

## Introduction to Paper One

### The Examination Paper

TOTAL MARKS FOR LEAVING CERT ENGLISH – 400

PAPER 1 – 200

PAPER 2 – 200

#### PAPER 1

COMPREHENSION QUESTION A – 50 marks

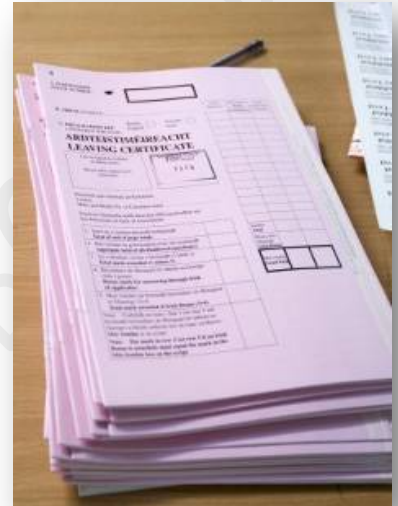
This is a reading comprehension task. You will be asked to answer **three** questions on the text of your choice. The most important thing to remember is that you must answer **Question A from one text and Question B from another**. You cannot answer Question A and B from the same text.

COMPREHENSION QUESTION B – 50 marks

This is a short writing task, based on a text.

COMPOSITION – 100

You will be required to write a composition – or essay if you prefer the term – on one of a list of seven titles.



## Timing

You have **two hours and fifty minutes** to complete your Paper 1.

Spend the first five minutes reading briefly through the paper to choose your questions.

Comprehension Question A should take you approximately forty five minutes.

The short writing section (B) should take you approximately forty five minutes.

The composition should take you approximately an hour and a quarter.

At this stage in the year, you should be timing yourself when completing any task from the past papers.

Get a watch and put it on the desk in front of you when timing yourself. Remember, you will not be able to bring a phone into the exam and the clock

in the room you are in may be difficult to see or not completely reliable.



## Language Genres

The Leaving Cert will test your ability to recognise and write in the appropriate style for the task you are set.

Remember, writing styles can overlap. Some newspaper reports may blend the languages of argument and persuasion, for example). However, it is essential to know before you start writing which style you intend to use and make sure you stick to it as far as possible.

In Comprehension Question B, the short writing task, you may be asked to write a letter, a report, a speech, a talk or a diary entry, to choose but a few examples. The examiner will expect you to use the appropriate language genre or genres.

In the composition, you will also be expected to show that you know which language genre or genres are appropriate to the task. If you take the time to study the five language genres, you will find that you are able to confidently tackle compositions which seemed too difficult in the past.

Speeches and newspaper articles appear frequently, and they can be a good choice for students who have an organised mind and strong opinions, or students who shy away from the thought of writing an imaginative piece. If you are thinking of writing a speech, talk or article, you need to brush up on the following language genres: argument, persuasion, information.

## The Language of Information

- The information should be given in as brief, clear and straightforward a way as possible.
- Give facts and figures wherever possible and avoid vague descriptions.
- Pieces written in the language of information should be as objective as possible. This means that the writer's tastes, feelings or opinions should not be revealed.
- It is not necessary to use many adjectives or adverbs as these can make your writing subjective (influenced by personal tastes, opinions or feelings).
- Personal pronouns: 'I', 'You', 'We' etc. are rarely used in informative writing.
- Anecdotes (short, personal stories) should not be used as they too make the writing subjective.
- Avoid qualifiers: 'Quite', 'Very', 'Fairly' etc. as they weaken your writing. Be specific.

The language of information is used in objective media reports, memos proposals, summaries and instructions.

## The Language of Argument

- The language of argument presents a viewpoint and tries to win the reader over by appealing to his or her logic rather than emotion.
- There is no emotionally charged language used, the tone is quite calm and logical.
- The evidence is presented, and the reader is encouraged to make up his or her own mind.
- Analogy is a useful tool here, (a comparison between two things which are otherwise dissimilar). 'Raising a child is like raising a plant. You must nurture, protect and care for both if they are to flourish.' Remember, however, that analogies cannot prove anything. Comparisons only go so far.
- Rhetorical questions (questions to which an answer is not expected or an argument phrased in the form of a question to which there is only one possible answer) are commonly used to engage the reader and to try to make him or her believe that there is a conversation taking place between the writer and the reader. Using rhetorical questions cleverly avoids giving the reader the impression that he or she is on the receiving end of a lecture. If people feel they are being lectured to, they may decide that the writer is arrogant, and the writer may lose their support.
- Facts and figures are given, but they are carefully chosen to support the point the writer is making. Using statistics can make the writer's case seem well-researched and therefore more believable.
- It is acceptable to anticipate and briefly respond to the reader's possible objections to the argument you are putting forward but be careful that you don't weaken your case by doing so. Giving both sides of the

argument equal weight is not a good idea. However, acknowledging other viewpoints can be an effective technique, as it makes the writer appear rational and fair-minded. It implies that the writer has approached this argument in a balanced way.

- Quotations can give the impression that the writer is just one of many people who feels this way and can imply that the writer's opinion is shared by independent, learned individuals. A quote can be an effective way to begin or end a piece written in the language of argument.
- Inclusive language, such as using the word 'We' is often used instead of 'I' draws the reader in and makes him or her feel on the same side as the writer.
- 'Pressure' words and phrases can be used to good effect. They make the reader feel that they, and everybody else, have always agreed with the point being made. The information now takes on the appearance of being a well-known, established fact. The reader feels that if he or she does not agree with the point, they are in the minority. Here are some examples: Clearly, plainly, undoubtedly, obviously, surely, as we all know..., everybody is fully aware that...
- Distancing phrases make the writing seem more formal and less personal: 'There are those who claim that...', 'It is often said that...' They can also make the reader feel that the views being put forward are generally accepted.
- Repetition can add emphasis and can make a piece memorable, particularly if a triadic pattern (also known as 'the rule of three') is used. This rule states that having three of something creates a memorable pattern. Advertisers are well aware of this and the rule of three often features in their slogans. You probably know this example, in use since 1959: 'A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play'.

- Antithesis can be an elegant way to contrast ideas by using parallel arrangements of words or phrases. Look at this example from John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech: 'Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.' Or think of Benjamin Franklin's famous line, 'By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.' Such lines are memorable and very effective.
- Just because the language of argument doesn't try to win the reader over with emotion doesn't mean that the writer doesn't have a strong opinion themselves; it simply means they give all the points in favour of their argument and trust the reader will be intelligent enough to weigh the evidence and come to the right conclusion.
- Reference / Allusion: The writer may refer to other sources, literary, biblical or historical, for example, to support his or her point. This can give the impression that the writer is learned and well-read and that the piece is well-researched and thought-out.

The language of argument is used in certain newspaper reports, scientific journals and legal documents.

### **The Language of Persuasion**

- The language of persuasion is similar in many ways to the language of argument and uses some of the same techniques, such as rhetorical questions and pressure words or phrases. Both outline a case for or against a particular point of view.
- The difference is that language of persuasion deliberately tries to influence the reader by appealing to his or her emotions, not reason.
- Manipulation can be a major part of the language of persuasion. It often

plays on the reader's conscience, making him or her feel guilty or pressurised into agreeing with the case being made. It can also flatter the reader into agreeing.

This is a common technique in advertising: 'L'Oreal, because you're worth it'.

- Strong, emotive language can be used to win the reader over.
- Adjectives and adverbs are used freely and they are often quite extreme.
- The writer's opinion is usually crystal clear from the opening sentence.
- Facts and figures may be given but they may be vague or exaggerated, 'The vast majority of people', 'Almost every student in the country', etc. This can add to the manipulative effect of persuasive writing because the implication is that if you don't agree, you are going against popular opinion and you don't fit in. Obviously, this is very useful in advertising. Generalisations are used without the support of a source – watch out for 'All' or 'Every'.
- Personal opinion and anecdotes are often used. A short account of an amusing or humorous incident can add human interest to the writing and can help to illustrate the writer's point. They can prevent an informative piece from becoming too dull and dry an account of whatever the subject is.

The language of persuasion is used in advertising, political speeches and some newspaper reports, particularly in tabloid newspapers.

## The Language of Narration

- This is almost certainly the first type of language most people used in their compositions when they were younger.
- In the language of narration, the writer simply tells a story.
- The story can be fact or fiction. Autobiographies are written in a narrative style: they generally present us with the events of the subject's life in chronological order.
- Particularly if the piece is written in the first person, there will be personal engagement with the topic, characters etc.
- The set novels on your course are examples of narrative language.
- The language of narration often contains an element of aesthetic language. Setting will usually be well-described in order to draw the reader in and allow him or her to visualise the scenes.
- Hooks may be used in the introduction in particular and intriguing details dropped in from time to time, raising questions the reader will want answered.
- Dialogue is a common feature of narrative writing.
- Characterisation plays an important role in most narrative writing.
- There may be dramatic or exciting moments to hold the reader's attention.
- Syntax: Long sentences can engage the readers and make them more inclined to agree with the point the writer is making. Short sentences can have a dramatic effect, particularly if used after a few long sentences. Varied sentence length can stop the piece from becoming monotonous and can keep the reader's attention.

## Aesthetic Language

- Aesthetic language is used to create images of beauty through carefully chosen words.
- Aesthetic language appeals to the senses. If a reader can imagine the sights, sounds, smells etc., they will be engaged by the writing.
- While it is more usually associated with fiction, aesthetic language can be used in non-fiction also. Good examples of aesthetic language may be found in descriptions of travel or of nature.
- It is a good idea to think of the literary terms you learnt for your poetry studies when you are considering writing in this style. Images, metaphors and similes and repetition can all be used to advantage here.
- The language can also be musically pleasing, as in a poem. This is achieved by the use of assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia.
- Just as in poetry, alliteration and assonance can be used in prose to create a sense of atmosphere. Look at the following sentence from James Joyce's *The Dead*: 'His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.'

The repeated 's' sounds add to the sense of peace and silence and the repetition of the alliterative words 'faintly' and 'falling' mimic the relentless snowfall.

- Personification can make the writing more interesting and can add drama. 'Flowers danced on the lawn.' 'The wind howled angrily around me and tugged at my clothes.'

'The operation is over. On the table, the knife lies spent, on its side, the bloody meal smear-dried upon its flanks. The knife rests.' Richard Selzer: *The Knife*

## Comprehension Question A

### LENGTH OF ANSWERS

As a general rule, five marks equals one well-developed point. A well-developed point is a paragraph in which you **make** a point, give an **example or examples** from the text to prove the point, and **explain** how your example supports your point.

### STYLE QUESTIONS

In the Leaving Cert, you are usually asked to analyse a writer's style. This is one of the most difficult questions but with a little preparation and practice, you can become quite adept at it. Such questions may be phrased in the following ways:

How does the writer convey...?

How does the writer give us a clear impression of...?

How does the writer show the atmosphere of tension and fear...?

Does the writer succeed in convincing you that...?

Do you think this piece is a good example of...?

Do you find the writer's style appealing or unappealing?

Does the writer make effective use of aesthetic language?

