Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Writing a literature essay

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The Assessment Objectives

- AO1: read, understand and respond to texts in a **critical style**, using references and quotations. AO2: analyse language, form and structure, using subject terms. AO3: show understanding of **context**.
- (AQA) AO4: spelling, punctuation and grammar, marked on the Shakespeare and modern text questions (4 marks each).
- (Edexcel and OCR) Every board uses the same four **Assessment Objectives**, but your papers are organised differently from AQA's: check your board's sections on your course page.

Planning

- Underline the key words in the question. Write a **thesis**: your main argument, in one sentence.
- Plan three or four points that move through the text, from the beginning to the end, each with a key quotation.

Writing paragraphs

- Make a point, give a short, **embedded quotation**, analyse it (zoom in on words, methods and effects), link it to **context** and the writer's purpose, and link back to the question.
- For extract questions, start with the extract, then move out to the rest of the text.
- Write about the writer's choices ('Dickens presents...', 'Shakespeare uses...'), not as if characters were real people.

Exam timing (AQA)

- Paper 1 (1 hour 45 minutes): Shakespeare, then the 19th-century novel, about 50 minutes each.

- Paper 2 (2 hours 15 minutes): the modern text, the anthology poetry and the unseen poetry, about 45 minutes each.

How to get top marks

- Start each paragraph with an idea you could argue about, not with a technique.
- Plan three moments from across the text, and know one short quotation for each.
- Use **context** to explain why the writer made a choice. If you can cut the sentence and lose nothing, it isn't helping.

Key terms

Thesis	Your main argument in answer to the question.
Assessment Objective	One of the skills the examiners reward, such as AO2.
Embedded quotation	A short quotation built into your own sentence.
Context	The time, place and ideas that shaped a text.
Writer's methods	The choices a writer makes in language, form and structure.
Critical style	Writing that analyses and evaluates, rather than retelling.
Subject terminology	Specialist words such as 'metaphor' and 'dramatic irony'.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What does AO2 assess?
2. What does AO3 assess?
3. Which AQA Literature questions carry AO4 marks? (AQA)
4. What is a thesis?
5. What is an embedded quotation?
6. What should you write about in an extract question?
7. How long is AQA Literature Paper 1? (AQA)
8. How many marks is the Shakespeare question worth, including SPaG? (AQA)

Answers

1. Analysis of language, form and structure
2. Understanding of context
3. The Shakespeare and modern text questions
4. Your main argument in answer to the question
5. A short quotation built into your own sentence
6. The extract and the whole text
7. 1 hour 45 minutes

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What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

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