boy, girl, table, handbag, shoes, hat, trumpet.

PROPER NOUNS – name of a particular person, place or thing – always begins with a capital letter – Mulberry, Jimmy Choo, Blessed Edward, Selfridges, Shakespeare.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS – name used to refer to a group of people or things – team, flock, crowd, pack, army.

ABSTRACT NOUNS – name of things that cannot be touched – health, happiness, wisdom, truth, pain.

## PRONOUNS

These are words that are used to replace nouns, for example personal pronouns - I, you, she, he, it, they.

## ADJECTIVES

These are the words used to describe nouns – **happy** girl, **two** shoes, **my** handbag, **what** colour?

In the exam, try to have some nouns with two adjectives – the beautiful blue sky – it shows flair and imagination.

## PREPOSITIONS

These give the reader some more information about the noun – above, below, over, under, against, into, between, near, on, by. **NEVER END A SENTENCE WITH A PREPOSITION.**

## VERBS

These describe an action or state – run, jump, skip, shop.

## ADVERBS

Describe the verb jump clumsily, skip quickly, shop hurriedly. They always come **after** the verb.

You may not remember the specifics of all parts of speech but if you can recognize some and comment of how they're used you will begin to get more marks – a good way of doing this might be to comment on the effect of verbs in a piece of writing.

## PUNCTUATION

You will need to show the examiner you can use a range of punctuation. A full stop and a comma doesn't make a range! If you've done your long and short sentences you should be using more of a range to create pauses but there are still other handy bits of punctuation you can use to help yourself to even more marks.

Colon :

Use to

- Introduce a list.
- Explain something previously said in a sentence
- Introduce a quote

Semi-colon ;

Use to

- Use to join independent parts of a sentence – The woman in black did not speak; she just stared at Mr. Kipps.
- Separate different parts of a list – At the chip-shop I ordered: fish and chips; kebab and salad; pie and gravy.

*If you realise at the end of the exam you haven't used any just change a few commas into semi-colons.*

Exclamation mark !

It's an excited full stop – use sparingly!

Speech Marks “”

Use to

- Indicate speech
- Enclose quotations

Inverted commas ”

Used to indicate titles- in 'The Woman in Black' there is a character called Sam Daly.

Brackets ()

Use to show sarcasm, wit or humour.

Dashes –

Use around an extra piece of information you've included in a sentence –

Apostrophe

Shows:

- Possession - James's shoes; the teacher's desk (only one teacher); the teachers' kitchen (more than one teacher).
- Contraction: You're the best student in the world.