

**ENGLISH HL 16 August 2025**

**GRADE 12 PAPER 3 – ESSAY WRITING TIPS**

**How to write story openings**

Always try to make the opening of your story interesting or exciting for the reader [Don't start with - One day -that's boring and unoriginal!]

**There are different ways to start a story:**

**Create a hook:**

“I’ve often wondered what happened to Steve- did he find that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”

**Dialogue:**

“Sharks!” shouted the ships look out, “hundreds of them!” “They seem to be heading our way,” cried the sailor.

**Action:**

An ear-splitting whistle made all the pirates leap to attention. At once they ran in different directions, bumping into one another, scrambling over untidy plates and piles of ropes and tarpaulin, sliding down rickety ladders, or trying to be the first in the queue for lunch.

**Description:**

The sea glistened like a sparkling, silver mirror. Waves lapped gently at the sides of Saucy Sue as she sailed silently along the cool, refreshing breeze, her jolly Roger flag fluttering limply. Seagulls circled overhead, calling to each other. No-one would guess what terrible adventure lay ahead for Captain Pegleg and his crew of daring pirates.

**Ask a question:**

“What would you do if you knew the exact moment you would die?”

**Write something unexpected:**

“I never knew the impact of the purple pen until it exploded in my face.”

/”The light did not flicker; she did.”

**One-word sentences:**

“Run”

**Write an intense Opening:**

Ashes rained from the sky for days. Not a single sign of vegetation remained, we were hungry – no starving for a morsel of bread.”

**Mysterious Beginning:**

“The door was never opened, yet everything was out of place. Someone had been here, but who?

**Start in the Middle of a story:**

“Police cars barricaded the street. Ambulances and fire trucks raced to the scene. The house was surrounded, and yet… nothing. No communication. No one knew if the hostage were dead or alive.”

**Disorient the reader:**

George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four:

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

How to write using **characters:**

**Two or three characters** are usually enough for a short story. Here's how to make the characters sound real.

Give them **suitable names**.

E.G. **Pirates**: **Captain Pegleg, Scar-faced Bull, Sly Sam, One-eyed Pete**

**Astronauts**: **Commander Ben** Lewis, Assistant Commander Buzz Owens, Captain Tilly Jones

Describe what you like and how they **move.**

E.G. A **wizened old man** **shuffled** about the house in slippers. **A giant, hairy, orange caterpillar** **creeping slowly along. /** A ten-year-old girl, rather small for her age, skipped merrily along the street, her long fair hair flying in the wind.

Try to show their **personalities** in the things they do.

E.G. **Careless** - always **breaking or losing things**.

**Lazy** - **never wants to do anything**, finds quicker ways of doing things.

**Coward** -nervous, **hides** behind the others, stammers, and stutters.

**Competitive** - tries to do things better and faster, wants to win.

**Posh** - **Eloquent** speaker, **Snooty,** thinks she is better than everyone else.

**Try to include the following**

Try to show how they feel **using adjectives and adverbs**. For example:

Tired, excitedly, gratefully, angrily, happy, sadly, curiously, worriedly, relieved, nervously.

Write what they say and **what they think** for example:

“I'm sure I’ll be able to fix the spacecraft.” **At that moment she believed herself**.

How to write **setting descriptions**

Imagine you're taking a video of everything you can see happening in the scene. Write detailed descriptive sentences of what you are seeing. Expand sentences to explain **who, what, how, where, when, and why** something happens like this: ***The tiny bird******hopped quickly across the garden, picked up the bread, and immediately flew off to a safe place to eat it.***

Write **colorful sentences** by grouping adjectives together to create:

**Alliteration** - example dark, dank, dreary forest; Crowded, cobbled streets.

**Rhyme**- example hustle and bustle; A rumbling and a tumbling

**Patterning** -example in the highest branches of the furthest trees, traveling faster and faster.

**Onomatopoeia** - example jingling, jangling, tingling coins.

**Similes** - Example: The wet mud was sticky like fudge cake.

**Metaphors** -Example: The wet mud was a sticky fudge cake.

An interesting story will contain **several events**.

