

Improving your GCSE coursework: English and English literature

Did you know?

- Coursework plays a significant part in the way you are assessed in GCSE: it carries 40% of the marks in English and 30% in English literature. Coursework can lift your final grade so it is worth making sure that you do as well as you can.
- The percentages of marks given for coursework are allocated as follows:
 - speaking and listening: 20% (English) and 10% (English literature)
 - reading 10%
 - writing 10%.
- You will lose marks if your coursework is not completed, so make sure that you are able to complete all your coursework on schedule. Before you finally hand in a piece, you could ask somebody who has not done a similar piece of work to read it and say if what you have done and why you have done it are clear. But remember that the work must be entirely your own and you will need to sign to confirm that.
- The criteria used to decide on your coursework marks are published by the examination boards. Ask your teacher about the criteria for the grade that you hope to achieve. Alternatively, look at the information on grade criteria on examination board websites.

Speaking and listening	
You are assessed for GCSE English in three situations: group discussion and interaction, drama and an extended presentation.	
Have you:	For example:
Understood how your teacher will assess your speaking and listening during lessons?	<p><i>While you are taking part in a debate, you could be assessed for your individual presentation or for group interaction.</i></p> <p><i>You could be assessed for drama while performing an extract from a play you are studying for English literature.</i></p>
Thought about what you do best and what you could improve in your speaking and listening?	<p><i>Ask your teacher or friends to give you feedback on how you speak in different situations, and on how well you listen. If others agree, you could make a tape recording of a group discussion and listen to it together.</i></p>
Set yourself personal targets for improvement in the three categories in which you will be assessed:	<p><i>Try to listen more carefully to what other people say in discussions, and build on their points.</i></p> <p><i>Try to speak clearly and confidently in class when defending your own point of view.</i></p> <p><i>Try to adjust your style and tone to reflect the needs of your listeners.</i></p> <p><i>Try to develop your note-making in order to become a better listener.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain/describe/narrate • explore/analyse/imagine • discuss/argue/persuade? 	

Practised different types of speaking and listening in a variety of situations to build your confidence?	<i>Take opportunities to be the person who chairs or gives feedback from group discussions in other subjects as well as in English. Take part in assemblies, school presentations, play productions and debates.</i>
Recognised that the way you speak should reflect your audience and your intentions?	<i>You will chat informally to family or friends, but you need to use standard English in a more formal way when you are addressing people you do not know well.</i>

Reading	
Examination boards have different requirements for reading coursework in English and English literature, so make sure that you know the requirements that apply to you.	
Have you:	For example:
Made sure that your assignment titles allow you to show that you have the skills that are being assessed?	<i>When writing about a novel or story, comment on the author's intentions and techniques, rather than just describing the characters. If writing about a play you should include comments on stagecraft, dramatic effect and audience response while making sure that your main focus is still on the author's text. (Don't just write a character's thoughts or diary because such titles limit you. Avoid such titles unless you add a critical commentary.)</i>
Written with your reader in mind, and remembered that your reader may be an unknown moderator?	<i>Always give the title of the assignment clearly so that it is obvious what you intended to write. It may sometimes be helpful to add a comment on what you think you have achieved, using the language of the grade criteria.</i>
Given your coursework pieces a specific focus?	<i>Rather than trying to write about the whole of a novel, or the development of an author, focus on one part of a novel, one aspect of an author's intention or some examples of the author's technique.</i>
Spent enough time on planning?	<i>Ask your teacher to comment on your plan for a piece of work at an early stage. Don't write an assignment and then ask for comments, since your teacher is not allowed to 'correct' your draft work and give it back to you for rewriting.</i>
Made sure that you have used quotations effectively?	<i>Your opinions about a text need to be grounded in evidence from that text. Wherever possible include brief quotations that support your line of argument or interpretation, but don't expect the quotations to speak for themselves - explain their significance.</i>
Found out about the context for any literary texts you are studying?	<i>Knowing when and where texts were written, particularly pre-1914 texts, can make a real difference to the way you write about them. Just make sure that your focus remains on the text itself.</i>

Talked with your teacher about making one of your reading coursework pieces oral rather than written?	<i>Some examination boards allow your teacher to assess what you say about a text for English or for English literature while you are also being assessed for your speaking and listening. Your teacher will advise you whether it is possible and advisable to do so.</i>
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Writing	
The criteria for success in writing coursework are the same as those for writing in the examination. Both require attention to purpose and audience, structure, sentence variety, vocabulary choice, accuracy and appropriate presentation.	
Have you:	For example:
Identified your own strengths as a writer, and set targets in areas where you need to improve?	<i>If you are good at analysing and commenting on books but sometimes spell technical terms incorrectly, set yourself the target of learning ten key words and pay deliberate attention to such spellings when rereading your work.</i>
Taken enough care over the planning of your written pieces?	<i>Talk with the teacher before launching into extended original writing. Although your teacher must not 'correct' and return your draft work for rewriting, teachers can comment on your plan for a piece of work.</i>
Proofread your work systematically before handing it in?	<i>Once you have finished writing, take a break and then reread what you have done three times. In the first rereading, think whether you have met the criteria by which you will be assessed; in the second rereading focus on the way you have structured the piece; and in the third rereading concentrate on the accuracy of your spelling and punctuation.</i>
Written too much?	<i>Longer work is not better and is not worth more marks. Many students write too much and then make more mistakes or lose the structure of their piece. Make your work as long as it needs to be, not as long as possible.</i>
Talked with others about your writing?	<i>If you have a writing partner, discuss your writing at the different stages of planning, composition, improvement and review.</i>
Tackled some tasks for a second time?	<i>If your first attempt at a piece of writing has not gone well, and you understand why, try again. Although you must not rewrite a piece that has been marked, you could try a piece that is different from the original, but close enough for you to apply what you have learned.</i>
Checked and re-drafted your work, if necessary?	<i>Get someone to read through your completed written work. Ask them if it all makes sense and whether you have explained yourself well. Explain to them what you have written and why. Doing this will help with your speaking and listening and you may notice some improvements that you could make to the final draft of your written work.</i>