

2014

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ESSAY WRITING

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Subject Matter

On the day of the exam, you will have **seven** titles from which to choose. There are a number of different types of essay set each year. Below is the list of essay types, along with the frequency with which they have come up in past papers.

Year	'13	'12	'11	'10	'09	'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01
Article	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Personal Essay	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Short Story	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Speech or Talk	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Letter													✓
Narrative			✓						✓				✓
Descriptive Essay	✓		✓										
Guide				✓									

To break it down even further, you could say that your choices are divided between

- Opinion pieces (talks, speeches, articles)
- Personal essays
- Story writing

Be sure you have an idea which type of essay suits you best.

If you are torn between a couple of options, write a brief plan for each. This will show you whether you have enough material for all of them.

Subject Matter

Each year, a theme is chosen which reflects some aspect of the lives of teenagers today. Always check the theme, which is given to you in capital letters on the first page of the exam papers. The theme and the texts can be an aid to your planning but you are not obliged to stick to the theme, of course. Nor should you copy from the texts.

2013	STORY-TELLING
2012	MEMORY
2011	MYSTERY
2010	THE FUTURE
2009	DECISIONS
2008	IDENTITY
2007	CHANGE
2006	PRETENCE
2005	ORDINARY LIVES
2004	WORK AND PLAY
2003	JOURNEYS
2002	FAMILY
2001	IRISHNESS

The topics will always be based on aspects of life to which teenagers can relate. Books, music, the future, uncertainty etc.

Past Titles: Personal Essays

- ✓ **‘...the storyteller’s connection to his audience.’**
Write a personal essay in which you explore the storytelling evident in music and song and its impact on you as a listener.
(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

- ✓ **In TEXT 3, Belinda McKeon refers to the tension between the everyday treadmill and the gilded promises of Grand Central Station.**
Write a personal essay about the tension you find between the everyday treadmill and the gilded promises of life.
(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

- ✓ **‘Yet the outside world had its continuing marvels...’**
Write a personal essay on what you consider to be the marvels of today’s world. (2012 Theme: Memory)

- ✓ **‘My favourite T-shirt...’**
Write a personal essay about your clothes, what they mean to you and what they say about you.
(2011 Theme: Mystery)

- ✓ **‘...It was terrific theatre...’**
Write a personal essay about your experience (as a performer and/or audience member of the dramatic arts: plays, musicals, concerts, comedy etc.)
(2010 Theme: Decisions)

- ✓ **‘...a certain freedom’**
Write a personal essay about your understanding of freedom and why you think it is important.
(2010 Theme: Decisions)

Past Titles: Articles

✓ **‘...a more ordered idea of urban existence.’**

Write a feature article for a popular magazine in which you discuss the competing attractions of both urban and rural lifestyles.

(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

✓ **‘Memory is a ghost train too.’**

Write a feature article for a newspaper or magazine on the role played by memory and the past in our lives.

(2012 Theme: Memory)

✓ **‘... all the time in the world...’**

Write a light-hearted and entertaining article, intended for publication in a magazine aimed at young people, in response to the phrase, ‘...all the time in the world’.

(2012 Theme: Memory)

✓ **‘I don’t discriminate...’**

Write an article for a serious newspaper or magazine on the twin issues of discrimination and tolerance.

(2011 Theme: Mystery)

✓ **‘...a thin girl...flips the key-guard of her phone and scrolls her texts.’**

Write an article for a popular magazine in which you outline your views about the impact of technology on the lives of young people.

(2011 Theme: Mystery)

✓ **‘You’re a new neighbour, aren’t you?’**

Write an article (serious or light-hearted) for a popular magazine on being a good neighbour.

(2010 Theme: The Future)

✓ **‘...a living classroom...’**

Write an article (serious or light-hearted) for a school magazine about your experience of education over the last number of years. (2009 Theme: Decisions)

Past Titles: Talks and Speeches

- ✓ **In Text 2, William Trevor expresses his views on heroes.**
Write a speech in which you argue for or against the motion, We live in an un-heroic age.
(2013 Theme: Story-telling)
- ✓ **'... another book which I have read with enormous interest ...'**
Write a persuasive speech about the importance of literature in people's lives.
(2012 Theme: Memory)
- ✓ **'... shaped our national identity...'**
Write the text of an address you could deliver to an international gathering of young people outlining what you believe helps to define Ireland's distinctive national identity. (2012 Theme: Memory)
- ✓ **'There are people and possessions I could live without. But a cat is indispensable.'**
You have been asked to speak to your class about what you think is indispensable in your life. Write the text of the talk you would give.
(2011 Theme: Mystery)
- ✓ **'But there is hopeful news as well.'**
You have been elected by your classmates to deliver a speech at your school's graduation ceremony. Write the text of the speech you would give, encouraging your audience to be optimistic about the future.
(2010 Theme: The Future)
- ✓ **'...science and research...'**
Write a persuasive speech in praise of science and technology.
(2009 Theme: Decisions)

