

# Strategies for Improving Non-Fiction Writing



# Improving writing skills – fast!

- Opportunities for short focused practice
- Zooming in on areas that need improvement
- Providing pupils with a repertoire of writing experiences that they can call on
- Providing opportunities to model and practise the process of planning
- Developing a bank of plans that can be adapted in exam conditions



# Teaching writing backwards

Over the last couple of years, I have had cause to work with English teachers and to read some of the literature on English teaching. I have become convinced that **writing is mostly taught backwards.**

**Typically, students are asked to write something. Once they have written it, they hand it in to a teacher to mark. This eats teacher time** because there are so many things to comment upon in the piece of writing. Teachers have discussions about how to handle this. They may create a coding system for spelling and grammar and restrict comments to other features of the piece.

**Nevertheless, it is still unmanageable and virtually all of these comments are never fully understood by the students**

December 1, 2017 | **Author:** [Greg Ashman](#)



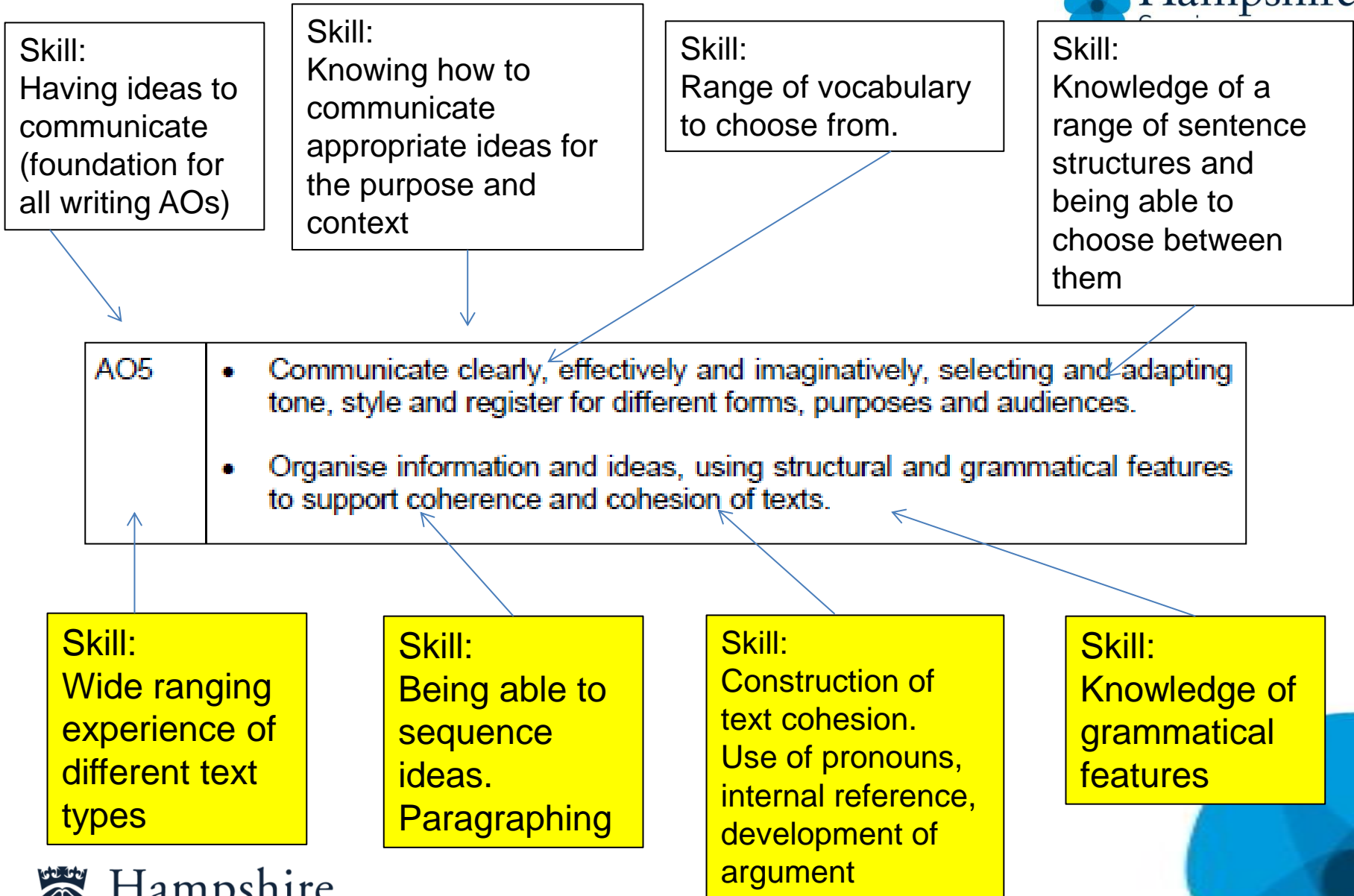
# Teaching writing forwards ...?

