

Introduction to GCSE English Language – Paper One

Descriptive Writing

Pupil name:

Teacher name:

Tutor name:

You will be asked to spend around 45 minutes on this question. You could be asked to write a **descriptive** piece or a **narrative** piece. There'll be a choice of two tasks, but they could both be a description, both be a narrative, or you could get the choice between the two styles of writing.

Every year, the exam board say that what earns students the most marks is **taking the time to write a decent plan.**

So that's what this booklet is going to be about: planning.

You can turn each plan into a full piece of writing, but the main focus of this is to get you used to planning descriptions focused on **the six elements of dramatic imagination.**

Sound & silence
Movement & stillness
Light & dark

What are the six elements of dramatic imagination?

Sound & silence
Movement & stillness
Light & dark

These six categories come from **drama** more than from **creative writing**.

These are the things which *bring a scene to life*. When you watch something – a play, a television program, or a film – then each of these six things will be involved.

Before you start a piece of descriptive writing, you could imagine that you have been placed somewhere in a scene. You can't interact with anything – you can just look, and listen. Being a descriptive writer is sometimes like being a CCTV camera.

Things will be **noisy!** The characters, background noise, the weather, nearby wildlife – all of these contribute to the **reality** of a scene. What noises you choose to include, and how you describe those noises, will help contribute to the **mood** of your writing.

But there will also be **silence** – it could be a coincidental and momentary lull, or a really purposeful moment of quiet – ‘the calm before the storm’.

Some things will **move** – this could be the main focus of what you're writing about, or something seemingly inconsequential moving in the background. Think about how things **interact** – if you introduce a description of ‘*whipping winds that whistle*’, then you need to tell your reader what it is that they whip!

Other things will remain **still!** This has to be handled sensibly; write about things that *resist* being moved, or whose stillness is in *contrast* with the movement of something else. Avoid cliché though: don't tell your reader something was “still as a statue”...

There will be sources of **light**. Describe these sources themselves: the sun, the moon, stars, a lamp, a fire, a TV screen flickering... But also, describe the way the light hits *other* things in your description.

And where there's light, there's **darkness**. Think about where your light-sources are: what shadows will they cast? Where will the light not reach? Who, or what, is left in darkness?

Planning out your content in this way will ensure you really bring a scene to life. It also gives you lots of opportunity to think about clashes and contrasts – it should *force* you into writing with juxtaposition and antithesis. You need to craft your writing in other ways, but this should help.



Write a description of boats near a seaside town, as suggested by this image.
Just notes and ideas first – see my example below. Add anything you can think of that I’ve missed out!

<p>Sound</p> <p>The sea, lapping against rocks Waves crashing Conversations taking place on/between boats Conversations taking place in/between homes Boats’ sails flapping in the wind Seagulls & other marine wildlife Someone fishing – casting, reeling, catching etc.</p>	<p>Silence</p> <p>The ‘gap’ between waves A house which shuts all doors and windows The moment the wind drops</p>
<p>Movement</p> <p>The moored boats drifting gently The boats actively sailing: leaving/returning Sailors at work Fishermen at work People on the shore; in/out of their houses The waves/tide Smoke coming out of the chimneys Seagulls & other marine wildlife</p>	<p>Stillness</p> <p>One boat sheltered from the wind A seagull who’s landed on a rock Sails when the wind drops A fisherman, waiting for a bite</p>
<p>Light</p> <p>Sunlight – a corridor of light on the ocean Ripples in the water; circles of light Reflections off the water, and the windows Lights from people’s homes Lamplights on boats</p>	<p>Dark</p> <p>Shadows of the boats on the water Alley-ways between houses Rocks/shoreline facing away from the sun Shoals of fish underwater The lights of a house being turned off</p>

So you've planned some content: now what?

Now you've got something to write *about*, you need to think about how you put it all together into one piece of descriptive writing.

Don't write six paragraphs – one for stillness, one for movement etc.

Don't talk *about* the picture. ~~"In this picture I can see..."~~

Instead, try to move from place-to-place or idea-to-idea. Move from the 'whole' scene into little, specific details, and then back out again. If it helps, as we said earlier, imagine you're actually watching a play, a television program, or a film – think about cameras that pan across scenes, which zoom in and out, which track something that moves etc.

