

Critical Essay Writing in the Broad General Education

Following on from the study of a text (e.g. a poem, novel, short story, play) pupils will often be asked to write a critical essay (sometimes known as a 'critical evaluation') based upon what they have read.

They will be given an essay question to respond to and will normally complete the planning process via a series of co-operative tasks in class.

A critical essay begins with an introduction, ends with a conclusion, and will normally have three or four 'main body' paragraphs in between. Each main body paragraph is made up of four distinct parts, as summarised below:

POINT (the statement you wish to make)

CONTEXT (what's happening in the part of the text where you found your quotation)

QUOTATION (words taken directly from the text)

EXPLANATION (what the quotation means and how it helps to prove the 'point' is valid)
(known as the 'PCQE' for short)

A Worked Example

The first text studied by most pupils in S1 is a novel called 'Shadow' by Michael Morpurgo. A main body paragraph from an essay about a character in the novel might look something like this:

POINT: Throughout the novel 'Shadow', Matt appears to be a kind character who goes out of his way to ease his friend Aman's troubles as best he can.

CONTEXT: We see this at the beginning of the novel when Matt urges his Grandpa to go and visit Aman at Yarl's Wood, the detention centre where Aman is being held. Matt says:

QUOTE: "You could go and see Aman instead of me, couldn't you?"

EXPLANATION: Matt cares about Aman and is worried about him feeling alone and miserable in Yarl's Wood so he tries to convince his Grandpa to go and spend time with him. This shows us that Matt is a good friend and a decent person.