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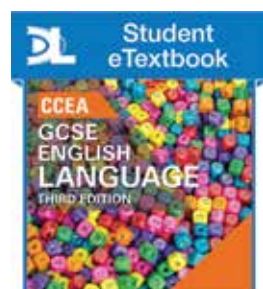


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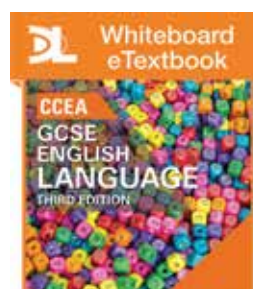
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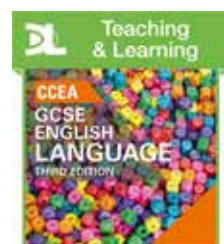
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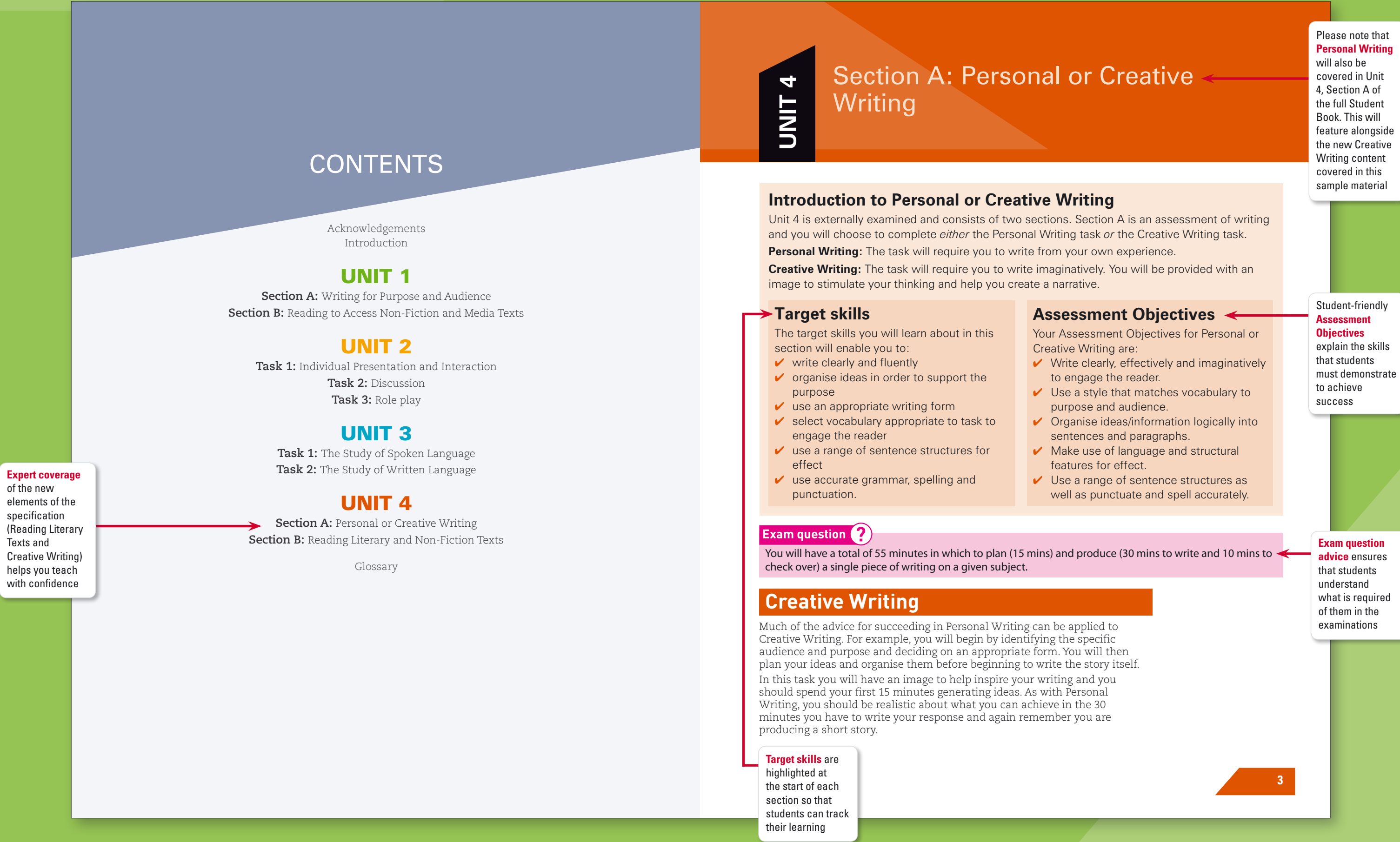
Jenny Lendrum

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Features in the book:



Selecting an appropriate form

Selecting an appropriate form for your creative writing is an important decision as you need to select a form that will allow you to **showcase your skills, show imagination** and **effectively engage** your reader.

1 If you are inspired to create a character you may decide to write a diary entry that allows the reader to understand the primary concerns of the character, and gives access to their private thoughts and feelings about certain situations and people.

Below is an extract from *The Martian* by Andy Weir, which is a science-fiction story about an American astronaut who is presumed dead and left behind on Mars. Sections of the book take the form of log or diary entries.

‘Six days into what should have been the greatest two months of my life, and it’s turned into a nightmare.

I don’t even know who’ll read this. I guess someone will find it eventually. Maybe a hundred years from now.

For the record... I didn’t die on Sol. Certainly the rest of the crew thought I did, and I can’t blame them. Maybe there’ll be a day of national mourning for me, and my Wikipedia page will say, “Mark Watney is the only human being to have died on Mars.”

And it’ll be right, probably. ‘Cause I’ll surely die here. Just not on Sol 6 when everyone thinks I did.

Let’s see... where do I begin?

The Ares Program. Mankind reaching out to Mars to send people to another planet for the very first time and expand the horizons of humanity blah, blah, blah. The Ares 1 crew did their thing and came back heroes. They got the parades and fame and love of the world. Ares 2 did the same thing, in a different location on Mars. They got a firm handshake and a hot cup of coffee when they got home.

Ares 3. Well, that was my mission. Okay, not *mine* per se. Commander Lewis was in charge. I was just one of her crew. I would only be “in command” of the mission if I were the only remaining person.

What do you know? I’m in command.

I wonder if this log will be recovered before the rest of the crew die of old age. I presume they got back to Earth all right. Guys, if you’re reading this: It wasn’t your fault. You did what you had to do. In your position I would have done the same thing. I don’t blame you, and I’m glad you survived.’

(Andy Weir, *The Martian*)

2 You might write a letter from a given character. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is written in the form of letters and journals. Below is an extract from a letter that appears in Chapter 5 and is sent from Miss Mina Murray to Lucy Westenra.

9 May.

My dearest Lucy,

Forgive my long delay in writing, but I have been simply overwhelmed with work...

