

AQA GCSE English Language Complete Paper 1 & 2 Walkthrough

Mark scheme breakdowns | Paragraph structures | Examiner insight

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How to Use This Guide

This walkthrough covers **AQA GCSE English Language Papers 1 and 2** in full. For each question you will find the marks and timing, the Assessment Objective being tested, what the examiner is looking for, and my paragraph structure to follow.

The mark scheme is not a secret but most students never read it. I spent years marking GCSE papers as a registered Edexcel examiner. The difference between a grade 5 and a grade 7 almost always comes down to depth of analysis, not knowledge. This guide shows you exactly how to demonstrate that depth.

Key principle throughout: Comment, Explain, Analyse. Commenting gets you grades 3 to 4. Explaining gets you 5 to 6. Analysing — going deep with how, why, and because — gets you 7 and above.

The How / Why / Because Rule

Every time you make a point, ask: *How* does this technique create its effect? *Why* does the writer use it? *Because...* — finish the sentence. You cannot end a sentence on the word "because." It forces you deeper. That depth is what separates a grade 6 from a grade 7.

Exam at a Glance

Paper 1 — Q1	4	3-4 min	AO1 — Identify information
Paper 1 — Q2	8	10 min	AO2 — Analyse language
Paper 1 — Q3	8	10 min	AO2 — Analyse structure
Paper 1 — Q4	20	25 min	AO4 — Evaluate
Paper 1 — Q5	40	45-50 min	AO5/AO6 — Creative writing
Paper 2 — Q1	4	3-4 min	AO1 — Identify information
Paper 2 — Q2	8	10 min	AO1 — Compare and summarise
Paper 2 — Q3	12	15 min	AO2 — Analyse language
Paper 2 — Q4	16	20 min	AO3 — Compare perspectives
Paper 2 — Q5	40	45-50 min	AO5/AO6 — Transactional writing

PAPER 1 — Fiction Extract

One unseen fiction extract. Answer all five questions. Read Q2 to Q4 first, then read and annotate the extract before answering.

Question 1

4 marks marks | 3-4 minutes | AO1 — Identify information

What to do:

Choose **4 correct statements** out of 8 given options.

Read carefully — some statements are close to correct but subtly wrong.

No analysis needed. One mark per correct statement.

Examiner tip

Get in, make your four choices, and move on. Do not spend more than four minutes on this question.

Question 2

8 marks marks | 10 minutes | AO2 — Analyse language techniques

What to do:

Analyse **language techniques** in the given lines.

Write **2 paragraphs**.

You are marked on: Technique, Quote, Effect on the reader, Further analysis (zoom in on a key word).

My Paragraph Structure — Q2

1 Opening point	Link your point to the question. Name the technique.
2 Quote	Select a precise, relevant quotation.
3 General effect	What does this technique always do? (e.g. simile = creates a comparison = clearer picture). This never changes.
4 Specific effect	What emotional response does it create in THIS context? This changes depending on the extract.
5 Zoom in	Pick one key word. Analyse it — noun, verb, adjective. Use how/why/because to go deeper.
6 Link back	Return to the question wording to close the paragraph.

Two types of effect — always include both

General effect: What the technique is always designed to do, regardless of context. E.g. "A simile creates a comparison, giving the reader a clearer picture."

Specific effect: The emotional response created by how the technique is used in this particular context. This changes with every extract.

Question 3

8 marks marks | 10 minutes | AO2 — Analyse structure techniques

What to do:

Analyse how the writer has structured the text to achieve a **specific named effect** (e.g. build tension, create unease, engage the reader). The question will name the effect — use that word throughout your answer.

Think in three parts: **beginning, middle, and end**.

Focus on **shifts in focus** and the development of the story.

The bullet points on Q3 will always remind you to discuss shift in focus and story development.

My Paragraph Structure — Q3

1 Beginning	What happens? What is the best quote? Why is it interesting? How does it contribute to the named effect?
2 Middle	What shifts? What is the best quote? What does the shift make the reader feel? How does it develop the named effect?
3 End	What happens? What is the best quote? Why is it interesting as an ending? How does it resolve or intensify the named effect?
4 Overall	Why do the three shifts together create the named effect? What is the full journey of the text from start to finish?

When reading the extract

Map out where all the shifts in focus occur and what each section specifically focuses on. Think about any shifts in tone. Ask yourself: what is the journey of this text from the opening line to the final line?

Question 4

20 marks marks | 25 minutes | AO4 — Evaluate and respond to the text

What to do:

You are given a **statement** about the text. Agree or disagree with it.

Write **4 paragraphs** at 5 marks each.

Stay detached — keep a wide angle lens on the text.

Build in a variety of responses across your four paragraphs.

My Paragraph Structure — Q4

1 Personal opinion	State your position on the statement directly. Use the key word from the statement.
2 Quote	Select a relevant quotation from the extract.
3 Technique	Identify the technique used.
4 Effect	Briefly explain the effect on the reader.
5 Zoom out	Link to the key idea or theme in the text. Keep a wide angle view.
6 Expand opinion	Return to the statement. Use its key word again. Develop your personal response further.

Vary your agreement across four paragraphs

"I partially agree..." | "I strongly agree..." | "I firmly believe..." | "I disagree..." | "I fundamentally disagree..." | "I agree to some extent..."

Build variety into your four paragraphs to demonstrate a range of response.

Question 5

40 marks marks | 45-50 minutes | AO5 — Content and Organisation | AO6 — Technical Accuracy

Spend 5 to 10 minutes planning before you write.

5 paragraphs, each with a clear narrative aim (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution).

At least **2 techniques per paragraph**. Name them and use them deliberately.

