

# Higher English

## Guide to Folio Writing



### **Welcome to Higher English**

This guide will give you all the help and support you need to succeed in the folio writing section of the course.

So, what do you need to know about the Higher English Folio?

- It's worth **30 marks** – **30 %** of the overall marks for the course
- You will produce **2 pieces** of writing: one discursive/persuasive; one creative
- Each piece will demonstrate a range of techniques
- Your writing will be clear with very few mistakes in spelling and punctuation
- Each piece should be more than **650 words** but no more than **1300** words (you can go 10% over, but beyond that you will be penalised!)
- You can gain up to 15 marks for each piece of writing
- **YOU MUST USE YOUR OWN WORDS**

**What is expected at Higher? How will my folio be different from National 5?**

- Your essays will be longer – 1300 words
- Your essays will be more detailed
- Your writing style will be more fluent/sophisticated
- You will use writing techniques more effectively
- You **SHOULD NOT USE** topics you have previously covered

**Extra Support: Useful links to help you with the folio:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QakhF4J\\_ZOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QakhF4J_ZOs) – Guidance on personal writing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAaDrSMiz1I> – Higher English descriptive writing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9IHuPgA9ks&t=129s> – How to nail the folio

**Creative Writing**



### **In this section, you may choose:**

- a personal essay/reflective essay
- a piece of prose fiction (for example short story, episode from a novel)
- a poem
- a dramatic script

### **Personal/Reflective Writing**

It's a good idea for you to base your writing on your own personal experience, for the simple reason that you will have experienced something you will know better than anyone else how you felt and thought about it.

This is a view shared by many famous authors:

'the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung out tossed from cradle most protected mind...' Jack Kerouac



'Stick to your story. It is not the most important subject in history but it is one about which you are uniquely qualified to speak.' Evelyn Waugh



### **Personal/Reflective Writing: What is the examiner looking for?**

- It should give the reader a flavour of your **personality**
- It should have a **strong voice**
- It should express your **thoughts and feelings** – it should not be a series of narrated events
- It should contain a sense of **thought and reflection**
- There should be a sense of **development** running through the essay
- The topic should **engage** the reader
- You should use an appropriate **style** of writing

### Useful Checklist

- Written in the first person
- Use personal pronouns; I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours
- Include your thoughts and feelings
- Try to express your personality
- Include lots of relevant details
- Use lots of detailed description (sight, sounds, smells, textures etc)
- Use descriptive language and imagery
- Use the past tense
- Include reactions to the events
- Include the reactions of others to the events
- They may exaggerate for impact
- Reflect. Make clear how the events, experiences and people described have affected them
- Look back, show what the character has learned/regretted/remembers fondly/would do differently
- Finish in the present tense. How do they feel about it now?

As mentioned before, most writers when they are writing a personal or autobiographical item will reflect on their experiences. This is an important part of Personal Writing. Top marks can only be achieved with essays that have elements of reflection throughout.

Reflection allows the writer to look back and say or show what s/he learned from the experience.

**Task 1** - Read the following paragraphs.

1. Identify the statements which reveal reflections (the first has been started for you)
2. What has the person learned in each extract?

#### **Extract One**

And that, I'm afraid was that. All those years of friendship ended just like that. I haven't spoken to Marcia since then and deep down I will always regret not giving her the chance to tell her side of the story. But I also know that even if we did get back together, it could never be the same as before.

#### **Extract Two**

And so December 16 1981 changed my life dramatically. If I hadn't had that horrific accident, I might never have had the courage to follow my desires, never had the perseverance to continue when everyone advised me against it, and never know the true happiness of achieving an impossible dream.

**Task 2** - Take one of the extracts on the previous page and continue as if you were that character.

A. Think of the events

B. Make sure the reflective statements still emerge – that is the writer has learned something from the experience.

### **Extract Three**

Years later when I heard that Granny McEwan had died, I looked back on the prank and felt sorry that I had taken so much pleasure in an annoying poor old lady. But, of course, I was older then and realised the torture she must have gone through from boys like me who thought only of their own fun and showing off to others. As they carried her coffin from the dark tenement, I shed a silent tear and said a silent prayer asking her to forgive me.



**Read the following extract and complete the tasks which follow on the next page.**

### **Lost**

The June grass, amongst which I stood, was taller than I was, and I wept. I had never been so close to grass before. It towered above me and all around me, each blade tattooed with tiger-skins of sunlight. It was knife-edged, dark, and a wicked green, thick as a forest and alive with grasshoppers that chirped and chattered and leapt through the air like monkeys.

I was lost and didn't know where to move. A tropic heat oozed up from the ground, rank with sharp odours of roots and nettles. Snow-clouds of elder-blossom banked in the sky, showering upon me the fumes and flakes of their sweet and giddy suffocation. High overhead ran frenzied larks, screaming, as though the sky were tearing apart.

