

## Doing better in GCSE English literature

This guidance is for teachers working with students who are predicted to be grade D/C on the GCSE exams. It is intended to support teachers in helping these students to achieve a grade C. The advice offered may also be useful to other teachers and in turn to many other students.

By the time students come to revise for their GCSEs they have covered most of the syllabus in lessons. Revision is not about doing those lessons again but about reminding students of what they have covered and learned and revisiting any aspects which remain unclear in their minds.

An important element of subject revision lessons is to provide students with the opportunity to learn, practise and refine revision techniques. In this way individual students will discover for themselves those techniques which are personally most effective. In addition, you can provide focused feedback, not just on the subject material, but also on the techniques. Using lessons just to complete or review past test papers is unlikely to be an effective strategy for helping D/C students to improve. Neither is giving students unstructured lesson time 'to revise' since many of these students are not very good at revising although they may well give the impression of industriously getting on with their work.

Remember to link your planned English literature revision with any whole-school programme and with advice that students may be receiving in their other subjects.

Further information and advice on helping these students revise and prepare for their exams can be found towards the beginning of the *GCSE booster pack* in the section 'GCSE booster: guidance for teachers and school leaders on using the materials'.

### Using the subject guidance leaflets

There are two leaflets for English literature. One is for you, the teacher; the other is for students.

It is envisaged that you will use these flexibly to suit your own circumstances. The student's leaflet can be photocopied and given to targeted students. Go through the leaflet with them. Encourage them to annotate it, and explain how your subject revision programme will fit with and support the students' own revision programmes and the advice on their leaflet.

Use the teacher's leaflet to plan your revision programme, covering those topics and aspects which you have identified as most relevant to the students. Encourage the students, at intervals during the revision programme, to use the traffic light system on their leaflet to assess their confidence in each aspect and to check with you those which remain difficult.

A number of revision activities are suggested in the teacher's leaflet, but plan your revision programme to suit your own students. Using specific revision activities is less important than planning to use a range to ensure that your lessons retain variety and that you offer students opportunities to work in their preferred ways.

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To achieve a grade C in GCSE English literature your students need to complete their coursework and be able to show that they can do all of the following, not just by chance, but because they understand what is expected and are confident in what they are doing.