Stick to **first person** throughout. It is more immersive and engaging.

Use **past tense** throughout. Do not switch.

Vary your punctuation: commas, semi-colons, dashes, ellipsis.

Vary sentence length. Short sentences build tension. Use them deliberately.

Use **ambitious vocabulary** — but only words you genuinely know how to use correctly.

AO5 vs AO6

AO5 (24 marks) — Content and Organisation: Range of ideas, language techniques, appropriate tone, suitable for the form and purpose, paragraph length and structure.

AO6 (16 marks) — Technical Accuracy: Spelling, punctuation range, grammar, sentence length variation including parenthesis, structural techniques.

Want to go deeper on Q5?

I have a full separate guide to this question, with key tips and a clear paragraph structure on the website. You can also watch a 45 minute in-depth video on it from me here:

<https://youtu.be/ApV-drmX7AU?si=3Nb4h5OiQRMYOygV>

PAPER 2 — Non-Fiction Extracts

Two unseen non-fiction extracts. Q2 and Q4 are comparison questions using both sources. Q1 and Q3 are on one extract only. Recommended order: Q1, Q3, Q2, Q4.

Before reading: read Q2 to Q4, underline key words, then read and annotate both extracts. For Q4, note ideas and perspectives at the bottom of each extract as you read.

Question 1

4 marks marks | 3-4 minutes | AO1 — Identify information

What to do:

Choose **4 correct statements** out of 8 given options.

Read carefully — some statements are close to correct but subtly wrong.

No analysis needed. One mark per correct statement.

Question 2

8 marks marks | 10 minutes | AO1 — Compare and summarise both sources

What to do:

Write a summary of the **differences (or similarities)** between both sources. Write **2 paragraphs**. **No language techniques needed** for this question.

My Paragraph Structure — Q2

1 Comparison	State a main difference. Mention both sources in the same sentence.
2 Source A quote	Give a relevant quotation from Source A.
3 Source A inference	"It shows us that..." — interpret the quote. Do not just repeat it.
4 Source B quote	Give a relevant quotation from Source B.
5 Source B inference	"It shows us that..." — interpret the quote from Source B.
6 Comparison	Directly compare the difference between the two sources to close the paragraph.

Question 3

12 marks marks | 15 minutes | AO2 — Analyse language techniques

What to do:

Analyse language techniques in **one extract**.

Write **3 paragraphs**.

Zoom in on key words in each paragraph.

My Paragraph Structure — Q3

1 Opening point	Link to the question. Summarise what your paragraph will argue.
2 Quote	Select a precise, relevant quotation.
3 Technique	Identify the technique.
4 General effect	What the technique always does, regardless of context.

5 Specific effect	How it makes the reader feel in this specific context.
6 Zoom in	Pick one key word. Analyse it — noun, verb, adjective. Use how/why/because.
7 Link back	Return to the question wording to close the paragraph.

Question 4 16 marks marks | 20 minutes | AO3 — Compare perspectives and attitudes

Common wording: "Compare how the writers present their different attitudes towards X."

Key vocabulary: attitudes, opinions, thoughts, feelings — all mean perspectives.

What to do:

- Write **2 to 3 paragraphs**. Each paragraph must quote from **both sources**.
- Compare perspectives, not just techniques.
- Use the key word from the question throughout your answer.

My Paragraph Structure — Q4

1 Comparison point	Mention BOTH sources in your opening sentence.
2 Source A quote	Quotation from Source A.
3 Interpret + perspective	What does it show? Link back to the question. Use the word "perspective".
4 Technique (brief)	Name the technique. Give a brief effect. This is not an AO2 question so keep it short.
5 Comparison point	Introduce the next point — again mention both sources in the same sentence.
6 Source B quote	Quotation from Source B.
7 Interpret + perspective	What does it show? Link back to the question.
8 Technique (brief)	Name the technique. Give a brief effect. This is not an AO2 question so keep it short.
9 Final comparison	Directly compare the overall perspectives of the two writers.

Question 5 40 marks marks | 45-50 minutes | AO5 — Content and Organisation | AO6 — Technical Accuracy

Write for a specific purpose and audience: article, speech, letter, or leaflet. Spend 5 to 10 minutes planning.

Forms and Their Requirements

Magazine article	Informal	Title, 4 subheadings (alliteration), shorter paragraphs, anecdote, language techniques, statistics
Newspaper article	Formal	Title, 1-2 subheadings, longer denser paragraphs, no techniques, statistics, expert quotes
Speech (peers)	Informal	No title, 2-3 topics and a conclusion, direct address, rhetorical questions, statistics
Speech (adults)	Formal	No title, formal register, 2-3 topics and a conclusion, statistics, facts

Leaflet	Mixed	Title, 4-6 subheadings (alliteration), short paragraphs, facts, maybe reviews
Formal letter	Formal	Your address top right, date, their address left, "To whom it may concern", "Yours faithfully"
Informal letter	Informal	Your address, "Dear [Name]", language techniques, "Kind regards"

Want to go deeper on Q5?

I have a full separate guide to this question, with key tips and a clear paragraph structure on the website. You can also watch a 45 minute in-depth video on it from me here:

<https://youtu.be/js5SKkYtnR8?si=LMI0-IBlCgFtQUv>

Want to put this into practice?

This guide gives you the framework. But knowing the mark scheme and applying it under exam pressure are two different things. The students who improve fastest are those who practise with **targeted feedback on every answer**, not just by reading guides.

I work with a small number of GCSE English students each year. Every session is built around your specific exam board, your weak spots, and your target grade. You also have direct access to me between sessions.

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