Past Titles: Short Stories

- ✓ **'...they make manipulation a virtue.'**
Write a short story in which a central character is either manipulated or is manipulative.
(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

- ✓ **In TEXT 3, the writer refers to two short stories on the theme of reunion.**
Write a short story about a reunion.
(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

- ✓ **'... an inferior rock band howling for fame.'**
Write a short story inspired by the phrase, '... an inferior rock band howling for fame'.
(2012 Theme: Memory)

- ✓ **'When I was eighteen, I couldn't wait to get out of that town ...'**
Write a short story in which a young character is eager to leave home.
(2012 Theme: Memory)

- ✓ **'The man above remained rigid, and yet his mystery was mobile.'**
Write a short story in which a mystery is solved.
(2011 Theme: Mystery)

- ✓ **'Isn't that funny, and sad too?'**
Write a short story suggested by the above quotation.
(2010 Theme: The Future)

- ✓ **'...the decisive moment'**
Write a short story in which the central character is faced with making an important decision.
(2009 Theme: Decisions)

Past Titles: Descriptive Essays

- ✓ **In TEXT 2, William Trevor mentions ‘the art of the glimpse’.**

Write a descriptive essay based on a variety of glimpsed moments.

(2013 Theme: Story-telling)

- ✓ **‘...the dust and seep of the city...’**

Write a descriptive essay about twenty-four hours in the life of a town or city.

(2011 Theme: Mystery)

Past Titles: Narrative

- ✓ **‘...the waiting had been magical...’**

Write a story to be included in a collection of modern fairytales.

(2011 Theme: Mystery)

Introduction to the Composition

- Choose your title carefully. Think which language genre suits you best.

Don't be attracted to a short story because the title sounds exciting or interesting; be sure you can write a well-structured piece that is not simply a re-write of a film.

- Plan your essay, jotting down ideas as they come to you. Then organise them into a paragraph plan. You should aim to make six strong points in your essay in order to gain high marks. Sometimes you discover at this stage that a title which seemed appealing is

more difficult than you had first imagined and you can't think of enough ideas to fill the required length. It is better to discover this at the planning stage, abandon the essay and start again than to find out when you have already written a full page.

- Look at your plan again under each of the following headings:

Clarity of purpose – are you certain your essay is to the point? Can every part of it be linked back to the title? Check all the points you plan to make and make sure you have not gone off the point at any stage. Are you writing in the correct language genre? Are you very clear on what your composition is trying to achieve? If it's a short story, have you avoided using a clichéd plot? (30%)

Coherence – Have you organised your essay well? Is there a logical order to your paragraphs? Is the register appropriate and is the same register maintained throughout the entire composition? (30%)

Keep your writing clear and refreshingly interesting. Do not rely on common modifiers such as 'pretty', 'little', 'a lot', 'really' and 'very'. One writer on style refers to these overused qualifiers as 'The leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words'.

Your essay should be approximately four pages in length.



How to Begin?

Some tips for writing good introductions

- You may find it difficult to write an introduction at the beginning. Sometimes you may only write a tentative introduction, continue with the development, then come back and write the introduction last.
- Pay attention to your opening sentence. This is the sentence the examiner reads first. You should make a good impression, and should write it very carefully. If you start your essay with a sentence full of grammar, spelling or vocabulary mistakes, you cannot expect to make a good first impression.
- Avoid making announcements: Do not start with opening sentences such as ‘In this essay I will discuss ...’
- Avoid making ‘Dawn of man’ introductions. That is, whatever topic you are assigned, you should not start with sentences such as ‘Since the beginning of history’, ‘Since the beginning of humanity’, ‘Since the industrial revolution’, etc. These kinds of statements make only very broad generalisations, and you cannot start everything with the industrial revolution! It also indicates that you do not really have much to say about the topic.
- Avoid using clichés. Clichés mean that you do not have anything new to say.
- Avoid filler introductions: When you do not have much to say about a topic, you list a couple of sentences one after the other, just to fill the introductory space. If the writer had something effective to say, he would have said it. However, in this example, he is just filling space.

Many young people choose to live on their own. The number of people living on their own is increasing. Many people in the cities prefer to do this. There are reasons for this phenomenon. There are also some results.

NOTE: Never, ever start an essay with a definition. ‘What is freedom? Freedom means not being restricted...’ Do you really think the examiner needs to have terms defined?