What students need to be able to do	What this means to them	How you can help them improve
<p><b>Assessment objective 1</b> Respond to texts critically, sensitively and in detail, selecting appropriate ways to convey their response, using textual evidence as appropriate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an individual critical voice that enables them to do more than rehearse received opinions</li> <li>• Explaining <b>why</b> authors make particular choices at word, sentence and text level, and <b>how</b> these choices affect the meaning and impact of the text</li> <li>• Having sufficient confidence and reading stamina to persevere with challenging or longer texts from a range of cultures and times</li> <li>• Using quotations and textual references to support points made</li> <li>• Knowing how to construct and write a critical essay, using appropriate terminology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use <b>shared reading</b> to model reading with the writer in mind for texts from a range of cultures and times</li> <li>• Use <b>guided reading</b> sessions to support students in interpreting texts and explaining authors' choices</li> <li>• In <b>shared writing</b>, model writing about texts, paying particular attention to planning</li> <li>• Encourage <b>independent reading</b> at home so that students can hear the voice of a text in their heads</li> <li>• Build <b>critical debate</b> into lessons so that students are expected to articulate their ideas and opinions</li> <li>• Model and give practice in incorporating brief quotations to support points</li> <li>• Avoid building reliance on marginal notes, since these can undermine the capacity for personal response to unanticipated questions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment objective 2</b> Explore how language, structure and form contribute to the meanings of texts, considering different approaches to texts and alternative interpretations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the terms <i>language, structure and form</i></li> <li>• Responding to the questions set on a text in a focused and relevant way, guided by the question's key words and terms</li> <li>• Demonstrating sustained and relevant knowledge of the texts</li> <li>• Making reference to specific text features and explaining <b>how</b> particular effects are achieved</li> <li>• Showing understanding of the text's themes and content, and relating these, not only to their own knowledge and experience, but to the views and interpretations of others (e.g. stage or film directors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Model</b> for students how to look for key words in examination questions and how to respond to these using the question to structure their answer</li> <li>• Use <b>shared reading and writing</b> sessions to model the process of planning and shaping a written answer</li> <li>• In guided <b>reading and writing sessions</b>, target students who struggle to make relevant responses to texts of a given type, giving support over interpretation and over framing a written response</li> <li>• Build students' confidence through familiarity in using appropriate terminology, and teach them to <b>explain</b> features, not just to identify them</li> <li>• Use <b>shared and guided reading</b> sessions to discuss the choices authors make, relating these choices to readers</li> <li>• Use word deletion tasks to focus students' attention on authorial choices at word level, e.g. figurative language</li> <li>• Use annotation tasks to focus students' attention on sentence structure, e.g. highlight all the short, simple sentences</li> <li>• Model during <b>shared writing</b> how to explain in a written answer the impact that specific language features can have on readers</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Assessment objective 3</b> Explore relationships and comparisons between texts, selecting and evaluating relevant material</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising the similarities and differences between texts they have studied</li> <li>• Developing a language for comparison and using connectives effectively to structure an argument</li> <li>• Using the <b>Point – Example – Explanation</b> structure as a useful vehicle for linking their judgements to textual references</li> <li>• Identifying the features of a text that exemplify points and making judicious use of brief quotations</li> <li>• Engaging with authorial intentions, and seeing a text as the result of an author's choices</li> <li>• Comparing features across texts, rather than writing everything about one text and then another, without connecting the two effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach students the <b>PEE</b> (point, example, explanation) formula, and demonstrate it in relation to comparison through <b>shared</b> writing; target students who find difficulty with it in <b>guided writing</b> sessions</li> <li>• Give students practice in selecting quotations for a given purpose</li> <li>• Teach the principle of making quotations as brief as possible, and exemplify this in starters</li> <li>• Use a <b>comparison grid</b> (see appendix 1) to structure thinking, and teach a range of connectives that help students compare evidence from different texts</li> <li>• Through <b>shared reading</b>, develop a class comparison grid of key features and teach students to look for significant features in different types of text and use annotation to mark them</li> <li>• Ensure that students have a reasonable grasp of <b>terminology</b> for key features, but discourage aimless 'feature spotting'; remind students that it is pointless identifying textual features unless this is connected to a comment on intention or impact</li> <li>• Encourage <b>critical debate</b> in class about the differences and similarities between related texts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment objective 4</b> Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating some of the consequences for an author of writing in a particular time and place</li> <li>• Knowing enough about the cultural or chronological context to comment on the attitude or intentions of the author</li> <li>• Understanding enough about how literary language and conventions have changed over time to make informed personal comments</li> <li>• Identifying the key points and linking them with textual exemplification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students to <b>annotate texts</b>, identifying key points, subsidiary points and examples about chronology and cultural context with different highlighters</li> <li>• In <b>shared reading</b>, discuss evidence of the writer's envisaged audience</li> <li>• Use <b>guided reading</b> to build the confidence of students in identifying evidence and articulating ideas</li> <li>• Read <b>related texts</b> from the same time or situation to develop a sense of literary context and tradition</li> <li>• <b>Inform students about cultural and chronological contexts</b>, but warn against swinging from literary criticism into sociological summary</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Quality of written communication</b></p> <p>Choose a form suitable to the purpose</p> <p>Write legibly and accurately in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar</p> <p>Use appropriate style and structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing clearly enough for an examiner to read</li> <li>• Structuring writing effectively in relation to the task</li> <li>• Incorporating quotation succinctly</li> <li>• Spelling literary terms correctly, e.g. <i>imagery, character, soliloquy, alliteration, author, comparison, analysis</i></li> <li>• Punctuating accurately to clarify meaning for the reader</li> <li>• Understanding the conventions of literary critical writing, but retaining a personal voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use <b>shared writing</b> to establish understanding of the conventions of critical writing</li> <li>• Emphasise and model the importance of <b>planning</b>, since exam boards comment consistently on its value and its absence from most scripts</li> <li>• Use <b>shared reading</b> to look at answers written by students, to recognise their strengths and to identify what could be done to improve them</li> <li>• Give students individual or group <b>targets for improvement</b>, based on analysis of their previous writing</li> <li>• Use <b>guided writing</b> to address shared difficulties which are not characteristic of the class as a whole</li> <li>• Have <b>writing partners</b>, so that each student is involved in another student's progress</li> <li>• Use <b>starters</b> to ensure that key terms are understood and spelt correctly</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1: Pupil grid for supporting literary comparison

This grid, adapted as appropriate, can be used for shared reading or group work and to support individual analysis.

TIME	PLACE	AUTHORIAL INTENTION	STRUCTURE & FORM	LANGUAGE CHOICES	IMAGES	SOUNDS
When was it written? Consequences of that time for readers Language of that time	Where was it written and for whom? What difference does that make?	What was the writer trying to say or do? How do we know? Point of view 'Message' What doesn't the author tell us?	PROSE Shape of the narrative Paragraph length and function Sentence length and impact Opening Ending POETRY Visual shape Link between form and content Opening Ending	Register (formal, informal) Tone Language choices Vocabulary Dialect? Standard English?	Metaphors Similes Personification Symbols	Assonance (repeated vowel sounds) Alliteration (repeated consonants) Onomatopoeia Enjambement (sense flows over line ending) Rhythm Rhyme

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In the examination, you must write about what you have read. To achieve a grade C you need to be confident in most of these aspects.