When you are answering these questions, think about the five language genres. Remember that there may be a mixture of several of these in any given piece. If you know the main purpose of the passage and can identify the language genres used, you will have no difficulty.

# KEY POINTS

- ✓ Attempt to answer the question immediately.
- ✓ Provide **reasons** for your opinion.
- ✓ Offer **examples** to illustrate your points.
- ✓ Use **quotations** by incorporating them into your own sentences.
- ✓ Use the **verbs** 'suggests,' 'evokes' and 'captures' when discussing the richness of language.
- ✓ Always **explain** why a word or phrase is so effective.

As a general rule...

**Factual information** informs, supports, clarifies, shows.

**Rhetorical questions** provoke, engage, interest.

**Emotional language** moves, provokes, persuades.

**Anecdotes** amuse, interest, engage.

**Descriptive language** creates, captures, suggests.

## Sample Answers

QUESTION: 2006, TEXT 1, QUESTION A

*Note: This first sample answer appeared in a paper some years ago but I don't remember which one or exactly when, which is why I cannot acknowledge the source.*

“WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM, LADY SARAH?”

*In this extract (adapted from A Border Station, by Shane Connaughton) a father and son are cutting down a tree. The father, a garda sergeant, has been given permission by Lady Sarah, a member of the landed gentry, to cut down a small tree on her lands. However, he decides to ignore her wishes and cut down a magnificent beech tree on the avenue leading to the Great House. We join the story as the tree falls...*

“She’s going,” said his father. Branches quaking, the huge tree tilted, twisted and fighting to stay upright, grabbed at a neighbouring tree but, bowing to its fate, keeled over and with a creaking goodbye-sigh rushed to the earth with a thunderous hurricane crash. The boy felt the shock waves in his feet and saw the light flood in to the space where the tree had stood. It was mad, he thought. Ridiculous. Lady Sarah was bound to find out. His father grinned.

(i): Do you consider the first paragraph to be an example of good descriptive writing? Explain your view.

**Sample Answer:**

Although it's very short, the opening paragraph here is also very powerful.

The writing effectively captures a scene in which there is action, movement, and human reaction, and it manages to move fluidly between the various aspects. Opening with a brief, dramatic piece of dialogue – 'She's going.' – immediately creates a sense of tension and expectation.

Over the next sentence, the tension is held and increased, as the slow, reluctant descent of the falling tree is captured in the evocative verbs – 'quaking' 'tilted' 'twisted' 'fighting' and 'grabbed' – which take us slowly through the various stages of the tree's almost heroic resistance. The end approaches with a couple of words evoking painful sounds – 'creaking' suggests discomfort and 'goodbye-sigh' suggests regret – and then finally arrives with a triple assault on the ear, when 'thunderous,' 'hurricane' and 'crash' all imitate the cacophony of the tree smashing against the earth.

As the noise subsides, the imagery moves from reverberating in the ear to touching the other senses, as the boy feels the 'shock waves' along the ground where he stands and catches the 'light' pouring through the gap created by the felling of the tree. The verb 'flood' is particularly effective to describe the burst of light, because it suggests the onrushing of a tidal wave in the wake of the 'shock waves' of the earthquake.

Verbs, adjectives and images combine here to suggest that something truly momentous has occurred. This is reflected when we enter the boy's mind in the next two sentences – 'mad,' in particular, suggesting something extreme,

outlandish – but it is rather checked by the final short sentence, which captures the grin of the well-satisfied father and which somehow manages to put what has been presented throughout as the felling of a colossus – the tree is personified as a giant – into a somewhat different perspective.

In its variety and intensity, the descriptive writing brilliantly recreates a dramatic little scene.

*This answer has 317 words – more than a page of handwriting in an exam answer booklet.*

**Advice:**

- ✓ Know what you're looking for when analysing a particular type of text, in this case a narrative, which creatively uses verbs, adjectives, metaphors and visual detail to capture a sequence of events.
- ✓ Summarise your points in your final paragraph.
- ✓ Write extensively, not briefly, in response.



## 2016 Comprehension Solutions

*Note: These solutions, along with all the solutions I wrote from 2009 to 2016 inclusive are available on the [educateplus.ie](http://educateplus.ie) website.*

### Text One

#### Question A

- (i) Outline, in your own words, the insights Andrew Dickson shares about Shakespeare's play *The Comedy of Errors* in the written text above. (15)

#### Note:

It is important to note that the focus here is on the written text only. Do not refer to the images in your answer.

This is a basic comprehension question, testing your knowledge of the extract. As always, you must focus on the key words in the question. In this case they are 'the insights Andrew Dickinson shares' about the play. Do not simply give a summary of Dickinson's views, but pick out those parts of it in which he shows a deep and accurate understanding of the nature of the play. You should keep an eye out for words and/or phrases which show that the writer has reflected on the play and come to a new understanding of it. This is what insights are. In this case, examples of key phrases are 'I saw something new'; 'I'd forgotten altogether', and 'It occurred to me'.

### Plan:

- Play is more than a comedy; it has a serious message about exile and separation
- Has as much relevance for modern audience as it did for Elizabethan audience
- Deals with the nature of travel

### Sample Answer:

Dickinson shares a number of insights into 'The Comedy of Errors'.

He observes that the play has long been dismissed as little more than a rather clumsy comedy but, having seen the modern version, Dickinson realises it has an important message. Beneath the humour is the serious theme of the suffering caused by exile and separation. Seeing the play set in contemporary Kabul allowed Dickinson to fully appreciate both the anxiety of a father searching for his missing sons and the difficulty of being an illegal immigrant in an unfriendly country.

The question asked you to use your own words so you should summarise and rephrase Dickinson's points about the play.

Dickinson has also come to understand fully how the play could have relevance for a contemporary audience. Although the play was written to appeal to an Elizabethan audience whose ideology and culture would be quite different from their modern day counterparts in Kabul, it evokes laughter and reflection in the same way that it did when originally performed, showing that its message and appeal is universal.

It is vital to link your quotation or reference to the question and the point you are making in relation to it.

The final insight that Dickinson shares about the 'The Comedy of Errors' is that it deals with the issue of travel and how it feels to be a stranger in a strange land. Travel, Dickinson says, sometimes exceeds expectations and sometimes fall short. The characters in the play are at times confused and make mistakes, but they discover more than their lost family members: they discover that the realities of life in another land can be outside the realms of what they could ever have imagined. Dickinson appreciates now how much the play has to say about coping and finding your way in another country and culture.

Where possible, show that your answer is well-structured by using link words and phrases between paragraphs.

- (ii) From the four posters in the above text, choose the poster that you think is most effective in advertising a production of the play, *The Comedy of Errors*. Explain your choice with reference to the written text and the content and visual appeal of the poster. (15)

**Note:**

You are only asked to talk about one poster in detail here but you may briefly refer to the others if you feel it will help your case.

You are not asked to comment on any specific production, such as the one mentioned in the text, but to reflect on what you have learned about the theme or themes of the play and to choose a poster which you feel expressed that.

Remember, the visual text includes the text of the posters, the fonts used, the colours of the text etc.

Be sure to comment on the *link* between the visual and the written text. As this is a fifteen mark question, you should aim to make three well-developed points.

**Plan:**

- Poster 2
- We see half of each face – together they make a whole. One brother aware; one unaware
- Facial expressions a mixture of anxiety and humour
- Elegant presentation: muted palette etc.

**Sample Answer:**

The poster which I feel most effectively advertises a production of the play, 'The Comedy of Errors' is Poster 2.

Your opening sentence should make your approach to the question crystal clear. The posters are numbered, so it is best to use the labelling given on the exam paper.

The main body of the poster is a drawing of two identical faces, side by side. We only see half of each face, which I feel perfectly reflects the idea of the twins searching for their other half in order to be made whole. It is also significant that the twin on the right is glancing sideways at his brother who stares ahead, seemingly oblivious. This is a clever

way of showing that one pair of brothers is searching but the other is unaware of this.

The expressions on the brothers faces are a mixture of anxiety and amusement. On the one hand their eyebrows are slightly raised and their foreheads furrowed, suggesting they are ill at ease, but on the other hand the corners of their mouths are turned up at the edge as if they are about to break into a smile. Dickinson says that there is 'farce aplenty' in the play but that there is also much that is fraught. The brothers' facial expressions subtly but effectively convey this blend of emotions.

The final reason I consider this poster the most effective advertisement of the play is that it is understated. Dickinson say that 'The Comedy of Errors' has long been dismissed as a 'creaky and mechanistic face' with 'corny sight gags' and he feels that this is selling the play short. It has, he believes, a serious message to impart about 'exile and separation'. Poster 2 is elegantly simple with the two faces set against a backdrop of beautifully decorated panels. The colours are muted and the limited palette of browns, greens, reds and yellows gives the poster an air of sophistication, as does the simple, clean font detailing only the times and places of the performances. There is no description of the play, which I think is a good way of ensuring an open-minded audience. Dickinson says he learned something new by watching the play and I believe this poster supports the idea that those who go to see 'The Comedy of Errors' should do so without any preconceived ideas in order to fully appreciate its complexities.

When discussing the visual text, you must go into detail. Comment on colours, composition, lighting or whatever else is appropriate.

Make sure to link any comments about the visual text to the written text as the question asks you to comment on both.

- (iii) The writer suggests that Shakespeare's plays have timeless and global qualities. Do you agree with this view? Support your answer with reference to the above text (written and visual) and your own experience of at least one Shakespearean drama, other than *The Comedy of Errors*. You may refer to written texts, stage productions or films.

**Note:**

This is a complex question and it is unusual in that it requires you to discuss aspects of literature that would normally be dealt with in Paper 2. Again, it is essential to read the question carefully and highlight or number each part of it. Planning is key here in order to ensure that you deal with every part of the question as there is a lot to be covered.

1. Timeless
2. Global
3. Refer to written AND visual texts
4. Refer to at least one other Shakespearean drama you know (Single Text and / or Shakespearean play you studied for the Junior Cert would be easiest)

You do not, of course, have to divide these aspects of the question into separate points in your answer. I found it easiest to deal with timeless and global together when discussing the plays and the visual texts.

### Plan:

- Plays deal with themes and aspects of human nature
- ‘The Comedy of Errors’ deals with themes of exile, separation and travel
- ‘Romeo and Juliet’ is about love and conflict – works in any setting
- ‘King Lear’ is about family breakdown, power struggles etc.
- Posters show play works in modern USA. Bollywood has no connection with Shakespearean England but play translates well

### Sample Answer:

I agree that Shakespeare’s plays have both timeless and global qualities. I believe the reason for that is that the plays explore themes and aspects of human nature that are common to people throughout the world and throughout history.

In this text, Dickinson says that ‘The Comedy of Errors’ works well when set in contemporary Kabul because it deals with relationships, separation, exile and what it really feels like to travel. These are issues with which anyone can identify or relate so **it does not matter where and when the play is set.** Indeed, Dickinson says that he actually ‘saw something quite new’ and gained a greater understanding of the themes at the heart of the play by watching the Rah-e-Sabz performance.

You don’t have to keep using the words ‘timeless’ and ‘global’. Vary your vocabulary wherever possible while showing the examiner that you are sticking to the terms of the question.