Instead, it might be better to **teach a skill** first, to all of the students, in class. **Students can then practise the skill**. Once we are sure that they can do the skill in isolation, **we can ask them to demonstrate it in a more complex task where they need to synthesise a number of skills**, again focusing on the application of the one we have taught them. Once we have had a look at their responses, rather than writing to our students, we could use what we have learnt to **design a plan for a new lesson where we correct misconceptions** or further develop the skill. **This would be teaching writing forwards**

December 1, 2017 | Author: [Greg Ashman](#)



# Component Skills in GCSE Assessment Objective 5



# AO5/ AO6 Writing

- **Planning:** Many students would have benefitted from a **quality rather than quantity approach**: having the confidence to take time to plan, and then craft a shaped and structured response in two or three sides, with time at the end to revise and improve. (AQA, Edexcel)
- **Avoid prepared answers:** There were a large number of ‘prepared’ narratives which had little or no relation to the specified titles. It is difficult to give much credit for communication and organisation to this type of response and candidates need to be reminded that the titles are not there just to be ignored if they choose (Eduqas)
- **Don’t make it up:** Of particular note as being often out of place were the ubiquitous statistics and spurious surveys, fake experts and fictitious anecdotes, none of which were very effective in supporting a clear argument. It is rare for a student who introduces the opinion of a made-up scientist to be rewarded for a convincing argument (AQA, Eduqas)
- **Technical accuracy** often made a significant difference to the overall mark (Eduqas, Edexcel, AQA)

# Adaptable planning

- What patterns do we notice?
- What text types do we need to ensure pupils are familiar with?
- Have they had opportunities to read and experience these?
- Do they understand how the structure of their work needs to adapt according to text type?
- What kinds of experiences do pupils need to be able to call on?



# Structure

## Reading into Writing

### Read

- Example of the kind of text that exemplifies the structure/ text features (e.g. newspaper article, opinionated piece etc.)

### Explore

- Planning structure – extrapolated by pupils from the text (link to reading skills)

### Imitate

- Imitative task using the same structure that is either supported by a range of information to support the formation of an opinion/ or linked to a literature text



# Reading as a Writer

## Imitative Structural Work

### With friends like these ...

by Tom Hodgkinson

Paragraph 1

**I despise Facebook.** This enormously successful American business describes itself as “a social utility that connects you with the people around you”. But hang on. Why on earth would I need a computer to connect with the people around me?

Paragraph 2

And does Facebook really connect people? Doesn't it rather disconnect us, since instead of doing something enjoyable such as talking and eating and dancing and drinking with my friends, I am merely sending them little ungrammatical notes and amusing photos in cyberspace, while chained to my desk? A friend of mine recently told me that he had spent a Saturday night at home alone on Facebook. What a gloomy image. Far from connecting us, Facebook actually isolates us at our workstations.

Note down what the writer is doing in each paragraph e.g. providing reasons, presenting an anecdote etc.

*Presents strong feelings about the topic.*

*Gives a definition of what it is*

# Imitative Structural Work – Text features

- Read back through.
- Which structural features could you borrow to help you imitate this writer's style and structure?
- For example – the strong first sentence '**I despise Facebook**'
- **Imitate this article but instead present a strong opinion on the topic of selfies ....**



# Collaborative Writing

## Together, write your own first paragraph about selfies

**I despise Facebook.** This enormously successful American business describes itself as “a social utility that connects you with the people around you”. But hang on. Why on earth would I need a computer to connect with the people around me?

