

2022 JUNE CRASH COURSE NOTES

O Level English

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Composition Guide



Situational Writing

Situational writing consists of 20m and is generally the easier essay out of the two to score as it is more structured and requires a lot less creativity on the students' part.

Informal Letter



Informal letters are usually sent to those who have **closer relationships with the sender**. It is for this reason that such letters are usually:

- The tone is warmer and friendlier, but can be persuasive as well depending on the context.
- The letter has less of a 'transactional' tone.
- Contractions can be used
- Use more casual transition markers (e.g. can you believe that?).

You will know to write an informal letter when the question tells you that you are writing a letter to one of your parents/close friends/siblings/relatives (basically anyone that is meant to be close to you).

Structure of informal letters

Mary Tan
123 Sengkang Way, Singapore
#01-45
152732

10 June 2022

Dear Mary, (Use the name that you will usually use to address this person)

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Check in on the person you are writing to, ask how they have been.
- Tell them why you are writing this letter.
- Remember to include **context** (e.g. I need your advice **on what activities to include for my school's carnival.**)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points
- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- Restate purpose and request for a reply (e.g. I hope you can reply to me as early as possible, as...)

Best wishes,
John

Informal Email



Similar to an informal letter, informal emails are usually written to those who are closer to us. Therefore, the underlying tone of the letter should be more sentimental and less transactional.

Note that:

- Refer to **Informal Letter**.

Structure of informal emails

To: marytan@gmail.com

From: johnlim@hotmail.com

Subject: Activities for my school's carnival

Date: 10 June 2022

Dear Mary, (Use the name that you will usually use to address this person)

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Check in on the person you are writing to, ask how they have been.
- Tell them why you are writing this letter.
- Remember to include **context** (e.g. I need your advice **on what activities to include for my school's carnival.**)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points

- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- Restate purpose and request for a reply (e.g. I hope you can reply to me as early as possible, as...)

Best regards,
John

Formal Letter



Formal letters are usually written to someone with authority, and their purpose is usually to implement change of some sort. Therefore, the tone of the letter has to be **convincing** and confident. As you may not be as close to the recipient, using a friendlier tone is generally frowned upon. Instead, one should opt for a more **professional tone** (i.e. keep the topic strictly to the work at hand; do not deviate and inquire about their personal lives, not even in the introduction). You will know to write a formal letter if the person you need to write to is someone **with authority or with high social status** (e.g. movie stars, celebrities, etc)

Take note that:

- All paragraphs are to be aligned to the left.
- No two finger spacing is allowed.
- Leave a line between paragraphs.
- Tone is usually polite, do not be rude.
- Use formal transition markers (e.g. thus, moreover, etc).

Structure of formal letters

John Lim
123 Sengkang Way, Singapore
152732

10 June 2022

Mary Tan (Full name of recipient)
Senior Teacher (Recipient's title)
MOE Incorporated (Recipient's company)
112 Orchard Road (If the sender is from the same organisation, **do not** include an address)
193831

Dear Mrs Tan, (Use recipient's surname)
Advice on Activities for the School Carnival (Underline title, prepositions are in **lower case**)

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Tell them why you are writing this letter.
- Remember to include **context** (e.g. I request your advice **on what activities to include for my school's carnival.**)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points
- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- Restate purpose and request for a reply (e.g. I hope that you can reply to me when convenient).
- Remember your tone; this is a formal letter. Do not ask for the recipient to reply quickly as it shows disrespect (unless required by the question).

Yours sincerely/Yours faithfully,
John Lim (Use full name)
Head Councillor (Title held)
Park View Secondary School (Company/School)

Formal Email



Just like formal letters, formal emails are usually written to those of authority. Their structure is very similar to that of formal letters except for:

- You do not need to write down your email address.
- The *title* is now the *subject*.

Structure of formal emails

To: marytan@gmail.com

Subject: Activities for my school's carnival

Dear Mrs Tan,
(No title needed)

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Tell them why you are writing this letter.
- Remember to include **context** (e.g. I request your advice **on what activities to include for my school's carnival.**)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points

- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- Restate purpose and request for a reply (e.g. I hope that you can reply to me when convenient).
- Remember your tone; this is a formal email. Do not ask for the recipient to reply quickly as it shows disrespect (unless required by the question).

Yours sincerely/Yours faithfully,

John Tan (Use full name)

Head Councillor (Title held)

Park View Secondary School (Your company)

Proposal Report



Proposal reports are usually written to convince someone of authority to implement change, just like formal letters and formal emails.

Note that:

- Tone should be persuasive and polite.
- Do not sound rude or condescending.
- Do not use contractions.
- Use formal transition markers.
- **Sound positive even when giving negative feedback** (e.g. Although our activities for our school's carnival are already popular with the Upper Secondary cohort, there are still measures we can take to ensure that they are further improved to attract even more students from the Lower Secondary cohort to participate).

Structure for proposal reports

To: Mary Tan
Senior Teacher

From: John Lim
Head Councillor

10 June 2022

Advice on Activities for the School Carnival (Underline title, prepositions are in **lower case**)

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Check in on the person you are writing to, ask how they have been.
- Tell them why you are writing this letter.
- Remember to include **context** (e.g. I need your advice **on what activities to include for my school's carnival.**)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points
- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Submitted by: (For reports and proposals, use *submitted by* to sign off)

John Lim

Speech



Speeches are usually written to be spoken to a wide audience, thus please ensure that the language used in your essay helps to refer to **a large group of people**. Also remember that no one likes to sit and listen to a boring speech; ensure that your speech conveys the necessary information **while being captivating to listen to** at the same time.

Note that:

- Begin with an interesting or relevant question to 'hook' in your audience (e.g. Have any of you ever been in the shoes of a first responder?).
- Tone can be formal or less formal depending on the purpose of the speech.
- **Be interesting.** If the speech allows it, please try to add in some jokes or one liners when appropriate. If not, please try to make the information presented seem as interesting as possible. **Cambridge will grade you based on tone.**

Structure of speeches

Good morning Principal, teachers, and fellow students. I am John Lim from class 3/7, and I am extremely grateful for this rare opportunity to share with you all about the importance of first aid and, more importantly, how to perform it in emergency situations.

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points
- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

I have come to the end of my speech. I hope that my short time here on stage has both informed and taught all of you about first aid.

Article



Articles are usually written for readers to be made aware of certain current affairs. Thus, the structure of an article has to imitate that of one found in a newspaper or magazine.

