



VCE Exam Advice – Unit 3 & 4 English

Exam Preparation Checklist

1. Design a realistic and paced study timetable now.
2. Build in regular short breaks and down-time.
3. Go over Exam Assessment Criteria for each section of the paper.
4. Using the Exam Assessment Criteria, develop a list of strengths and areas for improvement by reflecting on SAC progress and teacher feedback throughout the year. Make sure you know what you need to do to improve your writing. If you aren't sure, ask your teacher directly
5. Practise developing essay plans and writing full responses as well as introductions, body paragraphs and conclusions.
6. Read and annotate a range of high scoring sample essays
7. If you find it helpful, listen to the audio of your texts.
8. Reread/view texts and focus on key passages/scenes.
9. Memorise several short text quotes a week.
10. Write theme and character profiles.
11. Consolidate your understanding of symbols and motifs.
12. Write practice responses under timed conditions and have these corrected by your teacher.
13. Create a personal list of spelling demons.
14. Create a list of transition words and phrases.
15. Read and annotate VCAA examination reports, particularly those from 2017 onwards with the new study design.

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Section A: Text Response

Exam Assessment Criteria 1: Knowledge and understanding of the text

1. You need to understand the key aspects of literary texts: theme, character, plot, setting and style (literary techniques) and how they work together to create meaning in a text.
2. Higher scoring responses directly address authorial intent as the 2019 Examiner's Report highlights: *"Students who could present an understanding that the text they were discussing was a deliberate construct by the author, designed to present a particular worldview, were better able to demonstrate an insightful reading"*.
3. Your response should demonstrate that you are familiar with the entire text and not just the most obvious scenes or episodes. This could include referring to minor characters as well as the more obvious ones.
4. *"When studying collections of poetry and short stories it is important to remember that they are commenting on the collection and not only on one or two specific short stories or poems"* (Examiner's Report 2019)

Exam Assessment Criteria 2: A coherent analysis in response to a topic

5. You must identify and address all the elements presented in the prompt. *The wording of the topic should be closely considered so that the whole prompt is fully understood* (VCE Examiner's Report 2019). Before the exam, make sure you understand the different types of essay prompts (question, proposition and quotation) and the demands of each.
6. Related to point 5, the 2019 Examiner's Report specifically suggests that *"students should consider the scope of any 'how' question... these require a discussion of the construction elements of the text as well as a discussion of the ideas"*.
7. Use your dictionary in the exam *"to determine the exact meaning of words in essay topics... [as] some essay questions challenge students due to their uncertainty about the vocabulary ... An accurate understanding of the terms of the topic allowed students to answer the question in a precise manner. It also increased the chance of the student recognising and addressing the implications of the topic"* (VCE Examiner's Report 2019)
8. Remember to structure your paragraphs logically. For example, you might choose the TEEL approach – topic sentence, elaboration, evidence and link back to the topic/prompt.
9. Your introduction needs to clearly identify your stance in response to the prompt. Don't be afraid to 'resist' the wording of the question. You don't have to agree or disagree outright. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers in text: only strong or weak cases!
10. For each body paragraph make sure you have a strong concept-based topic sentence that introduces your supporting argument.
11. Conclusions should contain no new evidence; they should tie the threads of your arguments together and they should link back to the introduction.

Exam Assessment Criteria 3: Textual evidence to support the interpretation

12. Avoid including long quotations but weave in numerous shorter quotations to support your points.
13. Textual evidence also includes references to symbols, motifs and literary techniques – you should use these as well as quotes from your text to evidence your argument.

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Exam Assessment Criteria 4: Controlled and effective language use

14. Make sure that you understand the genre and form of your text and its conventions, and that you can use the appropriate metalanguage to describe how this is relevant to the prompt.
15. Make sure you use formal language and demonstrate a broad and articulate vocabulary.
16. Use a range of sentence starters and transition phrases that progressively build your argument.

Section B: Comparative Analysis of Texts

Exam Assessment Criteria 1: Knowledge and understanding of both texts, and the ideas and issues they present

1. You need to know both texts in an insightful way. This means you need to have *“explored an array of key ideas and issues that are apparent in both their texts for study, and the ways in which these arise”* (Examiner’s Report 2019). Comparison should focus on form, the historical and social context, setting, plot, authorial intent, genre, structure, language and style, characters and characterisation, and ideas, issues and themes.