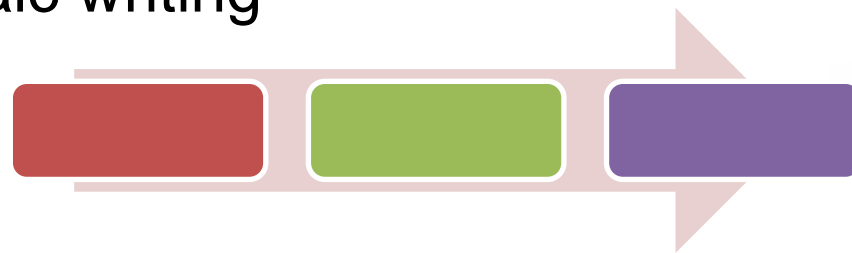
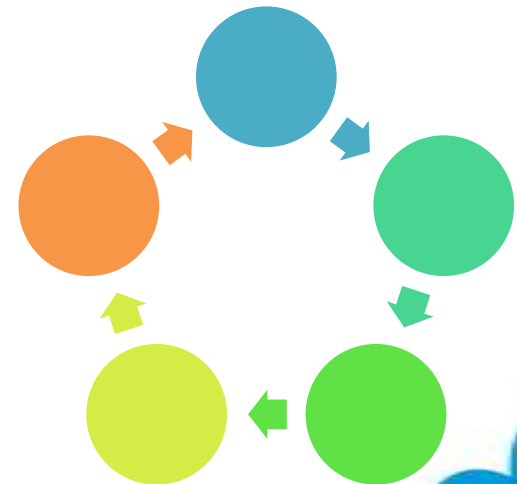
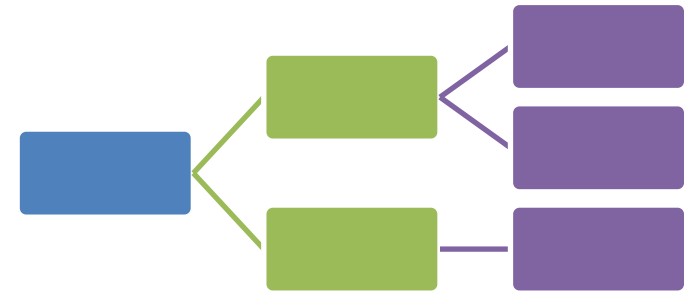
*Presents strong feelings about the topic.*