Note that:

- You are conveying facts and information. Your tone should not be persuasive.
- Ensure that your heading is captivating but not untrue.
- You can write creatively, as long as your facts are conveyed.

Structure of articles

Charity with a Heart (Do not capitalise prepositions. Nouns and verbs should be capitalised.)

By John Lim

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Include a 'hook' to engage your readers (e.g. Imagine being caught out in a major natural disaster...).
- The end of this paragraph should help ease the reader into the body paragraphs, which will contain the bulk of information.

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points

- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

Internal Letter



Internal letters are usually written when writing to someone **within the school**. This is usually a teacher or principal.

Take note that:

- All paragraphs are to be aligned to the left.
- No two finger spacing is allowed.
- Leave a line between paragraphs.
- Tone is usually polite, do not be rude.
- Use formal transition markers (e.g. thus, moreover, etc).
- **Sound positive even when giving negative feedback** (e.g. Although our activities for our school's carnival are already popular with the Upper Secondary cohort, there are still measures we can take to ensure that they are further improved to attract even more students from the Lower Secondary cohort to participate).

Structure of internal letters

John Lim
Head Councillor

10 June 2022

Mr Tan Yee Kuan
The Principal
Park View Secondary School

Dear Mr Tan,

Proposal to Organise Musical for School (leave out articles, capitalise nouns and verbs)

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

- Answer **all** the bullet points
- Develop each idea coherently (i.e. elaborate on each point, do not simply state it and move on without further adding on).
- Use the ideas given by the visual stimulus before using your own.
- Try not to lift the text that comes with the stimulus.

Yours sincerely,
John Lim

Note: In British English, *Yours sincerely* is typically employed when the recipient is addressed by name (e.g. Dear John) and known to the sender to some degree, whereas *Yours faithfully* is used when the recipient is not addressed by name (e.g. Sir/Ma'am) or the recipient is not known personally by the sender.

Free Writing

Narrative/Recount



Narrative and recount essays are essays that require you to **tell a story**. The main difference between the two is the fact that narrative essays can be from either a third or first person POV, whereas recount essays must be from a first person POV.

e.g.

4 Describe an uncomfortable experience on a train and how it affected you.

The question above is a **recount** question as it is asking for **your own experiences** how the experience affects **you**. This forces you to write in a first person POV.

e.g.

5 Write about a time when you saw one or both of your parents in a different light. How did this increase your appreciation of them?

The question above is also a **recount** question as it asks you to write about **your** parents and therefore **your own experiences**.

Now, let's see what narrative questions look like.

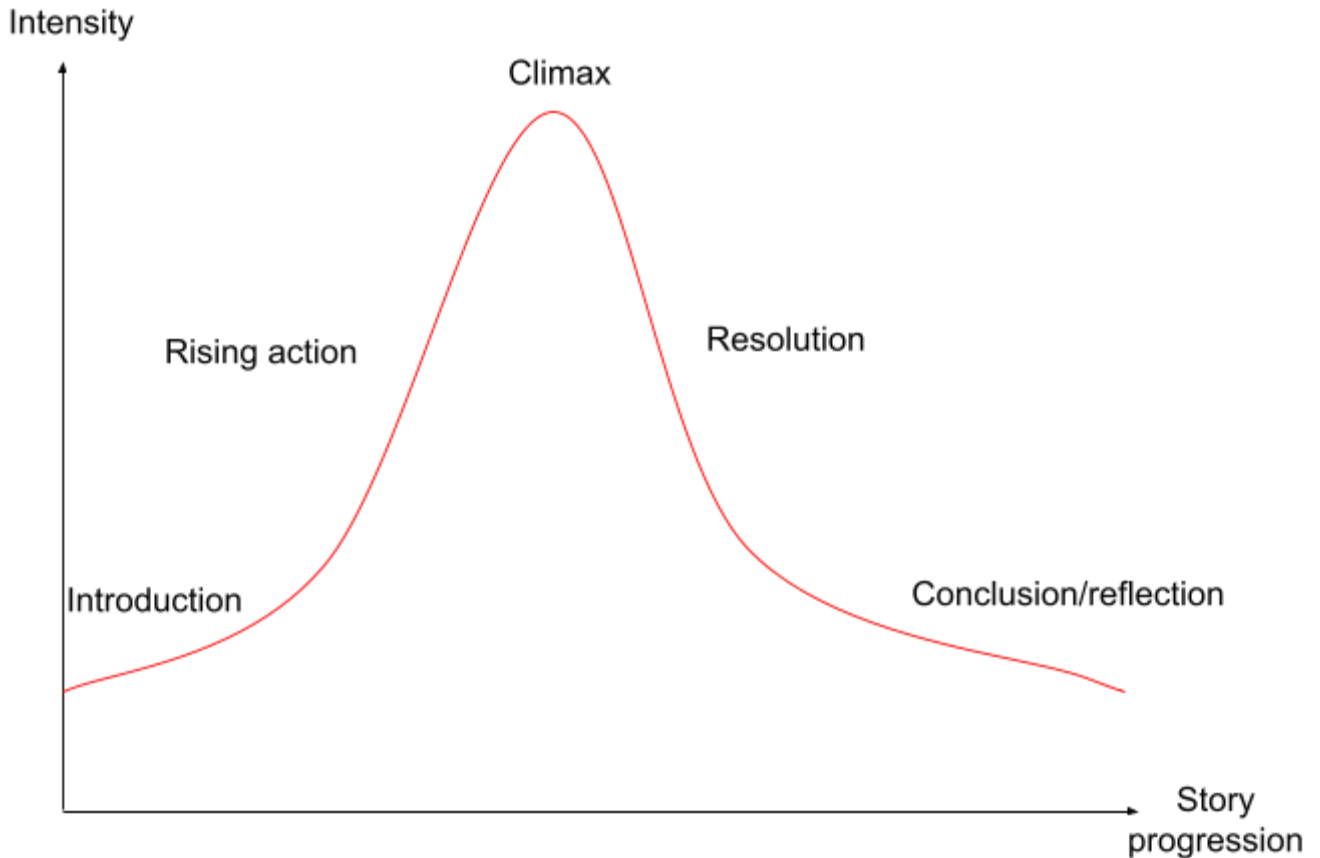
e.g.

2. "I didn't expect my friend to react that way at all!" Write about a time when this happened.

The above question is a **narrative** question. Despite the fact that it looks like a recount question, note how the question did not specify that your experiences must be used. You can use the stories of your cousins, your friends, your siblings, your goldfish, your teacher's second cousin, etc.