... I will tell you of my little plans when we meet. I have just had a few hurried lines from Jonathan from Transylvania. He is well, and will be returning in about a week. I am longing to hear all his news. It must be nice to see strange countries. I wonder if we, I mean Jonathan and I, shall ever see them together. There is the ten o’clock bell ringing. Goodbye.

Your loving

Mina

Tell me all the news when you write. You have not told me anything for a long time. I hear rumours, and especially of a tall, handsome, curly-haired man???

(Bram Stoker, *Dracula*)

3 You might decide to write a monologue, from a character at a specific moment in time. Below is the opening to *Stone Cold* written by Robert Swindells. Read it and see how the central character Link, who is sixteen-years-old and homeless, seems to speak directly to the reader, immersing us into his situation:

You can call me Link. It’s not my name, but it’s what I say when anybody asks, which isn’t often. I’m invisible, see? One of the invisible people. Right now I’m sitting in a doorway watching the passers-by. They avoid looking at me. They’re afraid I want something they’ve got, and they’re right. Also, they don’t want to think about me. They don’t like reminding I exist. Me, and those like me. We’re living proof that everything’s not all right and we make the place untidy.

Hang about and I’ll tell you the story of my fascinating life.

(Robert Swindells, *Stone Cold*)

Activity

With a partner, re-read the extracts above and discuss your impressions of each of the characters. What makes us want to know more about them?

Features in the book:

AO4 i. ii

Selecting an appropriate perspective

All of the previous three examples are written from a **first person perspective**, that is, the author writes as the central character. An alternative is to write using an omniscient **third person perspective**, which involves writing in an observational style, as though the 'voice' telling the story is detached from the events taking place.

Below is an example from *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck which is told using a third person omniscient perspective, allowing the reader to judge the various characters and situations for themselves:

The thick-bodied Carlson came in out of the darkening yard. He walked to the other end of the bunk house and turned on the second shaded light. 'Darker'n hell in here,' he said ... He stopped and sniffed the air, and still sniffing, looked down at the old dog. 'God awmighty, that dog stinks. Get him outta here, Candy! I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog. You gotta get him out.'

Candy rolled to the edge of his bunk. He reached over and patted the ancient dog, and he apologised, 'I been around him so much I never notice how he stinks.'

'Well, I can't stand him in here,' said Carlson. 'That stink hangs around even after he's gone.' He walked over with his heavy-legged stride and looked down at the dog. 'Got no teeth,' he said. 'He's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you, Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself. Why'n't you shoot him, Candy?'

(John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*)

Activity

Using the image on the right, write four different paragraphs:

- 1 Write a paragraph from a diary entry written by this character.
- 2 Write a paragraph from a letter sent by this character to a close friend revealing dramatic news.
- 3 Write the opening paragraph to a monologue where the character speaks to the reader and immerses us into his situation.
- 4 Write the opening paragraph to a story that introduces this character using a detached, third person perspective.

Share your examples with your class.
Agree on the best and discuss how the piece would continue.



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AO4 ii

Beginnings and endings

The challenge with Creative Writing is to write something you would like to read – to produce a piece of writing that will hook the attention of your reader and successfully hold their interest. It is sometimes best to have an idea of how and where you want your story to end, then work backwards making decisions about the events that will unfold to arrive at that point. For example, you may wish to end with the words, 'You're fired' and think about the actions taken by the character that resulted in their dismissal.

Beginnings

There are many techniques that can be used to begin a piece of creative writing and you should experiment with different approaches to develop your skills. Here are some ideas for getting started:

- ▶ Begin with an exchange of dialogue between two characters that will intrigue the reader:
"Didn't I tell you never to come here?"
"Yes, but I had to let you know, he's discovered your secret and he's coming for answers. Now."
- ▶ Begin with a dramatic moment:
Gill woke up in a cold sweat. There was a light on in the hallway and she could hear the sound of footsteps climbing the stairs. Shadows danced up the walls outside of the bedroom. She was paralysed with fear.
- ▶ Begin with a discovery or revelation:
Tentatively he opened the letter, removed the thick white page and carefully opened it up to reveal his fate. His eyes quickly scanned the page and his face broke into a wide grin as he read, 'Dear Mr Giles, congratulations, you have successfully passed our recruitment process. Welcome to S.E.P.A.' He was officially a secret agent.
- ▶ Begin with an intriguing situation:
Jess had arrived on time as instructed. Without wasting another second, she knocked loudly on the door of number 29. She had no idea what or who was waiting for her on the other side...
- ▶ Begin with a description of character:
Mr Crane patrolled the school corridors like a prison warden, swinging both arms and looking left and right in search of a fresh victim, usually some poor kid engaging in petty rule-breaking like having a tie out or the wrong haircut. As soon as he believed he'd spied some act of indiscipline he'd stop suddenly, rise up on tip-toes, twitch his head and blink incessantly like he could hardly believe

Activity

What makes this situation intriguing? With a partner discuss how this opening could be developed. Share your ideas with your class.

Step-by-step guidance takes students through the writing process – with ideas and tips from an author with extensive teaching and examining experience

what he was seeing. Everyone sympathised with the poor kid summoned to stand in front of Mr Crane, for the man was incapable of speaking without showering the listener in his saliva. Up close you could see the patchwork of stains over his suit jacket and when he swooped down to get right into your face, his nose hairs danced as he delivered his monologue. He was disgusting!

- ▶ Begin with a description of setting:

The moon was disappearing behind solemn grey clouds as Emily made her way home through the park. Only hours before, crowds had thronged the green fields but now it was eerily empty, except for Emily and whatever creatures were rustling in the bushes that framed the pathway. Gravel cracked beneath her feet, causing her to jump and then laugh at her own foolishness. Just ahead she could make out the silhouette of the old gate...

- ▶ Begin with a compelling flashback:

It had been almost six years since I had last encountered Jonathan Quaker. As I observed him now celebrating his success, I felt sure he held no memory of that day, but I would never forget, nor would I forgive...

Activity

- 1 Re-read the sample opening paragraphs above. Select your three favourites and rank them in order. Be prepared to explain your decision making. Then select one of the sample paragraphs above that you feel could be improved. Re-write it and share with a partner. You should be able to explain how you improved upon the original.
- 2 Find an image that you think would inspire an interesting piece of creative writing. Select three of the suggestions for writing an interesting beginning and write the opening paragraphs. Share your writing with a partner.

Endings

It is important to end your story in an appropriate and convincing way. Below are some suggestions on how you could end your piece of creative writing.

- ▶ End with an unexpected twist that takes the reader by surprise:

At that moment Harry realised he had got it all wrong: it was not Sam who had betrayed him, it was Ben, his own brother and the one person he had shared all his suspicions with right from that first discovery in the garden. How had he been so blind?

- ▶ Resolve all conflict and end with a 'feel good' conclusion:

Leaving school that afternoon Anna felt content for the first time in weeks. The torture was over and the true culprits had been discovered. She was now free to put the whole horrible episode behind her.