(Use the code in the second column to say how well you think you are doing: G - green, very confident; O - orange, not fully sure; and R - red, not very confident. Ask your teacher about anything you colour red.)

Can I?		What can I do to improve?
<p><b>Show that I have not just read the texts, but thought and talked about them enough to give a personal response which is honest, sensitive and uses evidence from the texts.</b></p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise <b>finding evidence to support my view</b> of a text in 5 minutes.</li> <li>• Use pattern notes to <b>practise planning answers within 5 minutes</b>, and identify the detailed evidence to back up each point I want to make.</li> <li>• Take plans that I have prepared earlier and try writing them in the time I will have in the examination.</li> <li>• <b>Think and talk with others</b> about what an author was trying to achieve.</li> <li>• Find examples of the range of techniques the author chose to use, and <b>practise explaining to others</b> the impact of them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Show that I understand:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>what</b> the question is asking;</li> <li>• the need to <b>base my answer on detailed evidence from the text</b>;</li> <li>• how to use <b>appropriate language for a critical essay</b>.</li> </ul>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with a partner to <b>practise highlighting key words</b> in exam questions (e.g. <i>Compare, Explain why</i>) so that my answer is to the point. Check that we both really know what the question is about.</li> <li>• If there are bullet points in a question, answer each one separately.</li> <li>• <b>Make sure I understand</b> (and can spell) <b>key terms</b>, such as <i>imagery, character, author, description, alliteration, metaphor, simile</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Back up what I say by giving examples</b> from the texts I have studied and <b>explaining their impact on a reader</b>.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For each text I am using <b>find and try to remember brief quotations</b> that illuminate central characters and key themes.</li> <li>• If it fits the question, use the PEE formula:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is my <b>point</b>.</li> <li>- Here is an <b>example</b> from the text.</li> <li>- Here is a comment to <b>explain</b> the example.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>If I quote, make it as short as possible</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Compare texts by <b>identifying similarities and differences and commenting on them</b>.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with a partner to explain <b>key elements</b> of two texts, and check that neither of us is just describing one text and then the other.</li> <li>• Practise using helpful <b>connectives</b> to structure my answer. <i>Whereas, On the other hand, Instead of</i> are useful links if I am contrasting two texts. <i>Similarly, Likewise, In the same way</i> are useful if the texts are saying more or less the same.</li> </ul>

Can I?		What can I do to improve?
<p><b>Make comments about the way a writer has chosen:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to write in a specific form (especially in poetry);</li> <li>to use particular words and images;</li> <li>to organise (i.e. structure) the content with readers in mind.</li> </ul>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain to a partner the <b>conventions</b> of a particular literary form such as the sonnet or the short story.</li> <li>Read a short piece of text and explain to a partner the <b>effect</b> of the author's special use of words or presentation. For example, say: <i>The many adjectives make the description richer and more detailed so the reader can imagine the scene more easily.</i> Don't just say <i>It's a good description because there are lots of adjectives.</i></li> <li>Check that I can explain how the organisation of material influences its <b>impact on readers</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Take into account <b>different approaches</b> to texts and alternative interpretations.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at <b>different interpretations</b> of a play or story and make short notes on differences and similarities I find.</li> <li>Using a short piece of text <b>explain</b> to a partner <b>why</b> readers in different times could see things differently and <b>why</b> the meanings a text has depend on the readers as well as on what is written.</li> </ul>
<p>Relate texts to their <b>social, cultural and historical contexts</b> and literary traditions.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find out about <b>when</b> an author was writing, and work out with a partner what this meant in terms of language, style and how the author addressed the readers of the time.</li> <li>Try to find out <b>where</b> a text was written and what this meant in terms of language, style, ideas and the expectations of readers.</li> <li>Explore and discuss ways in which <b>writers are influenced by other writers</b>.</li> <li>Remember: examiners are looking for <b>my personal response</b> to what I have read.</li> </ul>
<p>Write about literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>using a form suitable to the purpose;</li> <li>using appropriate style and structure;</li> <li><b>legibly and accurately</b> in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar.</li> </ul>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R  <input type="radio"/> O  <input type="radio"/> G         </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In class or as a group, <b>look at other students' answers</b> and identify the key aspects of a critical essay such as tone, terminology, how to frame an argument in response to a question and how to use quotes.</li> <li><b>Practise writing</b> effective opening and concluding paragraphs.</li> <li>Try to <b>identify my strengths and weaknesses</b> as a writer; and if I need it, seek help with things like spelling, expression or punctuation.</li> <li>Learn how to <b>spell key words</b> by finding a way of remembering (i.e. a mnemonic) that works for me.</li> </ul>