Structure of narrative/recount essays

The structure of such essays are relatively straightforward. They follow the same template that we have used for writing stories our whole lives.



Introduction

- Introduce the setting and characters.
- The situation has not occurred yet, everything is normal.

Rising Action

- Introduce the situation at hand.
- The action is "rising up".
- **Describe what is going on now, and what you feel about the situation so far.**

Climax:

- Answer question given.
- The action is at its peak and this whole paragraph is completely dedicated to how the **situation is unfolding** and **how you are affected**.
- Include your personal feelings.
- You can choose to briefly state how you want to resolve it, but do not implement the solution just yet.

Post-Climax

- Situation is being solved or, if it cannot be solved, is nearly over. The action is "dying down".

- If your settings have changed, indicate how they have changed in this paragraph.

Reflection/Conclusion

- Situation is over, the character reflects upon what previously happened.

As it can be difficult to remember all this information, you can use a table like the one below to help you in planning your essay.

Paragraph	General outline
1	Location: Time: Weather: What are you doing now:
2	What has happened: How are you feeling: How are you reacting: What are you going to do: How have others around you reacted:
3	What uncomfortable experience occurred: How are you feeling: How are you reacting: What are you going to do: How have others around you reacted:
4	How has the situation been resolved: What did you do to help resolve it (if you helped at all): How are you feeling: What are you going to do: How have others around you reacted:

	Has your setting changed? How has it changed:
5	How do you feel about the whole ordeal: What lessons have you learnt: What are you going to do now:

Here is an example of what you can write:

Paragraph	General outline (Wayne)
Question	Describe an experience on the train that made you feel uncomfortable.
1	Location: Serangoon MRT Station Time: Late afternoon, just after school Weather: Swelteringly hot What are you doing now: Going home to take a nap
2	What has happened: A man just entered the train and is standing uncomfortably close to me. His hand starts touching the waistband of my skirt. How are you feeling: Vulnerable and nervous, I do not know what to do How are you reacting: My eyes are darting from side-to-side, cold sweats broke out What are you going to do: Debating if I should make a scene or keep quiet How have others around you reacted: Nothing, they have not noticed
3	What uncomfortable experience occurred: The man is now groping me How are you feeling: Scared and afraid that something worse might happen if I say something How are you reacting: Fists are clenched on the train pole, praying that he stops, hoping someone comes to my aid What are you going to do: Nothing, I am too scared to move How have others around you reacted: A woman behind me sitting down takes notice

4	How has the situation been resolved: The woman grabbed my molester's arm and shouted for help. She got off on the next stop, dragging the man with her. She told me to follow her as SMRT staff alerted the police. When they came, they handcuffed the molester and asked for my parent's contact info What did you do to help resolve it (if you helped at all): Nothing, I simply followed the instructions of the woman and the police. How are you feeling: Relieved that someone finally spoke up on my behalf What are you going to do: Follow the instructions of the woman and the police How have others around you reacted: People are shocked as the man's actions were brought to their attention, others started staring and glaring at him Has your setting changed? How has it changed: I am now in another MRT station that I did not intend to get off on, I am now waiting for my train to go back to Sengkang
5	How do you feel about the whole ordeal: I felt very scared the whole time, followed by a sense of relief when the woman came to my aid and when the proper authorities were alerted What lessons have you learnt: I have learnt to speak up when I am in need of help, as I might not be as lucky as I was today to have someone act on my behalf. What are you going to do now: I am now going home to inform my parents about the whole ordeal. The urge to nap is no longer there

Descriptive



Descriptive essays are essays that require you to **describe** an object or an experience. These essays are usually very easy to spot: they will ask you directly in the question to describe whatever it is they are asking.

e.g.

- 2 Describe some of your favourite moments with your family. Why are they important to you?

In the example above, the question is asking you to describe **your favourite moment with your family**. Fairly straightforward, no?

e.g.

4 Describe an uncomfortable experience on a train and how it affected you.

Note how the above examples can be considered to be narrative/recount questions as well. This allows you to answer in the same format as you would a normal narrative/recount question. This, however, begs the question: what is the difference between narrative/recount essays and description essays then?

The answer is simple: descriptive questions don't have to be about experiences.

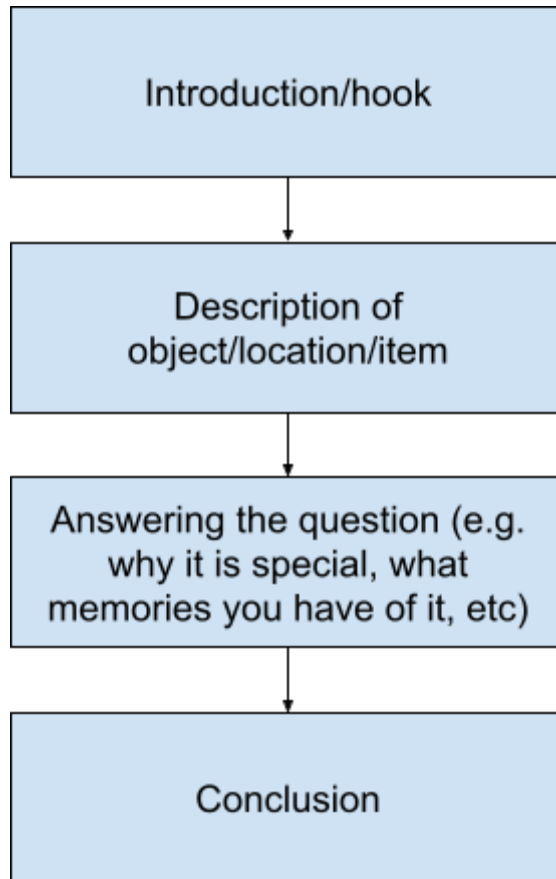
e.g.

Describe a place that means a great deal to you. Why is it so important?

Such a question like the one above is asking you to describe a **location**, rather than an **experience**. This question cannot be answered like a narrative/recount essay question.

Structure of descriptive essays

Descriptive essays are usually much more creative and may not need to heed to any specific structure. However, the following guidelines can be used for such essays to help students plan descriptive essays that do **not** follow the structure of narrative/recount questions.



Introduction

- Give a hook to make your readers interested in your story
- Explain what your story is going to be about (i.e. what are you going to be describing)
- Try not to describe the object you are showing here, as you will need to describe it later and might thus repeat yourself.