Exam Assessment Criteria 2: Discussion of meaningful connections, similarities or differences between the texts, in response to the topic

2. You need to be familiar with *“the range of potential question approaches, including a consideration of how the idea or issue is explored in each text”* (Examiner’s Report 2019).
3. You must be able to compare and contrast the ideas and issues in a coherent analysis. Simply putting “similarly” or “conversely” in the middle of a paragraph is not comparing. The 2019 Examiner’s Report highlights the need *“to explore meaningful textual connections – similarities or differences with respect to the topic”*. Weaker responses often *“could not move beyond an account of the attributes of protagonists or focusing predominantly on the events in each text”*.
4. Make sure you understand the ways in which your specific text pair compare in terms of focus and purpose (have the same purpose but achieve it in different ways, have the same purpose but a different insight into ideas/issues/themes or have the same focus/subject but a different purpose).
5. Whilst the 2019 Examiner’s Report suggests that there is no preferred essay style and suggests that *“students should adopt the approach that most readily enables them to compare the nominated ideas and issues with assurance and consistency”*, you need to consider the essay structure that will best allow you to present an insightful and synthesised comparative argument.

Exam Assessment Criteria 3: Use of textual evidence to support the comparative analysis

6. You need to use textual evidence to support your arguments. *“The most assured responses were able to demonstrate a capacity to use strong textual insights to analyse the essential ideas and issues at the heart of the topic”* Examiner’s Report 2019.
7. Make sure that you embed your quotes in your sentences.
8. Ensure you use textual evidence from both texts.
9. Only use a quote and evidence once.
10. Use a range of textual evidence beyond quotes such as symbols, motifs and literary techniques.



Exam Assessment Criteria 4: Control and effectiveness of language use, as appropriate to the task

11. Make sure you use formal language and demonstrate a broad and articulate vocabulary.
12. Use a range of sentence starters and transition phrases that progressively build your argument by showing constant comparative connections.
13. Most importantly, use the metalanguage of comparison to convincingly reveal the nuanced similarities and differences of your text pair.

Section C: Argument and Persuasive Language

Exam Assessment Criteria 1: understanding of the argument(s) presented and point(s) of view expressed

1. You will need to use the background information to give the task material context. This material can often help you write your introduction.
2. The 2019 Examiner's report highlights that *"the best responses identified the overall purpose and intended audiences of the advertorial and letter, and used this as their context to structure their analysis of the key stages of the respective argument/s and their purpose in positioning the reader, before closely analysing the particular language and persuasive devices used"*.
3. Identify the shifts in tone and how they influence the argument.
4. Understand that if presented with more than one text, *"no comparison of these two texts [is] required. Rather, students [are] expected to approach each piece in a holistic manner, asking how it persuades its audience through a combination of argument and language"* (Examiner's Report 2019).



Exam Assessment Criteria 2: Analysis of ways in which language and visual features are used to present an argument and to persuade

5. You need to have a developed understanding of a broad range of appeals, persuasive techniques and tone words and their appropriate uses.
6. You should avoid creating a list of persuasive techniques or organising body paragraphs by technique. The techniques are used to help advance an argument – they should not be analysed in isolation
7. In a meaningful way, explain how the language both builds and advances an argument and positions the intended audience to feel and react.
8. Analyse how the organisation of arguments and points of view help the persuasiveness of the task material.
9. Further to point 3 (above), the 2019 Examiner's Report notes that *"some responses were hampered by efforts to integrate the analysis of the two pieces. Students became so focused on trying to address the two articles side by side that they lost control of the analysis, and the response fell into 'he-said-she-said' description. Some students adopted an awkward 'compare and contrast' paragraph structure for their response, which mostly resulted in repetition, paraphrase and general confusion. Students cannot successfully understand the development of individual arguments if they are constantly trying to compare and contrast the two authors"*.

10. Do not analyse the visual text in isolation. Consider how it works with the written language to build an argument.

Exam Assessment Criteria 3: control and effectiveness of language use, as appropriate to the task

11. Efficiently plan your response to keep your writing on track.
12. Organise your writing and aim to use language fluently and efficiently.
13. The use of relevant descriptive and analytic metalanguage is needed.

More subject specific advice will be issued to students at our "VCE Exam Revision Lectures".

Good luck with your exam preparations!
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vce exam highlights

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