

AQA GCSE English Language — Paper 2

Transactional Writing

Complete Guide to Question 5

All seven forms | Planning strategies | Full mark example essay

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What Is Transactional Writing?

Transactional writing is writing for a particular purpose, in a particular format, to a particular audience. Every piece you write must serve the needs of that audience and present a clear opinion or argument. Question 5 on Paper 2 is worth 40 marks — half the paper. It deserves half your preparation.

Mark scheme split

AO5 — 24 marks: Range of ideas, language techniques, appropriate tone, suitable form, paragraph structure.

AO6 — 16 marks: Spelling, punctuation range, grammar, sentence length variation, structural techniques (direct address, rhetorical questions).

The Seven Forms at a Glance

Form	Tone	Key Features	Purpose
Magazine article	Informal	Title, 4 subheadings (alliteration), shorter paragraphs, anecdote, language techniques, facts and statistics, celebrity quotes	Entertain and inform
Newspaper article	Formal	Title, 1-2 subheadings, longer denser paragraphs, no language techniques, facts and statistics, expert quotes (professors, MPs)	Inform and educate
Speech to peers	Informal	No title, 2-3 topics, 1 conclusion, facts and statistics, direct address, rhetorical questions, famous quote to open or close	Inform and convince
Speech to adults	Formal	No title, formal register, 2-3 topics, 1 conclusion, facts and statistics	Inform and convince
Leaflet	Mixed	Title, 4-6 subheadings (alliteration), short paragraphs, facts, bullet points fine for majority of text	Inform and inspire
Formal letter	Formal	Your address (top right), date, their address (left), "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Mr...", no language techniques, facts and statistics, "Yours faithfully" (unknown) or "Yours sincerely" (named)	Inform and convince
Informal letter	Informal	Your address, "Dear [Name]", language techniques, facts, "Kind regards" or "Yours"	Entertain and inform

Note: Leaflet and informal letter have never appeared on a past paper but remain on the specification. Formal letter and newspaper article are the most commonly tested forms.

Form Guides — What Each One Needs

Magazine Article

- Title — make it engaging, use alliteration or a hook
- 4 subheadings — use alliteration in each one
- Shorter paragraphs — lighter, more readable
- Language techniques throughout — similes, metaphors, alliteration
- Anecdote or personal story to draw the reader in
- Facts and statistics to add credibility
- Quotes from the general public or celebrities
- Expand on ideas to show complexity of thought

Newspaper Article

- Title — clear and direct
- 1 to 2 subheadings only
- Longer, denser paragraphs
- No language techniques — formal register throughout
- Facts, statistics, and expert quotes (professors, MPs, scientists)
- Longer sentences to convey complex information

Speech to Peers

- No title needed
- 2 to 3 topics with a concluding paragraph
- Average paragraph length
- Facts and statistics
- Direct address throughout ("you", "we")
- Rhetorical questions to engage the audience
- Could open or close with a famous quote
- Simple sentences used deliberately for impact

Speech to Adults

- No title needed
- Formal register throughout
- 2 to 3 topics with a concluding paragraph
- Facts and statistics
- Avoid overly casual language or slang

Leaflet

- Title — clear and purposeful
- 4 to 6 subheadings — use alliteration
- Short paragraphs — punchy and direct
- Facts, possibly statistics
- Bullet points are fine — the majority of text can be bulleted
- Maybe reviews or quotes to add social proof

Formal Letter

- Your address — top right corner
- Date below your address
- Their address — left hand side
- "To whom it may concern" (if unnamed) or "Dear Mr/Ms [Name]"
- Average paragraph lengths
- No language techniques — formal register
- Facts, statistics, and quotes if relevant
- "Yours faithfully" if you addressed them as "Sir/Madam"
- "Yours sincerely" if you addressed them by name

Informal Letter

- Your address at the top
- "Dear [Name]" as your greeting
- Average paragraph lengths
- Language techniques welcome
- Facts and statistics can be included
- "Kind regards", "Yours", or "See you soon" to close

How to Make Transactional Writing Interesting

Most students write competent but forgettable transactional answers. These five techniques are what separates a grade 7 from a grade 5.