Description of object

- Describe what object you have chosen.
- Make sure to use **show don't tell** as well as your **five senses**.
- It would be advantageous to describe a **special characteristic** about the object you are describing. This characteristic can be something physical (e.g. unique colourway on shoes, some scratches on the side of a phone due to some special experience, etc) or something sentimental (e.g. a pen that has been with you since primary three, the last photograph of a loved one, etc).

Answering the question

- In this paragraph, you should answer the question given
- e.g. Describe your favourite place in the world: explain why this place is your favourite.

- If the question has two parts, such as those shown in the examples above, then you should seek to address both parts (for more info, go to Two-Part).
- You can include more than one reason to help in answering the question (e.g. this place is important to be as...and also because...).

Conclusion

- The conclusion is where you wrap up your story; try to include something that will make your readers feel as if the story is finished (e.g. In the end, I will always go back to that park, with that old oak tree and the low hanging branch.) or give them something to think about (e.g. I do not know what happened to that old photograph, but I will always treasure the memories it gave me. After all, if photographs are meant to capture moments, isn't the best photograph one that can never be forgotten?).
- Try not to end the story abruptly. This can make the reader feel that the story is incomplete as it is not nicely "wrapped up".

Once again, you can use a table to help you plan out your essay under exam conditions.

Paragraph	Content
Question	Describe a place that means a great deal to you. Why is it so important?
1	Intro/hook: What are you describing:
2	Description of object:
3	Reasons for liking/remembering/hating object: R1: R2:
4	Conclusion:

Here is an example of what you can write.

Paragraph	Content (Wayne)
Question	Describe a place that means a great deal to you. Why is it so important?
1	Intro/hook: The pandemic ravaged on ever since 2019, taking its toll on humanity. We suffered so much and gained so little, and no one knew when it would end. That is, until the vaccine was released.

	What are you describing: A vaccination clinic set up in a community centre at the height of the pandemic.
2	Description of object: The space was not very big, enough to fit maybe fifty, at most sixty, people. It had a stage, although it was old and wooden, and probably slightly creaky. Tables and chairs were set up at the entrances and exits, and surgical curtains covered the cubicles lining the walls, with nurses holding needles and other medical tools. Chairs were lined up in the middle of the room, filled with the sighs and grunts of the elderly as well as the cries and shrieks of their future generation. At the front of it all was a table lined with laptops, all humming away while bored teens stare at screens of their own.
3	Reasons for liking/remembering/hating object: R1: Found my current girlfriend there. R2: Showed me the behind the scenes work of a frontliner.
4	Conclusion: Every place, no matter how small, how insignificant, or how overlooked, can have a great and meaningful purpose.

Argumentative



Argumentative essays require you to **take a stand** on certain issues. These types of essays are usually more structured and are geared towards arguing your point compared to more creative writing topics. Despite this, our essay will still have to show both sides of the argument, albeit only supporting one side.

e.g.

5 Young people are becoming more impatient these days. Do you agree?

The question above requires you to take a stand; to either agree or disagree with the statement provided. Note how in this case, you **cannot** be neutral. We also have to **define our terms** (e.g. who are considered young people? What does impatient mean?). More on this later.

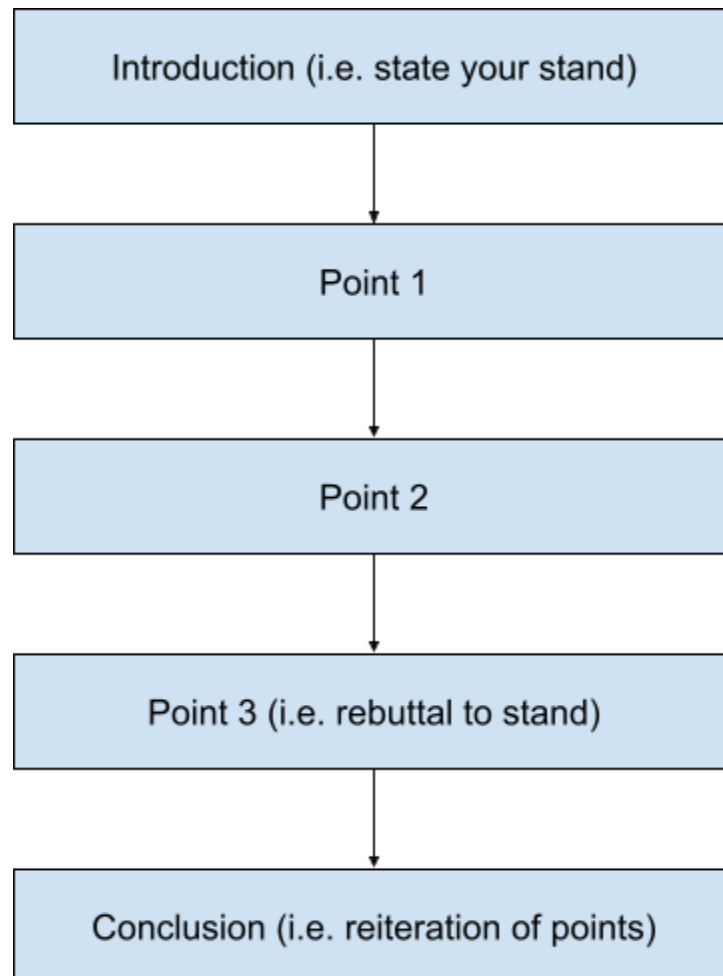
e.g.

4 Is academic excellence the only means to success in one's life? What are your views?

The question above is asking if academic excellence is the **only** means to success in one's life. Note how this stand is very extreme, and we must show that we disagree or else we risk our argument being one-sided. Similar to the above question, we **cannot** be neutral and must **define our terms** (e.g. what is academic excellence? What is success?).

Structure of Argumentative Essays

Each argumentative essay will follow the structure below:



Take note of the following:

- In the introduction, **write a short 'hook'** to engage your readers and then **state your stand**.
- Points 1 and 2 will both **agree** with your stand.
- Only Point 3 will **rebut** your stand.

- Your conclusion should **reiterate** your points. Show how you have systematically supported your argument and **include a call-to-action** (i.e. what we as readers can do after reading your essay).

PEEL Method

Due to the very rigid structure that argumentative essays have, it is essential that each of our paragraphs contain the necessary information we need to back up our argument. Thus, each paragraph in our essay (excluding the introduction and conclusion) will need to follow the **PEEL format**.

PEEL format:

Point

Elaboration

Evidence

Link

Your schools should have taught you this method as well, but I will reiterate their teachings to ensure that we are all on the same page.