- ▶ Leave the ending unresolved. A question can be an effective way of prompting the reader to speculate.

After weeks of meticulous planning Logan Bailey was in position. Would he make it out alive?

- ▶ End on a cliffhanger. If you think of your writing as the first chapter of a larger story, you should be able to decide the right moment to end so that your ending is dramatic and your reader is encouraged to want to know what happens next.

At that moment the candle was extinguished, plunging the place into darkness. Ross could feel a presence behind him. He turned slowly. 'Who's there?' he whispered. The reply was faint but it sent spasms of fear snaking up his spine, 'I've been waiting for you...Ross.'

- ▶ End with an epiphany. This is when your character achieves an awakening or a moment of striking realisation that alters their view of themselves and the world around them.

It all made sense now. Tessa had to leave. If she stayed she would achieve nothing. All of her dreams would fade to nothing. She would become like every other girl on the estate, a devoted wife and selfless mother. That might be enough for them, but it wasn't the life she wanted. She dared to dream big and only she could turn her dream into a reality. The prospect of leaving frightened and excited her all at once, but she knew she must say goodbye to the security of family and routine that had held her back for so long.

Activity

How does leaving the ending unresolved make this an effective conclusion? With a partner, discuss what might have happened in the lead up to this moment.

Activity

Select a sentence that you think is an effective opening to a story from a novel in your English classroom or school library. (It may not necessarily be found at the beginning of a chapter!) Share it with your class and explain why you think it is a successful introduction. Swap your suggestion with a peer and try to continue the story in your own words.



Creating narrative

A great story is something everyone enjoys but there are a number of key elements you need to consider to make your story enjoyable:

- ▶ **Plot:** This is the basic storyline. It can be relatively straightforward and uncomplicated or contain unexpected twists and turns.
- ▶ **Structure:** How your story begins; how events unfold and develop, perhaps to a dramatic climax; how your story ends; how you use different sentence structures for maximum effect.
- ▶ **Narrative stance:** The viewpoint from which the story is told – most writers use first- or third-person narrators.
- ▶ **Characters:** You will have time to develop only one main character and perhaps two or three others. The storyline should revolve around these characters and how they interact.
- ▶ **Setting:** Where the events of the story take place. This is an important factor in generating mood and atmosphere as well as pulling the reader into the narrative.
- ▶ **Language:** The words and phrases and linguistic techniques selected are at the heart of creating a story that will absorb the reader.

Plot and structure

In any narrative, plot and structure are closely connected:

- ▶ A story is often structured as a series of **key moments**, each of which move the narrative forward. Some of these key moments may surprise or shock the reader.
- ▶ The **time sequence** in which events are presented is a crucial feature of the structure. A common structural device is the use of **flashback**. Letting the reader glimpse the past in this way can add dramatic impact. It can also provide insight into what motivates characters, so helping the reader understand their behaviour. For example, a plot can unfold in a **chronological** manner or **time shifts** can be used such as starting in the present, going back to past events and concluding by coming back full circle to the present.
- ▶ Structure is also linked to changes in **mood** or **atmosphere**. This should be varied in order to keep the audience interested. For example, the opening could be light-hearted with the mood gradually darkening as the story builds up to a dramatic **climax**. **Tonal shifts** can be introduced through description, the use of setting and how characters are presented.
- ▶ **Foreshadowing** is a more complex device used to good effect in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The shooting of Candy's dog foreshadows the tragic end to this famous novel.
- ▶ The **pace** or speed at which the action is revealed should vary in order to create effects such as an increase in tension or a sense of excitement. Events can happen in quick succession or there could be a series of crises as the action builds up to an exciting conclusion.

In Unit 4A: Personal Writing you will find more about how you can use these structural features to create an interesting narrative. You can also learn about the importance of varying sentence openers and sentence structures to keep your reader interested and enhance meaning.

Activity

Find and read a short story.
(You might choose *The Signal-Man* by Charles Dickens or *The Fib* by George Layton.)
Using the bullet list on plot and structure on the previous page, identify how the writer develops the narrative for maximum impact on the reader. Note your findings in a grid like the one below.

Key or significant moments	Time sequence	Mood and atmosphere	Pace of action
Opening sequence			
First key moment			
Second key moment			
Next key moment			
Next key moment (and so on as required)			
Climax			
Ending			

You can also use a grid like the one above to help you plan your narrative writing. It will help you think through how the key moments in your story can connect to changes in time, mood and pace.

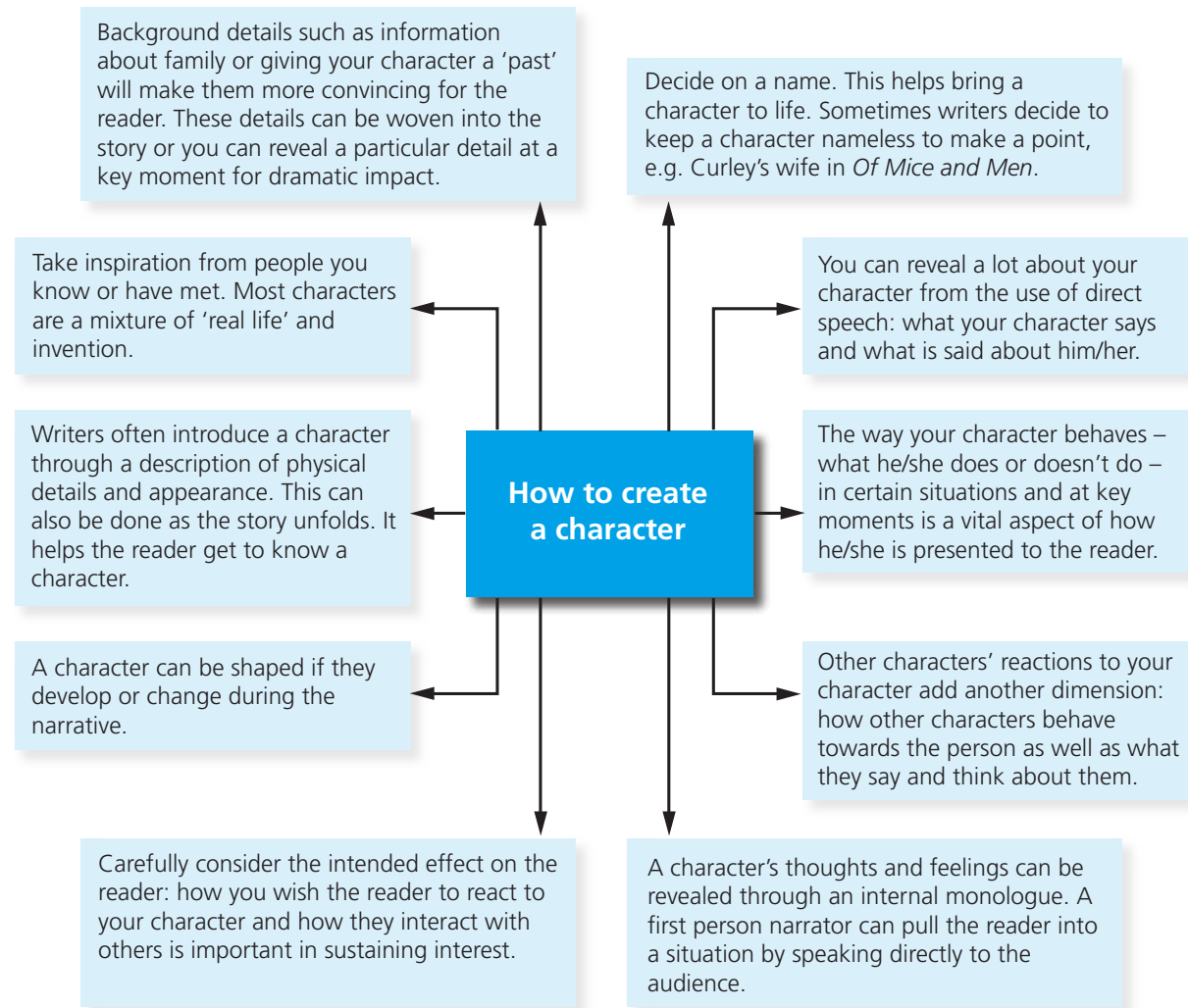
Remember: The climax of your story does not have to occur at the end.



