

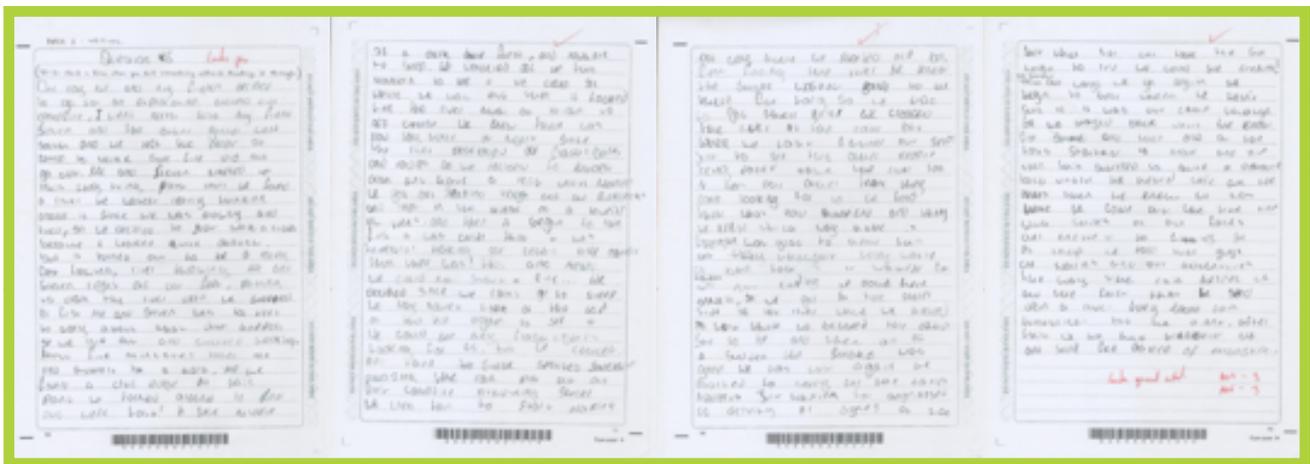
Cunning Plans

Do you get bored with your teacher telling you that you must plan your writing answers in the GCSE exam? If so, you are not alone. A recent survey of the writing section of GCSE exam scripts found that less than 20% showed any sign of planning. They decided they knew best and ignored their teachers.

So it seems there is a widespread misunderstanding among students about what is important when responding to the writing questions. Many students seem to think that it is the amount that they write which will help them get good marks. Consequently, examiners report every year that students are:

- Writing far too much
- Not spending time on planning what they are going to say
- Forgetting to leave enough time to check their work when they have written their answer

Look at the thumbnail below which shows one student's writing response in the exam:



You won't be able to read it: that wouldn't be fair. But you can see that this student has covered four sides of the A4 exam booklet. They have written nearly 800 words. For their trouble, these are the marks they got:

Three marks for Assessment Objective 5. Without planning, they don't know where their piece is leading. Without that knowledge, they cannot meet the requirement that they must:

- Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts

Three marks for Assessment Objective 6. This AO states that:

- Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation

If you are still writing the final sentence of your first (and only) draft when the exam invigilator says "Put your pens down" you obviously haven't had time to check the accuracy of your spelling and punctuation, let alone see if you have used the best possible words and varied your sentence structure.



Activity 1:

Say after me: *"Unless I spend time planning my work I am going to do badly."*

Repeat that phrase until you think it has sunk in.

Now say: *"My teacher probably knows best when s/he say I have to plan my exam answer."* Keep saying it until you believe it.

Activity 2:

You are now going to plan, write and check an essay.

1. Choose one of the following titles to work on:

- Memories of my first day at school. (This can be your primary school, your current school, or a school you arrived at half way through your school career)
- Write an article for a newspaper about things you couldn't live without
- Write a letter to the Headteacher giving ideas about how your school could be improved.

2. Planning:

- Draw four squares and number them 1-4. Each square will be a paragraph.
- Jot down one thing you are going to write about in each square
- Write your opening sentence in square 1. Re-read it. Does it clearly introduce what you are going to write about? Does it start with a capital letter and have a full-stop at the end?

3. Writing:

- Write the first paragraph, using your opening sentence and adding 4 or 5 more. Re-read your work. Are the commas and full-stops in the right place? Have you used capital letters at the start of every sentence? Have you used a variety of sentence structures?
- Leave one clear line and then use the planning box to write paragraph 2, repeating the same checking procedure.
- Do this for paragraphs 3 and 4, remembering to leave a clear line between each paragraph

4. Re-read your last sentence again. Does it bring the piece to a good end?

There you are. Easy wasn't it? All you have to do now is remember to follow that process in the exam room.