Point

The **starting sentence of your paragraph** should include your **overall point**. This is so that the reader can quickly understand what the paragraph is going to be about and what your argument for this paragraph will be towards.

e.g. I agree to a large extent that we should donate to charity as much as possible as it is a convenient way for us to indirectly help those in need.

Elaboration

The next few sentences will be dedicated to elaborating what your point is about. This is where you can provide more in-depth explanations to your point.

e.g. Charities are often set up to provide help to such people; their main cause is to do good and support others that are struggling to support themselves. It is also safe to say that most of us also want to give help to those that need it. However, unlike the past, the modern world demands much of our time and energy to be devoted to our work and other ways of life, such as travelling. Therefore many people often do not have the time to volunteer or reach out to help those in need. One solution to this problem is obvious: set up organisations whose main purpose is to help said people, with no intention of profit. Thus by donating to charity we will be indirectly helping such people by providing charities with more resources, be it material or monetary, which can help them serve more of the underprivileged.

Evidence

After elaborating and explaining your point, you will need to back up your statement with evidence. This step is relatively self-explanatory.

e.g. For example, in 2019 a survey was done by the 'Today' newspaper which concluded that Singapore is a very much KPI driven society and that an average Singaporean spends only 2.8 hours on leisure a week. With such meagre amounts of time dedicated to relaxation and leisure, how is it possible for us to expect Singaporeans to dedicate time and energy to volunteer or help the needy? The most time-effective way would be to simply donate to charities and let them settle the rest.

Link

At the end of your paragraph, **link back to your point at the very start**. This link will be like a mini conclusion; reiterate what you have said and summarise it in one or two sentences. Please take note to **not** include any new points or any new evidence. The last part of your paragraph is not meant to introduce any new material, but rather to sum up what has been said.

e.g. Therefore, due to the lack of time that most Singaporeans experience on a daily basis for tasks outside of work, the easiest way to help those in need will be to donate to charities.

Rebuttals

Rebuttals are unique to argumentative essays. Having a rebuttal is important as it shows that you are able to interpret both sides of the argument. Try to place your rebuttal after your first two points to allow the examiner to see the points for your stand first.

Do not place your rebuttal as your first point. This makes your essay flow a little janky, as your introduction will state your stand and your first paragraph will immediately rebut it.

Do note that you should also **rebut the rebuttal** to show the examiner why your main point is still the better one.

e.g. We should donate **less to charities as most of the money goes to the pockets of the top brass running such companies, and little actually goes to those in need.** Most charities do not publish their spendings unless they are government-run. This can and has led to the outcome of resources, usually money, going into the hands of those in charge of the charities and not to those that actually require the help that these charities provide. Such acts are obviously counterproductive and are effectively deceiving the public to line the pockets of those at the top. For example, in 2012 CNN undertook a year long investigation with newspapers and nonprofits to see into the dealings of charities in America. The investigation was dubbed 'America's Worst Charities', and it found that many charities spend relatively little of what they had on actual charity, and instead blew it on marketing campaigns and funding the salaries of their CEOs. The Kids Wish Network raised USD \$18.6 million in 2012 but spent only USD \$240,000 on actually helping young kids, their main target group. The Cancer Fund of America is another example; they ran sweepstakes that promised winners thousands of dollars but

handed out cheques for pennies. They were eventually sued in 1989 by a dozen states. Such examples show how donating to charities might not have the effect that the public intended, and might simply be syphoning money off the people to give to those who do not deserve it.

However, such charities should not be representative of the entire industry. Many charities do in fact help their intended audience and do not partake in such fraudulent activities. Government-run charities can be a donation staple for many people if they are afraid of the misappropriation of funds that can happen when private charities raise money. Charities with good track records, such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation that spends around 85% of their money on helping young children achieve a goal before they eventually pass on, can also be avenues for people to donate their money to.

Discursive



Discursive essays are usually written to **discuss** certain issues. You are **not meant to take a stand** and the essay itself should show both sides of the argument (i.e. it should be **balanced**)

e.g.

3. What are your thoughts about giving and receiving gifts during festive occasions?

Note how the question above did not ask you to take a stand or to take a side on the issue. Your aim should be to show the reasoning behind giving and receiving as well as not giving and receiving gifts during festive occasions.

e.g.

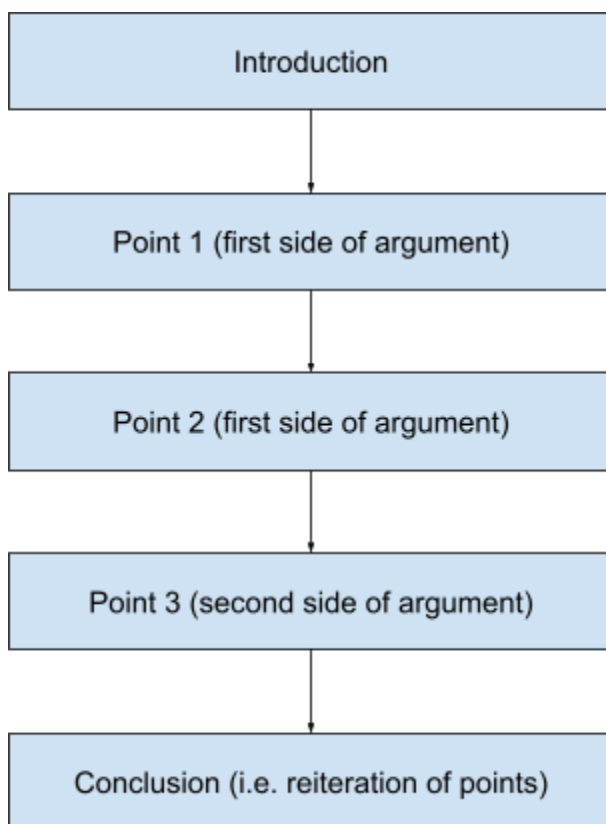
1. What changes have you seen in your school since you joined it? How do you feel about these changes?

The question above requires you to write **more than one** change that you have seen in your school since you joined. The second part also requires you to show how you feel positively **and** negatively about these changes.

Structure of discursive essays

Discursive essays need you to show both sides of the argument in your essay. Therefore, each paragraph has to follow the PEEL writing style.

However, discursive essays **do not need a rebuttal** as we are not supporting either side of the argument. Similarly, you **do not need to include examples** in discursive essays as your main aim is to explain your points, not to support them. This means that the structure of discursive essays can be seen as a “watered down” argumentative essay.