Strategies for writing good introductions to discursive essays

Sometimes more than one method can be used to start your essay.

1. The funnel method

In this method, the first sentence is broad and general. It introduces your thesis, and each following sentence is narrower and more focused. Finally, it narrows down to your thesis. The important thing in this approach is that your funnel should not be too large, because you never will be able to narrow down.

Example:

Animals have been used in medical research for a long time. In recent years, animal rights organisations have questioned whether it is ethical or not to use animals for the benefits of medical progress. They believe that animals are equal to humans and that they have equal rights with human beings. In my opinion, animals certainly have some rights, but humans with their more developed brains are superior to them, therefore if there is no other alternative, animals may be used in medical research.

2. Asking questions

Using questions to attract the attention of your readers is another useful strategy. Then, your essay proceeds to answer the questions you have posed in the introduction.

Do modern children's books shelter youngsters too much? There is a place for puppies and bunnies, for Bob the Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine, and maybe even for the Care Bears. After all, perseverance and kindness are important life lessons. But surely there's still a place for the gruesome fairytales with wicked witches and hungry wolves, as well as matter-of-fact children's books that pull no punches and don't water down life. Literarily speaking, have we gone too soft?

4. Using an anecdote

Using a short anecdote is another way to start your essay. If you have a relevant anecdote ready, using it in the introduction will make your essay more interesting and attract the attention of your reader.

Beginning the personal essay or the short story

Opening.

- Choose a title which gives you the opening line.

If you have opted for a title which gives you little or no help, think about the following:

- What books have I read lately and why did I keep reading after the first paragraph?
- A good way to start your story is to pull the reader in immediately by starting with dialogue or by going straight into the action. You can always supply additional details as you go along to bring your reader up to speed if needs be, but do give him or her credit. They will read between the lines if they are engaged by your story.
- Be careful when using dialogue. It can become dull very quickly. Don't overuse it.

Sample openings

<p>6 December</p> <p>I'm trying to crucify three oranges. But I can't work out how to attach the slippery, swollen fruit to the wooden cross without impaling them, which would make the juice and pulp spurt everywhere – all over my carefully chosen skirt and on to the stone courtyard, where it would lie in sticky trails and be tracked into the house by my guests.</p> <p>The thing is, I've never decorated a rooftop cross before. It wouldn't have occurred to me to do so now if Foti hadn't told me, just a few days ago, that in Greece....</p> <p>From <i>North of Ithaka</i> by Eleni Gage.</p>	<p><i>This opening captures our attention immediately because the image is such a bizarre one. We want to know <u>why</u> the author is doing this.</i></p>
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<p>Captain Everard Gault wounded the boy in the right shoulder on the night of June the twenty-first, nineteen twenty one. Aiming above the trespassers' heads in the darkness, he fired the single shot from an upstairs window and then watched the three figures scuttling off, the wounded one assisted by his companions.</p> <p>They had come to fire the house, their visit expected because they had been before. On that occasion....</p> <p>From <i>The Story of Lucy Gault</i> by William Trevor.</p>	<p><i>This opening cleverly tells us the <u>setting</u> and introduces a character while at the same time bringing us straight into the action.</i></p>
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Imagine if the openings above had been written differently. Would the first one have been better if it had begun like this?

‘I had just moved in to a new house in Greece and a local friend of mine, Foti, told me about a most unusual tradition. Apparently it is the custom in Greece for anyone who builds a new house to decorate the roof with a cross. Oranges and small bags of money should be hung on the cross. The builders climb up onto the roof and take the money and the fruit as a little bonus. When this is done, it brings peace and good luck to the householder. So, I decided I should adopt this odd tradition...’

Of course not. The first opening intrigues us because it raises questions we want answered. We are engaged and involved from the start.

Descriptive writing: ‘Show, don’t tell’.

Think of the words of the writer Elmore Leonard here: ‘I try to leave out the parts that people skip.’ Too much description will bore your reader, but too little will make your story unconvincing. It is best, if you can, to work the descriptions of the setting into the fabric of the story rather than give them a paragraph or two of their own.

When you are describing the setting, think of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. You won't be able to use all of these, but they can be very evocative. The main thing to remember here is not to labour your point.

Read the example below, which incorporates many of the features of excellent writing which we have been discussing so far. It is taken from the opening lines of Tracy Chevalier's 'Girl With A Pearl Earring'.