*Gives a definition of what it is*

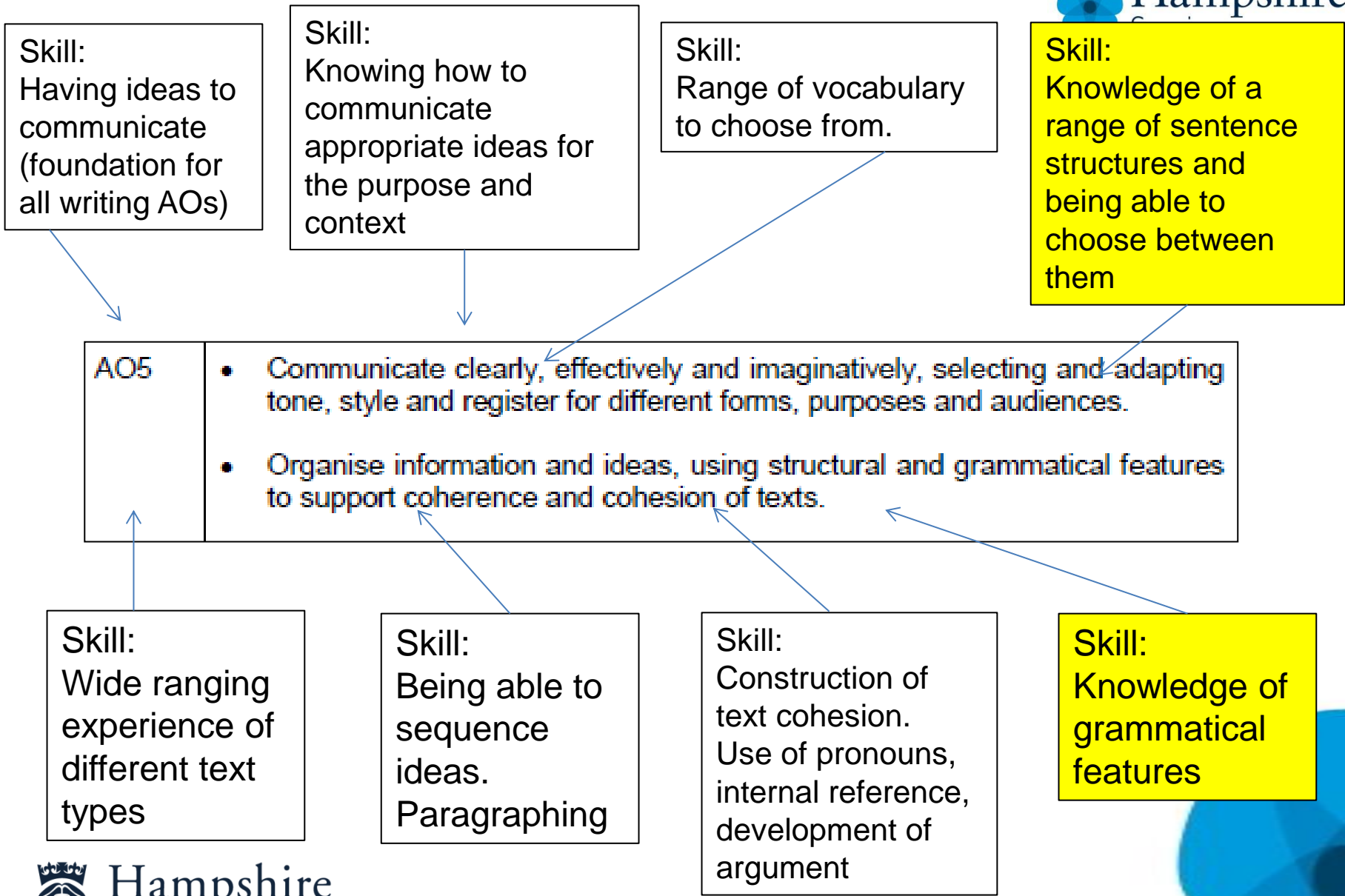


# Creating a bank of different plans

- Model your own planning
- Provide opportunities for pupils to deconstruct/ examine the planning of others
- Encourage pupils to experiment until they feel comfortable with a range of planning structures
- Avoid providing a prescriptive plan – this leads to formulaic writing



# Component Skills in GCSE Assessment Objective 5



# The use of ‘creative imitation’

## ***Offering model patterns for students to play with and then use in their own writing***

Imitation is different from copying: imitation involves some form of re-creation of materials or ideas rather than blind duplication. We felt that imitation was a supportive way to embed learning and to foster a sense of creative play – language as putty again. Imitation offered young writers a means to test things out, to experiment, to see what happens and helped to develop understanding of the grammatical feature being addressed.



# Sentence imitation

## Developing a toolkit of stylish sentences

The Apple Watch: only an unhealthily devoted Apple fanatic could bear to wear one.

The past few weeks haven't been great for Apple. First they were implicated in the stolen celebrity nude photo disaster, which reminded everybody how easily clouds leak. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think the iPhone is generally marketed as a diabolical timewasting device with the potential to wreak a grotesque and devastating invasion of your personal privacy. They tend to focus more on all the cool colours it comes in.

Then they launched the horrible-looking Apple Watch, which does everything an iPhone can do, but more expensively and pointlessly, and on a slightly different part of your body. Only an unhealthily devoted Apple fanatic could bear to wear a Apple Watch, and even that poor notional idiot would have to keep putting their iPhone down in order to operate the damn thing. It'll scarcely be used for telling the time, just as the iPhone is scarcely used for making calls. It's not a watch: it's a gaudy wristband aimed at raising awareness of Chinese factory conditions. Or a handy visual tag that helps con artists instantly identify gullible rich idiots in a crowd.