Must haves:

- ❖ Appropriate paragraphs, of different sizes, shapes, and structures
- ❖ Varied language devices: similes, metaphors, personification – think figuratively!
- ❖ Ambitious and varied vocabulary
- ❖ Accurate and varied use of punctuation
- ❖ Sentences of different lengths, chosen for impact
- ❖ Sensible transitions between ideas and paragraphs. Think about relationships, and the way different things interact. Prepositions are your friend here!

Variety and accuracy are key. But beyond those technical aspects, it's just got to *make sense*. You are bringing a scene to life for your reader: they should be able to picture it, smell it, hear it. Bear this in mind when you're writing, and you'll do well.

Once you've written it – stop, re-read, redraft, improve. You'll probably make mistakes on a first draft. That's fine, as long as you can spot them and fix them. And even if it's mistake-free, a piece of writing can usually be improved. Spend a few minutes after you've "finished" making sure it's as good as it can possibly be.

Annotate this example. What would an examiner like about it?

Waves swell and grow in the wind, starting out small and slow, far from shore, but rising and rushing as they approach the rocks where they crash and smash, flinging their salty spray high. This spray seems to hang in the air for a moment, before dropping to the ground. Then, a pause – a lull – before the next wave arrives.

As they make their journeys towards land, the waves navigate the boats – some sailing, some simply drifting gently in the breeze. From one, a fisherman casts out his line; it lands in the water, sending out huge, arcing ripples: circles that glimmer in the sunlight, before disappearing, melting into nothingness.

One boat, positioned behind rocks and hidden behind houses, is sheltered from the wind. It sits, perfectly – almost ominously – still. For all of the others, gusts of wind temporarily fill their sails, stretching their canvas tight before releasing them again. But this one, far removed from the corridor of brilliant sunlight which seems to cleave the ocean in two, sits in the dark, lifeless.

Elsewhere, though, life is everywhere. A seagull lands on a rock. A shoal of fish forms a black cloud scarcely visible beneath the ocean's surface. A school-child skips from his front door. His parents wave him off, silhouettes in their doorway, framed by light. When he is out of sight, the door is slammed shut, the bang echoing around the dark alleyways that separate the houses.

The fisherman has a bite now. Furiously, he reels and strains against the pressure which bends his rod, threatening to break it. After losing a violent struggle, the fisherman, despairing, throws his rod down and turns back to face the shore. He identifies his own house on the seafront, and traces the smoke billowing from the chimney, grey ghosts dancing gently in the breeze.

From one of the houses comes the clattering sounds of a couple arguing. The shrieks and shouts echo around; everyone else clearly hears, as all other sounds quieten and then disappear. It seems the argument has everyone's attention until it ends, abruptly, with the slamming of a door.

Angry clouds gather in the sky, threatening to burst and pound the boats and houses with rain. The whipping winds drive those black clouds until they begin to cover the sun, casting everything into darkness. In response, the windows of the houses begin to flicker with candle-light, and the lamps are lit on the decks of the boats.



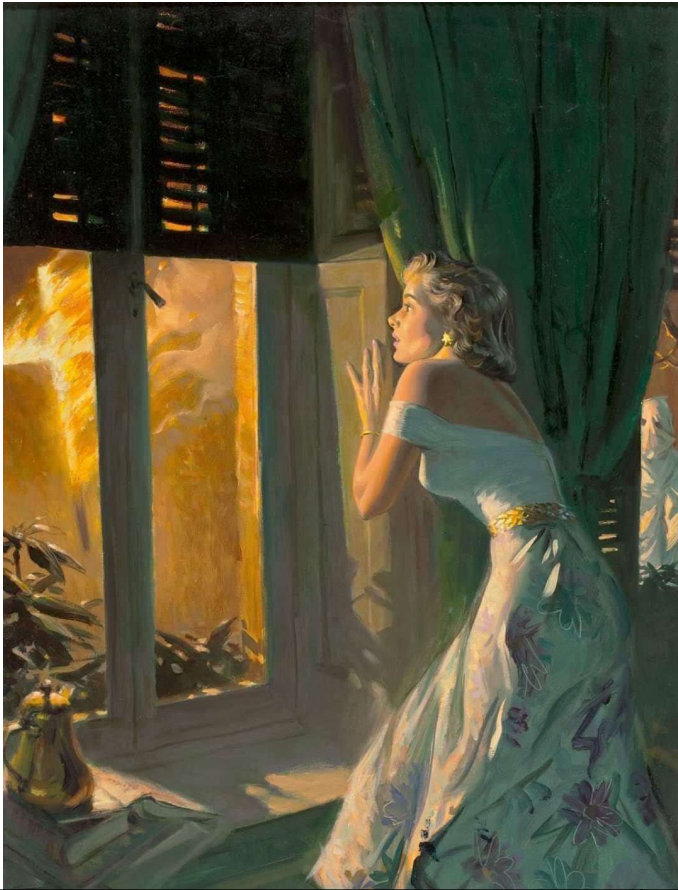
Write a description of a café scene; the window overlooks the street outside.