A **strong exciting plot centers on an unexpected event, a crisis, or a problem, which needs to be sorted out by the end of the story.** Stories can contain more than one problem. E.g. plans could go wrong.

**Descriptive sentences of different lengths** can create suspense: don't just write the monster attacked.

Hint at the attack by, for example, using **direct speech**:

*A very hairy monster slid amongst the trees, hid behind a bush, and watched hungrily. The monster growled.*

*“What was that?”, asked Christopher in a very scared voice.*

*“Probably just the wind,” replied Luke.*

*“No, it sounded like a lion’s roar”, said Christopher anxiously.*

*“Listen and see if you can hear it”. The monster growled again, and this time Luke heard it. “That noise?” he asked.*

*“Yes,” replied Christopher. Next moment the monster leaped from behind a bush and started to attack.*

**How to write how to write story endings:**

Explain the results of the events or show how the problem was solved (but don't end with everyone going home for tea or someone waking up to find it was a dream – that's boring!

Endings usually bring the story round “full circle”. For example:

**Circle Ending**

**Start:** Three scruffy pirates sat gloomily around a table in the Lord Nelson Pub, staring down into their empty beer glasses. One by one they emptied out their pockets. It seemed that they had all run out of money.

**Ending:** The pirate gang made their way down the quay to their favorite pub to celebrate their success, they had earned enough money now to buy a year's worth of beer- and have change. The final sentence it is as important as the opening sentence it usually sums up the stories theme or message.

**Moral Ending**

An ending where you learn a lesson or see a character develop.

**Surprise Ending**

An unexpected twist to the story.

**The Reflection Ending**

The character looks back on their past achievements and experiences.

**The Emotional Ending**

Leave readers feeling sad, bittersweet or happy.

**Cliff Hanger Ending**

End with something that will leave your readers at the edge of your readers at the edge of their seats.

**The Humourous Ending**

Finish in a funny/ humourous way.

**The Question Ending**

Leave something for the reader to ponder on.

**The Quote Ending**

End your story with a powerful quote. The quote could be from one of your characters.

**Dos:**

Do use **paragraphs**.

Do write **sentences of different lengths**.

Do write **some dialogue** in between describing what's happening.

Do you write a **question or several questions in a row**.

Do **start sentences in different ways**.

Use a **one-sentence paragraph** **for effect**

**Write neatly and clearly.**

**Don'ts**

**Do not have sub-headings** in your essay!

Don't use the words and, **then or but to link your ideas too often.** This is boring! Use different words like open in sorry: **as, next, later, when, whilst**, or use commas and full stops instead.

**Don't keep starting your sentence with the same word**. Example: The cat... The hungry man... etc

**Don't repeat yourself**! Find different and interesting words to use. What words could be used **instead of these? *Good, nice, walked, ran, soul, going, small, happy, sad, bad*,**

Write in **simple/ shorter sentences – fewer mistakes.**

**Do not over complicate the story**. Bear in mind that it is an essay and not a novel.

Keep the audience/reader in mind. What do they know and what are they assuming?

Do not write about **politics, religion and sex/love (predictable)** unless you handle these topics sensitively and maturely.

**EXAMPLES OF ESSAYS – ACKNOWLEDGEMENT KZN PROVINCIAL TEAM**

THREE ESSAYS of DIFFERENT LEVELS. We are hoping that you can see that small adjustments to your present writing can move you up by a symbol (or more). Use the tips above to see what we have done.

