

Unit 9. Improving your writing



Objectives:



- To demonstrate understanding of explicit, implicit meanings and attitudes
- To analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions, using appropriate support from the text
To articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
To use register appropriate to context
- To organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- To make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar

Introduction

IGCSE First Language English examinations test your Writing skills through two different tasks. One is Directed Writing task worth 40 marks which is marked for both Reading and Writing and requires a response to two texts included in the question paper. The second task requires you to write one composition (marked for Writing only) chosen from a choice of four topics (two descriptive and two narrative titles).



1. Improving your writing

Always keep in mind the key areas that you will be assessed on for any piece of writing, whether it is a composition, a piece of directed writing or coursework.

Writing well
means that you
should be able
to:



ARTICULATE
EXPERIENCE
AND EXPRESS
WHAT IS
THOUGHT, FELT
AND IMAGINED



ORGANISE AND
STRUCTURE
IDEAS
AND OPINIONS
FOR DELIBERATE
EFFECT



USE A RANGE OF
VOCABULARY
AND SENTENCE
STRUCTURES
APPROPRIATE
TO CONTEXT



USE REGISTER
APPROPRIATE
TO CONTEXT



MAKE ACCURATE
USE OF
SPELLING, PUNC
TUATION AND
GRAMMAR.

There are two main kinds of variations:

➤ **accents**, which are simply variations in the way the language is pronounced

➤ **dialects**, which are more significant variations, each with its own words and expressions.

- It's a mistake to say that any particular dialect of a language is 'wrong' although, in practice, people compare other dialects of English to the form that has come to be known as **Standard English**.
- The term 'Standard English' is the form of English that is agreed to be generally accepted for written English, and it is the form of the language taught to students learning English.

Key terms

Accent: The way in which people in a particular country, area or social group pronounce words.

Dialect: A particular form of language peculiar to a specific region or social group.

Key terms

Standard English: The most widely accepted form of the English language , as written and spoken by educated people in both formal and informal contexts.

Idiom: A form expression that is particular to a certain person or group of people.

Exercise 1.

There are a large number of idioms used by speakers of English and these sometimes confuse people who are not first language English speakers. In the sentences that follow, the idioms have been written in italics. Re-write each sentence in Standard English to show that you have understood the idiom.

- 1 The argument about whether to add an extra ten minutes to the school day proved to be a *real hot potato*.
- 2 The detective spent a long time investigating the actions of the murder suspect but realised he was *barking up the wrong tree* once the suspect produced a watertight alibi.
- 3 'Stop *beating around the bush*,' said the Principal. 'Are you going to tell me how the window was broken or not?'
- 4 I asked all my friends to help with my geometry homework but I realised that I *was clutching at straws* as they understood it no more than I did.
- 5 My parents treated me to a very enjoyable meal for my birthday but I'm sure that it *cost them an arm and a leg*.
- 6 'There's no point *crying over spilt milk*,' said my sister. 'There's sure to be another opportunity in the future.'
- 7 After being caught out by a heavy rainstorm and spending the afternoon in my wet clothes, I was feeling very much *under the weather* when I went to bed.
- 8 'Thank you for that comment,' said the teacher. 'It's *really hit the nail on the head*.'
- 9 'Don't try to *pull the wool over my eyes*,' said my father. 'I was young once, remember.'
- 10 We had to decide whether we were in favour of a longer school day or not, but some of my friends continued *to sit on the fence*.

You should use standard English for most of the written work you produce as part of your course and for any examination. Standard English rules are:

spelling

punctuation and sentence structure

paragraphing.

How to improve your spelling



- **Look at words.** People who read a lot see words and absorb them. If you come across a word that you find difficult, pause for a moment and look at it. Look at the shape of the word. After a while you will find that you recognise the word more easily and you can automatically think of its shape.
- **Draw up a list of common words.** Some words occur more frequently in your writing than others. Draw up a list of these words and spend a few minutes each day or every other day reading the list, covering it up and practising writing the words.



- **Learn some spelling rules.** Although there are a lot of words that break rules, nevertheless you can learn rules about spelling which are helpful. Find a book on spelling and look up the rules.
- **Say words out loud rather than just staring at the paper.** It won't always mean that you spell them correctly but, if you write down what you hear, the chances are that the word will be recognisable and it might jog your memory.
- **Use dictionary to check your spelling rather than as the first step.** Don't be discouraged if you can't find the word straight away.
- **Make sure you copy out names correctly.** If you are doing a piece of directed writing and there are proper names in the stimulus materials, or if you are responding to a piece of literature, there is no excuse for getting the spelling of names of people or places wrong.



