

In many English exams, you are asked to write a short story.

- You should write about 4-500 words
- Use paragraphs accurately and effectively
- Use a variety of sentence types
- Put dialogue inside speech marks and use a fresh line for each speaker.
- Remember: quality not quantity!
- Depending on the exam, spend 35 minutes on this question, dividing your time:
 - ✓ 5 minutes planning
 - ✓ 25 minutes writing
 - ✓ 5 minutes checking

What makes for a successful story?

- ▶ It will be lively and capture the reader's attention immediately:
 - ✓ 'Crowds! Don't you just hate them...'
 - ✓ 'Flick! Flick! Flick! The unremitting blue flash of the ambulance's light told its own sad story...'
 - ✓ "'Danger to Life! Keep Out!" Deffo not the kind of thing you should ignore. Well, we did ignore it.'
- ▶ It will be told in a way that is absorbing and which creates tension (the plot).
- ▶ It will be about an aspect of life that interests the reader (the theme).
- ▶ The reader will be able to relate to the main character (the protagonist) and learn from the problems the character faces (the conflict).
- ▶ It will use language in a lively and economical way, i.e. no waffle (the style).
 - ✓ Every word of narration, description and dialogue are there because the story needs them.

Preparing for the exam

BE SURE TO ARRIVE ON THE DAY WITH A FEW OUTLINE STORIES ALREADY IN YOUR HEAD.

- Well before exam day, sketch out a few plots for possible stories and memorise these.
- Know exactly who these stories will revolve around (their main character or protagonist).
 - ✓ Maybe base them on a few anecdotes, i.e. incidents from your life or others you've heard.
 - ✓ Perhaps base them on personal incidents such as when you were especially pleased / happy / proud of something or when you felt especially guilty / embarrassed / let down.
- Work out a few interesting plots... what conflict must the main character face and overcome?
- Work out "beginning > middle > end" structures for each story. Many writers find it easier to work out endings first then work backwards to the beginning.
- Make the setting realistic and atmospheric – to suit the story's mood.
- Avoid complex plots and genres like the plague: no romance, sci-fi, ghost and horror stories! There's no time to develop such a story under exam conditions – you'll drift and run out of time.