

HIAS MOODLE+ RESOURCE

Starting to write critically at Key Stage 3

3. Year 7

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Overview

This document contains...

This document is the third in a series of resources that explores progression in critical writing **as a written form** in order to support teachers in their planning of a Key Stage 3 curriculum. This section focuses on the introductory teaching of essay-style writing at vocabulary, sentence and paragraph level in Year 7.

Points to consider when using this resource

Critical and analytical writing is a new and unfamiliar form of writing to students starting at secondary school, yet many secondary English departments have historically assessed students' response to reading through this form of writing, which can lead to underestimation of students' capacity and lowered expectations in teaching if used as the only form of assessment for reading.

The working assumption should be that students will need to be taught critical writing as an entirely new written form in Key Stage 3.

Critical writing in Year 7

Learning to write in a critical voice is one of the key performance indicators for Year 7, but this is not to be expected of students at the beginning of the year.

Some written forms might precede essay writing in supporting students to establish their critical and evaluative voice, such as writing character profiles or reviews of texts studied, as well as responses to more challenging questions that demand some extension or comparison of content and ideas.

Thinking aloud about texts, noting and responding to writers' ideas and choices, both through discussion and through annotation, is a vital step that should come before any expectation of written response. Students' personal and aesthetic response to texts is important, alongside their expression of their deepening understanding. Barbara Bleiman's research for the English and Media Centre and its application in St Michael's Catholic School, High Wycombe, demonstrates the power of continuing to model and explore personal responses to texts, rather than moving immediately to an analytical dissection of texts. Discussion of the pleasure and puzzle of elements of texts can enable students to explore and deepen their interpretation and provides an effective stepping-stone to evaluative commentary.

Thinking in an exploratory way about poems – phrases a teacher might use to model an initial response:

I like...

I like this because...

It makes me wonder. I keep coming back and puzzling over...But that's fine. There's always more to see in it.

I like the sound of the words, especially...

I love the way it....

It surprises me. I don't expect poems to...

I like the way it ends...

I want to keep reading it because...

I like the way it seems like...

I'm still not sure why... or why....

I don't understand ...

[\(<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/blog/the-problem-with-subject-terminology-and-the-power-of-i-like>\)](https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/blog/the-problem-with-subject-terminology-and-the-power-of-i-like)

The teacher's interweaving of direct instruction, sharing knowledge and interpretation of texts with students, and discussion that allows students to absorb and explore ideas about texts is crucial in encouraging students to develop their thinking.

In Year 7, students should, initially, be taught to convert known ideas and content into formal interpretive and explanatory paragraphs, rather than expecting these paragraphs to focus on independent interpretation.

By the end of the year, students should be able to express their independent interpretation through critical paragraphs and/or short sequences of linked paragraphs under classroom conditions (ie following teaching, using all available resources to support planning and writing, including open texts, class notes, displays, etc, with time allocated for editing, redrafting and publication as appropriate).

Key elements of critical writing should be explicitly taught, modelled and secured in Year 7. Teachers will need to decide on the elements that are appropriate and useful in expressing ideas about the texts being studied and approaching the tasks that are set.

Students are familiar with many of these features of writing from other contexts and need to adapt and apply them to critical writing:

- expressing opinions:
 - vocabulary and phrases for expressing opinions (*I despise... I admire... although I feel... I can admit that...*)
 - alternatives to *tier one* evaluative language (alternatives to words such as *good, bad, important, a lot, weird, very/not very*)
 - phrasing for different forms of reader response (*this makes me feel/think... this helps me to visualise... I can imagine... this makes it sound as if...*)
- extending and justifying thoughts about characters and situations in the text with reasons, exceptions and results:
 - use of *and, because, but* and *so* to expand on ideas given
- critical phrasing:
 - formal ways of referring to the writer (use of surname, *the writer, the poet, the playwright*)
 - use of present tense to refer to events in the text
 - inferential language (*implies, hints at, suggests*)
- use of evidence:
 - ways of introducing evidence (*such as when she... because she...we can see when...*)
 - use of colons to introduce evidence for statements made
 - correct layout and punctuation of quotations
 - integrating short quotations into sentences
- vocabulary to describe character (*cruel, deceitful, aggressive, manipulative, grief-stricken, naïve, hostile, exasperated, ruthless, resourceful, resilient*)
- vocabulary to express and name emotions and attitudes (*despair, fury, contempt, self-loathing, joy, anticipation*)

- phrasing and vocabulary to support tracking a character or idea through the text:
 - adverbials for locating evidence in the text (*later in the chapter, at the key moment*) and sequencing (*initially, later on, by the end*)
 - vocabulary linked to change and development (*becomes, increasingly, more than ever*)
 - sentence forms to structure comparison and contrast (*although at the beginning it seems...later we can see that...*)
- ways of adding detail to interpretation and explanation:
 - use of relative clauses to add extra information (*who shows that she cannot be trusted when... where the richest members of the audience would have sat*)
- vocabulary to describe time periods and settings of texts (*in the mid-Victorian period, in the 19th Century, in South Africa during the 1980s*)
- organisational and cohesive features (*in the same way... in contrast...by the end of the chapter*)