Similarly, when I studied ‘Romeo and Juliet’ for my Junior Certificate, I was struck by how perfectly a play set in Renaissance Italy translates to modern-day Los Angeles. Baz Luhrman’s film version proves that it is love and conflict that lie at the heart of the play and give it its timeless and global qualities.

'Romeo and Juliet' is about a pair 'of star-crossed lovers' struggling to be together in a hostile world and that story could be set anywhere, at any time.

'King Lear' is a play with which every Leaving Cert student is familiar, and it might be tempting to think it is firmly rooted in ancient Britain, but of course it is not. The reason for this is, again, that it is Shakespeare's exploration of human nature that makes the play so compelling. Family breakdown, power struggles, betrayal, love and lust are not particular to any place or time period.

The posters which accompany the extract from Dickinson's book support the idea of Shakespeare's plays being timeless and global. They advertise performances in Texas, California and New Hampshire, for example, and it is fair to say that these places are 'geographically and ideologically remote' from Shakespeare's England. Poster 3 even advertises a spectacular and vibrant Bollywood production of the play. That 'The Comedy of Errors' can be presented as an Indian musical extravaganza proves that Shakespeare's work has relevance for all.

The question asked you to comment on the visual texts as well as the written text but you are not required to give equal treatment to both.

## Introduction to Comprehension Question B

Question B, the short writing task, is worth **50** marks. This is the same as the marks given for the prescribed poetry section, so it is well worth taking the time to prepare for this task. It is a relatively simple exercise to prepare for and students should be aiming for high marks here. Unfortunately, many students do not take this short writing task seriously enough, and fail to get a good grade.

It is a good idea to check all the Question Bs first and choose one that suits you, and then decide which comprehension you will use for Question A.

Typically, Question B asks for a response in one of the following forms:

- Letters
- Short talks
- Reports
- Diary entries
- Reviews
- Newspaper or magazine Articles
- Interviews
- Advertisements
- Blog posts
- Competition entries
- Introduction to a book

## Points to Note

This is a short piece of writing, roughly two pages of foolscap. Keep an eye on the length: this is not a long composition so don't make your answer too long. (300 words is about a page of foolscap, assuming an average of ten words per line.) Check to see if a particular length is specified.

- Plan your answer. You should get into the habit of doing this for every section of Paper 1 and Paper 2. A plan need not be detailed or contain more than a few words per paragraph. If you write a plan, it will ensure that you do not wander off the point and will also show you at an early stage whether you have enough material to sustain an entire assignment. If this is the case, better to abandon the task at this point and try another, rather than wasting time and trying to start again after fifteen minutes of writing.
- When you are planning the short writing task, think of the following **five** steps: **I, E, E, S, C**. These letters stand for **I**ntroduction, **E**laboration, **E**xploration, **S**ummary and **C**onclusion.
- Think about the target audience for the piece. If you are writing a letter to your friend the tone can be chatty and informal whereas if you are writing a letter to a government minister, the tone must be formal.
- Which language genre are you going to use? Will you be using more than one?

- You don't have the time or the space to ramble on so make sure your points are organised before you write. It can help to ask yourself the following four questions before you begin your Question B:

1. What form should this task take?
2. What should the content be?
3. Who is my audience?
4. What register should I use?

## Letter Writing - Formal

(Sender's address)

Address Line 1,

Address Line 2,

Address Line 3.

(Recipient's address)

Address Line 1,

Address Line 2,

Address Line 3.

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

In the first paragraph you should state the purpose of the letter. Think of the tone: if you are asking for money, you will want to be persuasive. Ask

yourself who will be reading the letter and keep this person in mind throughout. Avoid using contractions in formal writing, e.g. 'don't' instead of 'do not'.

In the second paragraph, you should expand on the subject of the letter. Make sure you have made a plan and that there is a logical sequence to the paragraphs. When writing formal letters, skip a line before beginning each new paragraph.

In the third and subsequent paragraphs, you should continue to develop the theme of the letter, giving any facts that you think relevant. Four or five points should be sufficient for the Leaving Cert letter. Remember to avoid slang, exaggeration, deeply personal anecdotes and any remarks which may be racist, sexist or otherwise prejudiced. Keep the tone as formal as possible.

The final paragraph is usually quite short, thanking the person for taking the time to deal with your complaint or consider your request. If you wish them to take some action on your behalf, this is the time to ask what they intend to do. You may also tell the recipient not to hesitate to contact you if they have any further queries.

Yours faithfully, (if you have opened with Dear Sir or Madam).

Yours sincerely, (if you have used the recipient's name at the start of the letter).



### **Sample Answer from 2015 LC Exam**

Write a letter to Margaret Laurence, in response to Text 1, commenting on what you find interesting in the extract, and telling her about your home place and its impact on you.

Remember to ask yourself these four questions every time you plan your answer:

#### **5. What form should this task take?**

This is a letter. It is to a person you do not know personally, so it is a formal letter.

#### **6. What should the content be?**

Note the word 'and' in the question. You are required to do two things: tell Margaret Laurence what you found interesting about her description of her home place, AND tell her about your home place.

#### **7. Who is my audience?**

Your audience in this case is a writer who is not personally known to you but whose work you admire.

#### **8. What register should I use?**

As this is a formal letter, and as you are addressing a writer, your language should be as correct as it can be. You should read the notes on formal letter writing before you begin. Also, as the text upon which the assignment is based contains both narrative and descriptive elements, you may wish to reflect these language genres in your own writing.

The Elms,  
Glenville,  
Co. Cork.

Ms. Margaret Laurence,  
No. 8 Regent Street,  
Lakefield,  
Ontario,  
Canada.

6<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Dear Ms. Laurence,

It was with great interest that I read your wonderfully evocative description of your home place. I was particularly moved by the way you lovingly described how each season brought with it a new type of beauty. As an Irish person unaccustomed to anything more than a light dusting of snow in the coldest months, I read with fascination of your childhood adventures in this winter wonderland. Your language was positively poetic as you waxed lyrical in your description of 'the perpetual fascination of the frost feathers on windows, the ferns and flowers and eerie faces traced there during the night by unseen artists of the wind'. Your eye for detail really brought this scene, and others, to life for me.

Your descriptions of the summer were no less compelling, again because

of the beautiful, sensual images. The setting you describe is unfamiliar, but the childhood play is not. I could almost hear the song of the meadowlark and feel the scorching sun on my back as I lost myself in your wonderful recollection of you and your young friends poling the battered old boat along the little river.

Not everything in your essay was strange or exotic to me, and an aspect of your writing which I found particularly intriguing was the way in which your childhood mirrored mine. Although we grew up thousands of miles apart, I was struck by the universality of childhood. What child would not relish a day off because of heavy snow, and is there any child on the planet who would not then immediately dash out into those same conditions deemed too dangerous and inclement to allow children to travel to school?

You say that your childhood shaped you and made you the person you are today. I feel exactly the same way, and I am perfectly content with that. To an outsider, this place may seem dull and much like any other little village that has been swallowed up by suburban sprawl, but all I see are the playgrounds of my childhood. At the top of the hill is the small stream where my sisters and I – along with a gang of neighbourhood children – fished for tadpoles every summer. Across the road is the small wood where we walked our dogs, climbed trees and made innumerable camps and fortresses. And all around me are the houses of my childhood friends. Nowadays they are my companions for evenings out in town rather than summer days in the woods and fields, but their friendship brings me the same sense of security and warmth

that it always did.

I'm not sure that I would have put my thoughts about my home place into words were it not for your charming essay about your childhood, but I am grateful to you for helping me to see the value of all that I had as a small child, and still have today. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and for inspiring your readers to look around them with new and appreciative eyes.

Yours sincerely,

*Clodagh O'Sullivan*

Aoife O'Driscoll CBC Cork

## 2006 Text 2 – Comprehension Question B

Write a letter to a famous writer or celebrity or sports personality of your choice offering your services as a ghost writer for a future book. In your letter you should outline the reasons why you believe you would make a successful ghost writer for your chosen author.

*This sample answer is taken from The Irish Times.*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: right;">“Hades”,<br/>Faithleg,<br/>Co. Waterford.</p> <p>Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro,<br/>c/o Manchester United FC,<br/>Manchester.</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> June, 2006</p> <p>Dear Senor Aveiro,</p> <p>Following your double triumph in being selected as both the Senior and the Young Footballer of the Year in England, and in the wake of Jose Mourinho’s ungracious comments about your ‘difficult childhood, no education,’ could I suggest that now is the perfect time to consider publishing your own account of your life thus far, your autobiography. Not only have your dazzling football skills brought the</p> | <p>Get the <b>format</b> right. This is a letter, so I comply with the basic conventions. I provide my own address, the address of the recipient, the date, a salutation and a valediction.</p> <p>Get your <b>audience</b> set in your mind. Here I’m addressing an individual. I want something from him. So, I’m being <b>flattering</b>.</p> |
|--|--|

attention of the world to you, but the world awaits your response to Senor Mourinho's unkind remarks. I know that your manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, has stoutly defended you in public, but what could be more interesting than your own story of your childhood and teenage years?

I am a ghost writer. I write books on behalf of my clients, whose names appear on the covers and whose life stories appear within these covers. Contractual restrictions forbid me to reveal the names of previous clients, but could I assure you that my area of experience is the English Premiership and that you are already professionally acquainted with all my previous clients. Many of these will confirm this to you, privately and in the strictest confidence, if you require testimonials.

Allow me to explain the process involved in creating your autobiography and to clarify your own part in it, assuring you that only the material you want to share with the public will appear in the finished work.

For a large project such as this, I always conduct a series of interviews with the subject. These are recorded and later transcribed. Obviously, the more relaxed the interviewing is and the less it resembles an interrogation or an obligation, then the more varied and interesting and colourful the material that will emerge. Nobody wants to confide in an unsympathetic listener. This has always been my particular strength in my profession. As others will confirm, again privately and in the strictest confidence, the interviews are really informal chats, during which we get to know each other. Usually, a few hours a week for several weeks is sufficient. If I need further material, we can arrange to meet again at your convenience.

*Try and avoid being predictable. Add a little bite to your writing by selecting unusual or controversial angles. Here, I'm looking for someone in the news, someone involved in a little controversy.*

*Get the **task** right. I have to 'offer (my) services as a ghost writer,' so I need to **explain** what's involved.*

*Get the **register** right. I note that I 'should outline the reasons' why I would be a success here. In other words, I've got to sell myself a little, I've got to be **persuasive**.*

After that, up to the approval of the first draft of the completed manuscript, the work is entirely mine, although you always retain the final say at each stage and I may occasionally need to consult you to confirm a detail or two. My previous work, under the names of others, of course, has been praised as ‘full of insights,’ ‘a gripping read,’ and ‘providing the sort of intimacy every fan craves to experience.’

But, as I’ve said, it is neither my skills as a researcher nor my skills as a writer that will make this project even better than my previous work, but rather the colour and courage of your own life story.

I look forward to hearing from you, sir.