For the first time in my life, I was out of sight of humans. For the first time in my life, I was alone in a world whose behaviour I could neither predict nor fathom: a world of birds that squealed, of plants that stank, of insects that sprang about without warning.

I was lost and I did not expect to be found again. I put back my head and howled, and the sun hit me smartly on the face, like a bully.

From 'Cider with Rosie' by Laurie Lee (adapted)

### **The Senses**

When we recall an experience, we not only remember what happened, but we often recall the sights, smells, etc. connected with that experience. These descriptions often reveal the writer's attitude to the experience; whether it was a memorable, happy, sad experience etc.

**Notice how the senses are used in the extract above.**

**Task 3** – Read the extract on the previous page and pick out the words which refer to the senses and complete the table below.

Senses	Words from Extract	Writer's feelings revealed
sight		
Hearing		
smell and taste		
touch/feeling		



**Task 4– Look at the personal piece of writing by Julie Myerson below. Answer the following questions:**

1. She opens with a short account of a personal experience. What is the connection between this and the main theme of the article?
2. Read paragraph 3 again. What do you notice about the sentence lengths here?
3. Which method of relaxation did not work for her?
4. Find one sentence that sums up the most important thing the writer discovered about relaxation as a result of her hospital experience.

**Julie Meyerson –**

A few years ago, I was rushed to hospital with heart palpitations. Or, at least, my GP agreed that my heart was beating way too fast to be acceptable and sent me off to casualty to be looked at.

Of course, if your heart is beating rapidly, it's unlikely to calm down in an A & E department. By the time the doctors had surrounded me, taped wires to my chest and frowned my pulse, my heart rate had soared. After a few minutes, I was told that I wasn't about to have a heart attack (as I'd feared), that it was probably just panic, that the best thing to do was to relax and watch my heart rate drop. Easy for them to say.

So I shut my eyes. Even though I felt stressed and afraid, I knew I had to relax. I took deep breaths and tried to think of something calm and serene. I took myself to a desert-island-style beach: blue skies, palm trees, the kind of holiday location you're supposed to go to when you meditate. It didn't work. I have no relationship with such beaches. So I tried my adored Suffolk coastline line. Vast grey skies, choppy sea, a sense of infinity that always brings death to mind. Not good for my heart beat. I came back with a bump.

I tried thinking of my kids. Which made me happy and warm, yes, but not calm. In the end, I was surprised by the two things that worked.

One: I am lying pinned to a bed by a cat, which is on my stomach, purring gently. Now I swear I'm not one of those cat ladies – give me people over animals any day - but you try remaining tense when the family tabby has decided to lie on you. Your limbs get heavy, you submit. Cats settle you. They don't take no for an answer. I conjured this picture and I felt warm and still. My heartbeat began to slow.

Two: my childhood bed. Or one particular view of the sheet. Striped pale pink, lavender, yellow, blue (didn't all we 1960s children have these sheets?) slightly furred from many washes, tucked tightly around my shoulders. A child's view of these sheets brings thermometers and penicillin to mind, long days of watching the sun move around the room, of knowing you were looked after, safe. This too brought down my heartbeat.

The men in white coats came and discharged me. I was pronounced fit, if tense. So began a long struggle to relax. But I soon discovered something interesting on that bed in casualty. For me, escape is not a place but to a feeling. It's not about choice, but about no choice. The tabby cat pins you down, the childhood bed sheets are tightly tucked. You're not going anywhere.

Your heartbeat plummets and you are calm.

**Task 5 – Read the extract on the next page. Answer the following questions:**

1. How interesting was the subject matter?
2. Did the personality of the writer come through?
3. Was there any humour?
4. How was the piece of writing structured?
5. Was there any development in the writer's thoughts and feelings?
6. What features were used to good effect – wordchoice, sentence structure, imagery. Look at the box below for further examples.

**Techniques writers use to a make writing standout:**

- Imagery – similes, metaphors, personification
- Use of the senses
- Varied sentence lengths
- Ambitious vocabulary/effective word choice
- Repetition
- A variety of punctuation

## Running

When the hectic hustle and bustle of everyday life gets to me, I run. When I feel angry or exasperated, I run. When I argue with my friends and family, I run. When I want to escape any anxieties or problems, I run. Even when I feel tired or weary, I run.

The instant I pull on my familiar, tatty trainers, I can feel the tension melt away. As I warm up physically, I calm down mentally. When I step outside, I don't need to think, I switch to auto pilot and am drawn, as if by an invisible force, to the park.

I gradually become aware of my breathing. In for two, out for two, in for two, out for two. Over and over. My face is becoming increasingly hot, but as I increase the pace, the wind whips pleasantly around me, cooling me down. I am in total control. I am inexorable.