Sound	Silence
Movement	Stillness
Light	Dark



Write a description of coastline at night, as suggested by this picture.

Sound	Silence
Movement	Stillness
Light	Dark



Write a description of a woman watching a fire blaze outside of her window.

Sound

Silence

Movement

Stillness

Light

Dark



Write a description of a young child having a piano lesson as suggested by this picture.

Sound

Silence

Movement

Stillness

Light

Dark



Write a description of a wet and windy city scene, as suggested by this picture.

Sound

Silence

Movement

Stillness

Light

Dark



Write a description of a waterfall and a river, as suggested by this picture.

Sound

Silence

Movement

Stillness

Light

Dark



**Write a description
of a café scene as
suggested by this
picture.**

Sound	Silence
Movement	Stillness
Light	Dark



Write a description of a moonlit lake as suggested by this picture.

<p>Sound</p>	<p>Silence</p>
<p>Movement</p>	<p>Stillness</p>
<p>Light</p>	<p>Dark</p>

You've now seen a 'plan' using **the six elements of dramatic imagination** model, and how I've turned it into a descriptive piece of writing.

You should have planned **eight** descriptions of your own now.

Pick some of them and write them up!

You should aim to write for 35 or 40 minutes continuously. This would leave you some time in the exam for proper planning.

Things the examiner will be looking to see:

- Accurate and varied punctuation (! ? : ; , . -)
- Ambitious vocabulary with accurate spelling
- Accurate and varied sentence lengths
- Accurate and varied paragraph lengths
- Effective and varied use of linguistic devices
 - Simile
 - Metaphor
 - Personification
 - Repetition

So as you can see – accuracy and variety are key.

BUT – the main thing is to have stuff to actually describe.

That's where planning comes in handy!

Writing A05 + A06

A05 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.	
Upper Band 4 22-24 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is convincing and compelling throughout • Tone style and register assuredly matched to purpose, form and audience; manipulative, subtle and increasingly abstract • Extensive and ambitious vocabulary with sustained crafting of linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly structured and developed writing, incorporating a range of integrated and complex ideas • Fluently linked paragraphs with seamlessly integrated discourse markers • Varied and inventive use of structural features
Lower Band 4 19-21 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is convincing • Tone, style and register consistently match purpose, form and audience; • Extensive vocabulary with evidence of conscious crafting of linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured and developed writing with a range of engaging complex ideas • Consistently coherent use of paragraphs with integrated discourse markers • Varied and effective structural features
Upper Band 3 16-18 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is consistently clear and effective • Tone, style and register matched to purpose, form and audience • Increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and phrasing , chosen for effect with a range of appropriate linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is engaging with a range of detailed connected ideas • Coherent paragraphs with integrated discourse markers • Effective use of structural features
Lower Band 3 13-15 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is clear • Tone, style and register generally matched to purpose, form and audience • Vocabulary clearly chosen for effect and successful use of linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is engaging with a range of connected ideas • Usually coherent paragraphs with range of discourse markers • Usually effective use of structural features
Upper Band 2 10-12 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is mostly successful • Sustained attempt to match purpose, form and audience; some control of register • Conscious use of vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing variety of linked and relevant ideas • Some use of paragraphs and some use of discourse markers • Some use of structural features

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.	
Lower Band 2 7-9 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with some success • Attempts to match purpose, form and audience; attempts to control register • Begins to vary vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some linked and relevant ideas • Attempt to write in paragraphs with some discourse markers, not always appropriate • Attempts to use structural features
Upper Band 1 4-6 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple success in communication of ideas • Simple awareness of purpose, form and audience; limited control of register • Simple vocabulary; simple linguistic devices Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two relevant ideas, simply linked • Random paragraph structure • Evidence of simple structural features
Lower Band 1 1-3 marks	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates some meaning; Occasional sense of purpose, form and/or audience; Simple vocabulary Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two unlinked ideas; No paragraphs; Limited or no evidence of structural features

AO6 Technical Accuracy Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.	
Band 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, including ambitious vocabulary • Extensive and ambitious use of vocabulary
Band 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
Band 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
Band 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