For the three points, please ensure that you are writing points from **both sides of the argument**. Similarly, there might be arguments where you find a **third side** to some questions. You can also add such points in, albeit such points might be quite uncommon to find.

The planning for discursive essays are very similar to those that you would use for argumentative essays, except that the rebuttal is removed. Instead, you should simply elaborate on the other side of the argument but not try to show how it is inferior to any particular stand.

Two-Part



Two part essays are essays that have two parts in their questions. In order to score high marks for such essays, **both parts** of the question must be answered.

Such essays are usually part of narrative/recount or descriptive essays. Let's take a look at some examples.

e.g.

- 4 Describe an uncomfortable experience on a train and how it affected you.

In the above example, we are asked to not only write about our experiences on a train, but also write about how it affected us.

e.g.

Describe a place that means a great deal to you. Why is it so important?

The above question is similar; it asks you to not only describe a place that is of significant importance to you, but to explain why it is so as well.

It is obvious that two part essays are simply longer, slightly more rigorous forms of normal essay questions. Thus, there is no specific structure or planning table for them.

ANSWER BOTH PARTS OF THE QUESTION OR YOU WILL FAIL.

General Composition Tips



Every essay type will have their own specific structures and their own specific way of writing. However, there are general tips and tricks that one can leverage to score better in Paper 1, regardless of question chosen.

1. PLAN PLAN PLAN!!

At the start of every paper, take around 10 to 15 minutes to plan out the general outline of the essay as well as what your storyline will be like or what points you will write.

For argumentative essays, ensure to decide what stand you want to take and plan out your argument. It will be difficult to switch your stand mid-essay-especially if you have already written your rebuttal- and doing so will likely result in a lower mark or even outright failing the paper if you are not careful.

For discursive essays, plan out what your points will be.

For descriptive and narrative/recount essays, plan what storyline or what object you will be writing about. These essays tend to be much more creative, so please ensure that you stay within the bounds of reality (i.e. do not write anything fantasy related or anything extremely improbable. A *deus machina* is possible, but may be difficult to fit into a story).

2. Make sure that you are answering the question correctly.

Do not mix up discursive and argumentative questions, or narrative and recount. Ensure that your essay plan answers all parts of the questions, especially if it has two parts. Failure to answer any part of the question will likely net you a **FAIL**. Even answering the question in basic English using a very straightforward and predictable storyline or using mediocre points of argument will still net you at least a **PASS**, as you have at least answered the entire question.

3. Do not change your essay midway.

Even if you suddenly got an idea for another essay question, please **do not** change your essay mid-way. Restarting your essay halfway through will mean that you would have to redo an entire essay in less than the amount of time allocated to everyone else.

4. Time management is key.

Your Paper 1 will be 1hr 50 min in total, and has a total of 50 marks (around 1.5min/mark).

The breakdown for your entire paper should thus be:

- Section A (10m): 15min
- Section B (30m): 47min
- Section C (30m): 47min

Comprehension Guide



Introduction to Comprehension

Your Paper 2 will consist of three sections:

1. Visual text (5m)
2. Narrative text (20m)
3. Non-narrative text (25m)

The non-narrative text will consist of a summary component, which 15m out of the 25m will be allocated towards.

Question Types (Section A)



1. Suggest Questions



Suggest questions usually ask you to explain how something in the poster helps to convey a certain message. Such questions are relatively straightforward. We must first **state the characteristics of the picture/phrase** and then **relate it to the message**.

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WORLD WISH MONTH 2019

Where There's A Wish, There's A Way

This April, join us each #WishWednesday as we help celebrate the hundreds of thousands of life-changing wishes that have been granted and the thousands still to come. Because for children battling a critical illness, a wish is not just a dream. A wish-come-true can be a turning point that allows children with critical illnesses to focus on the possibilities of tomorrow and not the challenges of today. Let's show the world what Make-A-Wish children, families, and our communities already know: Where there's a wish, there's a way.

Zahaan
Wish granted 2018

WHERE THERE'S A **wish** THERE'S A WAY.

#WISHWEDNESDAY

Make-A-Wish WORLD WISH DAY

DONATE HERE >

ACT NOW WITH A ONE-OFF DONATION

You can make their wishes come true

Children like Violette need your help

Little Violette was diagnosed with neuroblastoma at the tender age of 2. This type of cancer affects one's nerve tissue and it was an extremely trying time for her and her family. During her treatment, Violette sought solace from Disney's Princess Sofia, so when asked to make a wish, it was no surprise that her wish was to meet Princess Sofia.

Make-A-Wish brought Violette and her family on a trip to fulfil her wish. The whole experience brought Violette's family closer together and everyone was in awe of Violette's bravery, stamina and zest for life. It was a life-changing experience for Violette, imbuing her with newfound courage to continue fighting her illness.

Make-A-Wish wants to extend such experiences to more children and you can help make a difference to their lives.

Violette
Wish granted 2019

Q: Why is the use of alliteration in the tagline “Where There’s A Wish, There’s A Way” effective?

A: The alliteration is **catchy** and therefore makes the tagline **easy to remember**.

There are different ways that such questions can be worded:

- Suggest the purpose of XXX.
- Explain why XXX is effective in conveying the message of the poster.
- Explain how XXX is effective in showing YYY.

e.g.

A: The word is “life-changing”.

3. Direct Questions



Direct questions simply have their answers in the passage itself and simply require you to copy and paste the correct answers into the blank itself with little to no editing needed.

e.g.

Q: Identify two outcomes of a 'wish-come-true' for children with critical illnesses.

A: It allows them to focus on the possibilities of tomorrow and not the challenges of today. It also imbues them with newfound courage to continue fighting their illness.

Question Types (Sections B and C)



1. Direct Questions



Direct questions are questions that require you to simply **copy and paste** from the passage itself.

e.g.

Gerald set the table unwillingly. He grabbed the bottle of mustard as he slowly lamented his situation.

Q: What did Gerald do as he was setting the table?

A: He grabbed the bottle of mustard as he lamented his situation.

e.g.

Shami had never seen that much food on a table before. It was piled high on each other. Just the sheer size of the lobsters staggered him. There they were, stained redder than his teacher's marking pen.

Q: What was Shami looking at?

A: He was looking at food piled high on the table.

Both examples above show slight variations of direct questions. The latter requires a bit more analysis but it is by no means difficult.

2. Language Questions



Language questions are intended to ask you how certain words in the passage are **phrased in connection with an action or intention**.

e.g. *His veiny arms bulged as he lifted the weights, the iron bar that they are attached to slowly creaking and bending at the sides as it went past his shoulders and into the air.*

Q: Explain how the phrase ‘veiny arms’ is effective in conveying the fact that he is strong.

