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Exam tips for writing language papers

Exam etiquette

- ♣ Write your **name, grade** and **class** as well as your **teacher, subject of the paper** (Eg: English Language paper) and the **date** at the top of the page.
- ♣ Use a ruler to rule lines.
- ♣ **LEAVE A LINE BETWEEN EACH ANSWER.**
- ♣ If you use a fine liner or a very dark pen, only write on one side of the paper.
- ♣ Rule a line after each major section
- ♣ Read the instructions
- ♣ Never write in pencil

General exam tips:

- ♣ Answer in full sentences
“The tall brown fox jumped excitedly when he saw some food” is an example of a full sentence not “he jumped when he saw food” or “she is sick” or “sick”. Unless you are directed to quote one word or are told to explicitly write down one word such as “write down one word that sums up the boy’s feelings when he saw the monster”
- ♣ Be specific
Don’t answer the questions with “Because” and don’t say something like “because he was sick”. The teacher says who is sick?
- ♣ Give as much detail as possible.
For example: Don’t just say the people were poor. Say “The majority of the American population were poor because they were experiencing a financial crisis because the stock market had crashed.”
- ♣ One of the best ways to study is to teach another person.
So try to explain a concept (like what is a figure of speech?) without looking at your notes. If you can’t then you probably don’t know your work well enough and then go study again.
- ♣ Look at the mark allocations
Mark allocations act as a guide to tell you how much or how little to write. If the question is out of 3 marks, then you should aim to write 3-4 facts.
- ♣ Work through past papers.
You know the saying, practice makes perfect.

♣ When reading questions...

Highlight/ circle/ underline the most important words or instructional words in the question. For example:

"Suggest **two reasons** **why** Bloemfontein has **omitted** the **famous son** from its **list of local attractions**."

Language exam tips (P1)

♣ When dealing with comprehensions

-Clear your mind and read through the comprehension piece once.

-Then read through the questions

-Then read through the piece again underlining/ highlighting any important points

-If there are words you don't understand, **don't panic**, just try to figure out what they might mean by looking at the context and the other words surrounding it.

- Refer back to the information given in the text in your answer. Where possible back up what you are saying by quoting from the text. You will also have to draw on your general knowledge for some questions.

-Before you move onto the next question, re-read the question you have just finished making sure that you have answered the question completely.

♣ When dealing with visual literacy

Here we are testing to see if you are able to look at visual sources and analyse them to gain understanding.

All the clues and answers to the questions are within the picture/ advert/ cartoon etc

-Look at the verbal and non-verbal communication (words that are being said as well as hand gestures, facial expression and general body language- these are what you will be tested on)

-Look at what words have been written in **bold**, are **bigger**, are a **different colour** than other words and ask yourself why?

- Ask yourself:

- What is the general message of the picture/ advert/ cartoon?
- What figures of speech/ literary devices have been used to get the message across? (Eg: pun, irony, satire, hyperbole etc)
- Who is the intended audience and why? What clues in the picture/ advert/ cartoon tell you that for example that advert A is aimed at teenagers? You could argue that the advert shows young people hanging around a school, wearing trendy clothes and they carry backpacks.

-When answering a question back up your answer by referring to the picture/ advert/ cartoon.

Eg: We can see that the girl in picture A is angry because her eyes are narrowed, her arms are crossed and her lips are pursed.

♣ When dealing with summaries

Here we are testing whether you are able to look at a piece of information and recognise key bits of information.

- Read the instructions carefully.
- Always indicate the number of words you have used.
- Do not use abbreviations. So no won't/ can't/ it's etc.

♣ When dealing with editing / language / grammar sections

-Know the difference between PARTS of speech and FIGURES of speech. They are not the same.

Parts of speech= Noun/ Verbs/ Adverbs/ Adjectives etc

Figures of speech= Metaphor/ Pun/ Irony/ Bathos etc

- Learn your language chapters.
- Know all your figures of speech, how to identify them and explain them.
- Spelling is important.

How to answer specific questions:

♣ Quote a four word phrase

Means use quotation marks (" ") and take the information directly from the text provided.

Eg: "You are the best friend I have ever had" No quotation marks = No marks

♣ Quote five consecutive words that tell us....