1. Have a clear objective

Choose something you want to achieve — and take several deliberate actions in each paragraph to achieve it. Choose an interesting, unexpected objective.

Example: Magazine article on climate change

My objective is to make readers disgusted by government inaction — not just aware of the problem.

2. Break up facts with language techniques

Never let facts sit alone. Wrap them in technique immediately after.

Example: Breaking up a statistic

89% of people joined our protest — we were like a tsunami on the Houses of Parliament. A powerful force sweeping away inaction. Cleansing the filth of government ignorance.

3. Use structural choices to make information land

Anaphora, tricolon, and short sentences create rhythm and emphasis that plain prose cannot.

Example: Structural choices for impact

The government are wrong. The government are wasting our planet. The government needs change! (Anaphora, tricolon, short sentences)

4. End with a strong Call To Action

Your final paragraph should deliver your objective in the clearest possible terms. Tell the reader exactly what you want them to do.

Example: Call to Action

Next week we will be scheduling a new protest. Please get in touch at student@governmentinaction.com to find out how you can make a difference.

5. Come up with a story

Use an anecdote (personal story) or a made-up case study of someone affected by the topic. This is where you can use descriptive writing and language techniques freely.

Example: Anecdote in a persuasive piece

I remember when I joined my first protest. It was an icy cold winter's day, but I felt the warmth of our message melt through the frosty government inaction. My heart leapt when I saw the Prime Minister read our signs.

6. Make up statistics

You do not need to know real statistics. Invent them — but make them realistic and plausible. Ask yourself: what figure would give this point the most impact?

How to Plan Your Answer

Spend 5 to 10 minutes planning. Students who plan consistently outperform students who do not. The plan does not need to be neat — it needs to be useful.

Step 1: Come up with 3 to 5 talking points relevant to the topic.

Step 2: Work out what statistics or facts would support each point. Invent them if needed.

Step 3: Develop each talking point in note form.

Step 4: Ask yourself questions about each point to deepen it — what does this mean? What are the consequences? Who is affected?

Step 5: Decide on your Call To Action before you start writing.

Planning example

Question: Write a magazine article with the title "My hopes and ambitions for the future."

Talking point 1 — Personal ambition: Get better at boxing. Benefit in the future? Discipline, fitness, mental health. What advice can I give others?

Talking point 2 — Hope for safer communities: Less crime. What are the statistics on knife crime? What steps could reduce it?

Talking point 3 — Hope for less poverty: Job opportunities, economic growth, less corruption. What does a good job opportunity look like? How does a strong economy benefit everyone?

Full Mark Example Essay — Magazine Article

Question: "Our addiction to cheap clothes and fast fashion means young people in poorer countries have to work in terrible conditions to make them. We must change our attitude to buying clothes now." Write an article for a magazine or website arguing your point of view. [40 marks]

Clothing causes social chaos: and we might not even know it...

Open your wardrobe and you'll likely see a stack, if not a drawer full of t-shirts. There are one or two that are washed-thin and on the verge of fraying; some slightly faded graphic tees who have clearly seen better days; and that one shirt you purchased at a museum, which still has a tag on it.

Next year, a fourth of the contents of this drawer will be gone, replaced with new, vibrant, flashy t-shirts. And haunting this pile of discarded clothing is the hard work and sweat of hundreds of workers, their lives ignored and disregarded by the very people who encourage it.

Your t-shirt likely started its journey somewhere in India, where young children no older than ten waded up and down sweltering cotton fields, day in, day out, painstakingly picking cotton buds with their calloused hands. Once their basket is full, they bring it to the main building, where one of their friends carefully separates the fluff from the seeds before it is sent to the mill and shipped to Bangladesh as a fully formed sheet of fabric.

A little girl unloads the fabric from the truck. She sits down at her desk — row 64, column V — and begins to sew. Her movements are calculated, precise, clearly honed from months, if not years, slaving away at her rickety wooden desk in a sea of other girls and women in this crumbling, concrete building.

