

Spotlight on GCSE English Language

with Jonny Kay

Post-16 English expert





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Paper 1
Q5

Spotlight on GCSE English shines a light on exactly what examiners are looking for.

We've worked with Jonny Kay, post-16 English expert and author, to create a pack of resources to provide your students with best practice, guidance and top tips to improve their performance in GCSE English Language.

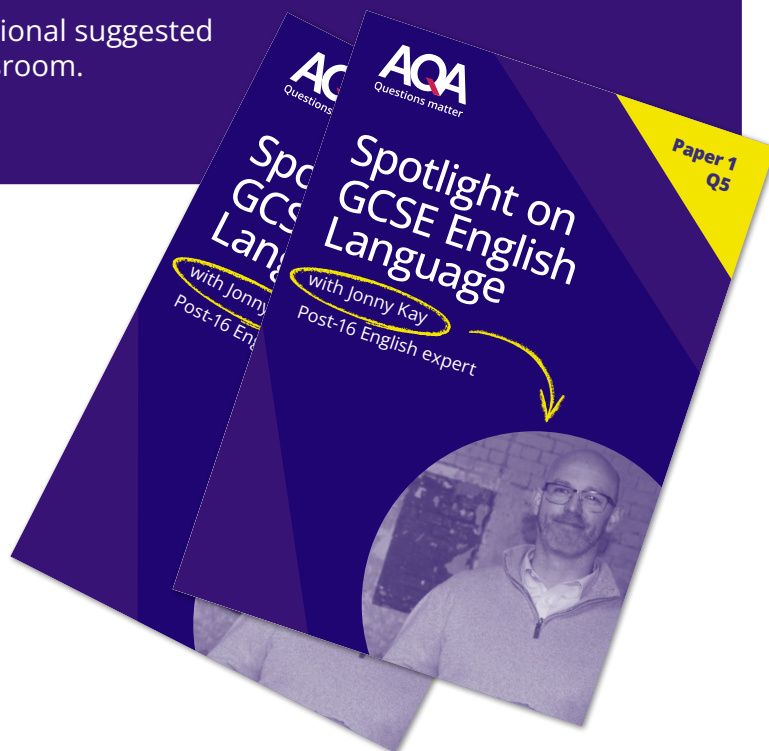
Focusing on Questions 4 and 5 on both papers, the Spotlight packs will support your students' progress and focus their development on the areas that will make the most difference to their performance in the exam.

These resources support our new [Spotlight videos](#)



Each pack contains:

- A video for students breaking down the question and what they need to do to succeed.
- This teacher guidance booklet, including a question from a past paper and an example student response to pinpoint exactly what examiners are looking for.
- An editable PPT presentation to help you deliver the content to your students.
- Differentiated tasks and some additional suggested resources for you to use in the classroom.
- Jonny Kay's suggested lesson plan.



What does the question look like?

Question 5 is always 40 marks and assesses AO5 and AO6. As a guide it's advised that students spend around 45 minutes on this question.

Question 5 provides a creative writing opportunity and there will always be a visual stimulus.

Students will have a choice between two tasks. This will vary between a narrative focus and an assessment of descriptive writing skills: one narration and one description, or two descriptions, or two narrations.

We know these two genres overlap: we find description in narrative and conventions of narrative can feature in description. There is a blurred line between the two forms but importantly students won't be penalised if their writing includes elements of both types. Remember examiners are looking at the writing ability of the student and it's the quality of the response that's paramount.

AO5:

Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

AO6:

Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Example - November 2018

Question 5

0 5

Your local newspaper is running a creative writing competition and the best entries will be published.

Either

Write a story about time travel as suggested by this picture:



or

Describe life as you imagine it in 200 years' time.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]

What is the question asking students to do?

Students have to produce a piece of writing that communicates to the reader on one of two given options. They're assessed on the overall quality of their writing.

Question 5 is divided into two parts:

- Content and organisation (24 marks). This assesses AO5.
- Technical accuracy (16 marks). This assesses AO6.

The most important word in AO5 is communicate.

What skills are being looked for in the mark scheme?