<p>My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.</p> <p>I was chopping vegetables in the kitchen when I heard voices outside the front door – a woman's, bright as polished brass, and a man's, <u>low and dark like the wood of the table I was working on</u>. They were the kind of voices we heard rarely in our house. I could hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur.</p> <p>I was glad that earlier I had scrubbed the front step so hard.</p> <p><u>My mother's voice – a cooking pot, a flagon</u> – approached from the front room. They were coming to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I had been chopping into place, then set my knife on the table, wiped my hands on my apron, and pressed my lips together to smooth them.</p> <p>My mother appeared in the doorway, <u>her eyes two warnings</u>. Behind her the woman had to duck her head because she was so tall, taller than the man following her.</p>	<p><i>Who are 'they'?</i></p> <p><i>Tension is introduced by the mention of 'nervous'. Why should she be nervous?</i></p> <p><i>Descriptions of the setting are woven into the action.</i></p> <p><i>The girl's social class is established by the contrast of the voices.</i></p> <p><i>Mood established in a few words.</i></p>
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The Conclusion – General Points

Using questions and quotations in the conclusion can be a good way to bring your essay to a close. If you can find a quotation that fits your position, the conclusion will sound interesting.

There are other ways of ending an essay, of course. Whichever method you use, make sure that you reach a conclusion at the end of your essay.

- Never bring up new ideas or start new discussions in the conclusion.
- Do not let your essay finish weakly with a weak conclusion section. A good essay deserves a good conclusion.
- Make sure that your conclusion is consistent with the arguments in your essay. Sometimes you may get carried away and end up concluding the opposite of your thesis, especially if you do not plan well. Do not let such inconsistency happen.

Answer the question.	A clear, logical structure is essential.	Give your own analysis, not mere description.	We want to see a fresh, original approach.
Clear, consistent references are essential.	Base your essay on extensive relevant reading and research.	Indecisive 'it's a bit of both' essays are disappointing.	Argue your case, with your own point of view.
Use commas properly. Learn how to deploy semi-colons.	We want to see evidence of independent thought.	Try to avoid formulas, clichés, and the obvious approaches.	Have a clear, relevant introduction and conclusion.
It's important to know the difference between "it's" and its alter ego, "its".	Don't allude to anything you've read without giving a reference for it.	Avoid a purely 'journalistic' style, in academic essays.	Don't waffle. It's not cunning, it just suggests you've got little to say.
Illustrate your points with up-to-date examples.	Construct your sentences carefully.	Use the internet – but with care and discrimination.	Don't fill an essay with irrelevant historical detail.
Use electronic resources to find material (see library website).	Check your spelling and punctuation. Seriously.	Ensure your essay is the required length.	Bring the subject to <i>life!</i>

The Personal Essay

Whatever approach you take to the personal essay, it is essential to keep the word 'personal' in mind throughout. Your experiences and **your reflections on** them distinguish you from the rest of your classmates. Use this to your advantage; draw the reader in and make him or her care about you and relate to your life.

THE NARRATIVE TREATMENT: In this approach, you use a story from your own life to illustrate the given topic. This can be quite a simple treatment, which will get you a C grade at best, or a more complex one in which you use the narrative shape to show the impact this event or series of events had on you. It would be expected at Higher Level that you could look back at various life-changing moments in your life and explain their significance.

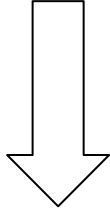
THE DISCURSIVE TREATMENT: This is a more sophisticated treatment of the personal essay than the purely narrative treatment. In this approach, you examine your feelings about a particular topic, friendship or families, for example and use personal experiences to support the viewpoint you are presenting. You might decide to open with an anecdote, perhaps leaving it unfinished, and return to it in your conclusion. The examiner will be looking for a mature, thoughtful, consistent treatment of the given theme. Quotes can be a good way to open your essay; you have learnt plenty of them for Paper 2, see if you can make use of any of them here.

THE LIGHTER DISCUSSION: The tone is usually lighter as the task is to write or address your peers. You may also be asked to write a magazine article and again, a light, chatty tone is appropriate here. You may include personal anecdotes, as in the discursive personal essay, but you can also take a more wide-ranging approach – the illustrations don't all have to be from your life. You can talk about things that happened to friends, classmates or family members, for example.

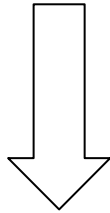
THE SERIOUS DISCUSSION: In this essay you will be targeting a more mature audience and your approach will necessarily be more serious. If you intend to write on a topic in this way, be sure that you know your facts. A weak, poorly-illustrated discussion of global warming or unemployment will not get you a high grade. You will need to explore the topic in some depth, with three or four supported arguments to illustrate your points. Don't attempt this essay unless you know your facts. Having said that, a well constructed essay of this type has a good chance of getting you a very high grade. If there are topics about which you feel strongly, it would be a good idea to learn some facts between now and the Leaving Cert and to keep abreast of current affairs. Beware of writing an essay taken in its entirety from another subject; the examiner does not want to read your history essay or biology answer, no matter how factually accurate they may be.

