

Library Helpsheet

Writing Skills

Essay/Assessment Questions

It is important to be clear about what you really have to answer for an essay question or assessment and what is expected of you before you start your research. Here's some guidance on what different questions mean:

Instruction	What you are expected to do
Criticise	Judge a piece of text like a poem, novel, story, passage, or statement – using points for and against
Describe	Give a description of a topic so that the reader understands the topic and your opinion of that topic
Discuss	Write about all aspects of the question, with different points of view
Evaluate	Balance the evidence for and against, and conclude with your opinion
Illustrate	Include a diagram or an example to answer the question
Outline	Include the main points only – what, where, when, how, why and who

Sentences

A sentence should always make complete sense and have a clear meaning. This will ensure your reader understands your ideas and what you are writing about.

Any sentence must contain at least one **verb** – a doing word e.g. walking, jumping – and at least one **subject** e.g. him, Harry or a **noun** (a thing) such as tree, car, hand.

There are 3 types of sentences:

- **Simple sentence** – which contains one subject and one verb e.g. Harry walked home (where 'Harry' is the subject and 'walked' is the verb)
- **Compound sentence** – which contains 2 or more simple sentences joined together with words such as and, or, but, e.g. Harry walked home and had his dinner
- **Complex sentence** – which is made up of 2 or more ideas, each contain a verb and linked with words such as because, as, when, which, although e.g. Harry walked home, although he was tired, because he had missed the bus.



Linked phrases

A well written essay or assessment will flow from one point/idea to the next. One technique for achieving this is to use words and phrases to link ideas.

Here are a few examples of **linking phrases and words**:

- in addition
- because
- however
- furthermore
- likewise
- but
- therefore
- although
- consequently
- meanwhile
- then
- nevertheless
- moreover
- to sum up
- as a result
- so
- for example
- in fact
- indeed
- in other words
- in conclusion

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are used to break up text and to introduce new ideas or topics. They can be long or short, contain a group of sentences, or even contain only one sentence. However, a paragraph is organised around one sentence – the **topic sentence** – containing the main idea, and other (support) sentences which relate to the idea to form a paragraph.



The **support sentences** develop the main idea in the topic sentence and tell us more about the topic. The support sentences also provide examples to support the main idea.

Each new paragraph should start on a new line with a one-line space if you are typing using a word processing package.

Punctuation



What use punctuation? Why is it important? You need to use punctuation to help your reader quickly understand your main ideas and not misunderstand what you have written.

Punctuation is the way we can break up sentences when we write to make sense of them. Depending on where punctuation is placed, the sentence can change its meaning.

e.g. I find inspiration in cooking my family and my dog. This means you find inspiration in cooking your family and a dog!

Add punctuation e.g. I find inspiration in cooking, my family, and my dog. This means you find inspiration in those 3 things – family, cooking and your dog.

Here are some of the **punctuation marks** you should use:

Punctuation name	Punctuation Mark	Use
Comma	,	To separate items in a list, to break up a long sentence where you would naturally take a breath, or when use more than one adjective
Full stop	.	To indicate the end of a sentence.
Quotation marks	“ ”	Used around direct speech in written work, or to show where a quotation has been used from another source e.g. “Hello” he said.
Apostrophes	'	To indicate a missing letter e.g. in don't where it should be do not Or to indicate belonging to someone or something e.g. Harry's coat

Vocabulary and grammar

There are times which you need to speak and write **formally** (using proper language) or **informally** (using casual language). You can write informally to a friend in a letter, email or text, but written work for school needs to use formal language. This does not mean you need to use long words just for the sake of doing. It also means you do not need to sound “posh”; just use standard, polite language.

Remember:

- Use proper words; no slang words
- Use do not (not don't); I would (not I'd) etc.
- Don't start a sentence with because, and, so, but
- Use complex sentences with linking phrases
- Don't ramble on – keep to the point



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