AO4 i. ii. iii

Creating characters

As you are writing a short story it is probably best to focus on creating one or two central characters your reader will get to know well. Your reader will be interested in the relationships and interactions between the characters. When creating characters there is a lot to consider:



Memorable characters ignite a reaction within the reader. For example, your character may have a villainous streak which creates conflict causing the reader to dislike them. On the other hand, your character may carry a secret that makes them mysterious and intriguing. Alternatively, your character may overcome hardship or adversity, allowing the reader to admire them and feel an emotional connection. As the creator of your character you will shape the reader's response.

Read the extract on the next page from *A Kestrel for a Knave* by Barry Hines. The central character Billy Casper comes from a difficult home and in this episode Mr Sugden, the PE teacher, embarrasses Billy for forgetting his PE kit. As you read it consider how the author makes us dislike the character of Mr Sugden:

"Well get changed lad, you're two weeks late already!"

He lifted the elastic webbing of one cuff and rotated his fist to look at his watch on the underside of his wrist.

"Some of us want a game even if you don't."

"I've no kit, Sir."

Mr Sugden stepped back and slowly looked Billy up and down, his top lip curling.

"Casper, you make me SICK."

'SICK' penetrated the hubbub, which immediately decreased as the boys stopped their own conversations and turned their attention to Mr Sugden and Billy.

"Every lesson it's the same old story, 'Please, Sir, I've no kit.'"

The boys tittered at his whipped-dog whining impersonation.

"Every lesson for four years! And in all that time you've made no attempt whatsoever to get any kit, you've skyved and scrounged and borrowed and..."

He tried this lot on one breath, and his ruddy complexion heightened and glowed like a red balloon as he held his breath and fought for another verb.

"...and...BEG..." The balloon burst and the pronunciation of the verb disintegrated.

"Why is it that everyone else can get some but you can't?"

(Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*)

Activity

Look carefully at the image to the right and consider the prompts to help you generate an idea for a story involving this character.

Give this character an appropriate name and consider what it suggests about her.

- ▶ How would you describe her personality?
- ▶ What was/is her profession? Did/Does she enjoy it? What did/do her co-workers think of her?
- ▶ Note how she wears her glasses on the end of her nose – why is this?
- ▶ Look at how she is dressed. What do her clothes suggest about her?
- ▶ Look at her lips – what do they suggest about her feelings? Why does she feel this way?
- ▶ Who is she staring at? Describe her eyes and eyebrows.
- ▶ When she speaks how does she sound?
- ▶ What common gestures accompany her speech?

On the next page is an introduction written by a GCSE student based on this image. Read it and note the comments which indicate how they have crafted this passage in a way that shapes the reader's response to the central characters.



[1] Abrupt opening sentence provides a clue to the narrator's dislike for the character of Mrs Kissinglot. The choice of character name prompts the reader to make predictions and quickly proves humorously inappropriate once the story develops and we get the narrator's perspective.

[4] Some brief details on Mrs Kissinglot's past help the reader understand more about the character and her behaviour.

[6] Inclusion of direct speech brings the character of Mrs Kissinglot to life. The writer's choice of the verb 'shrieking' is deliberately used as it suggests to the reader even the voice of the character is shrill and unpleasant. The fact she labels the children 'brutes' confirms her lack of compassion.

[8] Specific zoom-in on a feature – the eyes – helps to make Mrs Kissinglot seem villainous which influences the reader's response to her character.

Mrs Kissinglot.[1] You hear a name like that and you imagine someone kind and friendly, someone with a face that oozes compassion. I don't think Crazy Kissinglot [2] had a compassionate bone in her dumpy body. She lived next door in number twenty-seven and never in my life had I met someone more inappropriately named- the woman was a demon. [3] Apparently she'd spent years working as a dinner lady and prided herself on being able to make young kids cry with just a look. She rarely smiled but it seemed her bitterness had got worse since her husband had died just over a year ago. [4] To pass her days old Kissinglot gawked out her front window watching us kids, seizing any opportunity to come bounding out into the garden and create a scene.[5] Crazy Kissinglot should have been an actress; she was a master of melodrama. She'd storm half way down the garden path, waving a fist and shrieking, "You brutes. I'll not tolerate you any longer!" [6] Then she'd stop, tuck her chin in tightly to her chest so her glasses would slide down her nose, raise an overly-plucked eyebrow and stare at us with her dark judgemental eyes before shooing us away like we were stray animals.[7] Her eyes were unnaturally dark, almost black like they no longer knew what happiness was.[8] I swear that woman lived to destroy our childhood.[9] For the next half hour or so she'd busy herself knocking on our front doors telling our parents we were harassing her and spewing out other lies in a pathetic effort to win their pity.[10] I had been thrilled when mum announced that she'd got a new job but delight quickly turned to despair when she revealed who would be looking after me during the summer holidays, none other than Crazy Kissinglot! [11]

[9] Varied sentence length – longer sentences followed by short sentences to vary the pace of the narrative and allow the narrator to influence the reader. The use of the verb 'destroy' makes Mrs Kissinglot seem like a formidable enemy in the eyes of the children.

[11] Contrast creates drama as the narrator's 'delight' turns to 'despair'. The vocabulary choices help increase the dramatic quality at this point as 'despair' is stronger than 'sadness.' Exclamatory sentence to end this paragraph emphasises the shock and helplessness of the narrator which earns them our sympathy.

