

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE AND WRITING TIPS

"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success." - Alexander Graham Bell

The English Exit Exam is 4 hours long. You can use this time well by following these guidelines.

READING AND COMPREHENSION: up to 1 hour

- **Underline** key words when you read the instructions to clarify what you have to do.
- **Begin reading** the type of text (short story or essay) with which you have more experience. Otherwise, read the first page of each reading and choose the one that is easiest to understand.
- Read your selection carefully. Make **notes** in the margins when you:
 - Identify **significant details**.
 - Recognize a **main idea** that is consistent throughout the reading. This is an idea you can develop in your essay. Most texts have more than one main idea. See handout RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA: Short Stories.
 - Identify **techniques and devices** used by the author to communicate that main idea.
 - Find references that relate to that main idea. Ensure you have enough **support**.

PLANNING: up to 1 hour

Introduction:

- Decide the focus of your essay:
 - **What** idea the author expresses (this means you will focus your discussion on a point the author is making on a topic and only mention techniques and devices 'here and there' as a secondary task in your body paragraphs)
 - **How** the author expresses an idea (your whole discussion will be based on the techniques and devices used to communicate an idea)
 - **A combination of both what and how** (focus some body paragraphs on a main idea and focus some others on techniques and devices used to express that idea)
- Think about what you want to say about the author's idea. Write this down as your **thesis statement**. See handout PHRASING TIPS: DECIDING YOUR THESIS.
- Write a simple list of **three or four supporting ideas** that you can use to explain and prove your thesis. Each idea will be the basis of a separate paragraph and introduced in your topic sentences. See handout ENGLISH EXIT EXAM ESSAY OUTLINE.
- Choose **two or three techniques and devices** that the author effectively uses to express the idea you are discussing. You are free to use devices that are not listed in the exam booklet. See handout TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES.
- If you are writing about **how** the author expresses an idea, the author's use of **devices** will be your supporting ideas.

Body Paragraphs:

- **Skim** the reading again and choose specific **examples** from the text (two to three per body paragraph) to which you can refer. Look for key words and phrases for short effective quoting.
- If you refer to examples from your own experiences, connect them well to your thesis.
- **From this plan, start your essay**. Writing a complete rough draft is **not** recommended.



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Continued

WRITING: 2 hours (1.5 hours writing plus 30 minutes to proofread and edit)

Introduction:

- Mention the **author's full name**, the **title** ("..."), and the **genre** (essay or short story).
- Based on your **plan**, write your introduction.

Body Paragraphs:

- Write **topic sentences** for each supporting idea as opening sentences for each paragraph.
- Refer to **examples**: use short quotes or paraphrase. See handout REFERRING TO A READING.
- Explain how these examples support each **idea** and how they relate back to your **thesis**.
- Write **concluding sentences** for each body paragraph that summarize what you have discussed. You can also include **a sentence that transitions** to the next paragraph.

Conclusion:

- **Restate** your thesis.
- Briefly **summarize** your supporting ideas.
- Share **any additional thoughts**, but be objective. Do not simply praise the author in a meaningless way. Include:
 - a critical judgment (strengths and weaknesses) **OR**
 - the importance of the author's idea and your response to the reading **OR**
 - insights into the author's beliefs, attitudes, or purpose for writing as you now understand them

WRITING TIPS:

- Use the full name of the author the first time; all other references require the last name only.
- Refer to the author at least **once** in every body paragraph. This helps keep your focus on the author's main idea. Always refer to the author in your conclusion.
- Work slowly and carefully, checking the grammar and punctuation as you go; due to time constraints, **writing a complete rough draft is not recommended**.
- Spelling counts, but not as much as grammar, punctuation, and correct word usage.
- Avoid overly complicated sentences; find simple and clear ways to state your ideas.
- Your essay can be less formal than an academic essay, but avoid casual language. You may use 'I' and mention personal experiences if you relate them to the author's main idea.
- Integrate quotations into your own sentences. See handout REFERRING TO A READING.
- Citations, page references, and bibliographies are not required.
- Budget your time so you can proofread and edit your essay in the last 30 minutes.
- **If time is short**, make sure your introduction and conclusion are clear and well-edited.