- **Remember that vocabulary is more important than spelling.** Don't let uncertainty about spelling frighten you away from using challenging and interesting vocabulary. It is better to use interesting vocabulary with the occasional spelling error than to 'dumb down' your writing, using only very simple words that you know you can spell.
- **Most importantly, remember to check what you have written.** One of the things to check is your spelling. You will probably not correct everything, but increasingly you will find that you can spot your own mistakes.



Exercise 2. Here is a collection of words that are commonly confused and misspelt. Write sentences for each group of words which make their meanings clear to a reader.

Affect/ Effect

Breath/ Breathe

Lead/ Led

Stationary/ Stationery

To/ Too/Two

Assure/ Ensure/ Insure

Emigrate/ Immigrate

Loose/ Lose

Their/ There/ They're

Whose/ Who's



4. Punctuation

The first question you should ask yourself when you are thinking about punctuation is, '*What is it for?*' Punctuation is all about make the life easier for the reader. In particular, it indicates to the reader where he/she needs to pause. There are 4 punctuation marks that indicate a pause and each indicates a different length of pause.



Key term

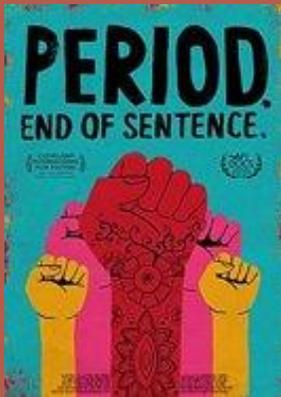
Comma: A punctuation mark (,) used to show a slight pause and so on.



- The shortest pause is the **comma**. A comma allows you to group words within a longer sentence so that the reader can see the idea developing. If you can, read what you have written out loud. You will find that you naturally pause, and each time you do you can probably use a comma.

Key term

Full stop: A punctuation mark (.) indicating the end of a sentence.



- The longest pause is a **full stop**. You put full stops at the end of sentences. They indicate that the point is complete and finished.

Key term

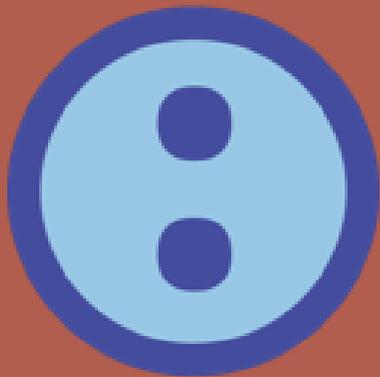
Semi-colon: A punctuation symbol (;) used to connect independent clauses closely related in meaning.



- In some ways the **semi-colon** is the most difficult of the pause marks to use. If you write a sentence in two balanced halves, and you want to keep the ideas of the two halves together rather than separating them into two sentences, use a semi-colon. The pause is a little longer than for a comma and, by using it, you will be saying to the reader 'This is one idea which has two halves'.

Key term

Colon: A punctuation mark (:) used to introduce a list and so on.



- The last of the four pause marks is the **colon**. You use a colon most frequently to introduce a list of items. It allows a substantial pause before the list but doesn't separate everything completely, as a full stop would.

Key term

Question mark: A punctuation mark (?) indicating that a question has been asked.



- A **question mark** is a specialised full stop- in fact, part of it *is* a full stop. It is used at the end of sentence that is in the form of a question. It is a signal to the reader that a question has been asked.

Key term

Exclamation mark: A punctuation mark (!) to indicate an interjection or exclamation.



- An **exclamation mark** is also used in a place of a full stop. It is used at the end of very short sentences, sometimes one-word sentences, where the writer wants to draw attention to something or pull the reader up short.

5. Using paragraphs

A **paragraph** is a collection of a sentences that go together to make a section of a piece of writing. The sentences are all about the same idea.

The paragraph normally begins with a topic sentence, which tells you what the paragraph is going to be about. The other sentences then develop the ideas.

You could say that paragraphing is a sort of punctuation. A sentence is a group of words that go together to make a sensible whole; a paragraph is a group of sentences that do the same thing.