A: The phrase is effective as the veins **accentuate how much his muscles are flexing** and thus shows how strong he is.

e.g. The small timid boy held the rifle in his hand as the door started banging. He grabbed the magazine and inserted it into the gun, expertly cocking the gun just as the door was breached.

Q: Explain how the phrase ‘expertly cocking’ is effective and unusual.

A: **It is effective** as it shows that he is **proficient in handling rifles** and is knowledgeable on how to use them. **It is unusual** as such a young boy **should not have intimate knowledge of guns**.

In both questions above, we have to show the **characteristics of the phrase**.

e.g. *Rachael was too tired to care about her appearance. Her hair was dishevelled and her mascara ruined, but she carried on pushing her greasy spatula onto sizzling burger patties. She contemplated going to the toilet to freshen up a bit, but went against it. It wouldn't matter anyway; she still had five more hours on the clock and any effort to improve her appearance would most certainly be destroyed by the oily musty environment she was currently in.*

Q: What does the word 'anyway' tell you about how Rachael felt about herself?

A: It tells us that Rachael **did not care much about her appearance** as she had too much work to handle.

Another way that examiners can ask vocab questions is by asking you directly for a synonym. This type of question requires you to have a good grasp on language, as not knowing the meaning of the word will almost certainly net you a wrong answer.

Q: What word in the passage about Rachael has the same meaning as 'messy'?

A: The word is 'dishevelled'.

Note that vocab questions often require you to have a wide range of vocab available as well as being able to interpret how they are used in various sentences. Thus, in order to ensure that students can answer such rigorous questions, students should keep a **vocab journal** to help record and catalogue difficult words and phrases that they encounter in their various classes and homework.

3. Example Questions



Example questions usually ask you to **give evidence from the passage**.

e.g. *The already popular Mayan ruins of Chichén Itzá in Mexico, for example, saw a massive influx of tourists after UNESCO declared them a World Heritage site in 1988. With more than 5000 visitors a day, the ruins have turned into a Disney-esque mecca. Worse, they are being threatened by the wear and tear of relentless foot traffic, not to mention outright vandalism.*

Q: Give a piece of evidence from the passage that supports the idea that designating a place a World Heritage site brings more harm than good.

A: Some of the visitors to the Mayan ruins of **Chichén Itzá** in **Mexico** vandalised the place.

Note how the key words Chichén Itzá and Mexico are included in the example, but the other parts of the answer are shortened. This is because **locations and names** should be copied wholesale, but the rest of the answer can be paraphrased.

4. Literary Questions



Literary questions will test you on the **literary devices** used in the passage. Thus it is imperative that we understand what literary devices they can use to test us.

Irony questions: Identify the oddness or strangeness of the situation.

Tone questions: Identify the tone and how it helps to convey a certain message.

Metaphor questions: Identify how the characteristic of a certain object is given to another (e.g. The red pepper led a determined rebellion against the rest of the vegetables in the salad, choosing to remain different against the sea of leaf green.)

Simile questions: Identify how a characteristic of a certain object is given to another (e.g. Mary was as pale as a ghost as she was rushed to the A&E.)

e.g. *John slowly ascended, the roller coaster creaking as it went up the rails. His face turned white as he looked down, his body shivering slightly as he noticed the height where he was at. His hands gripped the safety bar tightly, yet a huge grin appeared on his face as the roller coaster started to descend.*

Q: What is ironic about the 'huge grin' that John had?

A: It was ironic as he was scared of the fact that he was so high up **and yet** he was still excited for the ride despite this very fear.

e.g. *The desert was swelteringly hot, but despite the weather the army base was in full operation. Soldiers ran up and down, orders were being shouted left and right. James hated this life; it was meaningless and boring to him. However, it paid for tuition, so it wasn't like he had much of a choice. He grunted as he carried heavy boxes of ammunition out of the hanger, sighing at the fact that he still had three more months of deployment left before he could return home.*

Q: How does the tone of the paragraph convey how James felt?

A: The tone was one of **lament** and it conveys how **James hated the fact that he had no choice but to serve in the army so that he could pay for his tuition.**

e.g. *The fish swam like lightning; they split as the shark rammed through them, scattering in all directions and splitting up to avoid the missile of death heading towards them. It made a sharp turn as its mouth was still empty at another attempt to capture a full meal for itself.*

Q: What metaphor was used and how was it effective?

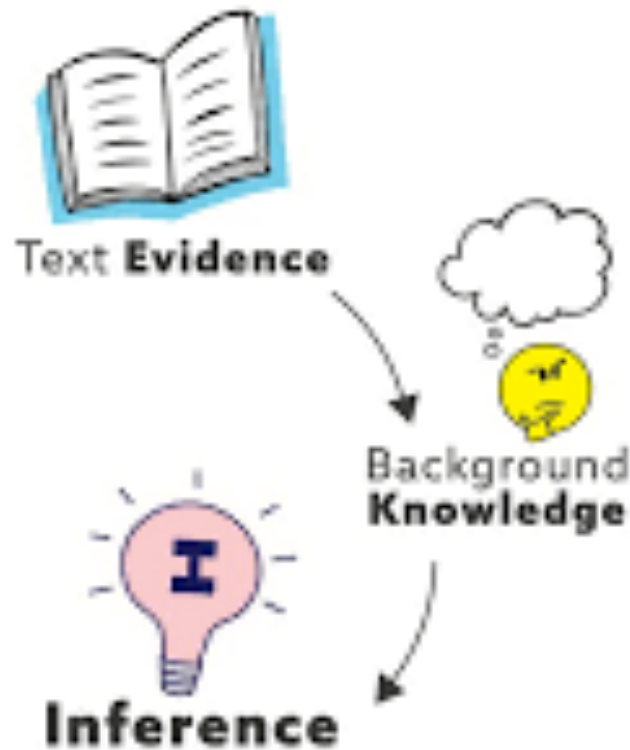
A: The metaphor used was '**swam like lightning**' and it was effective as **lightning strikes extremely fast**, thus to akin the speed of the fish to that of lightning **allows us to visualise how fast they were swimming.**

e.g. *Tammy stared at the candy bar in her hand, contemplating her two choices: eat it now or save the precious chocolate treat for later. She looked around her. No one was home, she was all alone. Nothing was stopping her from reaching into the candy jar yet another time. Fueled with greed, Tammy ripped open the candy wrapper as fast as a child on Christmas Day, the chocolate bar in her mouth and the caramel filling satiating her sweet tooth just a few seconds later.*

Q: What simile was used and how was it effective?