Yours sincerely,

*Jason Coodabin*

**The register has to be consistent.** *I am persuasive again.*



## Speeches and Short Talks

You may be asked to write a short talk as part of Question B or you may choose to write a longer speech as part of your composition. Whichever is the case, the most important things to remember are (a) your audience and (b) to plan what you are going to say.

Imagine you are delivering the speech. You want to capture your audience's attention and hold it. You don't want them to wonder what the speech was about or what point you were trying to make. Have a clear objective in mind and make sure that every point and every paragraph helps you to achieve that objective.

- Open with the correct form of address:  
'Ladies and Gentlemen' or 'My fellow students'. If it is a debate speech, remember to begin formally with "Madam Chairperson, fellow students, members of the opposition." The most important people are mentioned first.
- If you are giving a talk, the tone and the form of address can be less formal than in a speech. 'Good morning, everyone,' may be all you need to say.
- Be definite in your speech; you are trying to win the audience over to your way of thinking. If the speech is part of a debate, don't forget that your fellow team members will have points to make too so you will not be expected to cover every aspect of the argument.

- Don't bully your audience or make wild, unsubstantiated claims.
- Be logical and if you make a point, be prepared to back it up.
- Use factual information but beware of boring your audience with statistics. Imagine that you are making your speech on a soapbox in Hyde Park and you will only get and hold an audience if you are entertaining enough.
- Effective use of anecdotes can engage and interest your audience.
- Rhetorical questions can provoke thought.
- Use the language of argument/persuasion here.

Here is an example of an effective speech on the topic of chain mail, taken from a website. It is longer than you would be expected to write for the short writing task but remember that speeches also appear as composition assignments and the same rules apply.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><u>Break the Chain!</u></p> <p>Did you know that if you're being forced to withdraw money from ATM at gunpoint, you can inform the police by entering your pin in reverse?</p> | <p><i>Begins with a series of rhetorical questions, immediately provoking the audience to think. The</i></p> |
|---|--|

Or that Coca-cola logo is a secret message directed against a particular religion and the blasphemous message is clear if you hold the logo in front of a mirror?

I'm sure you also know that Bill Gates is sharing his fortune and you can be a beneficiary if you choose to forward a certain mail?

All of these seemingly unrelated examples appear at first glance to be appealing, interesting and informative but the biggest connection is that the source of all of these is a number of different chain-mails and each of them is untrue.

My fellow students, I come before you today to urge you to break the chain and to help put a stop to this irritating phenomenon. My main grudge is against the mails that seek to lure or threaten the recipient into forcefully continuing the chain: the ones which are meant to spread hatred, superstitions or misinformation or simply to continue the chain. Yes, I've even seen a chain saying, 'Let's see how far it can get; just add your name to the list and forward it to your friends'. Can it get any more absurd than this?

At this juncture, many of you may be wondering what harm an innocuous forwarded mail can do even if it's factually incorrect? This is what many of my friends argue. But believe me, it's more dangerous than it looks.

*questions are intriguing.*

*The topic is introduced and the speaker's views made clear.*

*Addresses students directly. Makes an appeal to their better judgement. Emotive language is used: "hatred," "absurd," "irritating" etc.*

*Other points of view are acknowledged, then refuted.*

*Anecdotal evidence*

To start with, it can make you look like an idiot. Recently, I got a mail from one of my friends asking me to forward it to ten others and then press F6 five times. The mail claimed that after this, the name of my secret admirer would appear on the screen. I couldn't believe that such nonsense could come from a seemingly intelligent student! I stopped reading his mails after that.

Many of us, who normally do not forward unsolicited mails, often give in to the emotional appeals and consider our job to the society done after forwarding such mails. I believe that most of us must have at some time received a mail regarding Red-Cross donating a cent for a cancer-struck child or for some 9/11 victim. What we don't realize is the fact that we're in fact causing more harm to the reputation and work of such organizations by forwarding unverified information about them. And then, they need to spend hundreds of man-hours refuting the contents of the mail.

Remember: often the original context of the mail is often lost in a chain and if some legal issue crops up and the mail is traced back to you, then you can be considered the author of that mail. Are you prepared to take that risk? Let us take a fictional scenario of Mr X, working for Microsoft in Dublin, who gets a hoax-mail regarding a new virus attacking Windows XP. Mr. X forwards it to some of his friends thinking, 'What's wrong with being cautious?' His friends forward it claiming, 'This comes from one of

*provided. Tone is light-hearted.*

*Use of the word "us" makes the audience feel they are on the same side as the speaker.*

*The register is consistent and the audience borne in mind throughout. Rhetorical questions and hypothetical situations hold the*

friends, who is working for Microsoft'. It won't take more than two-three steps of the chain for that to become, 'This is an official email from Microsoft'. Very soon, Microsoft is contacted for verification and when they trace the mail to their own employee, do you think it's going to be easy for Mr X to explain himself? I've read about employees losing their jobs on similar grounds.

Things can get worse for people who fall for such imaginary ideas. Think what can happen if you try the ATM trick and the tech-savvy robber gets to know that you were actually trying to inform the police.

Now that I believe I've managed to convince you against the dangers that this menace poses, here are some ideas to counter it.

The minimum we can do is not to be the source of any such message. A two minute search can reveal its falsehood. There are sites like Break-the-chain and Hoax-slayer dedicated to the cause and they will give you scientific reasons why the particular message is hoax. But don't stop at just ignoring the mail. If you're able to establish that the mail is fake, do attack the source. Reply to the sender, mention the links and request him to write a damage control mail to recipients of this mail as well as the person from whom he got the mail. I know this may create a kind of reverse-chain, but this surely is worth it.

*listeners' interest.*

*The locution "tech-savvy" is used but it is appropriate in the context of this speech.*

*Having introduced and elaborated upon the subject, the speaker now concludes by offering some possible solutions.*

Furthermore, if you really want to forward something, ask yourself if you're ready to be identified as the original source of message. Simply by taking these few simple steps, we can all do our bit against this menace.

The e-mail is one of the best innovations in the field of communication. Let's be responsible users and not abuse this wonderful communication tool. We just need to use some common sense and follow some simple steps to break the chain.

*Again, note the use of the words "we can all" and the description of these emails as a "menace."*

*Clear end to speech.*

## Blog Posts

There are no hard and fast rules for writing a blog post, but here are a few ideas for an approach to such a task in the Leaving Certificate:

General:

- A blog post is more informal than an article in a newspaper.
- Blog posts are not professionally edited so are more personal and possibly biased than an article may be.
- The main focus of a blog is to express the blogger's view on a particular topic.
- Despite the informality of the task, it is an opportunity to showcase your writing skills, so avoid being overly informal.

Opening:

- Use a title and underline it to make it stand out.
- Write the blogger's name (it should not be your real name).
- Include the date and the time of posting the blog.

Body of the blog:

- It can be helpful to make occasional reference to the fact that this is a blog post: 'Last week I posted about....'
- Most blogs are written in the first person
- Make sure you have addressed all the elements of the question
- Including underlined hyperlinks can add authenticity

Ending

- Depending on the topic, you may wish to include a call to action
- Asking the readers to sign an online petition is a good way to finish and reinforce the idea that this is a blog post rather than an article.

## 2016 Leaving Certificate

### Question B

Imagine that you are an American citizen and you have just listened to President Obama's speech above. You are opposed to the amount of public money committed by the President for space exploration and decide to mount an online campaign against the expenditure. Write a post for your blog in which you give your reasons for opposing the spending of so much public money in this way, and propose how you think these public funds could be better spent.

It can help to ask yourself the following four questions before you begin your Question B answer:

1. What **form** should this task take?

This is a blog post so it is an opinion piece similar to a feature article.

2. What should the content be?

- Oppose the spending of so much public money on the space programme and give your reasons
- Propose a better way of spending these public funds

3. Who is my **audience**?

Your audience is public: anyone who reads your blog post. Bloggers usually have followers who read their posts regularly because they are interested in or share their views so it is reasonable to assume your readers will agree with what you write.

4. What **register** should I use?

Use features of the language of argument and / or persuasion when making your case.

## Sample Answer:

### What Planet Are You On, Mr Obama?

by Mike Wright

10 a.m. June 8<sup>th</sup> 2016

Blog posts, like articles, should have a title. You may also, if you wish for added authenticity, include your name and the date of posting. Don't forget that you must not use your own name in the exam.

Underlining the title is a simple way to make it stand out and show that it is a title rather than the first line in the blog post.

Like many of you, I tuned in to CNN last night to hear President Obama's speech at the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. I hoped to hear a measured message which acknowledged both the work done to date and the budgetary and ethical restraints on future space exploration. I am not naïve enough to have hoped for a winding down of NASA's work, but I did hope for a budget freeze at worst or a budget cut at best.

Blog posts are an expression of the writer's personal opinions so it is appropriate to write in the first person throughout.

However, what I heard instead was a series of sound bites and a pledge to invest 6 billion dollars in NASA over the next five years. It's fair to say that my heart sank when I heard our country's leader - an articulate and learned man who has the ear of the nation - commit so much public funding to an extravagant and wasteful use of our resources.

President Obama argues that not furthering our exploration of space is 'ceding our future' which is ironic, to say the least. Our future is here, on this planet. That is the reality and our future is already in doubt because we have not invested anything like enough on combatting climate change, tackling poverty or even educating our children to the best of our ability so they might

be able to make their world a better place when they come of age. Imagine what \$6 billion dollars could do for our underfunded public schools or our hundreds of thousands of children who go to bed hungry every night. Of course, feeding and educating people is nothing like as glamorous or exciting as space travel, but it is a much more worthy ambition.

The president argues that NASA's work in space will 'reap untold benefits right here on Earth' but this is faulty logic. Certainly, there have been discoveries made as a result of NASA's work, but is the president saying that these discoveries would never have been made if it were not for the space programme? Why not harness the ingenuity and ability of these scientists to tackle problems right here on Earth? Last week I posted about the plight of bees and the devastating impact their extinction would have on plant life. If NASA's budget over the years had been spent on safeguarding resources on Earth rather than trying to 'harness resources on distant worlds', as the president suggests, then I have no doubt that we would not be in the perilous position we are in today.

It can be helpful to make occasional references to the fact that this is a blog post.

It's time to stop star-gazing and time to ground ourselves in reality once again. When we have put all the time, energy and public funding we can into making this world a better, fairer place for all, then we may look to the skies once more. If and when that day comes, I will throw my wholehearted support behind NASA's exploration of space.

Star-gazing has a double meaning here. It can mean observing the stars but it can also mean being absorbed in an impractical idea.

It is also time for those of us who feel strongly on this topic to have our voices heard. I would urge you all to sign the online petition below and let our government know that we believe it is time to invest in our planet and our children rather than in the unknown.

Blog posts on a topic like this should end on a call to action. You don't have to give details of the imaginary online petition but it is a nice way to finish and it reinforces the idea that this is a blog post rather than an article.



## Diary Entries

A diary is a personal account through which we see an individual's view of the world. The language is generally chatty and relaxed and would suit those students who find the structure of speeches and reports difficult. The diary entry seems to be one of the examiners' most popular tasks: it has come up five times in the last nine years.