I arrive at traffic lights – fleetingly irritated by the interruption – and press the button. I can hear the cars speeding past me as I wait for the green man. In for two, out for two, in for two, out for two. The sunlight beams down on my face, the rays bursting onto my skin, releasing a galvanising energy. I am alive. I hear the soft, cushioned thud of my trainers on the grass.

I see the steep hill ahead. I bring my knees up higher as I prepare myself for the challenge that looms ahead. I can hear my heart beat harder, faster, louder. I can feel the blood pounding through my ears as I push on. My breathing rate increases and becomes noisy and laboured. Nearly there, keep going, nearly at the top.

I pause momentarily and take a deep triumphant breath. As I start the descent, my stride lengthens and the pain in my muscles subsides. My breathing and heart rate slows and, all too quickly, I'm at the bottom.

I enter the woods and the atmosphere changes. Sounds are muffled by the trees overhead and I am running in a vacuum. The ground is soft and slightly wet underfoot. All is quiet except for the sound of my breathing and the occasional snap of a twig. As the aroma of deep undergrowth fills my nostrils, I feel totally relaxed. In for two, out for two, in for two, out for two. I concentrate on my breathing as I enter deeper into the woods. Darkness enfolds me as the trees block out all sunlight, but my head is clear and bright.

The sunlight hits me like a fist in the fact as I exit the woods. I hear the soft, cushioned rhythmical thud of my trainers on the grass. I am running alongside a fast flowing stream that seems to be racing me along the bank, mocking me playfully. The sun is beating now hard on the back of my neck. I feel invigorated.

As I turn a corner, I can at last see the gate. I am back on the tarmac and the sound of my feet against the ground has once again become clear. I force myself to pick up the pace as I head home. I can see my house, just a few hundred metres away. By now, I'm sprinting full pelt and racing myself home, no longer caring about my breathing or stride pattern. All I am thinking about is my destination.

I arrive home a different person.

**Task 6** – Imagine you are an SQA marker. Use the marking grid to give the previous extract on ‘Running’ a grade.

Think about the strengths and what could be improved. Make some notes on the writing.

	15–13	12–10	9–7	6–4	3–1	0
<b>Creative: content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ strong attention to purpose and audience</li> </ul> <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ strong creative qualities</li> <li>◆ skilful command of the genre</li> <li>◆ thematic concerns which are skilfully introduced and developed</li> <li>◆ ideas/feelings/ experiences which are explored with a strong degree of mature reflection/ self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity</li> <li>◆ strong sense of the writer’s personality and individuality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ clear attention to purpose and audience</li> </ul> <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ clear creative qualities</li> <li>◆ clear grasp of the genre</li> <li>◆ thematic concerns which are clearly introduced and developed</li> <li>◆ ideas/feelings/ experiences are explored with a clear sense of reflection/ self-awareness/ involvement/ insight/sensitivity</li> <li>◆ clear sense of the writer’s personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ adequate attention to purpose and audience</li> </ul> <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ adequate creative qualities</li> <li>◆ understanding of the genre</li> <li>◆ thematic concerns which are adequately introduced</li> <li>◆ ideas/feelings/ experiences which are explored with an adequate sense of reflection and involvement</li> <li>◆ adequate sense of the writer’s personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ limited attention to purpose and audience</li> </ul> <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ limited creative qualities</li> <li>◆ limited use of conventions of genre</li> <li>◆ limited thematic concerns</li> <li>◆ limited ideas/ feelings/ experiences explored</li> <li>◆ limited sense of the writer’s personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ very little attention to purpose and audience</li> </ul> <p>As appropriate to genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ very few creative qualities</li> <li>◆ very little use of conventions of genre</li> <li>◆ very few thematic concerns</li> <li>◆ very little evidence of exploration of ideas or feelings</li> <li>◆ very little sense of the writer’s personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ no evidence of the skills required in terms of content, style and accuracy</li> </ul>
<b>Creative: style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ linguistic features of the chosen genre used skilfully to create strong impact</li> <li>◆ confident and varied expression</li> <li>◆ effective structure which enhances the purpose/meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ linguistic features of the chosen genre used to create impact</li> <li>◆ clear expression</li> <li>◆ clear structure which enhances the purpose/ meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ linguistic features of the chosen genre used adequately</li> <li>◆ adequate expression</li> <li>◆ adequate structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ limited use of features of the chosen genre</li> <li>◆ limited expression</li> <li>◆ limited use of structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ very little attempt at using language effectively</li> <li>◆ very little use of structure</li> </ul>	

## **Possible Topics for Personal/Reflective Writing**

- A moving experience (positive or negative): running a marathon, climbing a mountain, a car crash...
- Practising a particular hobby – how does it make you feel
- Caring for someone in the family
- A part-time job – what does this give you?
- Aspirations – what are your goals and how are you working towards them?
- Interests – music – band/singers/arts/concerts
- Football match
- Addiction – coffee, chocolate, fashion...
- TicTok obsession
- Influences – explore the influences that have turned you into who you are
- Balancing cultures – do you have mixed nationality? What impact does this have on you?
- Memories – looking back on family pictures, what thoughts are triggered?
- Travel – they say it ‘broadens the mind’. What have you learned on your journeys?