Charlie Brooker – The Guardian



# Rewrite these sentences in the style of Charlie Brooker but for the topic of selfies

The Apple Watch: only an unhealthily devoted Apple fanatic could bear to wear one.

The selfie: only a ....

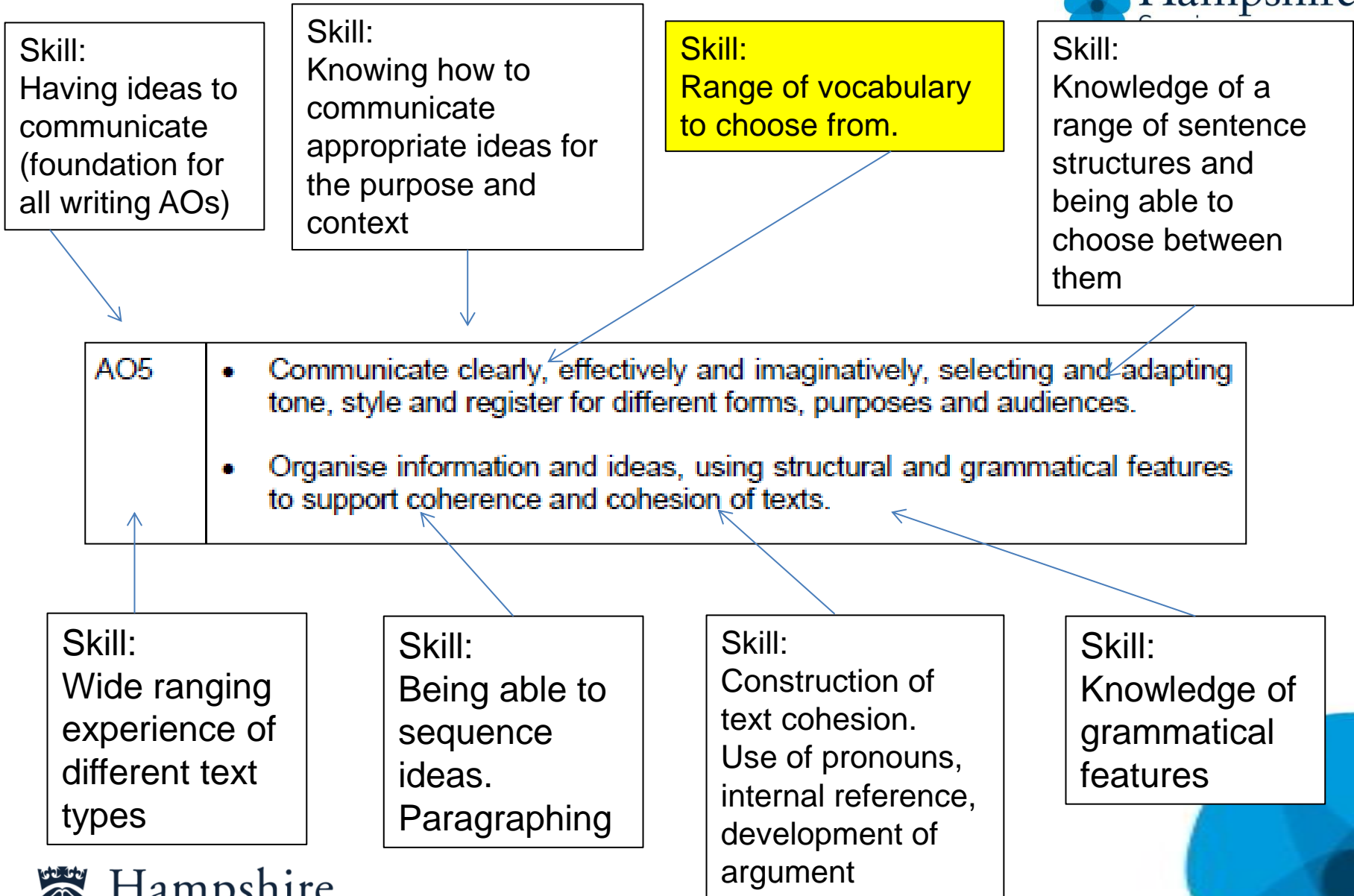
It's not a watch: it's a gaudy wristband aimed at raising awareness of Chinese factory conditions

It's no longer a phone: it's a ....