DISCURSIVE ESSAY STRUCTURE

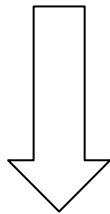
1. Begin with an anecdote



2. Make an observation based on that anecdote



3. Reflect on what the observation says about the human condition: move from the personal to the universal



4. Use other examples – briefly discussed – to back up your point if you wish



5. Draw conclusions and, if appropriate, suggest what could/should be done about the issue



6. Return to the anecdote and briefly say how the conclusion/s could be applied to that incident

Sample Essays

FRANK McNALLY in The Irish Times

Not the least traumatic aspect of the cold spell is the bit, last thing every night, where I have to put the cat out. This is always a difficult moment for both of us. The cat will invariably be asleep – or pretending to be – by then: curled up in a foetal position on whatever piece of soft furnishing she can find close to a radiator.

So first I have to wake her. And then, since it might be too much of a shock to eject her straight away, I have make small talk for a minute or two, subtly introducing the subject. After that, the blow is further softened with a saucer of milk and some supper. Finally, I usher her towards the back door – a gentle prod with my foot is sometimes required here – where, inevitably, she will pause to survey the bleak scenario.

As the door closes behind her, her tail will always linger until the last possible moment before it would be truncated. And once outside, she will sit for a further moment, staring at the foot-deep snow with apparent incredulity. Then – this is the bit I really hate – she will look back at me through the glass, her plaintive eyes suddenly somehow reminiscent of the little matchstick girl in the sad fairy tale.

Perhaps she will also miaow weakly, as if inquiring whether, for this night only, there's any chance of a reprieve. And not until I turn off all the lights will she at last surrender to her fate. Then she will tiptoe through the snow to her night quarters, an abandoned children's play-hut. Where, incidentally, she has a nice, comfortable bean-bag to sleep on. And where, minutes earlier, I will also have placed a hot water bottle to warm her bed.

I can't recall when it was, exactly, that I turned into such a sap. I don't even like cats. And my concern about this one is all the more misplaced because, strictly speaking, she's not ours. As I've told my kids on the many occasions they asked for one, we don't have room for a pet. And if we did have room, it would be a dog. Yet here we somehow are, in a situation where we have none of the advantages of pet ownership and all the responsibilities.

I suppose it started about 12 years ago, when the cat was still owned – nominally at least – by one of our neighbours. Despite which, she always spent large amounts of time in our house. We didn't mind much. It was a kind-of informal, community pet-sharing scheme, and it worked well. The

animal could be amusing company for an hour or two. But it wasn't a serious relationship and we never had to worry about her when we went away for the weekend or on holidays.

Even then, however, the cat may have had plans for us. It was a sign of things to come when, one evening about a decade ago, she brought a mouse to the same back door through which I now put her out every night.

Peering through the glass, we realised with horror that the mouse was still alive. Indeed, the cat demonstrated this fact by pawing the unfortunate victim, to make it squirm. And even though we knew this was intended as a token of our friendship – which she would further cement by bringing the mouse in and perhaps torturing it on the rug for a while, before dispatching it in our honour – we thought better of letting her in that night.

But it was probably already too late. When her owner moved away some years afterwards and the cat – for reasons unexplained – stayed behind, new owners were required. There was no consultation process. The cat just adopted us and, by hanging around our back garden more and more, allowed that fact to sink in gradually.

Her mouse-torturing days are long behind her now (in fact, a whole family of mice could be behind her, and she wouldn't notice), but she has acquired other skills to compensate. Chief among these is an ability to stare through the back door long enough to make you feed her, or let her in, or by a process of guesswork, provide whatever else she requires.



For a year or two now, I have become as used to buying food for the cat as for the children. When we go away anywhere these days, we always make arrangements with other neighbours to mind her. And any lingering resistance on our part to the arrangement succumbed to the first cold spell last Christmas, when we also started providing her with sleeping quarters, and hot water bottles, and what not.

I'm sure the cat's bewilderment at this second Arctic spell within 12 months is genuine. But I also suspect she is using the cold weather to her advantage. When she stares at me from the doorstep these nights, I think she may be trying to plant the idea in my head that it might be better for both of us if I just fitted the door with a cat-flap.

When I do that, her triumph will be complete. And then she will know, if she doesn't know already, that human owners are not just for Christmas, they're for life.