**SYMBOL CATEGORY – FROM A FAIL TO A PASS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TOPIC:**  **Today young people are influenced more by their friends than by their parents. Do you agree?** | |
| **Part of an original essay by a learner:**  I do agree abuat this statement because it happens everywhere specialy Sourth Africa, many children are influenced more by theire friends than their parants. Some children who does not have a home or food to eat becouse of the bad influence that comes from their friend This bad influence comes up whit pear-preasure. U see friends ore different some friends are good some are not good. So for young people that are influenced by their friends it is coused by their backgrounds or their farmalies u see some famalies who spoil their children and some famalies that cannot spoil their farmalies so that what makes most of the young people to be always in jail becouse they steal or do bad things so that he can be equally as the other children is. | |
| **Feedback given by the marker on the essay:**  Main idea/ argument is not presented clearly enough. There are some good content points.  Grammatical errors include poor sentence construction, spelling errors and one instance of colloquial language.  There is no evidence of development in the argument. The language errors adversely affect coherence  Little (if any) development of the candidate’s basic idea The conclusion does not sum up the essay in a convincing manner. This essay does not display the skills required in argumentative writing. The content lacks coherence. A few points are repeated.  The essay is riddled with language errors.  There is no evidence of proofreading and editing.  Length of essay is correct. **MARK GIVEN: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | |
| Below is a possible improvement of the essay by using some of the tips indicated above. These improvements can be achieved at a very basic level, but can result in a HUGE improvement of the overall mark. For example, the mere use of paragraphs, correction of basic spelling, using punctuation and shortening sentences can move an essay up by at least a symbol or two. | |
| **Revised essay**:  I do agree about this statement because it happens everywhere especially in South Africa. Many children are influenced more by their friends than their parents.    Some children do not have a home or food to eat because of the bad influence from their friends. This bad influence is caused by peer pressure. There are different types of friends. You see, there are some friends who are good, but others are bad.    Young people are influenced by their friends because of their backgrounds or their families. You see, there are some families who spoil their children and some families who cannot spoil their children. So, that is what makes most of the young people end up in jail. They steal or do bad things so that they can be equal to other children. | ***Notes****:*  *This is actually not a bad start to an argumentative essay as he has used the topic as his opening statement and he has also indicated his approach to the topic.*  *Ensure that you use paragraphs for every NEW IDEA. Add punctuation marks, like the comma, for meaning. (You see, there…)*  *This essay actually has appropriate content as the child is aware of aspects that influence his world. However, because of his poor grammar and vocabulary, this content is not expressed and is therefore misunderstood. By making BASIC grammar improvements, you can change that!* |
| ***Important: BY MERELY USING PARAGRAPHS, SHORTENING SENTENCES AND USING A FULLSTOP, THIS CANDIDATE WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY SCORED 26/50 OR 52%.*** | |

**SYMBOL CATEGORY – FROM AN AVERAGE TO AN ABOVE AVERAGE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TOPIC: Time is the only constant.** | |
| **Part of original essay by learner**:  It is not money that makes the ‘world go round’. Money can get you from A to B, but using time properly can get you anywhere. In fact, the world revolves around time.    He who masters time, masters the world. In most cases it is acceptable that a man who values his time tends to be more productive in all that he does. The rule is simple, value and respect your time. It is as easy as a pie. You do not necessarily need to be a rocket scientist to know how to master time. No, it is just a matter of being tactical and it takes you only to know what you want to achieve each day to be a master of time. | |
| **Feedback given by the marker on the essay:**  Errors of punctuation. Some clichéd expression. The concluding paragraph is good. New ideas are introduced, but needed to be coherently linked. The content in this essay shows insight into the topic. The register is appropriate in context. There is a substantial range of ideas, although some could be better developed. Paragraphing is fairly well structured. The essay is too long. MARK GIVEN **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | |
| **Revised essay:**  It is NOT money that makes the ‘world go round’. Money can only get you from point A to B, but mastering time can get you anywhere.    In fact, the world revolves around …TIME!    He who masters time, masters the world. In the same respect, in most cases it is acceptable that a man who values his time tends to be more productive in all that he does. The rule is simple - value and respect your time. It is as easy as pie. You do not necessarily need to be a rocket scientist to know how to master time. No, it is just a matter of being tactical – it takes you only to know what you want to achieve each day, to be a master of time. | ***Notes****:*  *In this essay, the spelling and grammar is good in comparison to the previous one. However, there are a few things this learner can do to improve the mark.*  *Use capitals to emphasise a point. Have a short and engaging introduction. Notice, the striking one sentence paragraph!*    *Add appropriate punctuation marks to clarify meaning.*  *The topic sentence in the 3rd paragraph is short, but engaging.* |
| ***Important: BY MERELY IMPROVING THE PARAGRAPHS, USING PUNCTUATION TO CLARIFY IDEAS, CORRECTING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION, THIS CANDIDATE WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY SCORED 38/50 OR 76%.*** | |