# Component Skills in GCSE Assessment Objective 5



# Positive or negative?

**good**

**bad**

**like**

**dislike**

**important**

**upsetting**

**attractive**

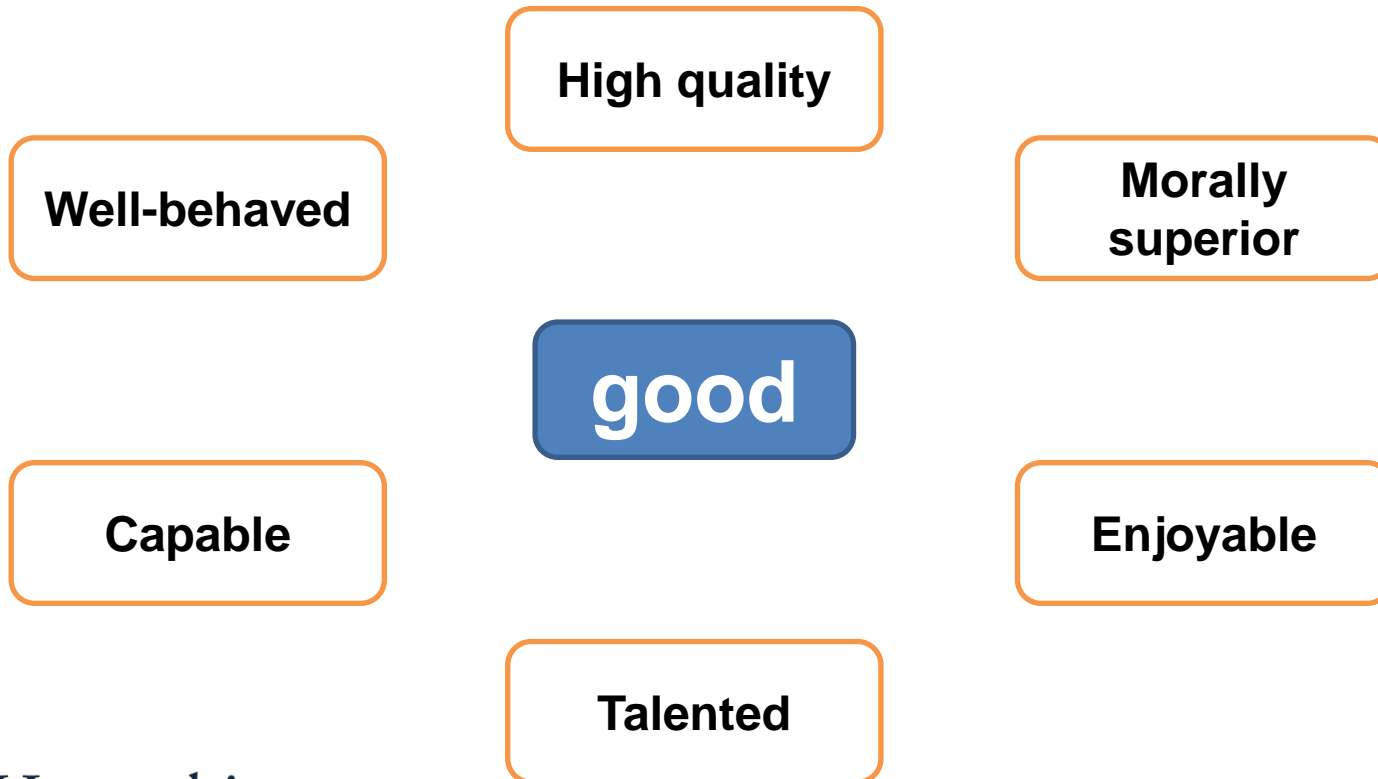
**frightening**

**pointless**

**serious**



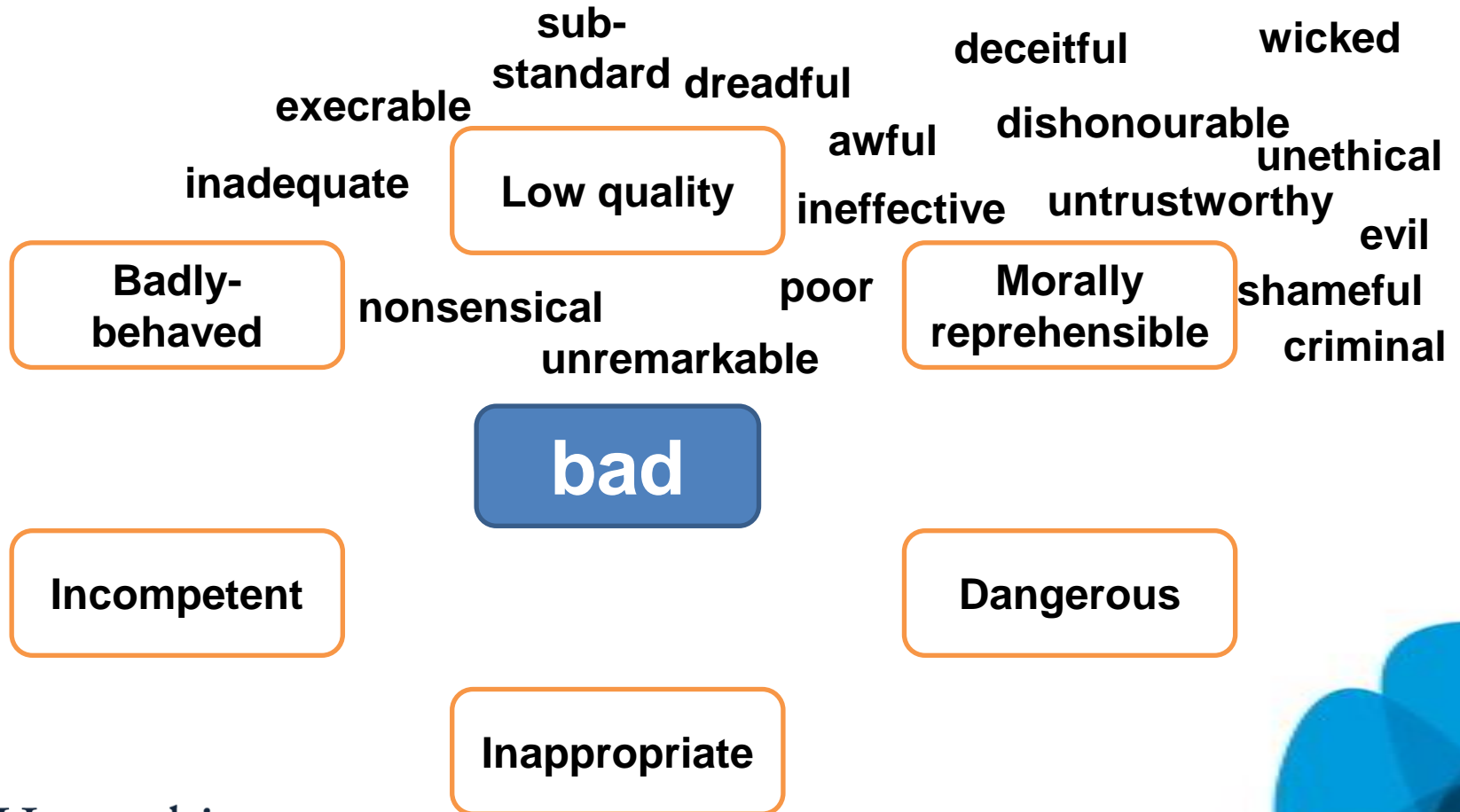
# What exactly do you mean?