In your diary entry, you can:

- Record events that have taken place or give details of a way of life.
- Record travels. (This is called a journal.)
- Entertain your readers.
- Give your opinions.
- Talk about your secret hopes and wishes.

Remember to choose the appropriate tone (formal or informal) and language for whichever type of diary you decide to write. If you are writing a personal diary, or one which is intended to entertain your readers (the diary is commonly used in newspapers) then the tone can be informal, chatty and relaxed.

It is usual to record events in chronological order and to reflect on each event you discuss.

You must give the date and start by saying, 'Dear Diary'.

There is no need to sign off as if you were writing a letter to a friend. Simply end when you are finished recounting and reflecting on the events of the day.

## **Sample Diary Entry (based on 2011 Paper)**

### **Plan:**

#### **1. What form should this task take?**

This is a diary entry. How it is laid out is not hugely important as there is scope within this type of task to approach it in a number of different ways. Generally, however, it is best (and easiest) to stick to a fairly conventional layout (see sample answer).

#### **2. What should the content be?**

You are Sarah, so you should reflect on events and talk about the impact they have had on you. Try to be imaginative about Sarah's reasons for leaving, but make sure to base as much as possible on the text. When talking about your meeting with the old woman, look for clues which tell you how Sarah feels about her, and consider Sarah's demeanour when she gets off the train.

#### **3. Who is my audience?**

A personal diary records the writer's thoughts and feelings and is not intended to be read by anyone else.

#### **4. What register should I use?**

The level of formality here is up to yourself. However, remember that it is difficult to be too correct, while it is easy to be too casual. As always, avoid text-speak, overuse of slang and abbreviations. Never use bad language. Don't focus on whether or not you would really be likely to write this sort of thing: focus on the fact that this is an opportunity for you to show the examiner how well you can write.

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November, 7.30 am

It is usual to give the date (and possibly the time) at the start of a diary entry.  
Note that the extract mentioned the passengers carrying 'raw November on the breath'.

Well, that's that. I'm sitting in Kent Station in the freezing cold, waiting for the Dublin train. I wonder if Mike has woken up yet and whether or not it has dawned on him that I've left. He'll work it out fast enough when he sees the note on the kitchen table. God knows, I dropped enough hints that I wanted to move on. He never picked up on them, though. Just smiled and said I sounded a bit tired and he'd make me a cup of tea, as if that would solve anything.

He thought we were so happy. It sickened me, in the end, to hear him talking to his family about 'our future'. I could never have a future with someone so unambitious. It was all well and good when we had just left school, but it became clear very early on that he'd have been content to live like that forever: him in his dead-end job and me picking up bits and pieces of work where I could.

It's up to you to decide why Sarah left, but the old woman in the extract does say that she is cold and distant.

If I tried to explain any of this to him, he'd just look puzzled and say we had it all going for us and that as long as we had each other we didn't need much else. No chance he'd ever have had the guts to leave his precious hometown and try to make it in Dublin or London. I'm well rid of him. Slipping out quietly was the best way. I couldn't have dealt with his begging and pleading. I had made my mind up to go, so what would be the point of talking about it?

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2.30 pm

Here in the hotel at last after the train journey from hell. It was fine until Mallow, but then an old woman barged into the seat opposite mine. I did my best to put her off but she was like Mike's Aunt Bridie: unstoppable once she was in full flow and wittering on about the dullest things imaginable.

That was bad enough, but then things became so strange that I'm shivering a little even thinking of it. She went oddly silent and stared at the ceiling as if she were reading something terrible that was written up there. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up, but there was nowhere to go, so I just sat there, frozen.

When she looked down again, the old hag stared right at me and started telling me all about myself. Honestly, I felt physically ill when I heard her accurately describing the way I left this morning and telling me that everything had a consequence. It was the first time I had a moment's doubt that I had done the right thing. But then I pulled myself together. After all, I'm just looking after my own interests, and that's simply good sense. I know people might judge me for it, but I can't help that. They'll see in time that I was right. I don't need them anyway.

There goes the phone again. Another text from Mike, as needy and frantic as all the others. He needs to face facts and realise it's over. I'm moving onwards and upwards and I don't need any dead weight holding me back.

There is no need to sign off at the end of a diary entry, although you can if you like. The same applies to the opening: you can write 'Dear Diary' if you wish.

## Articles

Points to note:

- Decide on the type of publication for which you are writing. This will determine the tone of your article and the type of language you use. If you are writing for a magazine, you may decide to use a more light-hearted approach than if you are writing for a serious broadsheet.
- Think about which language genre you should use. If you are writing a serious article about a controversial topic, you may choose to use the language of argument or persuasion. If you are writing a more light-hearted article on a less serious topic, you may use the language of persuasion and include several personal anecdotes (funny little stories from your own experiences.)
- Read as many articles as you can between now and the Leaving Cert. Most of the major newspapers are available online, so you don't even need to buy a paper to keep up with the news.

### **Feature Article**

A feature article is usually intended to amuse or inform. It often centres around human interest stories and can be opinionated. Personal anecdotes may be used and the tone is frequently light-hearted. Of course, the topic may be a serious one, in which case, the tone should be adjusted accordingly. Read the question carefully and study the text on which it is based. This will give you a clear idea of what is required.



### **Sample Article (based on 2013 Text 3 – Question B)**

Write an opinion piece, for inclusion in a series of newspaper articles entitled: Must-see Attractions for Tourists, in which you identify one place or public building in Ireland that, in your opinion, tourists should visit and explain your choice.

#### **Note:**

You don't have the time or the space to ramble on so make sure your points are organised before you write. It can help to ask yourself the following four questions before you begin your Question B:

#### **Plan:**

**1. What form should this task take?**

This is a feature article for a newspaper.

**2. What should the content be?**

You should name the place or public building and explain why you think tourists should visit it.

### 3. Who is my audience?

Tourists who are interested in learning about 'Must-see-Attractions'.

### 4. What register should I use?

You can be serious or humorous, but you must remember to be persuasive and to give information about the place or public building you have chosen.

#### **Sample Answer:**

In the centre of Cork city, tucked away between the busy main streets, is the English Market. If you step through one of the gateways that lead you into this warren of shops and stalls, you are stepping into history. This covered market has served the people of Cork for over four hundred years and has survived famine, floods and fire. Its name derives from the fact that it was built in a wealthy part of the city and originally served the prosperous inhabitants, many of whom were Anglo-Irish. The poorer people shopped in what was known as the 'Irish Market' a few streets away where prices were lower. Times have changed, of course, and while the English Market is still famous for its high-quality produce, it is equally well-known for its superb value.

Whatever your tastes, you will find something to delight you here. From fish to fowl, from artisan breads to organic chocolates, there is something for everyone. One word of advice, bring cash, not cards. Most of the stallholders deal in cash only and believe me, you will want to spend!

All of this shopping can be tiring, so what could be nicer than popping upstairs to the award-winning

Rhetorical questions are a feature of the language of persuasion.

Farmgate café and enjoy delicious, wholesome food on the wooden balcony above the heart of the market? There is no better place in the city to sit and watch the world pass by. Keep an eye out for some well-known faces while you are there. Darina Allen, of the world-famous Ballymaloe cookery school, is a regular visitor, as is her daughter-in-law Rachel. Best of all, of course, because this is a covered market you are safe from the vagaries of the Irish weather!

One of the most attractive aspects of the English market is that, despite its fame, it is not a tourist trap. This is a place where locals shop every day and they expect – and receive – good value, excellent quality and friendly service. There are no snooty, supercilious sales assistants here, but down-to-earth, helpful and often entertaining shopkeepers and stall owners: the real people of the Real Capital. This was never more obvious than during the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Cork a few years ago. As she and her entourage walked around the market, Prince Philip's eye was caught by some produce on one of the fish stalls. He pointed at fish cakes and asked the fishmonger what was in them. The immediate response: 'Fish, boy! What do you think?' epitomises the no-



nonsense attitude all shoppers can expect. It's safe to say that if you visit the market, you will be treated like royalty too!

## **Sample Feature Article (edited from an Irish Times article)**

With airline travel seen as less of a pleasure and more of a pain these days, air travel etiquette has taken on a whole new set of rules.

There used to be a time, not so long ago, when airline travel was a comforting and pleasurable experience. Cabin crews smiled, fluffed pillows and sliced lemons for complimentary gin and tonics. They asked how you were, thanked you for flying with them and didn't try to charge you €2.50 for a watery cup of tea. Now, air travel is a series of stressful situations that travellers have to endure, from cancelled or delayed flights to reduced in-flight food services, varying baggage allowances and cramped onboard seating. So, what are the best ways to minimise the stress of air travel and what rules of etiquette are now a given for modern flyers?

Let's start with checking in. For many the anxiety of air travel begins when entering the airport and approaching the desk to check-in. That's assuming, of course, that your airline allows you check-in at the airport. The simple rule is arrive in plenty of time. This ensures you face smaller queues and are less likely to encounter frazzled airline staff.

How you board the plane depends on whether you have been allocated a seat or not. If you have to fight for your seat, then it's best to sit or stand near the boarding gate, unless you want to end up beside the bathroom and creche corner. But, can you join the queue where you have been sitting or must you go to the back of the line? This mostly depends on the size of the passengers ahead of you.

On the plane itself, if you're travelling long haul, then the best advice is to try create your own peaceful environment. Bring an eye mask and ear plugs.

Sitting next to a passenger who is intent on continuing a conversation with you can be tricky, but there is no harm in letting them know you'd like some quiet time – "I've enjoyed our chat but I'm going to get stuck into this book now".

On shorter flights many of the complimentary snacks and drinks on offer previously have been withdrawn, so it is a good idea to bring your own onto a flight. Generally the prices within the airport itself will be cheaper than those onboard and the added bonus is that you won't have to wait until the trolley reaches you. With passengers in close proximity to you, you do need to be mindful of the type of food you are consuming – an apple may be preferable to garlic bread.

The bottom line then is that modern air travel is a minefield of potentially stressful situations. You just have to accept that air travel is not what it used to be and is, as Al Gore noted, "nature's way of making you look like your passport photo".



## Interviews

The purpose of an interview is to learn more about the person being interviewed, their background, life, work, likes, and dislikes.

### **Points to note**

- Give the name of your publication / radio station / TV show.
- State the name of the person you are interviewing and give some brief background information.
- Give each speaker a new line each time they ask or answer a question.
- Put the initials of the speaker before their question / answer each time.
- The interviewer's questions and comments should be short: one sentence should be plenty.
- The interviewee can answer in more detail, usually a short paragraph.
- The interviewer's tone is usually fairly neutral.
- The interviewee's tone is usually relaxed and chatty.

- It can be a nice touch to end the interview with some information about the book, film, concert etc. For example, you might mention where and when the concert is taking place.

### **Sample Answer: Text 1 2012 – Question B**

‘Early-in-life experience has been central to me.’

Imagine yourself fifty years from now. You have achieved great success and public recognition in your chosen career. Write the text of an interview (questions and answers) about the experiences and influences in your youth that contributed to your later success. (50)

#### **Note:**

As always, read the question carefully. Your chosen career must be one which has allowed you to achieve public recognition and great success. It might be a good idea to use your own interests or hobbies as a basis for this piece as that will make your writing more realistic. For example, do you participate in sports? Do you sing or play a musical instrument? Are you keen on science? There are many possibilities here, so try to choose something that really does matter to you and with which you have been involved since you were young. This last point is important because the question also requires you to talk – like Heaney – about the experiences and influences in your youth which contributed to your later success.