The bell rings at nine in the evening. The girl packs up her tools and trudges to her dormitory along with the horde of slow-moving, exhausted workers. Coughing is rife, and she thinks of herself as lucky that she hasn't caught anything yet. But living with sixteen other people crammed into metal bunks makes the incoming sickness impossible to dodge.

She can only hope that the coughing doesn't turn into something worse. Last year, a girl from her room had come down with a cough. The next day, she hadn't arrived at her desk. Two days later, a new girl took over her old desk.

Wait, am I the problem?

Every time you buy a t-shirt, every time you decide it has served its purpose and throw it away, there is a boy in a cotton field, a girl in the factory, and countless other faceless people whose lifestyles you have encouraged. With fast fashion more popular than ever, consumerism is also at a new high.

And it is your consumerist mindset, your disregard for their lives, that continues this vicious cycle of low costs and high prices. We mindlessly exploit and oppress those who cannot afford to speak up — every single day — without a second thought. Man is a greedy, selfish being.

Every year, the average person purchases 25 pieces of new clothing, and 2,000 tons of fast fashion ends up in landfill sites. These brands claim they have changed. But does the boy now have access to sanitation and education? Does the girl have stable accommodation away from her family?

This is the impact of our choices. We are the feeders of this cycle — it exists because of us. It is up to us to change, so that the hundreds of millions of children out there can access the life they deserve.

I, for one, am making the change today. Ask yourself: can you live with knowing what your addiction really costs? The lives you upend, just so you can own something a little newer, a little brighter, a little cooler. If you cannot — then I suggest you make the change too.

What makes this a full mark answer

AO5: Clear objective (to shame the reader into changing behaviour). Structural choices used deliberately — the two-sentence final paragraph creates devastating impact. Language techniques throughout. Form conventions met. Call to action lands powerfully.

AO6: Sentence length varied throughout. Parenthesis used correctly. Punctuation range includes semicolons, dashes, and ellipsis. Grammar accurate throughout.

Past Paper Questions — Practise These

Use these questions to practise planning and writing under timed conditions. Spend 5 minutes planning, 40 minutes writing. Time yourself.

Magazine article

"Our addiction to cheap clothes and fast fashion means young people in poorer countries have to work in terrible conditions. We must change our attitude to buying clothes now." Write an article for a magazine arguing your point of view.

Newspaper letter

"It is people who have extraordinary skill, courage and determination who deserve to be famous, not those who have good looks or lots of money or behave badly." Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper arguing your point of view.

Magazine article

"People are often going on expensive holidays, but you don't need to spend a lot of money." Write a magazine article expressing your views.

Broadsheet newspaper

"Homework has no value. Some students get it done for them; some don't do it at all. Students should be relaxing in their free time." Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper explaining your point of view.

Newspaper article

"All sport should be fun, fair and open to everyone. These days, sport seems to be more about money, corruption and winning at any cost." Write an article for a newspaper explaining your point of view.

Speech to peers

"Important lessons I have learned in my life." Deliver a speech to your peers covering what you have learned, how it has affected you, and any other points you wish to make.

Leaflet

Your local library wants to encourage young people to read more. Write the text of a leaflet explaining the benefits of reading.

Magazine article

"Animals are important to our world in many different ways." Write an article for a magazine competition covering the ways animals contribute to the world and their importance to you personally.

Charity leaflet

A local charity is hoping to gain more publicity. Write the text of a leaflet explaining the charity's work and why it is important.

News website article

"People have become obsessed with travelling ever further and faster. Travel is expensive, dangerous, damaging and a foolish waste of time." Write an article for a news website arguing your point of view.

Broadsheet newspaper

"Snow seems like it is picturesque, exciting and fun but in reality it causes accidents, inconvenience and economic disruption." Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper explaining your point of view.

Knowing the forms and techniques is the foundation. Applying them under timed conditions on an unseen topic is a different skill — and that is what we practise in sessions. I mark every practice answer and give written feedback on exactly what is costing marks.

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