[10] Italics for the word 'her' emphasise the narrator's disbelief. Verb choices such as 'spewing' along with the adjective 'pathetic' force the reader's dislike of Mrs Kissinglot to increase due to her dishonesty and her manipulative nature.

[2] Use of nickname and harsh alliteration of 'Crazy Kissinglot' emphasises the unpleasant nature of the character.

[3] Exaggeration emphasises the narrator's deep dislike of Mrs Kissinglot. The use of impersonal language 'the woman' and the metaphor comparing her to 'a demon' makes the reader side with the narrator and begin to share their dislike of Mrs Kissinglot.

[5] Well-chosen verbs force the reader to form a negative impression of Mrs Kissinglot's behaviour and make her seem like an angry and unpleasant character.

[7] Vivid description of the character's actions and gestures force the reader to dislike her. The simile 'like we were stray animals' is used to make the reader side with the narrator and dislike the old woman and how she interacts with the children.

Creating dialogue

AO4 i. ii. iii

Dialogue is a conversation between people. To make characters convincing and reveal more about them, writers will include interactions and direct speech that helps to bring characters to life and gives them a 'voice.' Dialogue can also be used to push the plot forward and when used effectively, it can break up the action.

When we are relating something that has happened to us, without even thinking about it, we usually quote what was said to us. This is because we instinctively know that using direct speech will make the anecdote more interesting for our listener.

The opening (below) to Alan Gibbons' novel *The Edge* shows this in action. What actually happens is that a mother wakes up her son and tells him to get out of bed. It's not very exciting when expressed like that! Gibbons, however, has added dialogue and internal monologue to bring the scene to life, so creating an opening full of tension.

Note how the dialogue in this extract is set out and punctuated. (You may need to revise how to do this.) Observe also the effect of using a variety of 'saying' verbs such as 'hisses' and 'whispers'.

He awakes with a start. Somebody is shaking him. Roughly.

'What ...?'

A hand covers his mouth, choking off the question. For a moment he gives in to a surge of panic, then he makes out a face in the darkness. His mother. She is crouching by his bed, one hand on the headboard, one clamped to the lower half of his face. He can see her properly now, her features slightly illuminated by the streetlamp a couple of doors away. It's her eyes he notices first, the frightened, pleading expression. Oh no, don't tell me it's happening again. He has learned to read his mother's face. Interpreting her looks, her mouthed warnings, has been essential to his survival. But this he can't read. It is too sudden, too unexpected. He gives a questioning frown.

'We've got to go,' Mum hisses. 'Now.'

'Go? Go where?'

Her hands are waving, palms down, reinforcing the pleading look in her eyes. 'Keep your voice down, Danny,' she whispers. 'Please!'

He does as he is told. His next words are barely audible, 'What's going on?'

'Can't explain. But we have to go. Right now.'

(Alan Gibbons, *The Edge*)

Activity

Write a story involving an interaction between these two characters. Include some dialogue thinking carefully about what each character says and how they speak. Swap your writing with a partner and ask them to share their impressions of your characters and the relationship between them.



Get the balance right

It is important to achieve the right balance of action and dialogue. Too much dialogue can get boring and it can even become difficult for the reader to keep track of who is talking at any given time. In real life we rarely stand motionless whilst we speak. Instead, our dialogue is accompanied by actions and gestures so you should give careful consideration to what your characters are doing as they speak.

Activity

Write a short passage involving these two characters. Include convincing dialogue that is correctly laid out on the page. Choose verbs that give your reader an indication of how the words are spoken and provide details of convincing actions or gestures that accompany the words.



Create a convincing voice

How your characters speak can also provide clues about their age or where they are from, for example. You want to make your characters believable and convincing so on occasions you should feel comfortable in abandoning Standard English, if it adds to your characterisation.

In *Of Mice and Men* the character of Carlson is a ranch worker:

Carlson was not to be put off. 'Look, Candy. This ol' dog jus' suffers hisself all the time. If you was to take him out and shoot him right in the back of the head –' he leaned over and pointed, '– right there, why he'd never know what hit him.'

(John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*)

Steinbeck makes this exchange convincing by bringing the character to life through what he says and how he says it. His request to kill the dog suggests that he is unsentimental but his way of speaking confirms his lowly social status as the final letters of words are omitted. Steinbeck also uses idiomatic expressions such as 'hissself' to make the character's voice and dialect seem authentic. It is important not to overdo this as a lot of omissions and informal vernacular can be off-putting for the reader – it's all about getting the balance right!

To give your characters individual identity, take care that they do not all sound the same. For example, a school principal may speak with authority when questioning a school pupil. The responses of the pupil may be brief and hesitant. An exchange between two strangers will be very different than that which occurs between friends. Similarly, if you were writing dialogue between an elderly character and a teenager there would be some notable differences in the voices of the characters.

Creating empathy

We have already identified the importance of creating convincing characters and how dialogue can be an effective way of bringing characters to life so that your reader can connect with them. Successful writers are able to create characters their readers will empathise with. Empathy is the skill of being able to put yourself in the position of another person. To get a reader to empathise means that they will be able to relate to a character and have an interest in their situation.

In this short extract from *Whispers in the Graveyard*, the author Theresa Breslin makes us empathise with the character of Solomon. Solomon has dyslexia and finds school challenging but he has been benefitting from support offered by Ms Talmur.

I look at the words on the page, at my crabbed writing carefully spaced out on alternate lines, and I know I should remember what they mean. I reach around inside my head and it's not there.

Then she tells me. Smiling patiently. And I recall that she told me that word yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that...

Embarrassment and humiliation are on my face, a sour taste in my mouth.

'It's no good,' I say.

'Yes, it is,' she says firmly.

The words tremble on the page. I shake my head. The ragged black hole of despair widening in and around me. Rage rushing in fast to fill up the void.

'No,' I shout.

'Did Sir Edmund Hillary give up on the slopes of Everest?' she demands. 'Did Captain Scott turn back? Did Columbus? Did Ezekial McGribbons?'

I fall for it.

'Who's Ezekial McGribbons?'

'I don't know. I made him up, didn't I?'

I laugh and we start again.

And again.

And again.

'Will it ever come right?' I ask.

She meets my eyes and doesn't look away. 'Not completely,' she says. 'When you're rich and famous, don't ever write out a cheque without having someone make sure that your numbers are correct.' She laughs. 'You'd be just as likely to put down 3,000 pounds as 300.' She puts her hand on my arm. 'But you CAN cope with it. Enough to get by. Remember it's a difficulty, not a disability. You must move past it and get on with your life. Do what you want to do.' Her nails are through the wool of my jumper. 'You control it, not the other way around.'

(Teresa Breslin, *Whispers in the Graveyard*)

You do not need to have dyslexia to empathise with Solomon as we are all able to relate to his feelings of insecurity and his need for reassurance. The use of first person narration helps us empathise with the character as he shares his private thoughts and feelings. The reader is able to relate to the emotions experienced by the character, therefore they are able to empathise.