**THE FOLLOWING ESSAY IS ONE WHICH APPLIES MOST OF THE TIPS GIVEN AND IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE ‘A’ CANDIDATE.**

|  |
| --- |
| **TOPIC: 'Only from the heart can you touch the sky.' (Rumi)** |
| “I’m leaving,” sobbed Mavis. “I just need MY space!”    Sli picked up her handbag, which was overflowing with tissues, and stormed out of the room. As she crossed the threshold, she gripped the door and with all the force her tiny body had to offer; she slammed the door shut.    Mzo had leapt from the chair and had desperately run towards the door to prevent Mavis from leaving. Unfortunately, he was too late and the door smashed into his face. His nose exploded like a ripe pomegranate and blood splattered over the door, floor and wall.    The scream that emitted from his shattered face brought Sli to an abrupt halt. “What the hell was that?” she said aloud. She turned and slowly walked towards the door. Her hand reached towards the doorknob. She turned it; her mind filled with trepidation and anxiety. She opened the door, completely oblivious to what awaited her. Her mind started pounding as the horror of the sight before her, consumed her. There was Mzo; lying sprawled on the floor. He was not moving…    Mzo was dead!    Sli bent down to feel his pulse. “Yes,” she whispered. “Can this be real or is this… a dream? Is this possible? The torturous years I have endured will end so abruptly? So suddenly?”  She needed to get out of that room. The smell of his blood was overwhelming and his spirit had seemed to linger in the air. It drenched her soul.  **CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO COMPLETE THIS ESSAY…** |
| ***Note****: This essay is captivating and engaging from the short introduction to the effective use of paragraphing. There is a variety of stylistic techniques used such as the capitalised words, the ellipsis, appropriate and varied punctuation usage, original phrases and vivid imagery. In the excellent example, you should note that the candidate used an original introduction to hook the reader (in this case the marker).* |

**The Narrative Essay**

Narrative writing -series of events (a story/a past event/fiction) in some meaningful order.

Acronym - **SPICED:**

**STORY LINE** must be convincing.

**PAST TENSE**. Use the past tense usually, but many authors use the present to create a sense of immediacy and directness.

**INTRODUCTION**. Use a captivating introductory paragraph.

**CONCLUSION**. Ensure that the ending is either satisfying, or ambiguous, even confusing, but never predictable.

**ENGAGE**. Use direct speech if you want immediacy or to empower a character, indirect speech if you want your reader to be distanced from the speaker.

**DESCRIBE**. Use descriptive elements where necessary, but good stories are very compact and writers remove every word that does not have a purpose.

**The Descriptive Essay**

**IFES**

Devise **imagery** associated with the senses (sight, sound, hearing, taste and touch).

Use **figurative** language.

Use **emotive** language.

You are allowed to use **subjective language**. This is where you write about your personal feelings and give your opinions.

**The Reflective Essay**

Personal rather than subjective: it needs a careful structure, but it does not have to present a clear conclusion. Nor does it have to present a balanced discussion. A reflective essay usually includes the writer’s emotional reactions or feelings. A reflective essay will be about what you think and feel about a topic. It shows your emotions, hopes and dreams.

Use the acronym: **KIT**

**K – KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE** - write about what you know, have experienced or observed.

Include your thoughts, feelings and reflections.

