**Reading and Responding Essay Writing.**

**When writing an analytical or expository essay on a text (e.g. novels, plays, poetry and film) you are aiming to show that you:**

• can analyse and understand the topic;  
• can answer the question, i.e. discuss the topic;  
• do know the plot and characters;  
• do know the themes, messages, issues well;  
• understand the topic in relation to the text, the characters, themes;  
• can draw upon appropriate evidence from the text and use brief quotations which can support your argument.

**Throughout your essay you are showing that you can:**

• write a sustained interpretation (an argument that develops);  
• develop a point of view (has something to say about the text);  
• support that view through close textual references and analysis (quotes and examples from the text are included to prove points you're making).

**Your essay should show that you have developed a clear understanding of:**

• 'tag' words that frame the topic: Discuss, Do you agree? How? Why? Do…? Does…?   
• planning and structuring an essay;  
• how to incorporate quotations into you essay; how to modify quotations;  
• writing strong introductions that engage with the topic;  
• using topic sentences that relate to the topic;  
• explaining and justifying each argument;  
• using specific evidence and explaining (qualifying) the evidence;  
• linking evidence to the topic and to the next paragraph;  
• reaching strong and firm conclusions;  
• developing vocabulary (metalanguage) with which to discuss the text;  
• planning by composing at least five main arguments relevant to the topic that will serve as the topic sentences for each paragraph of the essay.

For help on these areas, see the pages (navigate to your left),“Text Study” and “Text Study Strategies”.

**1. PLANNING THE ESSAY**

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| **STAGE 1: Analyse the topic or question** |
| 1. Define key words and phrases Read the question carefully and underline key (significant) words and phrases and key concepts;   these are the issues in the topic/question you need to address. Don't jump too quickly into your first  impulse; consider how the question might be interpreted. Briefly list the significance of these key words  and/or concepts, showing their relevance to the text. |
| 1. Topic Focus  In your own words rewrite the topic to show how well you have interpreted it.   This will help you with your main arguments. |
| 1. Key questions From your topic/question analysis, list key questions you need to address and focus on to answer the   question. — Briefly answer each of your questions. The questions, plus the answers, give you the material for  your essay. — Decide on appropriate and relevant evidence and quotations from the text that can support the  issues in the topic/question.  — Use your key questions to formulate your main arguments. |
| **STAGE 2: Plan the Essay** |
| Outline, in point form, the main ideas for each paragraph. This means your introduction, main body and  conclusion. — begin each paragraph with a topic sentence (main argument) — followed by a series of supporting arguments — include key quotations that support your arguments where applicable (provide page references) |
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**2. STRATEGIES FOR WRITING THE ESSAY**

**Paragraph one — INTRODUCTION**  
A well-written introduction is the generator of a successful essay. It should deal closely with the issues in the topic that your essay will concentrate on. The opening paragraph must provide a clear and definite response to the topic.

An efficient introduction should:  
• clarify and define key terms and phrases by discussing the main issues that will be tackled.  
• Articulate your main argument in a confident and assured manner - show a strong sense of authorial control.

Do not:  
• simply repeat the topic in your opening sentence.  
• simply agree or disagree.  
• disregard the topic altogether and rewrite a pre-planned essay that is largely irrelevant to the topic.  
• begin your introduction with: “In my opinion this statement is true…”, “I agree with the above statement”, or “In this essay I will talk about …”, and other such like expressions. Such phrasing is both unnecessary and begins the essay on a bad note.

A well-considered and thoughtful introduction should contain at least four to five key ideas that can be developed into substantial and intelligent paragraphs in their own right. Also, intelligent discussions explore the topic in depth. In other words, they do not reduce the statement or question to an either, or, scenario. Both sides will be developed, explored and discussed in some depth.