It is also possible to get your reader to empathise with a character's situation. In the following extract Stanley Yelnats has been sent to Camp Green Lake. The author writes using an omniscient third person perspective. The character of Stanley says very little but you can imagine how he must be feeling as he arrives at the prison camp:

He stepped onto the hard, dry dirt. There was a band of sweat around his wrist where the handcuff had been.

The land was barren and desolate. He could see a few rundown buildings and some tents. Farther away there was a cabin beneath two tall trees. Those two trees were the only plant life he could see. There weren't even weeds.

The guard led Stanley to a small building. A sign on the front said, YOU ARE ENTERING CAMP GREEN LAKE JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

The guard led Stanley into the building, where he felt the welcome relief of air-conditioning.

A man was sitting with his feet up on a desk. He turned his head when Stanley and the guard entered, but otherwise didn't move. Even though he was inside, he wore sunglasses and a cowboy hat. He also held a can of soda, and the sight of it made Stanley even more aware of his own thirst.

He waited while the bus guard gave the man some papers to sign. He had a tattoo of a rattlesnake on his arm, and as he signed his name, the snake's rattle seemed to wiggle ... Then the man in the cowboy hat walked around the desk to Stanley. 'My name is Mr Sir,' he said. Whenever you speak to me you must call me by that name, is that clear?'

Stanley hesitated. 'Uh, yes, Mr Sir,' he said, though he couldn't imagine that was really the man's name.

'You're not in the Girl Scouts anymore,' Mr Sir said.

Stanley had to remove his clothes in front of Mr Sir, who made sure he wasn't hiding anything. He was then given two sets of clothes and a towel. Each set consisted of a long-sleeve orange jumpsuit, an orange T-shirt, and yellow socks ...

Stanley got dressed.

(Louis Sachar, *Holes*)

Activity



Write a story involving this character. If you decide to use a first person narrator you may wish to write a diary entry, a letter, a speech or stream of consciousness. Alternatively, you may decide to write using an omniscient third person perspective.

Creating setting

As well as characters and plot, setting is another important feature of narrative writing. Short stories tend to contain their action within a specific setting, which can be an effective way of engaging the reader as the setting can enhance our understanding of the characters and contribute to an interesting plot.

The contribution of setting in involving the reader is clearly demonstrated in the following extract. Here, the main character, Ian, is being pursued by McClean, a villain also known as the wolfman. He has taken refuge in an empty flat in a tower block but McClean is closing in on him. At this point in the story Ian feels his only choice and chance of escape is to climb out onto a ledge that is eleven floors up.

Cold as it is up there on his precarious eleventh-floor perch, Ian is sweating. His palms are slimy against the wall. Ever so slowly he moves his right hand from the wall and wipes it on his shirt. Then, returning his right hand to the wall and easing his left off, he repeats the operation. Finally, realising he has no choice but to go on, he makes his first move since McClean's head appeared at the window.

Trying not to look down the dizzying precipice of the building, Ian takes the weight on his toes and on the balls of his feet and starts to inch forward. A few more steps and those aching muscles will be shrieking with pain.

You can do this, he tells himself.

He barks insults at himself under his breath. Coward! Idiot! It doesn't matter how much noise he makes, not in this howling wind.

Come on! You can do it.

But, as he feels the tendons in his legs starting to shudder again, as he feels the wind trying to suck him off the wall, he isn't sure he can ...

He knows that the keenness of his mind is all that is standing between him and fatal impact with the ground below. So, heels over the drop, toes clinging to the ledge, he edges forward, sliding his feet. And it is left foot, right foot, palms flattened against the bricks, fingernails clawing at the narrow crevice.

Not far now.

He continues to shuffle along the ledge. His movements are slow and deliberate, all the more so because of the rain that is trickling down the brickwork, sluicing over the ledge and puddling round his feet.

A few more steps.

(Alan Gibbons, *The Defender*)

You can see that in this extract the pursuit adds excitement. Ian's desperation allows the reader to empathise with him but the setting injects an added element of danger and complicates the plot. We are now keen to read on and see if Ian avoids the wolfman, and if he survives. This extract would not have the same power if the action took place on the ground floor.

Activity

Make a list of features that make this extract dramatic and interesting for the reader. You may wish to use the 'LADDERS' mnemonic on page 21 to help you think critically about what the writer has achieved.

Location! Location! Location!

We have seen how setting can enhance the reader’s interest in character and plot but many writers prioritise setting and a description of a location can be an effective way of beginning your story. In *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck begins each of his six chapters with a description of the setting, which prepares the reader for the events to follow.

In the exam, the image may inspire you to write a description of a character’s movements through a particular setting. Your challenge will be to bring the place to life so that the reader can imagine it in their mind’s eye. Read the extract below from *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill. There is very little in the way of action but it still succeeds in holding the interest of the reader due to the vivid description of the setting and the ominous atmosphere:

...I emerged into a small burial ground. It was enclosed by the remains of a wall, and I stopped in astonishment at the sight. There were perhaps fifty old gravestones, most of them leaning over or completely fallen, covered in patches of greenish yellow lichen and moss, scoured pale by the salt wind, and stained by years of driven rain. The mounds were grassy, and weed-covered, or else they had disappeared altogether, sunken and slipped down. No names or dates were now decipherable, and the whole place had a decayed and abandoned air.

Ahead, where the wall ended in a heap of dust and rubble, lay the grey water of the estuary. As I stood, wondering, the last light went from the sun, and the wind rose in a gust, and rustled through the grass. Above my head, that unpleasant, snake-necked bird came gliding back towards the ruins, and I saw that its beak was hooked around a fish that writhed and struggled helplessly. I watched the creature alight and, as it did so, it disturbed some of the stones, which toppled and fell out of sight somewhere.

Suddenly conscious of the cold and the extreme bleakness and eeriness of the spot and of the gathering dusk of the November afternoon, and not wanting my spirits to become so depressed that I might begin to be affected by all sorts of morbid fancies, I was about to leave, and walk briskly back to the house, where I intended to switch on a good many lights and even light a small fire if it were possible, before beginning my preliminary work on Mrs Drablow’s papers. But, as I turned away, I glanced once again round the burial ground and then I saw again the woman with the wasted face, who had been at Mrs Drablow’s funeral. She was at the far end of the plot, close to one of the few upright headstones, and she wore the same black clothing and bonnet, but it seemed to have slipped back so that I could make out her face a little more clearly. In the greyness of the fading light, it had the sheen and pallor not of flesh so much as of bone itself.

(Susan Hill, *The Woman in Black*)

In this passage the writer slowly reveals the setting to the reader, taking us through it a footstep at a time and detailing the narrator’s observations and reactions to the place. The writer begins by **immersing** the reader into the setting of the graveyard. Then we are **introduced** to the character’s thoughts on the location but the situation is **complicated** as the daylight fades and the wind increases. The passage **concludes** with the sighting of the mysterious figure.