Consecutive means Following after each other. So this question means, in the text quite a 5 word phrase, where the words follow after each other.

Eg: Question : Quote a five word phrase that tells us that the boy was a tall , buxom boy.

A: "He is a big boy" So don't write 5 random words that you took from the text.

♣ Quote from the text to support your answer...

Does not mean: Only quote as your answer.

Does mean: First give us what you think, then find a quote from the story that backs up what you think.

Eg: Question : Why does the lady kill her husband? Quote from the text to support your answer.

A: The lady (Melinda) kills her husband because she was mentally disturbed and thought he was a demon trying to attack her.

"Melinda had spent time in many mental institutions" and "She was accustomed to taking strong psychiatric drugs that often led her to see things that were not there"

♣ Identify and explain the figure of speech in

-Identify means say what type of figure of speech it is. (Metaphor, personification, simile, transferred epithet etc)

-Explain means tell me what image is created. If it is a metaphor/ simile/ personification then ask yourself what two things are being compared, and then explain the effect of that comparison.

Eg: Question: Identify and explain the figure of speech in "Summer hangs drugged from sky to earth"

A: Personification. Summer is being compared to someone that has been drugged **NOT** Summer is being compared to drugged The person is lethargic, slow and heavy. Thus the summer day is hot , heavy, muggy and humid.

Not to do : Personification, because personification is when you give human like characteristics to things that are not human.

Eg: Question: Identify and explain the figure of speech in "We sat there anxiously like naughty school boys"

A: Simile. The men waiting to get in trouble are being compared to naughty school boys who wait outside the principal's office waiting for their punishment.

♣ Describe the setting....

Means give details as to where the action took place, NOT, tell me what went on in the scene.

Eg: Question: Describe the setting of the scene in the extract above.

A: The scene takes place in Juliet's home at the Capulet's party. Juliet is standing on a balcony and Romeo is below her.

♣ Compare

Compare means say how things are the same and how they are different.

Eg: Question: Compare the characters of Alica and Jenny as we have come to know them at this point of the story.

A: Alica and Jenny both enjoy reading and writing short stories. They both grew up in Cape Town and both come from very difficult situations. However they are very different people and have responded to life challenges very differently. Alica has decided to embrace her challenges and tries to learn valuable life lessons through them. She reads many self-help books and channels her emotions into her writing of short stories. Jenny on the other hand has sunk into a complete depression. Her writing is dark and she is battling with thoughts of suicide and engages in multiple self-destructive patterns of behaviour. She resists all attempts from her peers, teachers and parents to help her.

Common spelling errors

• Where vs. Were

Where are you going? (where usually refers to a place)

Were you there yesterday

• Their vs. There vs. They're

Please put the oranges over there.

There: Shows a place

It is their fault for not coming.

Their: Shows ownership

They're quite eager to meet you.

They're: Omission (contraction of they are)

• His vs. He's

His= shows possession

That is his crayon

He's = Contraction of he is

He's going to the party tonight

• Your vs. you're

Your blazer is filthy.

Your: Shows ownership

You're the best rugby captain I know.

You're: Omission (contraction of you are)

You an idiot = WRONG

• A lot

ALOT ✖ 😞

A LOT WRITTEN AS ONE WORD= WRONG

A LOT 😊

A LOT WRITTEN AS TWO WORDS= RIGHT

• Write vs. right

Please write this down / I like to write stories / You write nicely.

Write: Action

I was right about the weather being rainy/
You were right about that coffee shop.

Right: Being correct about something

- **This vs. These**

This is a lovely dress.

This: Used when referring to one item (singular)

These boys are outrageous.

These: Used when referring to more than one thing (plural).

This cats are annoying me = WRONG

- **Because vs. cause**

I was late because the car broke down.

The cause of the accident is unknown. Girls are smart *cause* they study hard = WRONG

Girls are smart *coz* they study hard = WRONG

- **Two vs. too vs. to**

TWO=NUMBER

I have two left feet.

TOO= SUBSTITUTE VERY/ALSO

It is too late to change subjects.

TO= SHOWS WHERE WE ARE GOING

I am going to the shop.



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