The section of the mark scheme below shows the four skills descriptors for AO5 and then AO6 and what is required at each level of the mark scheme.

AO5: Content and organisation

Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.

Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.

Level		Skills descriptor
Level 4 Compelling, convincing communication 19–24 marks	Upper level 4 22–24 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication is convincing and compelling Tone, style and register are assuredly matched to purpose and audience Extensive and ambitious vocabulary with sustained crafting of linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied and inventive use of structural features Writing is compelling, incorporating a range of convincing and complex ideas Fluently linked paragraphs with seamlessly integrated discourse markers
	Lower level 4 19–21 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication is convincing Tone, style and register are convincingly matched to purpose and audience Extensive vocabulary with conscious crafting of linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied and effective structural features Writing is highly engaging with a range of developed complex ideas Consistently coherent use of paragraphs with integrated discourse markers

Level 3 Consistent, clear communication 13–18 marks	Upper level 3 16–18 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is consistently clear • Tone, style and register are clearly and consistently matched to purpose and audience • Increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and phrasing, chosen for effect with a range of successful linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of structural features • Writing is engaging, using a range of clear, connected ideas • Coherent paragraphs with integrated discourse markers
	Lower level 3 13–15 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is generally clear • Tone, style and register are generally matched to purpose and audience • Vocabulary clearly chosen for effect and appropriate use of linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually effective use of structural features • Writing is engaging, with a range of connected ideas • Usually coherent paragraphs with range of discourse markers
Level 2 Some successful communication 7–12 marks	Upper level 2 10–12 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with some sustained success • Some sustained attempt to match tone, style and register to purpose and audience • Conscious use of vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some use of structural features • Increasing variety of linked and relevant ideas • Some use of paragraphs and some use of discourse markers
	Lower level 2 7–9 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with some success • Attempts to match tone, style and register to purpose and audience • Begins to vary vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to use structural features • Some linked and relevant ideas • Attempt to write in paragraphs with some discourse markers, not always appropriate

Level 1 Simple, limited communication 1-6 marks	Upper level 1 4-6 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates simply Simple awareness of matching tone, style and register to purpose and audience Simple vocabulary; simple linguistic devices Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of simple structural features One or two relevant ideas, simply linked Random paragraph structure
	Lower level 1 1-3 marks	Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited communication Occasional sense of matching tone, style and register to purpose and audience Simple vocabulary
Level 0 No marks		Nothing to reward Students will not have offered any meaningful writing to assess.

AO6: Technical accuracy

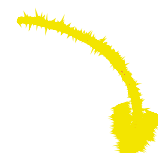
Students must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)

Level	Skills descriptor
Level 4 13-16 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence demarcation is consistently secure and consistently accurate Wide range of punctuation is used with a high level of accuracy Uses a full range of appropriate sentence forms for effect Uses Standard English consistently and appropriately with secure control of complex grammatical structures High level of accuracy in spelling Extensive and ambitious use of vocabulary
Level 3 9-12 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence demarcation is mostly secure and mostly accurate Range of punctuation is used, mostly with success Uses a variety of sentence forms for effect Mostly uses Standard English appropriately with mostly controlled grammatical structures Generally accurate spelling, including complex and irregular words Increasingly sophisticated use of vocabulary

Level 2 5-8 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence demarcation is mostly secure and sometimes accurate • Some control of a range of punctuation • Attempts a variety of sentence forms • Some use of Standard English with some control of agreement • Some accurate spelling of more complex words • Varied use of vocabulary
Level 1 1-4 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional use of sentence demarcation • Some evidence of conscious punctuation • Simple range of sentence forms • Occasional use of Standard English with limited control of agreement • Accurate basic spelling • Simple use of vocabulary
Level 0 No marks	<p>Nothing to reward</p> <p>Students' spelling, punctuation etc. is sufficiently poor to prevent understanding or meaning.</p>

Example Level 3 response - November 2018

Response to the question on page 7



The station is bustling with life. Every person you could ever wish to meet is present in this small corner of the world. All nationalities lie in every nook and cranny, waiting to start their journey: there are workers, there are tourists, there are different partners, there are loners and there are families, waiting to meet. Everyone is moving quickly; rushing and hanging from the announcement board that supports the entire station. Everywhere there are bursts of life, like confetti being thrown randomly, yet everyone is where they need to be. It is as busy as an ant colony: it's as if the people are the ants, moving perfectly around each other.