This structure is one way to begin developing your skills:

Immerse	Begin by immersing your reader in a location with a detailed description of the setting. The reader should know where the action is taking place, what time of day/year it is and what the weather conditions are. Use the method of zooming-in, which you were introduced to in the Personal Writing section.
Introduce	Introduce your character or characters so that your reader is made aware of the circumstances in which they find themselves in this place. The reader will be keen to know how the character(s) feel about being in this setting.
Complicate	Try to develop your plot by introducing some complication; this could be something as simple as deteriorating weather conditions or it could be a more dramatic turn of events, such as a fall or an unexpected sighting.
Conclude	Select an appropriate conclusion for your story. There could be a resolution or an inconclusive cliff-hanger. The choice is yours!

Using this **mnemonic** can help you remember the key features to bring your setting to life.

- L Location:** Establish a sense of where different scenes take place.
Language: Select words and phrases that will influence your reader’s reactions and emotions. Dialogue or direct speech can play an important role in creating setting.
- A Atmosphere:** This is the mood or tone you wish to convey to the reader. You can use setting to bring about tonal shifts and contrasts to add interest, e.g. start a story with a happy mood but build up a growing sense of tension. **Pathetic fallacy** (using the weather or landscape to reflect mood) can be used to reinforce a particular atmosphere or reflect a character’s feelings.
- D Descriptive:** Descriptive or visual details bring a scene to life by adding convincing touches.
- D Details:** A well-placed detail can have real impact.
- E Effect on the reader:** Aim to create interest through appealing to emotions such as fear, anger, joy or shock. Encouraging a sense of empathy with a character will also engage the reader.
- R Reactions of the characters:** The physical and emotional reactions of the characters within a setting also pull the reader into what is happening. Thoughts and feelings can be revealed through internal monologue.
- S Senses:** As well as creating imagery, appeal to other senses – smell, taste or touch – to make your writing more vivid.
Structure: Sustain the reader’s participation through a variety of sentence structures.

Activity

Use this image to write a story that takes place in this setting. You may wish to practise using the immerse, introduce, complicate and conclude approach suggested above. Remember to try to bring the setting to life and allow your reader to conjure up a vivid mental image.



AO4 i. ii. iii

Creating atmosphere

As you write your story, you will be making decisions about the mood or atmosphere you want to create. The first step in creating a suitable atmosphere is to select an appropriate setting for the events to take place. To achieve a romantic atmosphere, for example, you may decide to tell the story of a proposal that takes place on a candle-lit balcony at sunset. The same event in a dark, litter-strewn alleyway would simply not have the same effect!

Imagine you were asked to write a suspense story. Answer these questions:

- 1 What season or time of year will you set your story?
- 2 What time of day will you have the action take place?
- 3 What will the weather be like?
- 4 Where will you set your story?
- 5 What action might take place?
- 6 What is the time frame for the events taking place?

The most common answers to these questions include:

- 1 Autum or Winter.
- 2 Late at night.
- 3 Adverse weather such as torrential rain, a storm or dense fog.
- 4 An isolated setting such as a graveyard or forest. Other common suggestions include a derelict setting such as an abandoned house.
- 5 A pursuit, a sinister discovery or unexplained happenings, perhaps even the suggestion of supernatural activity.
- 6 To escalate the tension you will probably have a very short time frame with the situation developing minute by minute.

These are some of the conventions of suspense writing and if you want to create a sinister atmosphere you are likely to include most of these in your writing. When we watch a horror film or a thriller, the lighting effects, the camera angles and the music all contribute to the atmosphere and provide clues that something menacing is about to occur. Writers must rely upon words, techniques and sentence structures to achieve the same effect. Descriptions of setting, time, weather and sensory details will all contribute to creating atmosphere but to be successful you will need to think about your writing style as well as your content.

Style

The style of our writing is shaped by the choices we make about our use of words and phrases, our inclusion of linguistic devices, our sentence structures and our use of punctuation for effect. As writers we are fortunate to have many choices when it comes to telling a story but we must do our best to make the right choices!

Read this short extract from *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini and see how every sentence is contributing to the tense atmosphere and working to convey the panic of the young boy Abdullah:

[1] The dramatic opening creates intrigue and suspense. It also lets us understand the reason for Abdullah's panic.

[2] The use of a short sentence emphasises the child's sudden and intense fear.

[3] The description of the fire adds to the character's feelings of abandonment - there is no source of warmth or comfort. An ominous atmosphere is unfolding.

[4] The longer sentence reflects the desperate movements of Abdullah to try to understand his situation. The darkness is described as 'vast' and 'smothering' which makes Abdullah seem more vulnerable as his panic increases.

[5] Another short sentence confirms the child's intense fear and increases the tension.

[6] Abdullah's actions confirm his growing anxiety. The reader can appreciate how the darkness and the silence combine to create a fearful atmosphere for the child.

[7] One word is spoken and it is 'whispered.' Here the writer is escalating the tension as both Abdullah and the reader are hopeful of a reply from his father.

[8] This one word sentence is positioned in a paragraph of its own to emphasise the significance of the silence, allowing us to appreciate the terror it induces within Abdullah.

[9] The description of Abdullah's internal and external reaction to the silence and the reality of his abandonment escalate the atmosphere of fear and tension.

[10] A short sentence ends the extract and emphasises the atmosphere of isolation and the despondency felt by Abdullah.

Abdullah woke later and found Father gone.**[1]** He sat up in a fright.**[2]** The fire was all but dead, nothing left of it now but a few crimson specks of ember.**[3]** Abdullah's gaze darted left, then right but his eyes could penetrate nothing in the dark, at once vast and smothering.**[4]** He felt his face going white.**[5]** Heart sprinting, he cocked his ear, held his breath.**[6]** "Father?" he whispered.**[7]** Silence.**[8]** Panic began to mushroom deep in his chest. He sat perfectly still, his body erect and tense, and listened for a long time.**[9]** He heard nothing.**[10]**
(Khaled Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed*)

In the section on Personal Writing you encountered a list of techniques that could be used to add interest. You were also made aware of the importance of choosing dramatic verbs and vivid adjectives. Review this advice and make sure you feel ready to put it into practice.

Activity

Write a short descriptive passage based on this image. Remember to think carefully about your choice of words and phrases, your use of techniques and your sentence structures to create your desired atmosphere.

Now change the season and/or the time of day and write a second description creating a different atmosphere.



We all carry memories of enjoyable stories which leave a lasting impression upon us. This can be due to the characters and the events that unfold, but writers also use their work to examine themes.

A theme is an idea that runs throughout a piece of work and most stories explore various themes. In *Lord of the Flies*, for example, William Golding does more than simply tell a great story about schoolboys stranded on a desert island. As we read this novel, we are encouraged to reflect upon the themes of relationships, leadership, conflict, society and civilisation to name but a few.