**I – IMAGERY** use interesting words, figurative language (similes, metaphors,

personification, etc.) to describe or create an image/picture of your emotions and experience)

**T- TENSE** Vary the tense in your essay to describe / reflect on your past in relation to the present. You may use the FLASHBACK technique where your essay begins in the present tense, makes reference to events/ experiences written in the past tense and then returns to the present tense.

**The Argumentative Essay**

**Subjectively argued**. **Clearly state where the writer stands** and why. The purpose - **to try and convince, or persuade** the reader to agree with that opinion. The writer’s opinion about the topic is clear throughout the essay.

Use the acronym: **PORS**

In an argumentative essay, you must express your **personal opinion** about the topic.

Write in the Present tense.

You must begin your essay by stating your **Opinion**/ point of view on the topic. Present your point of view in your introduction. Avoid stating whether you agree or disagree with the topic.

**Support** your views by giving Reasons and linking them together in a logical way. For example, use linking words like “because …”, “this shows …”, “however …”, “therefore …”

When ending the essay use a Strong conclusion that clearly and convincingly states your opinion.

You may repeat the same idea given in your introduction, but it must be written in a different way.

**The Discursive Essay**

Discursive essays tend to be **more balanced**, and present **various sides of a particular argument**: the structure is carefully and clearly planned: the tendency is toward **objectivity**, but the writer can be personal. While emotive language is possible, the best arguments here are won because they make good, reasonable sense. The conclusion leaves the reader in no doubt as to where the writer stands.

Use the acronym: **BROT**

**B: BOTH SIDES** OF AN ISSUE -Provide a balanced view. (advantages & disadvantages)

**R: REASONS** TO SUPPORT EACH VIEW Use links (however, therefore, this shows, so, etc.) to connect reasons to views.

**O: OBJECTIVE** Avoid personal pronouns (I, me, we) and emotions.

**T: TENSE** Write in the present tense.

**Creative writing tips**

**Always plan**: - some sort of plan, you will inevitably waffle - lack good flow and structure.

Always have **a title** that relates to your topic [topic 5 is not a title].

Writing **paragraphs**!

**Tense**. [Do not jump from present tense to past tense] use what you know as inspiration for your piece.

C**reative spin** on your topic [nobody likes to watch a movie where they know what's going to happen]. However, **don't be outlandish/ crazy/ bizarre**. You don't want to leave the examiner thinking WHAAAAT?

Make sure that your **story makes sense**.

**Use inverted commas** to indicate dialogue only. [Some students use “” start of every sentence]

**Coherency** - **paragraphs should flow (**links from one paragraph to the next). Continuity words: similarly, moreover, additionally, likewise, in the same way, … o Contrast words: However, but, although, despite, nonetheless, … rather than ‘also’ or ‘like’ o Conclusion words: Thus, therefore, hence, in conclusion, in summary, … Another key aspect of good paragraphs is the understanding of **topic sentences.**

Vary the **use of punctuation**. For example - **add rhetorical questions** (end with a question mark), use an **exclamation mark, use parenthesis, the ellipsis**, etc. You can also add **one word in a sentence in capitals. E.g. This is MY classroom! / THIS is my classroom**!

**Help Help! HELP!** – Which one appears to be the loudest?

Remember, **ONE WORD and NOT EVERY WORD in capitals!**

Be **creative** in your essays. This is perhaps the only place where you can be **rewarded for lying!**

**Common mistakes**

Lack of **punctuation**. Lack of **capital letters**.

**Commas** [using too many commas(splicing) or not using any commas at all].

Abusing/ not using full stops.

Misplace **apostrophes** [its -possessive - The sun was hot. Its rays blinded me**. vs it’**- It’s hot today.]

Lack of proper spelling [THEIR versus THERE]

Incorrect word usage [**malapropism, slang** etc.]

Essays that are **too long or too short**.

Changing from the **third person to the first person or vice versa**.

***Better vocab = better marks****.*