**For each paragraph, your main body should consist of a key idea (topic sentence) that directly relates to the question:**

**Paragraph Two — MAIN BODY**  
• Develop and expand upon your first key idea. It is often possible to take one key word or phrase in the introduction and make it the focus for the whole paragraph.  
• Outline your first key idea and engage with the text by using useful quotes and references. Above all, sustain the connection with the topic and do not deviate from it!  
• Ensure that your concluding sentence leads onto your next paragraph; this gives your essay "coherency".

**Paragraph Three: Main Body**  
Develop and expand upon your second key idea. How does it relate to your first? How does it relate to the topic? Again, back your ideas up by using specific incidents or quotes from the text. Don't forget to link your concluding sentence with the next paragraph.

**Paragraph Four: Main Body**  
Let us assume that you have three key ideas, therefore this is the last paragraph that makes up the main body of your essay. Develop and expand your idea, link it with your two others and return to the topic. By slowly returning to the topic at the end of the paragraph, this will provide you with a fluent and cohesive link to your concluding remarks.

**Paragraph Five — CONCLUSION**  
The final paragraph should tie up your ideas and return quite clearly to the initial topic. Do not just summarise your views here. A good strategy is to provide a clear, logical and thorough response to the topic by re-expressing it to suit the way you have developed your argument. Such a strategy assumes that you have clarified, defined and substantiated the issues involved thoroughly in the main body of the essay. Never introduce new ideas that have not been developed earlier in the last paragraph. Finally, remember to finish confidently and assertively!

• Avoid concluding your essay with: “In conclusion…”, or “to sum up…”. This is very clumsy formulation and ends the essay on a bad note.

Do not, in the process of your discussion:  
• bombard your reader with too many quotes. Quotes should illustrate an argument or idea rather than act as a substitute for it!  
• re-narrate the story. Examiners know the plot and who the characters are! They are interested in your ideas and views.  
• simply rewrite an essay that is not relevant to the topic.  
• deviate from the topic!

Beware of “one-track” response. Try to recognize complexities: the better answers always do.

You may like to think of each paragraph as based on an "equation":  
One paragraph = one topic sentence (main argument) + detail (supporting arguments) + relevant examples (textual evidence) = well rounded paragraph that explores a key argument related directly to the topic.

Remember to use linking words and phrases to connect your paragraphs to each other.

**3. ESSAY WRITING CONVENTIONS**

Be a thoroughly good writer rather than a careless or ignorant one. Practice by getting into the habit of applying the following writing conventions:

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| • | Underline or type in *italics*the title of the text (do not use the inverted commas — unless it is the title  of a poem or short story). |
| • | Discuss the text in the present tense (not the past tense). The text is “alive” and is being read now,  in the present. The rule is simple: discuss it in the *present tense*. |
| • | Style and Tone must be formal (i.e. no colloquialisms, abbreviations, etc.). |
| • | Avoid contracting words (“don't”, “isn't”, “i.e.”). Write the words in full (“does not”). |
| • | Do not use the personal voice: “I think”, “In my opinion” — your essay is your opinion! |
| • | Refer to the author's concerns/intentions/view/values throughout the essay  (e.g. "Dickens' is critical of the way…" ; "Dickens is ruthless in satirising …") |
| • | Use the appropriate language (i.e. vocabulary and metalanguage (literary terminology) to write about  characters, themes, etc. Ensure you have developed a vocabulary sheet throughout your study of the texts. |
| • | Using Quotations. When you use quotations, you must quote exactly. You must, however, only  use the quotation if it strengthens your argument. It is better to quote a few apt words or key  lines than include large “chunks” which are irrelevant. |
|  | — Use the ellipsis (three dots) ... when you omit parts of a quotation. |
|  | * When you quote and you use a word(s) that is not in the quotation itself, put the word(s) in    square brackets [ ]. |
|  | * Note how quotations are used to support arguments and how they are   integrated into an argument in sample essays. |
| • | Citing Page References — Always write the page reference after your quotation. Use p. for page and pp. for pages.   DO NOT use pg or page. Place it inside brackets e.g. (p.19) or (pp.21-26) — Note how page references are used in commentaries and sample essays. |