You don't have the time or the space to ramble on so make sure your points are organised before you write. It can help to ask yourself the following four questions before you begin your Question B:

## Plan:

### 1. What form should this task take?

This is an interview. The interviewer's questions should be quite short and the interviewee's answers much longer.

### 2. What should the content be?

You should have at least two questions and answers. An anecdote or two would help to bring the piece to life.

The interview with Seamus Heaney may give you some ideas for questions.

### 3. Who is my audience?

This interview will be read by anyone with an interest in your chosen career.

### 4. What register should I use?

Your approach could be serious, humorous, narrative, discursive or a mixture of all of these.

## Sample Answer:

*In this month's episode of 'Before They Were Famous', Colm Dennehy talks to recent Nobel Prize winner Rory Kennedy about his formative years.*

You can write a brief introduction if you like. It makes it easier to abbreviate the interviewer and interviewee's names later on if you have given them in full in the introduction.

**CD:** Good morning, Rory, and thank you for taking the time to come into the studio this morning. Your breakthrough with cold fusion ushered in a new era of safe and cheap energy, and has brought you incredible fame and fortune.

However, we're not here today to talk about the discovery; we're here to talk about the man behind it.

I think it's fair to say that many people are surprised to learn that you do not come from a scientific background at all. Can you tell me a little about your parents?

**RK:** My father was a full-time farmer and my mother worked part-time in the local bakery. So no, I didn't exactly come from a scientific background, but my parents placed huge emphasis on their children's education. Every evening after dinner, no matter how tired they were, they made time to check up on our homework and help us out if we were struggling with anything. They never pretended to have all the answers, but they did show us that the answers could be found if you stuck at it. I think that's what made me so tenacious as a scientist; to this day I find it almost impossible to give up on a project. I hear my father's voice in the back of my head, quoting that old chestnut about success being '99% perspiration and 1% inspiration'. It might be annoying, but it's true!

**CD:** You went to a small, local secondary school, and you have been quoted before as saying that the facilities there were fairly basic. Did that make your study of science subjects more difficult?

**RK:** Not really. Don't get me wrong: we'd have loved a brand-new lab with all the bells and whistles, but we had an exceptionally dedicated science teacher who was a genius at making do and who encouraged all the pupils in his class to take science out of the realm of books and exams and

Don't fall into the trap of saying 'my friends and I' here. Break it up: 'he helped my friends and he helped me'. 'He helped my friends and me'.

into the real world. He helped my friends and me with our entry for the Young Scientist competition – we came up with a way to harness the energy generated by the breakdown of material in compost heaps - and winning first prize for our invention gave me huge confidence and made me believe I had what it took to make a future for myself in scientific research.

**CD:** When and why did you decide to make the production of low-cost, safe energy your goal?

**RK:** Growing up on a farm and being part of a rural community meant that I saw firsthand the effects of climate change. I remember with awful clarity the devastation that a series of harsh winters, late springs and wet summers wreaked on our farm. My father lost his entire herd because there was no fodder available in this country and the cost of shipping it in from overseas was beyond his means. The farm had been in the family for four generations, and I'll never forget the look of despair on my father's face when he thought he'd lose it all. He just managed to hang on and thankfully the following year was a bit better, but I resolved there and then to devote my future career to seeking out some way of lessening our reliance on climate-destroying sources of energy. Happily, I was successful and the rest is history.

**CD:** It certainly is, and there is no doubt that you will go down in history! Thank you again for coming in to talk to us this morning. It's been fascinating.



## Competition Entries

### 2016 Leaving Certificate

Your Transition Year class has decided to enter a film-making competition. Entries must be based on an extract from a novel and portray aspects of contemporary Irish life. Your class's entry is based on the above extract from Sara Baume's novel, *spill simmer falter wither*. Write the text for your class's competition entry in which you identify the elements in the above extract that you think make it suitable for filming and outline the aspects of contemporary Irish life the passage portrays that you would like to capture in your film.

#### Note:

It can help to ask yourself the following four questions before you begin your Question B answer:

1. What **form** should this task take?

This is a written competition entry.

2. What should the **content** be?

- Identify the cinematic qualities in the extract
- Outline the aspects of contemporary Irish life you would like to capture in your film
- It is essential to deal with both of these aspects of the question but you do not have to give both equal treatment.

3. Who is my **audience**?

Your audience is not specified so you should assume that it is adults with some knowledge of film-making.

4. What **register** should I use?

Use features of the language of argument and / or persuasion when explaining your reasons for choosing this extract. You will also need to use aesthetic language when describing the cinematic qualities of the extract.

**Sample Answer:**

Sara Baume's writing has a cinematic quality that would make this extract from 'spill simmer falter wither' ideal for filming. Indeed, the main character describes his car journey to a 'neverending reel at a wraparound cinema,' and on reading the piece it is easy to see why he feels this way. The loveliness of the wildflowers and fruits which swell the ditches and narrow the road to a single lane is contrasted with the potholes, loose chippings and 'ten thousand bottomless ruts' which are so much a part of Irish country roads. Baume's lyrical evocation of the Irish countryside would make a film of this piece a visual feast. Her keen observation of the less attractive aspects of rural life would also be instantly recognisable to an Irish audience and would provide a realistic balance to the natural beauty.

You are free to discuss both aspects of the question – the extract's suitability for filming and the outline of contemporary Irish life you would like to capture – in one paragraph or deal with them separately. The choice is yours.

The characters of Ray and One-Eye are quirky and unusual and would undoubtedly engage an audience. The contrast between Ray's anxiety and

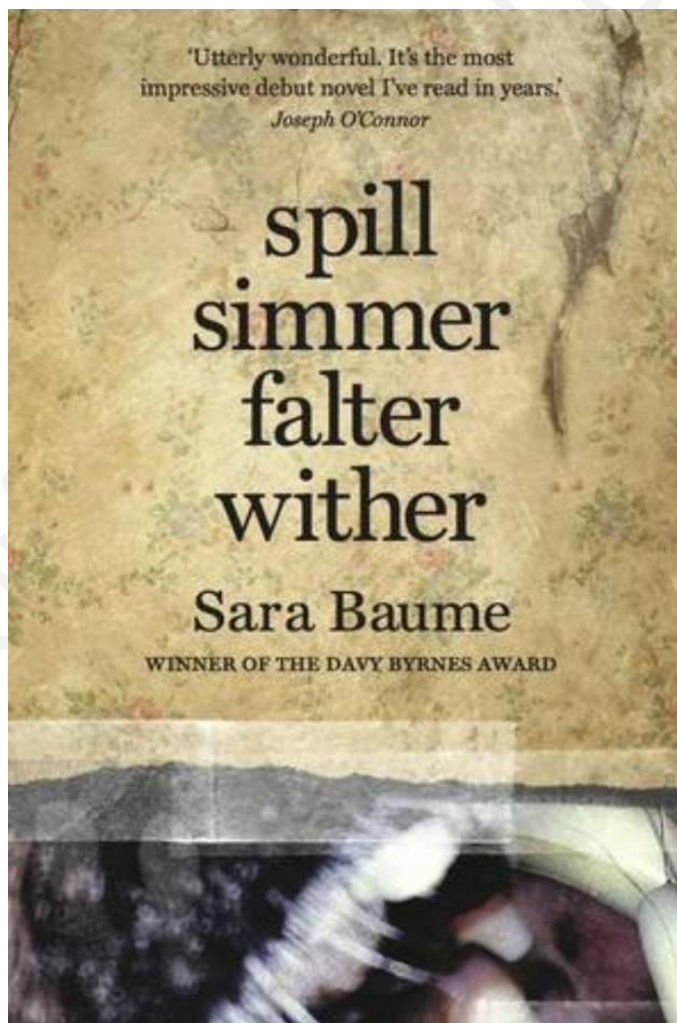
One-Eye's casual interest in the world around him creates an interesting tension and a certain amount of humour. We feel it would be most effective to have Ray address One-Eye aloud as he wonders how the dog experiences the journey. There would be poignancy and humour in this approach. In the extract One-Eye sits and gazes at the places they pass while trying valiantly to sniff the tantalising scents of the outside world. Ray is fleeing the authorities to save his dog, but by so doing he is subjecting them both to a nomadic and heartbreakingly lonely lifestyle in which the car becomes their home. However, the sadness of the pair's directionless journey would be relieved by a cut to One-Eye licking a dead newt or lizard on one of his dawn walks. Such a balance would make the film's messages more palatable to an audience than unrelenting misery.

This extract from Baume's novel also offers an interesting and thought-provoking insight into contemporary Irish life. Ray represents those who feel marginalised and vulnerable in our community, and this is expressed perfectly by the description of the 'countless closed door behind which are countless uncaring strangers'. A short film chronicling Ray's feelings of isolation and loneliness would be an excellent way to gently remind viewers that our society is not as inclusive or caring as we might wish and that it is perhaps time to focus on core values of compassion and understanding rather than focusing on the state of our economy.

The final aspect of modern Irish life that we would like to highlight in our film is the shallowness and temporary nature of wealth. Celtic Tiger Ireland was not an attractive place, marred as it was by greed and a desire to flaunt money that was borrowed at high interest to create an illusion of success. Ray describes the 'unfinished palace' at the end of an 'extensive driveway' and we

feel that no commentary on this would be needed. We would have the camera zoom slowly from the electronic gate past the mud that should have been a garden and linger for a moment on the unpainted façade and the empty windows. We believe that this rather sobering image would remind viewers that a headlong rush towards recovery should be tempered by the lessons learned from the past.

All of us in Ashgrove College would like to thank the judges in advance for considering our entry and we look forward to a favourable response.



## Composition

On the day of the exam, you will have **seven** titles from which to choose.

Your choices are generally divided between

- ✓ Opinion pieces (talks, speeches, articles, discursive essays)
- ✓ Personal essays
- ✓ Story writing

Be sure you have an idea which type of essay suits you best.

The topics for opinion pieces and personal essays will *always* be based on aspects of life to which teenagers can relate: books, music, the future, uncertainty etc. Here is a brief summary of the topics covered in recent years:

- ✓ Important lessons learned in life / Significant moment in life to date / Important event in your life / Time when you achieved something important / Moment of uncertainty
- ✓ How to enjoy teenage years
- ✓ Views on music, money, happiness, music, sport, drama
- ✓ Problems of our age and how to address them
- ✓ People you admire and why you do so / Celebrity status in this day and age / Important people in your life / Someone who has inspired you / A person whose achievements you admire
- ✓ A time you felt left out or ignored
- ✓ Romance

## Writing Your Essay

Capture the reader's attention straight away. Use a hook such as a quote, an anecdote, a description or a question.

Use the first person – 'I' – in your personal essay. Give the impression that this is an intimate but interesting conversation between you and the reader.

Whenever you describe a place or an event, make sure that you have reflected on it and given your opinion. Did you learn something?