Sunlight streams through the huge windows; illuminating the busy city of transport. The enormous windows (supported by huge brick columns) let the sunlight in, but shield the market place from the outside, manic world.

Each person is filled with a different emotion – some are happy, some are worried.

The lone black figure at the entrance to the station is holding onto a briefcase which is packed full of stressful tasks for the day. Opposite him is a family of 4, with two children – one purposefully making the other cry. A gigantic clock – ticking, angrily – hangs from above, catching everyone's attention. And underneath it are bunches of station workers. At the very back are the impressive marble station steps, who wait for the station master and his staff. Every person imaginable lies in this station!

I can imagine the people and station staff arguing over prices and how this creates a tense atmosphere.

However, this station is only filled with people making short journeys. One day, could this be gone? Could this small world, full of light, slowly disappear...?

How do students perform on Paper 1 Question 5?

The most successful approaches in the descriptive writing task use the image as a springboard into the students' imaginations, balancing this by focusing on the finer, subtle details in the image.

Students do tend to interpret the title of the narrative writing task in a myriad of different ways. Evidence has shown that those who opt for more poignant subject matters do so with considerable sensitivity and maturity.

Examiners have reported some students plan to excess. It's an important and effective skill but students should practise allowing themselves sufficient time to write the piece.

Whilst students' technical accuracy has improved in the range of sentence types and punctuation used, it's more effective to use apostrophes, semi-colons and colons sparingly – and accurately – rather than indiscriminately and incorrectly. The same principle applies to complex vocabulary which only adds to the quality of the writing if chosen aptly.

Plots borrowed from films, computer games, literature texts or a previous exam paper aren't successful and should be avoided.

Tip:

Students could begin to plan and write about a character a few months before the exam. By adding small details to the character on a regular basis, they'll have a fully formed character that can be used in the exam.

Tip:

Students should spend 45 minutes on this question; 5 minutes planning, and 40 minutes writing their response.

It's important that students use all of the available time when answering this question as it's worth 50% of the available marks on Paper 1.

Support for teaching the AO5 and AO6 skills

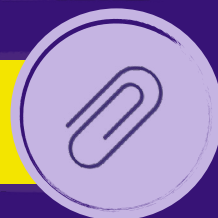
Ideas for teaching

- Give students the courage and confidence to adopt a 'quality rather than quantity' approach to plan and craft a structured response, leaving time at the end to revise and improve.
- Practise not only addressing the skills descriptors in the mark scheme but integrating them seamlessly into a description or narrative.
- Extend students' use of varied punctuation, sentences and paragraphs. Spelling of key words, correct homophones and accurate punctuation of sentences, including speech and apostrophes, are core skills.



Use the suggested lesson plan, classroom resources and teaching presentation in this pack

Example student responses across the grades can be found on [Centre Services](#), and we've included one in this guidance



There's a range of material for each question on every paper in the [Exampro Highlights](#) package

[Spring 2018 GCSE hub network meeting materials](#)
Focuses on writing (slides 13, 15, Activities booklet pages 8, 10–11)

[Summer 2018 GCSE hub network meeting materials](#)
(Activities booklet page 33 activity 8)



[2020 Stretching grade 3 to 4](#)
Activities including box and pyramid planning for creative writing

[Focus on success packs](#)



Contact us

Our team of subject experts are here to help and support you as you deliver our specifications.

We're here to provide advice and respond to queries you might have to make sure you feel confident about guiding your students to fulfil their potential.

We understand the trust you put in us to provide great assessments for your students and we are committed to delivering on this.

E: english-gcse@aqa.org.uk

T: 0161 953 7504

8am - 5pm Monday to Friday