Key term

- **Paragraph: A distinct portion of writing consisting of sentences focused on a single idea.**

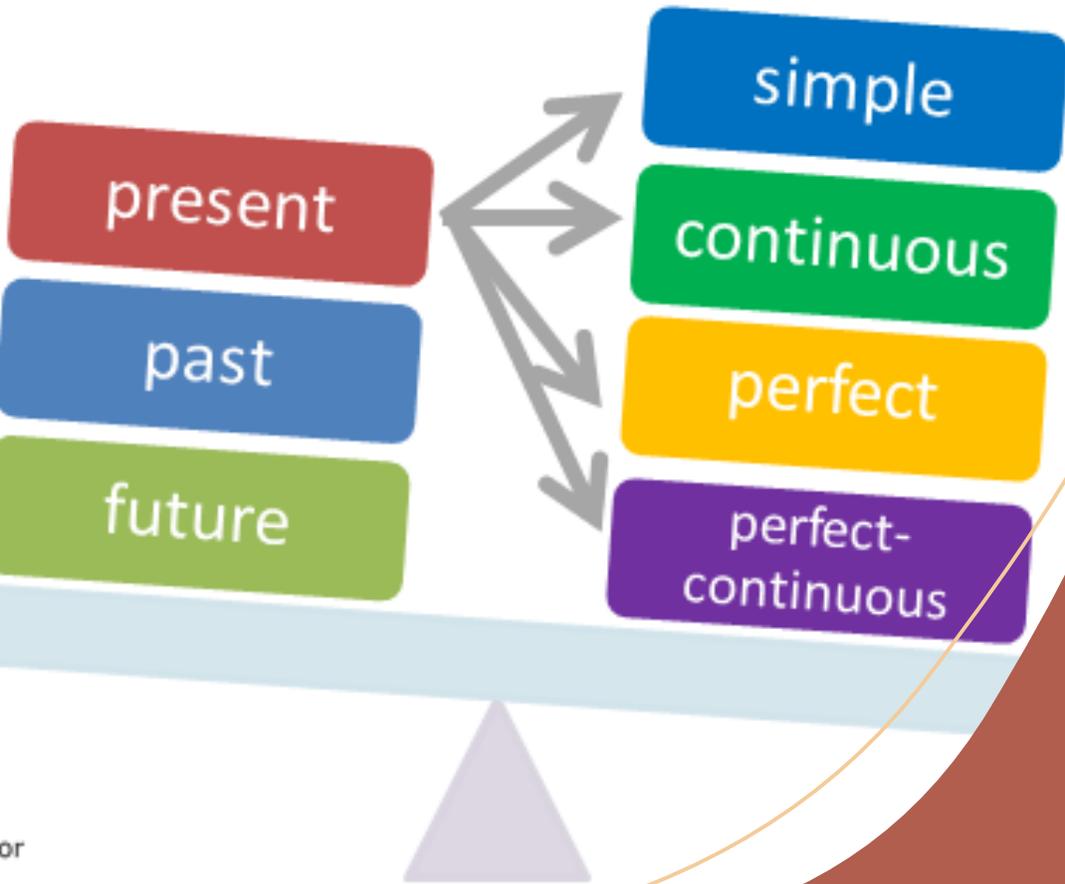
Using paragraphs

Make sure not only that you use paragraphs, but that you use them correctly. Sometimes it's easy to forget about paragraphing when you are writing quickly and concentrating on what you want to say. It's important to read through your work to make sure that:

- you have started a new paragraph often enough
- you have started the new paragraphs in sensible places.

tense

aspect



6. Tenses

Quite often students get tenses confused, swapping from **present tense** to **past tense** and back again, especially in stories.

When you are writing, think carefully about the tense you are writing in- if you are writing in the present tense, then stick to it. If you are writing in the past, then stick with the past tense.

7. Controlling and choosing language

Your ability to control and choose how you use language is also important. You can demonstrate your ability by:

- using a variety of sentence structures to produce different effects
- using a variety of vocabulary which is appropriate for what you are writing.

Last, but not least...

Make sure your handwriting can be read easily. If only one word in three is clearly legible, the reader will gain only a partial understanding of what you are trying to say. Try to see it from the reader's point of view- the person marking your work can award marks only for what they can read!

8. Handwriting



The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features several large, organic shapes in shades of purple, olive green, and teal. These shapes are filled with various patterns: some have a fine dot pattern, others have larger white dots, and one has a wavy white line pattern. There are also solid-colored areas and small, scattered black squiggly lines. The overall aesthetic is modern and energetic.

**GOOD LUCK ON
YOUR EXAM!**