A: The simile used **as fast as a child on Christmas Day** and it was effective as children who open their presents on Christmas Day **usually feel excited**, thus telling us how excited Tammy felt when she was about to eat the candy bar.

5. Inference Questions



Inference questions are usually some of the most difficult questions to answer, especially due to the fact that their answers cannot be directly found in the passage, but rather must be found by reading between the lines. This can lead to much frustration, as many students will often say that they understand the passage intuitively but cannot seem to put their thoughts into words (refer to the Rachael vocab question).

To answer inference questions, you have to understand the **logic behind the author's statements** and **try to deduce their meaning**.

e.g. *The piano tuning was the most ghastly part of the entire afternoon. Surie would not have made the appointment if not for his mother. It was always the same affair. The tuner would descend on them with his tuning equipment and set*

the piano going with horrendous squeaks and echoes from Hitchcock's movie on birds.

Q: How does the piano tuning suggest different effects for both Surie and his mother?

A: **His mother wanted a piano tuning as she probably was not there when it happened** and felt that it was a worthwhile effort. However, **Surie disliked the piano tuning**. It was **implied that he was reluctant to go** as he showed up only because his mother was not present for the appointment and because **the tuning sounded horrendous**.

Summary



Summary makes up 15m out of the 25m that Section C has.

Summary is often a challenge for many students; they often complain that they are unable to find the points required, find it challenging to get good marks for style, or even keep within the word count. In this section, I will teach you how to more easily score and get higher marks.

Summary writing consists of two strategies:

- Editing on the text itself
- 8x10 table

Editing on the text itself

Editing on the text itself is quite self-explanatory. You simply **highlight** or underline the points you wish to write, then you proceed to alter some of the words and phrases to better your marks for style. However, this method is not recommended as it can get very messy, and weaker students might get confused on what to write as well as what words to change.

8x10 table

The 8x10 table is my recommended way of doing a summary. Using a pencil, draw out an 8x10 grid on a blank side of your exam paper. It should look something like this:

Next, go into the text and highlight or underline what points you want to write. Once you have found all your points, you can write them out within the grid, with each cell containing a single word. This helps you to ensure that you do not exceed the word count and also helps you to gauge how many words you must reduce or add.

Tips for Summary Writing

In addition to summary techniques, I have also included some general tips that can be applied to all summaries below.

Tips for Content

1. Content before Style

Content is worth 8 marks while style is worth 7. However, content is **much easier to score**. Simply getting the correct points will net you a mark each, even if you copy them wholesale and do not paraphrase anything.

However, what limits this is that by not paraphrasing, you will hit the 80 word limit very quickly and thus cannot get the full 8 marks for content if you simply copy and paste from the passage.

2. Answer the Question

The question that you need to answer for summary writing may come in two parts.

e.g. *Summarise the negative effects of eating too much sugary food, and how we can mitigate the consequences of such effects.*

In the example above, ensure that you split your 8 points for content between the two requirements: negative effects of eating too much sugary food and how we can mitigate the consequences of such effects.

It is recommended that you split your 8 points evenly (i.e. 4 points to each requirement).

Do not ignore or forget to answer one of the requirements, as you will likely fail your summary for not answering the question completely **unless you are extremely proficient in your writing style.**

3. Count your words

The limit for summary writing is 80 words. Do try to utilise the word count as much as possible. While exceeding the word count should be avoided, not maximising the number of words used (i.e. using less than 70 words) should be avoided as well. This is because it shows that you have not written enough points (no paper will have points so short that they require less than 70 words to summarise). If you do have extra words to spare, please **check your points** and ensure that all of them have been written. If you cannot find any new points to write, try to use the extra words to better your style (e.g. use to “spruce up” your sentences).

Any words above the 80 word limit will be **cancelled and ignored**. Do not attempt to circumvent this rule; it will not work.

Tips for Style

The main way to score for style is to **change the words** of the points **without changing its intended meaning**. Changing at least **one word** for **each point** will already net you **3 marks** for style.

Strategy 1: Changing at word level

Changing at word level means that you change familiar words into different ones. Note that the new words **do not have to be complex and difficult**, they just have to be **different**.

e.g. *One negative effect of eating too much sugary food is weight gain.*

Instead: A downside of consuming excessive amounts of sugary food is weight gain.

Strategy 2: Changing at sentence level

Changing at sentence level means to change the sentence from active to passive or vice versa

e.g. *Exercising helps to reduce weight gain.*

Paraphrased: Weight gain is reduced by exercising.

Strategy 3: Look for verbs to change

One good way to improve your style and decrease word count is to find verbs that can be converted to '-ing' structure or '-ed' structure.

e.g. *The group felt it was frustrating to climb the mountain and wanted to leave immediately.*

Paraphrased:

Frustrated by the idea of climbing the mountain, the group wanted to leave immediately.

OR

Feeling frustrated by the idea of climbing the mountain, they wanted to leave immediately

General Comprehension Tips



1. Read the questions first before the preamble.

The preamble refers to the texts that you have to read to answer the questions. Most students will instinctively read the text first. However, it is much more efficient to read the questions first and then proceed to scan through the text for answers, as you will be able to get the answer to more than one question from just a single read.

Some students like to place the question paper and the text side-by-side and then scan the text for answers to each paragraph's questions (e.g. they will read all the questions that state "In paragraph 1..." and then proceed to read paragraph one. Repeat for all questions). This is also a good tactic that can be used.

2. Do not leave questions blank.

While I understand the frustration of not being able to answer questions, please do note that leaving questions blank is a surefire way to get zero for that particular question. Attempting a question, even if you write something you are unsure of, might get you a mark.

A 10% chance of scoring one mark is much better than 100% chance of scoring no mark at all. **ATTEMPT ALL QUESTIONS!!**

3. Time management is key.

Your Paper 2 will be 1hr 50 min in total, and has a total of 50 marks (2.2min/mark).

The breakdown for your entire paper should thus be:

- Section A (5m): 11min
- Section B (20m): 44min
- Section C (25m): 55min

Note that the Summary itself is 15m, thus you should dedicate 33min to it. Therefore, you should use only 22min for the rest of your Section C.

Keep a mental note of how much time you have left to complete the paper. Do not dwell on one question for too long; secure all the questions you are confident in getting first before going back to the ones you are unsure of.

QnA



