**Critical Essay Guide**

It is crucial to spend time planning your answer in relation to what you know about the novel. This is where you can select information from the work you have done in class. There is no substitute for a high level of knowledge and understanding about the text. This is down to you now – if you are unsure about anything, you must ask either another pupil or your teacher.

**Step 1 – Breaking down the question**

1. You need to be able to break the question into its key words so that you can understand what you are being asked to do and how you should respond.
2. Notice there are 2 parts to the question. You are asked to **identify** something in the text (a key scene, a turning point, a character etc.). Then you are asked to **do something** (e.g. explain how the structure of the story enhances your understanding of the theme etc.)
3. You will usually be asked to ‘show how’ or to ‘refer to appropriate techniques’. This means discussing the writer’s techniques (e.g. characterisation, structure, language, setting, narration etc.)
4. Think about how the words of the question can help you write a relevant answer – what key points from what you have learned are **relevant** and will help you answer **this** question.
5. Make sure you use these key words throughout your essay to show the teacher/marker that you can stay on task.

**Step 2 – Planning the Essay**

You should always plan your critical essay with the question in mind. This will mean selecting the best information from the notes you made in class whilst studying the text.

Most critical essays follow the same broad structure:

* An introduction that clearly addresses the task and sets how you intend to answer it
* A brief summary (a short outline linked to the question) of the text
* A main body – the detailed paragraphs answering the question
* A conclusion/evaluation

You need to construct an argument which will answer the task you have been set, so you need to think about the task you have been set and all you know about the text.

First, brainstorm for ideas using the keywords. Use this to construct a simple answer to the question. You should be able to express this in a sentence or two.

Next, you need to come up with a number of points which you think will help you to answer the task. The best way to order your ideas is the order they come in in the text itself. This will form your paragraphs. You should aim to make between 4 and 7 points.

Make sure before you start that you can provide evidence to support your points – include the quotations you want to use to support your argument.

Once you are happy and you have plenty to write which will answer the question and you know what order you are going to write it in, you are ready to begin.

**Step 3 – Beginning the Essay**

The first thing to do is to tell the reader what you will tell them in the rest of the essay. This is called the introduction.

Your job in writing an introduction is to show the teacher that you have understood the question and that, rather than ignoring it and writing all you know about the text, you are going to answer it.

* Include the name of the text **Title**
* Include the name of the author **Author**
* Focus on the words of the question. Use **Refer to** the key words from the question. **Q** Give your answer at this point
* Outline the techniques you are going to use **Techniques**
* Keep this short. Do not go into detail

You may then need a short summary paragraph which links your chosen text to the question. This is called a:

* **Brief**
* **Outline**

In order to remember these, use the following phrase:

Start with a **TART** with **BO**.

**Step 4 – Developing the Essay**

If you have planned your essay well, you should be clear about what you want to say in the essay next in order to support the answer you gave in the introduction. You need to show that you can write in a logical way where points follow naturally from one another and you need to prove that the points you are making answer the task you were originally set. You need to BUILD UP an argument.

Make sure you **stick to the plan** and do not write anything which does not directly answer the question asked. In order to help you do this, keep the question in mind – refer back to and use the key words.

Open each paragraph with a clear topic sentence – a point which answers the question. Topic sentences should refer back to and answer the question and should include **linking and key words.**

Now go on to back up each point with evidence from the text. Evidence from the text will usually take one of two forms:

* A reference to a scene, event or conversation which you summarise in your own words
* A direct use of actual words from the text (a quotation)

The best formula to use is PEEL:

**P –** make a general point which answers the question

**Evidence –** back up your point with a reference or quotation

**Explanation –** say how your evidence backs up your point and backs up the answer you

gave in the introduction (explain the use and effect of any different

techniques)

**Link back to the question –** Link your analysis back to the original question

**At National 5**, you would be expected to have roughly 4/5 PEEL paragraphs in your essay.

**At Higher**, you should have around 6 paragraphs and at least 2 pieces of evidence per paragraph (i.e. your paragraphs should follow the structure PEEEEL)

**Step 5 – Concluding your Essay**

As with the introduction, the conclusion should be kept short and not add anything new.

The word conclusion means two things:

1. An ending
2. A judgement, following logically from an argument

The last paragraph of your essay should combine both senses of the word. It should:

* Recap briefly your main points
* Refer back to the words of the questions
* Sum up clearly you answer to the question. Basically, tell them what you have already told them in the essay.

A good formula to use is:

**Title**

**Author**

**Refer to the original question**

**Recap your main points**

**Techniques**

**Step 6 – Points to Remember**

* Always write in present tense
* Always write using formal English – avoid contractions
* Avoid using ‘I’ or ‘This essay’
* Check over your essay for spelling, sentencing and punctuation etc.
* Avoid using ‘This quotation’ or ‘This quote’
* Know the difference between ‘quote’ and ‘quotation’
* Take a new line for quotations longer than 6 words