## **Building A Sense Of Reflection**

Remember to try to reflect and think about what you have learned from an experience. For example, if you wrote about the value of having a part-time job when you are young, these are some of the things you might reflect on:

- learn the value of money (not something you learn at school)
- responsibility, independence, earning your own money gives you a sense of freedom
- gives you the opportunity to learn life skills – prepares you for when you leave school/college/university to look for long term work
- handle the pressures of working life/finding a balance – it’s not always easy juggling commitments
- value the time you have spent with friends and family
- especially valuable when you are young but gets trickier when you move to the senior phase in school

## Planning Your Writing

If you find it difficult to put your thoughts into order, try drawing up a **paragraph plan**, or a **spider diagram**. Think about what content you would include in each paragraph, and then start to think about what techniques you could include to enhance your writing.

Here is a plan a student wrote on 'Hanging up the Apron for A grades', an essay about a difficult decision to give up a part-time job to focus on her senior phase at school.

P1 – *Background – life as a waitress in the local café – the challenges/ positive aspects of the job.*

'The hiss of the coffee machine, the clatter of cups on the plastic counter, trays being swished to and fro are all familiar sounds...'

P2 – The difficult choice ahead: whether to work in the café at the weekend or leave the job to focus on studying for exams. A tricky dilemma.

'I knew I was coming to a difficult crossroads in my life, and I wasn't sure which way to turn'

P3 – Reasons for choosing to continue working at the weekend while at school - earning cash, being able to buy clothes, go to concerts, enjoy a good social life, enjoy a sense of independence...

P4 – Reasons for giving up the job – focusing on studies, good grades, opening doors for the future...

P5- The decision: which option to choose & why

P6- The result – did it turn out to be the right decision? /any regrets? / reflections

### Checklist for Success

- Strong intro (hook) & strong conclusion
- A sense of development
- A range of sentences
- Imagery – similes, metaphors, personification
- Ambitious vocabulary
- A strong voice

## **Short Stories**

A short story is a type of prose fiction.

Prose simply means it is written in sentences and paragraphs, and is not a poem or play-script. Fiction means the story is made up, though of course you can base your story on something that has really happened.

A short story is not a cut-down novel. In a novel the author has time to develop characters and show us many events in their lives. A short story takes characters at an important point in their lives and gives us a snapshot of a significant moment.

### **Point of view**

Before writing a short story, consider the narrative perspective you are going to take. This is usually done in the first or third person.

#### **First person narrative**

If you want to tell the story from the point of view of one of the characters, you can write in the first person, using 'I'. This puts the reader inside the mind of that character, seeing things as that character sees them.

The character you choose to tell the first person narrative is important. A story about bullying, for example, will be different depending on whether you tell it from the point of view of the bully or the victim.

#### **Third person narrative**

This is where you tell the story from the point of view of someone not in the story, using 'he' and 'she' throughout. This means the story can be told from a more objective point of view.

You need to decide which point of view to take, depending on which is best for your particular story. Sometimes if a story is not working it can help to change it from third to first person narrative or vice versa.

#### **Characters**

Your characters are at the heart of the story. They must seem real and you should aim to make the audience care about them. The plot of the story should reveal something about your characters. For example, the reader should see them developing, at a crisis or a turning point in their lives.

## **Characters**

Your characters should also be consistent, doing and saying things that seem to fit their personality. Limit the number of main characters to a maximum of three.

Try not to simply tell your reader about the character, instead reveal the character to them through actions, gestures and dialogue.

## **Plot**

Something of significance must happen in a short story. It is advisable, however, to limit the number of plot events. A significant event does not have to be unusually dramatic or violent. Your characters do not have to be abducted by aliens or involved in international terrorism. If you try to make your story too exciting it can become 'over the top'. A significant event is one that changes the character. For example, something that makes them grow up, come to a realisation about something or develop. The event itself does not need to be dramatic. Conflict can arise when a third character affects the lives of two others. Examples of this could be:

- A parent and teenager come into conflict over the teenager's friend.
- Two friends come into conflict when a new friend comes on the scene.
- Parent and teenager have problems when a grandparent comes to stay.
- A new teacher causes problems between two friends.

## **Setting**

Setting is where and when your story takes place. An effective setting can make your story really come to life. You can do this using description, dialogue and details.

If you are struggling with setting, it can be easier to set the story in a place you are familiar with. Your description can therefore draw on your experience and is more likely to be realistic.