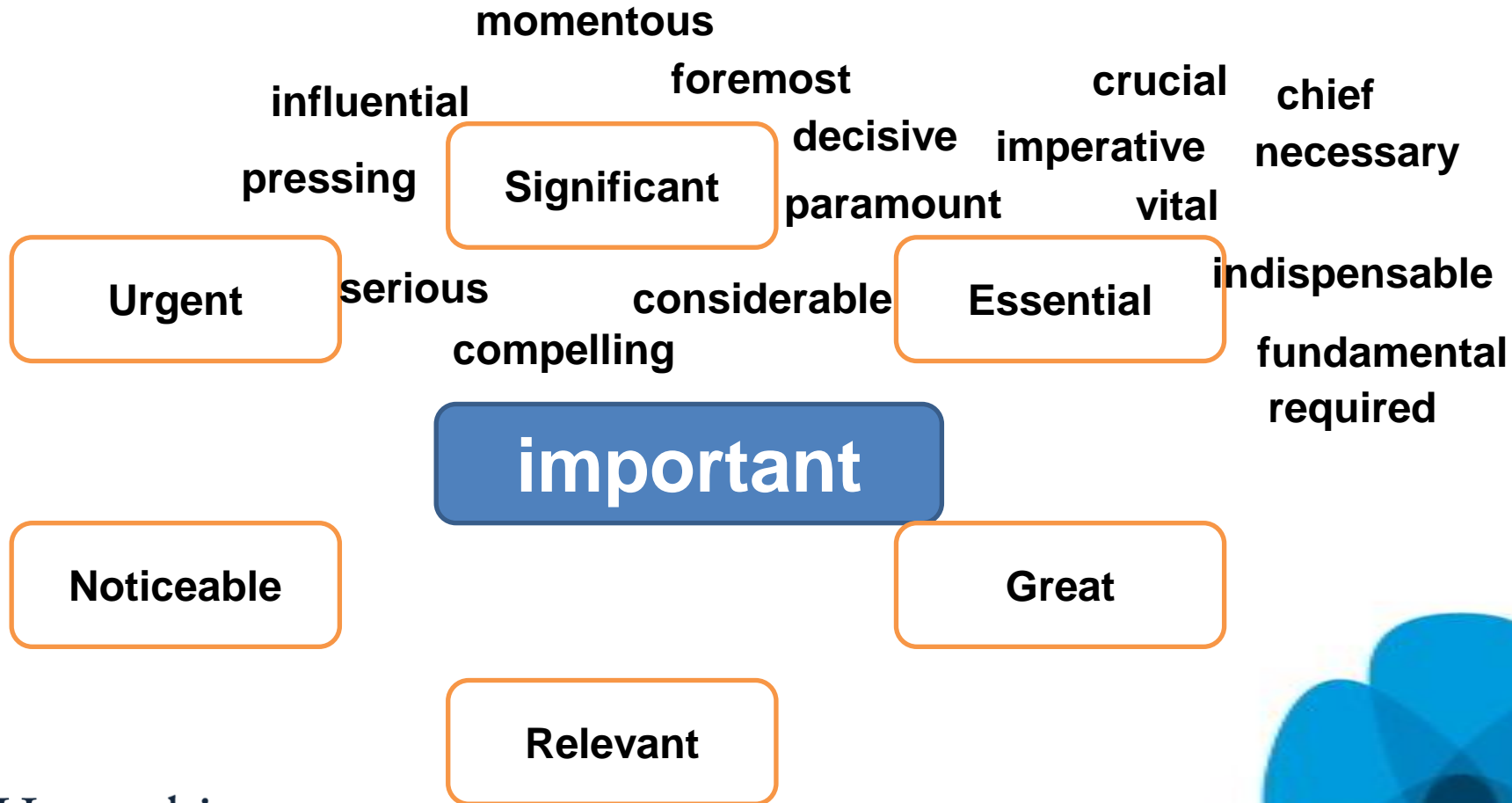
# What exactly do you mean?



# What exactly do you mean?



# What exactly do you mean?



# What exactly do you mean?

**Strange**

**Supernatural**

**Unusual**

**Weird**

**Unlikeable**

**Unexpected**

**Inappropriate**



# What exactly do you mean?