The reader must get a sense of your personality. Allow your own voice to shine through. If you feel strongly about something, say so.

Be careful not to lecture or preach to your reader. This can be an issue when you feel strongly about the topic!

Remember that you are trying to persuade the reader to see things from your point of view.

### **Sample Approach to a title:**

**'She was expected to carry on as she was.... he was always expected to take over the family business.'**

Write a personal essay on the part which other people's expectations play in our lives.

(2005 Theme: Ordinary Lives)

- ✓ Trace the development of people's expectations in your life.
- ✓ When you were a child, what was expected of you? Did that influence your behaviour or cramp your style in any way?

- ✓ As you have grown older, have you become more concerned with the expectations of a different group? For example, have you stopped worrying so much about your parents' expectations and begun to focus more on those of your peer group? Do you think that this has played an important role in your life?
- ✓ Reflect on the way that this might be true for others (move from the personal to the universal).
- ✓ End by wondering what expectations will shape your life in the future and perhaps conclude that it is time to set your own goals.

### **Opening.**

- What books have I read lately and why did I keep reading after the first paragraph?
- A good way to start your story is to pull the reader in immediately by starting with dialogue or by going straight into the action. You can always supply additional details as you go along to bring your reader up to speed if needs be, but do give him or her credit. They will read between the lines if they are engaged by your story.
- Be careful when using dialogue. It can become dull very quickly. Don't overuse it.

## Sample openings

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>6 December</p> <p>I'm trying to crucify three oranges. But I can't work out how to attach the slippery, swollen fruit to the wooden cross without impaling them, which would make the juice and pulp spurt everywhere – all over my carefully chosen skirt and on to the stone courtyard, where it would lie in sticky trails and be tracked into the house by my guests.</p> <p>The thing is, I've never decorated a rooftop cross before. It wouldn't have occurred to me to do so now if Foti hadn't told me, just a few days ago, that in Greece....</p> <p>From <i>North of Ithaka</i> by Eleni Gage.</p> | <p><i>This opening captures our attention immediately because the image is such a bizarre one. We want to know <u>why</u> the author is doing this.</i></p> |
| <p>Captain Everard Gault wounded the boy in the right shoulder on the night of June the twenty-first, nineteen twenty one. Aiming above the trespassers' heads in the darkness, he fired the single shot from an upstairs window and then watched the three figures scuttling off, the wounded one assisted by his companions.</p> <p>They had come to fire the house, their visit expected because they had been before. On that occasion....</p> <p>From <i>The Story of Lucy Gault</i> by William Trevor.</p>  | <p><i>This opening cleverly tells us the <u>setting</u> and introduces a character while at the same time bringing us straight into the action.</i></p>     |

Imagine if the openings above had been written differently. Would the first one have been better if it had begun like this?

‘I had just moved in to a new house in Greece and a local friend of mine, Foti, told me about a most unusual tradition. Apparently it is the custom in Greece for anyone who builds a new house to decorate the roof with a cross. Oranges and small bags of money should be hung on the cross. The builders climb up onto the roof and take the money and the fruit as a little bonus. When this is done, it brings peace and good luck to the householder. So, I decided I should adopt this odd tradition...’

Of course not. The first opening intrigues us because it raises questions we want answered. We are engaged and involved from the start.

### **Descriptive writing: ‘Show, don’t tell’.**

Think of the words of the writer Elmore Leonard here: ‘I try to leave out the parts that people skip.’ Too much description will bore your reader, but too little will make your story unconvincing. It is best, if you can, to work the descriptions of the setting into the fabric of the story rather than give them a paragraph or two of their own.

When you are describing the setting, think of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. You won't be able to use all of these, but they can be very evocative. The main thing to remember here is not to labour your point.

Read the example below, which incorporates many of the features of excellent writing which we have been discussing so far. It is taken from the opening lines of Tracy Chevalier's 'Girl With A Pearl Earring'.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.</p> | <p><i>Who are 'they'?</i></p>   |
| <p>I was chopping vegetables in the kitchen when I heard voices outside the front door – a woman's, bright as polished brass, and a man's, <u>low and dark like the wood of the table I was working on.</u></p>   | <p><i>Tension is introduced by the mention of 'nervous'. Why should she be nervous?</i></p> |
| <p>They were the kind of voices we heard rarely in our house. I could hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur.</p>  | <p><i>Descriptions of the setting are woven into the action.</i></p>                        |
| <p>I was glad that earlier I had scrubbed the front step so hard.</p>   |   |
| <p><u>My mother's voice – a cooking pot, a flagon –</u> approached from the front room. They were coming to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I had been chopping into place, then set my knife on the table, wiped my hands on my apron, and pressed my lips together to smooth them.</p>                              | <p><i>The girl's social class is established by the contrast of the voices.</i></p>         |
| <p>My mother appeared in the doorway, <u>her eyes two warnings.</u> Behind her the woman had to duck her head because she was so tall, taller than the man following her.</p>   | <p><i>Mood established in a few words.</i></p>  |

## The Conclusion – General Points

Using questions and quotations in the conclusion can be a good way to bring your essay to a close. If you can find a quotation that fits your position, the conclusion will sound interesting.

- Never bring up new ideas or start new discussions in the conclusion.
- Do not let your essay finish weakly with a weak conclusion section. A good essay deserves a good conclusion.
- Make sure that your conclusion is consistent with the arguments in your essay. Sometimes you may get carried away and end up concluding the opposite of your thesis, especially if you do not plan well. Do not let such inconsistency happen.

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Answer the question.   | A clear, logical structure is essential.                                | Give your own analysis, not mere description.               | We want to see a fresh, original approach.                                 |
| Clear, consistent references are essential.                                    | Base your essay on extensive relevant reading and research.             | Indecisive 'it's a bit of both' essays are disappointing.   | Argue your case, with your own point of view.                              |
| Use commas properly. Learn how to deploy semi-colons.                          | We want to see evidence of independent thought.                         | Try to avoid formulas, clichés, and the obvious approaches. | Have a clear, relevant introduction and conclusion.                        |
| It's important to know the difference between "it's" and its alter ego, "its". | Don't allude to anything you've read without giving a reference for it. | Avoid a purely 'journalistic' style, in academic essays.    | Don't waffle. It's not cunning, it just suggests you've got little to say. |
| Illustrate your points with up-to-date examples.                               | Construct your sentences carefully.                                     | Use the internet – but with care and discrimination.        | Don't fill an essay with irrelevant historical detail.                     |
| Use electronic resources to find material (see library website).               | Check your spelling and punctuation. Seriously.                         | Ensure your essay is the required length.                   | Bring the subject to <i>life!</i>  |

## The Personal Essay

Whatever approach you take to the personal essay, it is essential to keep the word 'personal' in mind throughout. Your experiences and **your reflections on** them distinguish you from the rest of your classmates. Use this to your advantage; draw the reader in and make him or her care about you.

THE NARRATIVE TREATMENT: In this approach, you use a story from your own life to illustrate the given topic. This can be quite a simple treatment, which will get you a C grade at best, or a more complex one in which you use the narrative shape to show the impact this event or series of events had on you. It would be expected at Higher Level that you could look back at various life-changing moments in your life and explain their significance.

THE DISCURSIVE TREATMENT: This is a more sophisticated treatment of the personal essay than the purely narrative treatment. In this approach, you examine your feelings about a particular topic, friendship or families, for example and use personal experiences to support the viewpoint you are presenting. You might decide to open with an anecdote, perhaps leaving it unfinished, and return to it in your conclusion. The examiner will be looking for a mature, thoughtful, consistent treatment of the given theme. Quotes can be a good way to open your essay.

THE LIGHTER DISCUSSION: The tone is usually lighter. You may include personal anecdotes, as in the discursive personal essay, but you can also take a more wide-ranging approach – the illustrations don't all have to be from your life.

## Sample Personal Essay

FRANK McNALLY in The Irish Times

Not the least traumatic aspect of the cold spell is the bit, last thing every night, where I have to put the cat out. This is always a difficult moment for both of us. The cat will invariably be asleep – or pretending to be – by then: curled up in a foetal position on whatever piece of soft furnishing she can find close to a radiator.

So first I have to wake her. And then, since it might be too much of a shock to eject her straight away, I have to make small talk for a minute or two, subtly introducing the subject. After that, the blow is further softened with a saucer of milk and some supper. Finally, I usher her towards the back door – a gentle prod with my foot is sometimes required here – where, inevitably, she will pause to survey the bleak scenario.

As the door closes behind her, her tail will always linger until the last possible moment before it would be truncated. And once outside, she will sit for a further moment, staring at the foot-deep snow with apparent incredulity. Then – this is the bit I really hate – she will look back at me through the glass, her plaintive eyes suddenly somehow reminiscent of the little matchstick girl in the sad fairy tale.

Perhaps she will also miaow weakly, as if inquiring whether, for this night only, there's any chance of a reprieve. And not until I turn off all the lights will she at last surrender to her fate. Then she will tiptoe through the snow to her night quarters, an abandoned children's play-hut. Where, incidentally, she has

a nice, comfortable bean-bag to sleep on. And where, minutes earlier, I will also have placed a hot water bottle to warm her bed.

I can't recall when it was, exactly, that I turned into such a sap. I don't even like cats. And my concern about this one is all the more misplaced because, strictly speaking, she's not ours. As I've told my kids on the many occasions they asked for one, we don't have room for a pet. And if we did have room, it would be a dog. Yet here we somehow are, in a situation where we have none of the advantages of pet ownership and all the responsibilities.

I suppose it started about 12 years ago, when the cat was still owned – nominally at least – by one of our neighbours. Despite which, she always spent large amounts of time in our house. We didn't mind much. It was a kind-of informal, community pet-sharing scheme, and it worked well. The animal could be amusing company for an hour or two. But it wasn't a serious relationship and we never had to worry about her when we went away for the weekend or on holidays.

Even then, however, the cat may have had plans for us. It was a sign of things to come when, one evening about a decade ago, she brought a mouse to the same back door through which I now put her out every night.

Peering through the glass, we realised with horror that the mouse was still alive. Indeed, the cat demonstrated this fact by pawing the unfortunate victim, to make it squirm. And even though we knew this was intended as a token of our friendship – which she would further cement by bringing the mouse in and perhaps torturing it on the rug for a while, before dispatching it in our honour – we thought better of letting her in that night.

But it was probably already too late. When her owner moved away some years afterwards and the cat – for reasons unexplained – stayed behind, new owners were required. There was no consultation process. The cat just adopted us and, by hanging around our back garden more and more, allowed that fact to sink in gradually.



Her mouse-torturing days are long behind her now (in fact, a whole family of mice could be behind her, and she wouldn't notice), but she has acquired other skills to compensate. Chief among these is an ability to stare through the back door long enough to make you feed her, or let her in, or by a process of guesswork, provide whatever else she requires.

For a year or two now, I have become as used to buying food for the cat as for the children. When we go away anywhere these days, we always make arrangements with other neighbours to mind her. And any lingering resistance on our part to the arrangement succumbed to the first cold spell last Christmas, when we also started providing her with sleeping quarters, and hot water bottles, and what not.