Task setting

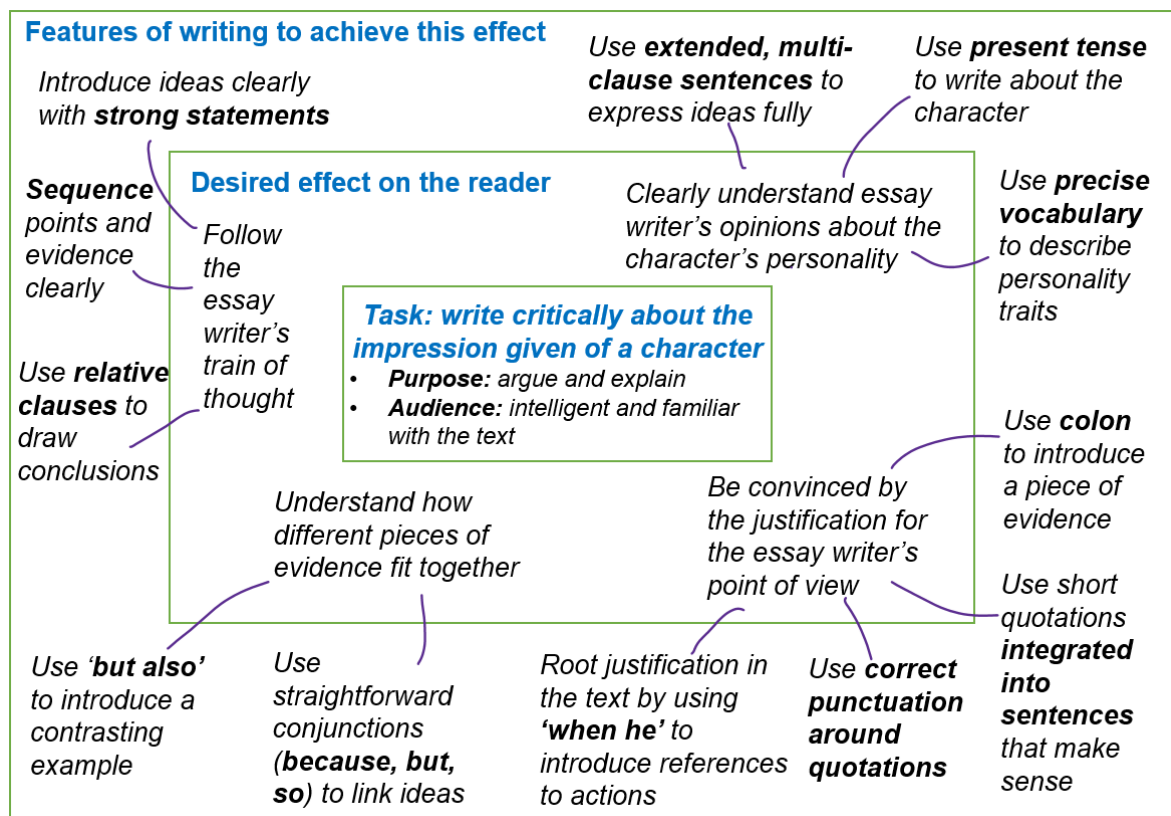
The temptation to set questions and task titles that reflect the kinds of assessment tasks seen at KS4 can be strong. However, questions such as *'How effectively does X writer present ideas about Y?'* can be unhelpful in developing students' critical voices at this early stage. More straightforward task titles and questions can support students to respond in a formal written style as less mental effort is expended on working out what the task means. Questions such as *'What impression do you get of Mr Zamora in this chapter?'* or *'What sort of place is the island?'* are age-appropriate and can lead to thoughtful responses.

Thinking about purpose and audience in critical writing

James Durran's work on planning formats that help students to link the elements of writing to the intended effect on the reader is useful in developing students' understanding of the critical form in a way that goes beyond a checklist of features.

His blog post [Re-thinking Success Criteria](#) from January 2019 focuses mainly on primary school practice across a range of forms of writing, but the approach he suggests can equally well be used to think about the reasons for the use of different features of writing in a critical paragraph.

This planning format places the task, with its intended purpose and audience, in the middle of the grid; the next layer explores what the writer wants the effect on the reader to be; the outer layer links the features of writing that will build towards those intended effects. A further layer could be used beyond these to include vocabulary and phrases that might be used in the piece of writing.



Planning a piece of critical writing about a character using a Durran grid

What does progress look like in Year 7?

Progression in critical writing in Year 7 might look something like this across the year:

Early in the autumn term

(Following *think-aloud* annotation of an extract from *Black Beauty*)

2
mmos

Think-aloud work from Crookhorn College

I can tell that the story is set in the Victorian times because it says in the text "I shall never forget the first train that ran by". This makes me think that the narrator has never seen a train before and I know that trains were invented in the 1900s. I can tell that the narrator is a horse because there is lots of evidence in the text when it says "I galloped to the further side of the meadow" and "I stood snorting" which is not something a person would do.

By the end of the year

(Following class discussion of *The Island at the End of Everything* and tasks designed to root inferences about character in evidence from the text, so that content ideas and quotations are secure before writing)

adverbial opener locates evidence in the text

In the "Butterfly Lessons" chapter, Mr Zamora shows two sides to his personality: he shows that he is cruel when he punishes Datu by making him stand with his arms up for the whole lesson, but he also shows that he can be fascinating when he is talking about his specialist subject. I can see that he makes the subject interesting because Amihan says that Mr Zamora is "transfixing" when he is talking about butterflies and even the boys are "listening intently". He is extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic so he communicates well, which makes him an effective teacher.

colon used to introduce evidence for statement made

vocabulary to describe the character shows some ambition and precision

short quotations are effectively integrated into sentence

present tense is used throughout to refer to events in the text

relative clause is used to develop point

Through explicit teaching of critical writing as a written form, the expectation is that students learn to express themselves fluently and clearly in this style, basing their responses on their prior learning. Editing and redrafting to improve should be an element of teaching of this form of writing. Through regular practice, students become confident to convert their thinking into a critical written form with increasing independence.

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