

TIPS FOR LEAVING CERT ENGLISH

EXAM TECHNIQUE



PAPER 1 - THE LANGUAGE PAPER

PAPER 1 200 MARKS – HALF THE TOTAL OF THE EXAMINATION

100 MARKS FOR COMPREHENSION – 100 MARKS FOR COMPOSITION

2 HOURS AND 50 MINUTES DURATION

Choose your QB first. Then your question A

COMPREHENSION: spend 35 minutes.

- Know your languages and the characteristics associated with each style. ***Autobiographical argument, informative, narrative, persuasive, descriptive.***
- Identify the theme, tone and the intention/purpose of each piece of prose writing.
- Assess the structure and form of the comprehension passage – paragraphs, sentences, word choice.
- These are words that the examiner likes to see in comprehensions: ***declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory, syntax, complex, periodic, balanced, inverted, antithesis, abstract, concrete, context, connotations, informal, formal, sensationalist, assertion, cacophony, repetition, emotive, irony, simile, metaphor, imagery, vivid, exotic, atmosphere etc.....***
- A well written answer will be focused, show a clear understanding of the passage, grasp of the writers intension, structured sentences and paragraphs, understanding of tone and imagery and excellent English.
- **Answers should be clear, logical, factual, precise, simple, and unambiguous.**
- Bad answers show misunderstandings, incorrect facts, no reasons for opinions, irrelevance and not answering the question asked.
- Understand the difference between these words: ***analyse, compare, contrast, criticise, define, discuss, disprove, evaluate, explain, illustrate, justify, prove, state, summarise, outline, trace.***

QUESTION B

35 MINUTES DURATION

BE PREPARED TO BE ABLE TO WRITE ON ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF WRITING:

- REPORTS
- INSTRUCTIONS
- MEMOS
- LETTERS
- NOTICES AND BULLETINS
- INTERVIEWS
- REVIEWS
- DIARY ENTERIES
- SPEECHES
- RADIO TALKS
- TEXTS FOR PROPERTY PAGES ETC
- WRITE ON A PHOTOGRAPH/ PICTURE

IT IS VITAL YOU UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LANGUAGES WHEN YOU ATTEMPT THIS QUESTION. STYLE IS PARAMOUNT IN YOUR ANSWER.

COMPOSITION:

100 MARKS

SPEND 70 MINUTES ON THIS SECTION

VITAL TO REMEMBER: THE FIRST IMPRESSION OF A MARK FORMS IN THE EXAMINERS HEAD BY THE END OF THE FIRST PARAGRAPH – SO GET A REALLY STRONG OPENING!!!!

- Effective writing means the piece is purposeful, topic related, context strong, audience linked and superb language and techniques.
- Keep to the chosen genre
- Keep unified and structured throughout
- Get it finished!!
- Relate to title at all times
- Brainstorm
- Know your beginning, middle and end before you start
- Excellent spelling required
- Excellent structure required
- Paragraphing is essential
- Don't introduce irrelevant material
- Finish strongly
- Write simply
- Use quotations, clever phrases – idioms if possible
- Avoid clichés
- Don't make global statements without knowing the facts.
- Leave the examiner in no doubt at the end of your essay.

IT IS VITAL TO FINISH THE PAPER!!!!!!

PAPER 2

**THE LITERATURE
PAPER**



THIS IS THE PAPER THAT REALLY DETERMINES YOUR GRADE. COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT OF TEXTS AND POETRY IS ESSENTIAL. YOU MUST SATURATE YOUR ANSWERS WITH A DEEP KNOWLEDGE – QUOTATION, REFERENCE, RELEVANT OPINION – LET THE EXAMINER KNOW HOW PREPARED YOU ARE IN THE **OPENING PARAGRAPH OF EVERY QUESTION**. IMPRESS IMMEDIATELY. IT REALLY DOES HELP FORM A POSITIVE GRADE IN THE EXAMINERS MIND.

SINGLE TEXT – 60 MINUTES

COMPARATIVE TEXTS – 70 MINUTES

PRESCRIBED POETRY – 50 MINUTES

UNSEEN POETRY – 15 MINUTES.

TED: 1. TOPIC SENTENCE

2. EXAMPLE

3. DISCUSS

THIS IS A GOOD LITTLE ACRONYM TO HELP YOU KEEP ONE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPED POINT PER PARAGRAPH.