Realistic Kids' Books

by Beth Carswell (adapted for the purposes of these notes)

Do modern children's books shelter youngsters too much? There is a place for puppies and bunnies, for Bob the Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine, and maybe even for the Care Bears.

After all, perseverance and kindness are important life lessons. But surely there's still a place for the gruesome fairytales with wicked witches and hungry wolves, as well as matter-of-fact children's books that pull no punches and don't water down life. Literarily speaking, have we gone too soft?

I remember greatly enjoying 'Little House in the Big Wood' as a small child. I read with interest the story about Laura Ingalls Wilder and her sister Mary inflating a pig's bladder like a balloon on slaughter day, and having a grand time playing with it. I also recall the graphic, frank descriptions of the pig being killed and drained, having its bristly whiskers scraped off, and then having its body rendered in an enormous cauldron of boiling water.

Even as a child who loved animals, I recognised there was no cruelty in this. The pig was killed quickly - for food, for fat, for life. I understood the connection between that pig and my dinner, and while it seemed a bit unfair and sad, the passages in the book were explained frankly, and to my young mind, were simple fact.

Look at books like William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' and Barry Hines' 'A Kestrel For A Knave'. In 'Lord of the Flies', children are pitted against each other in the most horrific and violent of circumstances, and two are killed. And 'A Kestrel for a Knave' is basically one day in the life of a young, working-class boy whose life is so bleak, hopeless and relentless that it rises up and snuffs out the one spark of joy that accidentally flies into it, leaving him in abject misery once more. From the savage to the wretched, both books depict very adult, advanced concepts and situations, yet both were assigned as reading for secondary school classes for decades. Were children disturbed and haunted as a result?

Another story that didn't make me bat an eyelash was 'Little Red Riding Hood' These days, there are countless versions. The best known the Brothers Grimm version, in which a little girl is accosted in the woods by a wolf on the way to bring food to her sick grandmother. Upon learning Red's destination, the wolf races ahead, consumes Grandma in one swallow, disguises himself in her clothes, and waits for Red. When Red arrives, the wolf swallows her, as well. However, there is a happy ending (not for the wolf) when a passing woodsman chops open the wolf, releasing both Little Red and Grandma unharmed.

'Little Red Riding Hood' is hundreds and hundreds of years old. Variants of the story have been traced back as early as the 15th century. To a modern child like myself, the idea of walking alone through a forest, let alone a dark, dangerous forest teeming with wolves, was positively thrilling. More importantly, it was completely foreign and fictional.

The stories also held real value. 'Little Red Riding Hood' cautions against trusting strangers with personal information. 'The Red Shoes', a gruesome tale by Hans Christian Andersen, sees a little girl trick her adoptive mother into buying her expensive red shoes. She is punished for her vanity when the shoes turn out to be cursed, and won't allow her to stop dancing or remove the shoes. She eventually begs an executioner to chop her feet off, and he complies. Grim, but it teaches the lesson of valuing loved ones over possessions.

Children, I believe, are brighter, more observant, and more intuitive than many adults give them credit for. Children who are loved, taught, and read to, who are encouraged to be inquisitive, understand the difference between right and wrong, between reality from make-believe. They perceive lessons and symbols. They comprehend that while two nasty old biddies being squashed flat in a story book (as in Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach) is a funny example of just desserts, death in reality is a very big deal, and permanent.

The difference between reality and stories isn't lost on children. While I might have been on the edge of my seat (bed) while reading Little Red Riding Hood, the story neither gave me a phobia of wolves nor a mistaken belief in the regurgitation of animals unharmed. My brain, even at age five or six, knew real from pretend.

I understand the desire to protect innocence and keep a child from unpleasantness. But is leading a child to believe that all is lovely and fluffy and safe and friendly fair? Does it give them an adequate picture of the world, or is it setting them up for a rude awakening when they get out on their own? It seems to me the best policy is to be honest and frank.

And what about the relish of a good gruesome read? When I was little I positively delighted in the dark and macabre, loved the squishy, dark, scary places, provided I knew when I closed the book I was tucked in and safe. And I always knew when I was being condescended to, and appreciated when I wasn't. Part of the fun of childhood, as well as reading, is in using our imagination - and not just one side of it.

Here's to the children's books that pull no punches, that tell it like it is, that realise gruesome guts and growing up are part of being a kid.

Cyberbullying

Adapted from an article by India Knight

Say you're at a party. You're introduced to someone for the first time. In the course of conversation this complete stranger says something you don't agree with. What do you do – keep quiet? Roll your eyes and move the conversation on? Find someone else to talk to? Do you try to convey your point of view? Stamp your foot a bit? Leave the room?