I'm sure the cat's bewilderment at this second Arctic spell within 12 months is genuine. But I also suspect she is using the cold weather to her advantage. When she stares at me from the doorstep these nights, I think she may be trying to plant the idea in my head that it might be better for both of us if I just fitted the door with a cat-flap.

When I do that, her triumph will be complete. And then she will know, if she doesn't know already, that human owners are not just for Christmas, they're for life.

## Writing An Article

There is no set structure for a feature article, but there are a few tips that can help you to plan your composition.

- ✓ Begin with an observation, a question, an anecdote or a mention of a recent news story.
- ✓ Comment on the broader implications of the observation, anecdote or story
- ✓ Give your analysis of the broader implications
- ✓ Provide an example or examples which support your analysis
- ✓ Consider the implications of the problem (if there is one) not being addressed
- ✓ Suggest ways in which the problem might be solved if applicable
- ✓ End with a short, powerful sentence



## Strategies for writing good introductions to discursive essays

Sometimes more than one method can be used to start your essay.

### 1. The funnel method

In this method, the first sentence is broad and general. It introduces your thesis, and each following sentence is narrower and more focused. Finally, it narrows down to your thesis.

The important thing in this approach is that your funnel should not be too large, because you never will be able to narrow down.

#### **Example:**

Animals have been used in medical research for a long time. In recent years, animal rights organisations have questioned whether it is ethical or not to use animals for the benefits of medical progress. They believe that animals are equal to humans and that they have equal rights with human beings. In my opinion, animals certainly have some rights, but humans with their more developed brains are superior to them, therefore if there is no other alternative, animals may be used in medical research.

## 2. Asking questions

Using questions to attract the attention of your readers is another useful strategy. Then, your essay proceeds to answer the questions you have posed in the introduction.

Do modern children's books shelter youngsters too much? There is a place for puppies and bunnies, for Bob the Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine, and maybe even for the Care Bears. After all, perseverance and kindness are important life lessons. But surely there's still a place for the gruesome fairytales with wicked witches and hungry wolves, as well as matter-of-fact children's books that pull no punches and don't water down life. Literarily speaking, have we gone too soft?

## 3. Using an anecdote

Using a short anecdote is another way to start your essay. If you have a relevant anecdote ready, using it in the introduction will make your essay more interesting and attract the attention of your reader.

## The Conclusion – General Points

Using questions and quotations in the conclusion can be a good way to bring your essay to a close. If you can find a quotation that fits your position, the conclusion will sound interesting. (See the end of these notes for some quotations you may find useful.)

There are other ways of ending an essay, of course. Whichever method you use, make sure that you reach a conclusion at the end of your essay.

- ✓ Never bring up new ideas or start new discussions in the conclusion.
- ✓ Do not let your essay finish weakly with a weak conclusion section. A good essay deserves a good conclusion.
- ✓ Make sure that your conclusion is consistent with the arguments in your essay.
- ✓ Sometimes you may get carried away and end up concluding the opposite of your thesis, especially if you do not plan well. Do not let such inconsistency happen.

## Sample Article 1 - Realistic Kids' Books

by Beth Carswell (adapted for the purposes of these notes)

Do modern children's books shelter youngsters too much? There is a place for puppies and bunnies, for Bob the Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine, and maybe even for the Care Bears. After all,

Rhetorical questions draw the reader in.

Persuader or pressure phrase: 'But surely' used to good effect.

perseverance and kindness are important life lessons. But surely there's still a place for the gruesome fairytales with wicked witches and hungry wolves, as well as matter-of-fact children's books that pull no punches and don't water down life. Literarily speaking, have we gone too soft?

Personal memories used to illustrate the point.

I remember greatly enjoying 'Little House in the Big Wood' as a small child. I read with interest the story about Laura Ingalls Wilder and her sister Mary inflating a pig's bladder like a balloon on slaughter day, and having a grand time playing with it. I also recall the graphic, frank descriptions of the pig being killed and drained, having its bristly whiskers scraped off, and then having its body rendered in an enormous cauldron of boiling water.



Even as a child who loved animals, I recognised there was no cruelty in this. The pig was killed quickly - for food, for fat, for life. I understood the connection between that pig and my dinner, and while it seemed a bit unfair

and sad, the passages in the book were explained frankly, and to my young mind, were simple fact.

Look at books like William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' and Barry Hines' 'A Kestrel For A Knave'. In 'Lord of the Flies', children are pitted against each other in the most horrific and violent of circumstances, and two are killed.

Broader approach to the topic mixed with examples and another rhetorical question.

And 'A Kestrel for a Knave' is basically one day in the life of a young, working-class boy whose life is so bleak, hopeless and relentless that it rises up and snuffs out the one spark of joy that accidentally flies into it, leaving him in abject misery once more. From the

savage to the wretched, both books depict very adult, advanced concepts and situations, yet both were assigned as reading for secondary school classes for decades. Were children disturbed and haunted as a result?

Another story that didn't make me bat an eyelash was 'Little Red Riding Hood'. These days, there are countless versions. The best known the Brothers Grimm version, in which a little girl is accosted in the woods by a wolf on the way to bring food to her sick grandmother. Upon learning Red's destination, the wolf races ahead, consumes Grandma in one swallow, disguises himself in her clothes, and waits for Red. When Red arrives, the wolf swallows her, as well. However, there is a happy ending (not for the wolf) when a passing woodsman chops open the wolf, releasing both Little Red and Grandma unharmed.

'Little Red Riding Hood' is hundreds and hundreds of years old. Variants of the story have been traced back as early as the 15th century. To a modern child like myself, the idea of walking alone through a forest, let alone a dark, dangerous forest teeming with wolves, was positively thrilling. More importantly, it was completely foreign and fictional.



The stories also held real value. 'Little Red Riding Hood' cautions against trusting strangers with personal information. 'The Red Shoes', a gruesome tale by Hans Christian Andersen, sees a little girl trick her adoptive mother into buying her expensive red shoes. She is punished for her vanity

when the shoes turn out to be cursed, and won't allow her to stop dancing or remove the shoes. She eventually begs an executioner to chop her feet off, and he complies. Grim, but it teaches the lesson of valuing loved ones over possessions.

Children, I believe, are brighter, more observant, and more intuitive than many adults give them credit for. Children who are loved, taught, and read to, who are encouraged to be inquisitive, understand the difference between right and wrong, between reality from make-believe. They perceive lessons and symbols. They comprehend that while two nasty old biddies being squashed flat in a story book (as in Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach) is a funny example of just desserts, death in reality is a very big deal, and permanent.

Analysis of the points raised.

Acknowledging and refuting other side of the argument.

The difference between reality and stories isn't lost on children. While I might have been on the edge of my seat (bed) while reading Little Red Riding Hood, the story neither gave me a phobia of wolves nor a mistaken belief in the regurgitation of animals unharmed. My brain, even at age five or six, knew real from pretend.

I understand the desire to protect innocence and keep a child from unpleasantness. But is leading a child to believe that all is lovely and fluffy

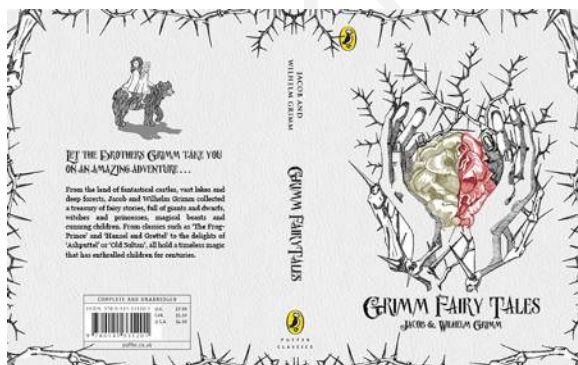
and safe and friendly fair? Does it give them an adequate picture of the world, or is it setting them up for a rude awakening when they get out on their own? It seems to me the best policy is to be honest and frank.

Suggested solution

And what about the relish of a good gruesome read? When I was little I positively delighted in the dark and macabre, loved the squishy, dark, scary places, provided I knew when I closed the book I was tucked in and safe. And I always knew when I was being condescended to, and appreciated when I wasn't. Part of the fun of childhood, as well as reading, is in using our imagination - and not just one side of it.

Persuasive and catchy final sentence. There is no need for a long, repetitive conclusion.

Here's to the children's books that pull no punches, that tell it like it is, that realise gruesome guts and growing up are part of being a kid.



## Quotes Which You Might Find Helpful for Compositions

Note: Don't overdo it. Use one or two per Comp B or extended composition. A quote can be a good way to open or close an essay. Don't feel you have to know who said each quote originally. You can just say that you saw a quote somewhere once and it stuck with you, or someone told it to you and it struck a chord.

Below are famous (and not so famous) quotes on some of the topics which may come up in the Leaving Cert.

### **Change**

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

**John F. Kennedy**

When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.

**Viktor E. Frankl**

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

**Barack Obama**

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

**Mahatma Gandhi**

I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road.

**Stephen Hawking**

There is nothing permanent except change.

**Heraclitus**

Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots.

**Victor Hugo**

When you are through changing, you are through.

**Bruce Barton**

**Education**

The aim of education is the knowledge, not of facts, but of values.

**William S. Burroughs**

Some people drink from the fountain of knowledge, others just gargle.

**Robert Anthony**

All real education is the architecture of the soul.

**William Bennett**

The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change.

**Carl Rogers**

Education is the movement from darkness to light.

**Allan Bloom**

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

**William Butler Yeats**

**Music**

Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything.

**Plato**

Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything.

**Plato**

Where words fail, music speaks.

**Hans Christian Andersen**

Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.

**Berthold Auerbach**

After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.

**Aldous Huxley**

Music is moonlight in the gloomy night of life.

**Jean Paul**

Music is the soundtrack of your life.

**Dick Clark**

If a composer could say what he had to say in words he would not bother trying to say it in music.

**Gustav Mahler**

**Courage**

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

**Winston Churchill**

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

## **Nelson Mandela**

You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honour.

## **Aristotle**

It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.

## **J. K. Rowling**

Either you decide to stay in the shallow end of the pool or you go out in the ocean.

## **Christopher Reeve**

## **Equality**

Here are the values that I stand for: honesty, equality, kindness, compassion, treating people the way you want to be treated and helping those in need. To me, those are traditional values.

## **Ellen DeGeneres**

The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal.

## **Aristotle**

If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.

## **John F. Kennedy**

All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

**George Orwell**

Until we get equality in education, we won't have an equal society.

**Sonia Sotomayor**

All the people like us are We, and everyone else is They.

**Rudyard Kipling**

Equality may perhaps be a right, but no power on earth can ever turn it into a fact.

**Honore de Balzac**

## **Dreams**

A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.

**Colin Powell**

Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die today.

**James Dean**

There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?

**Robert Kennedy**

The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up.

**Paul Valery**

The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, the world needs dreamers who do.

**Sarah Ban Breathnach**

**Freedom**

Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves.

**Abraham Lincoln**

Freedom means you are unobstructed in living your life as you choose.  
Anything less is a form of slavery.

**Wayne Dyer**

Aoife O'Driscoll CBC Cork