THE SINGLE TEXT –

1. READ THE QUESTION

2. REPHRASE THE QUESTION INTO YOUR OWN WORDS
3. TAKE A STANCE ON WHAT YOU FEEL YOU HAVE TO SAY – BE STRONG AND DECISIVE
4. ORGANISE YOUR IDEAS IN A LOGICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL FASHION
5. ASSEMBLE ALL YOUR MATERIAL FOR IDEAS – QUOTATIONS, REFERENCES ETC
6. WRITE OUT YOUR ANSWER CLEARLY AND NEATLY.

HINT: EXAMINER LIKES STUDENTS TO KNOW HOW A TRAGEDY IS WRITTEN:

ACT 1 – THE EXPOSITION

ACT 2 – THE COMPLICATION

ACT 3 – THE CLIMAX

ACT 4 – THE CATASTROPHE

ACT 5 – THE RESOLUTION

IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO RELATE TO THE QUESTION IN EVERY PARAGRAPH – THIS WILL HELP YOU KEEP ON TASK AND GAIN MARKS STEADILY.

Finish the question strongly. Relate back to question. Reiterate your stance. Do not introduce any new material in the conclusion. Leave the examiner on a high! That's when the final mark is awarded.

THE COMPARATIVE STUDY

This is considered the hardest question on the paper – mainly due to structure. 4 things must happen in each paragraph. 3 key moments from 3 texts – and they must all interact with the question. Link words help to keep focus.

A well-structured comparative question is key to scoring well on this question.

It is vital to know the key characteristics of each mode of comparison.

It is vital to have 3 key scenes from each text relating to each mode of comparison.

It is vital to have a selection of link words – and vary them throughout your answer.

It is vital to compare and contrast. One is not more important than the other.

Just a small note on film: This is quite a different text to a play or a novel and should be treated as such. Films are made up of images that are photographed within a particular frame – the rectangle that contains the image. The camera frame controls what the audience sees and how they see it. Speak about striking camera movements, long shots, abrupt transitions, how credits are presented, how music is chosen etc. Every film uses patterns of repetition that are contrasted with certain important moments.

PRESCRIBED POETRY

ONLY ANSWER ON ONE POET BUT IT IS VITAL THAT YOU USE AT LEAST 5 OF THEIR MOST POWERFUL POEMS. DO NOT LEAVE OUT THE DIFFICULT ONES – IT WILL BE NOTICED. IT WILL ALSO BE NOTICED IF YOU MISQUOTE

There are two ways to answer a poetry question (a) thematically or (b) poem by poem. A good honours student will always answer thematically – the structure is more sophisticated and it is expected from those who hope to score a good grade.

UNSEEN POETRY

THIS SECTION ONLY CARRIES 20 MARKS AND SO STUDENTS OFTEN DO NOT CONSIDER IT TOO IMPORTANT – OFTEN STUDENTS DON'T GET TIME TO COMPLETE IT. **THIS IS A BIG MISTAKE!!!!!!!!!!**

THE UNSEEN POETRY SECTION COULD ACTUALLY SEE YOU JUMP A GRADE – SO GIVE IT THE IMPORTANCE THAT IT DESERVES!!!

How to tackle an unseen poem:

1. Read the poem through once and try and understand its meaning
2. Read it again.
3. Identify the ideas, the persona, the language
4. Create some kind of connection to the poem – pick out a striking phrase.
5. Comment on the significance of the title

KEY WORDS THAT EXAMINERS LIKE TO SEE: *Theme, tone, imagery, onomatopoeia, metaphor, simile, run on lines, enjambment, stanza, synaesthesia, ambiguity, assonance, alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, allusions, associations, repetition etc. etc.*

Overall, the English examiner is looking for excellent knowledge combined with flow of words. Strong opinions are well received. Learned off essays from books of notes are never a great idea – the examiners are teachers and they know all these revision books!! Original ideas, original opinions, a new way of looking at things – these are where the marks are!!

Be original. Be convincing. Be unequivocal. That is how to improve your grade in English.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT GRADES ARE FORMED EARLY IN EVERY ANSWER – THEREFORE IT IS VITAL TO MAINTAIN A GOOD LEVEL THROUGHOUT. BE CONSISTENT FROM START

***TO FINISH. DO NOT WANDER. DO NOT GO OFF THE POINT. AVOID
IRRELEVANT INFORMATION – THERE ARE NO PITY MARKS***

MS C. HAVEL