In the same way that many words have more than one meaning, images can communicate more than one meaning. As you study the image provided in the examination, you may feel inspired to base your writing on what you see, which will involve writing a description of the scene or adopting the persona of the character. You may also be asked to write a story based on the themes or emotions conveyed by the image shown.



Did the photographer of this picture want to simply capture an image of a hurricane or does this picture convey other messages?

When presented with this image one student may write a story about experiencing a hurricane and will offer a description of what is shown in the photograph. Another student may interpret this as an image of destruction or power and decide to write a story on these themes.

Activity

Look at each of the images below and consider the different options they offer you as inspiration for your writing.

Select one and write a short story based on your chosen image.



The last 10 minutes spent reviewing and editing your writing could make that all-important difference to your final grade. Reviewing and revising your writing is one of the best ways to maximise your performance.

Don't be afraid to cross things out and make changes: it shows you are a thoughtful writer. Make sure you keep changes readable and make your corrections clear.



Check your writing to get the best possible mark:

Does it make **sense**?

Have you included **full stops, semicolons and commas**? Also check for **speech marks, colons, question marks and apostrophes**.

Have you used different sentence lengths? Could you **vary** your **sentence openers**? Could you enhance some sentences to make them more descriptive and detailed?

Do any of the words you've written look as though they're not quite right? If so, try writing them out in the designated planning section, **spelling** them differently; keep trying until they look right and then correct them in your work.

Have you divided your work into **paragraphs**? If not, read it carefully and decide where you think the breaks ought to go. Mark **//** where you want to end a paragraph and then **NP**. This will indicate that you want to begin a new paragraph.

Have you **included all that you wanted to say**? If not, mark the place where you want to add something with an asterisk *, make the same mark at the end of your piece, where you have some space, and then write the points or ideas you wish to add by the second mark. If you want to add extra points or ideas somewhere else use a different mark, such as **. Avoid excessive additions by planning effectively before you commence writing.

Features in the book:

Target success

Matching grades to Personal and Creative Writing

In Section A the essential qualities you need to show are highlighted at the important grade boundaries. Read these descriptions carefully; they tell you what your answer should be like.

Grade C writing displays:

- ✓ development that holds the reader's attention
- ✓ an appropriate sense of audience and purpose
- ✓ clearly structured and increasingly fluent expression
- ✓ a series of sentence structures, competently handled
- ✓ accurate use of basic punctuation that makes the meaning clear
- ✓ generally accurate spelling and the use of a widening range of language.

Grade A/A* writing displays:

- ✓ development that is sophisticated and commands the reader's attention
- ✓ a sense of a positive relationship with the audience
- ✓ an assured use of structure and a confident style
- ✓ sentence structuring that enhances the overall effect
- ✓ a range of punctuation, confidently employed to enhance fluency
- ✓ accurate spelling and use of an extended vocabulary – errors tend to be one-off mistakes.

Practice question

Creative Writing

Write a suspense story based on this image.
Response time: 55 minutes
15 minutes thinking and planning
30 minutes writing
10 minutes checking your writing



The **grade descriptions** are explained in simple language so that students can see how to get a Grade C or Grade A/A*

Practice questions prepare students for examination, enabling them to improve their extended writing skills under timed conditions

Sample student response

Creative Writing

The harsh snow pelted against my face as I walked tentatively further and further down the icy pathway.

[1] Each step was becoming more difficult as the storm gathered strength. Every few seconds I was temporarily blinded and my toes ached with the pinch of cold but I was reassured by the knowledge that the old decaying mansion stood three or four hundred yards up ahead.[2] It looked far from welcoming but I had no choice, out here I would freeze to death.

Approaching my dilapidated sanctuary, I remained cautious as the branches beneath my feet cracked like brittle bones [3] and in an instant the whole place seemed to come alive; in the bare trees birds fluttered in alarm, in the bushes I could hear the scuttling of wild animals and even the gate gave a moan to mark my arrival.[4] The mansion itself was suffocating [5] under a tangle of moss and ivy. A thick blanket of snow served to intensify the blackness of the building and in truth I was looking for any excuse not to enter but a cold icy wind seemed to push me forward, as if reminding me I was quickly running out of options.[6]

Once inside I became aware of the heaviness and discomfort of my sodden clothes.[7] Shivering and vulnerable I stood dwarfed by the vast hallway.[8] The scuttling of spiders and the creaking of floorboards made me feel like the entire house objected to my intrusion...or was warning someone or something of my presence.[9]

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I moved down the hallway and pushed on a large door. It opened abruptly, catapulting me into a large living room. Coughing and spluttering, I picked myself up off the dust strewn floor and took a good look around. The moon shone in brightly illuminating the room...

This answer demonstrates:

- ✓ confident awareness of purpose and audience
- ✓ a developing, confident style
- ✓ deliberate manipulation of a range of sentence structures
- ✓ some extended use of vocabulary
- ✓ some effective use of linguistic devices.

[2] Long sentence to emphasise the character's struggle against the snow storm. The reader has an understanding of where the action is taking place and the mention of the old mansion injects an ominous atmosphere.

[3] Use of the simile is foreboding and adds to the creepy atmosphere of the house.

[5] Personification and use of the verb 'suffocating' adds suggestions of death whilst allowing the reader to conjure up an image of the house.

[6] Maintains a sense of danger and tension by providing the character with limited options

[7] Good use of vocabulary and convincing details

[9] In this sentence the student demonstrates their ability to use alliteration and the inclusion of ellipses heightens the tension, compelling us to read on.

Detailed commentary breaks down the **sample student response**, showing students how a successful answer is constructed

The **answer summary** reminds students what the examiners are looking for in a high-level response

Personal and Creative Writing: Key to success

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Read these key pointers to help you prepare:
- ▶ Remember that the skills for Personal and Creative Writing are transferable.
 - ▶ The best writing results from the following process: **Think, Plan, Write**. Resist the temptation to start immediately; taking the time to think and plan is essential to produce your best work.
 - ▶ Make your writing lively and engaging. Let your personality come through in the writing – the last thing anyone wants is to read something dull!
 - ▶ Remember you have only 55 minutes in which to complete the writing process.
 - ▶ There are no prizes for finishing first so use all of the time wisely – the only reward for finishing early could be a low grade if you do not make the most of the time available.
 - ▶ Review your finished work – you must review your work to get the most out of your answer because everyone makes mistakes when they are working quickly and under pressure. Remember too that there are no marks for extreme neatness – it is much better that your work is accurate even if it contains a few corrections. As you check your work, consider the following questions and correct any mistakes that you find:
 - i) Have you used paragraphs?
 - ii) Did you use a range of sentence lengths?
 - iii) Did you vary the sentence openings?
 - iv) Have you used a varied vocabulary?
 - v) Have you left out any words or are there any sentences where the meaning is less than clear?



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For the
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