Or do you tell them they're a mentally retarded freak and cast wild aspersions on their personal life, sexual quirks, domestic set-up, the physical attractiveness of their children, meanness to animals and so on? Do you tell them they're so sexually undesirable they could crack a mirror at 20 paces? That they're such a repulsive wreck you wouldn't be surprised if their wife/husband had zillions of affairs? And then do you crank it up a notch, just to make sure?

No, you're thinking. Of course not. I'd never do that. To which I say, not so fast. What if you were anonymous? Invisible? Would you alter your behaviour? Remember, nothing terrible has happened. You haven't just witnessed someone beat up somebody else or hurt a child. All that's happened is that someone has said something you don't agree with. It has annoyed you, but it is completely irrelevant to your well-being. Still no? Well, you clearly have never posted a comment on any website, then.

I read a story in a newspaper last week which reported what happened when a 13-year-old girl went to school wearing a skirt that was too short. Her teacher told her she looked like a 'slut' and said that skirt 'does nothing for your cellulite'. The newspaper that reported this story identified the child and named the school she attends. Like all newspapers, it encouraged readers to comment on articles. They did so in their dozens. Many agreed with the teacher: the girl did look 'like a slut' ('and dumpy too') and what was the world coming to?

So now you have a load of anonymous adults, fuelled by moral outrage and what they see as their own impeccable rectitude, hiding behind pseudonyms, calling a named child a slut. The child had been reduced to tears by the teacher's initial outburst. Let's just hope she didn't check to see what the marvellous great British public had to say. I wrote to the Press Complaints Commission, quoting clause 6 of its code of conduct, namely that 'young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion'. It brushed me off because a child being called a slut by a load of adult strangers didn't personally affect me.

Anonymous online commenting means that the public's disinhibition is out of control in some quarters. It takes effort to write a cross letter: you have to get the paper, the pen, compose the letter, find a stamp and then a postbox – by which time you've calmed down and can't necessarily be bothered. Online, your bile can be shared in seconds and you can say all the things you'd never dare to say 'in real life'. Except it is real life. One 'quality' newspaper's website is filled with strange

people calling other people names and deriding their opinions with a nastiness that verges on psychosis. Amusingly, the newspaper prides itself on its liberal credentials. All I can say is that it has some spectacularly foul readers.

All this became evident during the weeks following the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, where her mother's character was demolished online: she was too pretty, she was not sad enough, she was weird and behaving weirdly, she killed Madeleine herself – she'd know how, being a doctor. The poisonous posters were, of course, anonymous.

None, I imagine, would have dreamt of saying any of these things to McCann face to face. I doubt they'd even be comfortable expressing them if doing so involved posting a real address and having it published for all to see. Equally, the people calling such and such a celebrity 'fat' or 'skanky' or 'diseased' might be less likely to do so if their comment involved being photographed themselves, looking gorgeous in their gorgeous homes.

Anonymity online has its uses: people who helpfully leak material in the public interest that would otherwise be suppressed obviously can't sign their entries. But the people I'm talking about neither run websites nor act in the public interest. They just delight in the ease with which they can be unspeakably vile.

They do it because no one's going to catch them doing it and also because there is a strange perception that if you are in any way in the public eye – if you're good at acting, say, or can carry a tune – then you somehow deserve to be abused. You can 'take it'. You've put yourself 'out there' ergo you are fair game: you have no feelings or insecurities. If the commentators are properly stupid, they will tell themselves that being financially secure and having a nice life means some hapless celeb can 'take it' even more. Do these people go and abuse their bosses because they live in bigger houses and drive flashier cars? Of course not.

I know a lot of female newspaper columnists; none can bear to look at the readers' comments below her articles online. It's a shame, because it would be nice to enter into debate with the non-loony element, or to have one's views broadened, or even to have a bit of human interaction. But life's too short to have a beautiful day ruined by the demented rantings of complete strangers – and we're cynical hacks, not teenage schoolgirls.

People should think twice before pressing the send button. They might also bear in mind that anonymous commenting's days are numbered, according to my more technologically knowledgeable friends: 'Open identity is the future and it's on its way.' This means no more adults calling children sluts and that's okay by me.

Misery Lit

The public's appetite for gruesome, heave-making detail always disconcerts me. I consider myself to be robust rather than squeamish; matter-of-fact rather than wet. My eyes don't well with tears of joy at the sight of kittens playing. I understand that not everything is lovely, but I don't trawl for trauma, either. If I see a particularly upsetting headline, I skim what comes below and stop reading the second I've got the gist. I stupidly assume that most people feel the same way, when quite clearly the opposite is true.

The idea, for example, that there would be a hungry readership for a mass-market paperback about Baby P – 300 pages of minute detail, say – strikes me as revolting and morally gross. It is dubious, to say the least, to get your kicks from devouring pages of grim detail about someone else's stomach-churning misery – details that offer no insight, that shine no light, but that merely confirm what you already knew: that some people are monstrous and that some people's lives are desperate.

This would appear to be a minority view. No such book exists – yet – although I've no doubt that some enterprising soul is putting one together as we speak. Would it be a bestseller? Probably. People come up with all sorts of excuses to feed their quasi-pornographic appetite for other people's misery: it's 'important' to understand the evil that ordinary-seeming people are capable of; it's 'fascinating' to read about people's depravity; it's 'necessary' to be fully informed before forming an opinion (that last is especially disingenuous, given that the opinion is usually formed within 30 seconds of the first news report).

And, of course – unspoken, but at the core of all this – reading this stuff makes you feel better about your own life's shortcomings, because at least your dad didn't rape you. But then a tub of ice-cream or a glass of wine or whatever harmless vice keeps you going makes you feel better, too.

I don't think misery lit is a harmless vice. I don't think people should be cheered by the fact that they weren't victims of incest. And I don't think reading about victims of incest ought to pass for entertainment. I think people who read these books should hang their heads in shame.

Misery lit, once the province of tiny American publishing houses that no one had ever heard of, is now enormous business; in Britain the sector is worth about £24m. Dave Pelzer's *A Child Called It* (1995) is widely credited with bringing the genre to the mass market. That book, and its sequels, have spent a combined total of 448 weeks on The New York Times's bestseller list, despite the chorus of doubts about its veracity (doubts come with the territory).

Frank McCourt's classmates have raised many a quizzical eyebrow over his Angela's Ashes. A Memoir of the Holocaust Years (1997) by 'Misha Defonseca' was a European bestseller, translated into 18 languages – and then shown to be nonsense: the author was not Jewish; her parents were not deported; she did not roam Europe killing Germans and bonding with wolves. Sometimes, people just make it up.

What is especially astounding about misery lit is that its readership is estimated to be 80% to 90% female, with the bulk of sales taking place in supermarkets. Presumably, during the weekly shop, the typical customer picks up a volume about a child who spent his infancy being punched to go with the Pringles. Are these the same women who are expressing their grief and anger about Baby P all over the internet: the ones setting up online shrines, or grotesque social networking groups that enable one to become a 'fan' of Baby P?

If they're not in the supermarket or online, perhaps they're in Waterstone's at its section called Painful Lives, browsing through titles such as the hugely popular Please, Daddy, No, which is about a child raped by his father before becoming a plaything for paedophiles – just the thing to curl up with on a rainy Sunday. Torey Hayden, the American author who produces titles such as Ghost Girl – about a child so chronically abused that she seemed half-dead – has sold 25m books worldwide.

I hold the possibly old-fashioned, or maybe just hippieish, or maybe just sane, view that you can't dictate what lodges itself in your head. That's why I'm not keen on young children watching horror films or reading horror books – not when a close friend has had recurring nightmares for more than a decade as a result of a childhood devotion to James Herbert. Years ago I tried to explain this to my eldest son, then 10, when he announced that everyone in his class was reading A Child Called It and why couldn't he and did I know that the mother in the book stabbed her son in the stomach and made him drink bleach?

I checked with other parents and, sure enough, these children, who five years ago had been in nursery, really were lapping up abuse memoirs. One mother said, 'Well, at least he's reading', which makes you wonder: what's wrong with Harry Potter?

Forget James Herbert: this is in another league altogether. It doesn't take a child psychologist, surely, to point out the harm that such soul-polluting material might cause. Do we really want a world where some piece of horrific abuse prompts our children to say, 'Oh yes, that's just like the bit in Don't Tell Mummy', only to have the parent argue that no, actually, it's more like the scenario in Damaged, or was it Daddy's Little Girl? Many people already do and see nothing wrong with it. I think they should have their heads examined.

Still, there may be no need. It is possible that the libel suit being brought against Constance Briscoe - author of the bestselling abuse memoir *Ugly* – may coincide with a decrease in the public appetite for mis lit, a genre at its most popular during our period of greatest prosperity. In these financially constrained times perhaps we'll develop an appetite for books that make us happy. Failing which, there's always *My Godawful Life: Abandoned. Betrayed. Stuck to the Window*, by Michael Kelly, the first mis lit spoof featuring, among other things, living in a bird coop and being bullied by pigeons, as well as prostitution, Tourette's, necrophilia, anorexia and autism. Bad taste? Hardly: there's such an embarrassment of it elsewhere. But the beginning of the end, perhaps.

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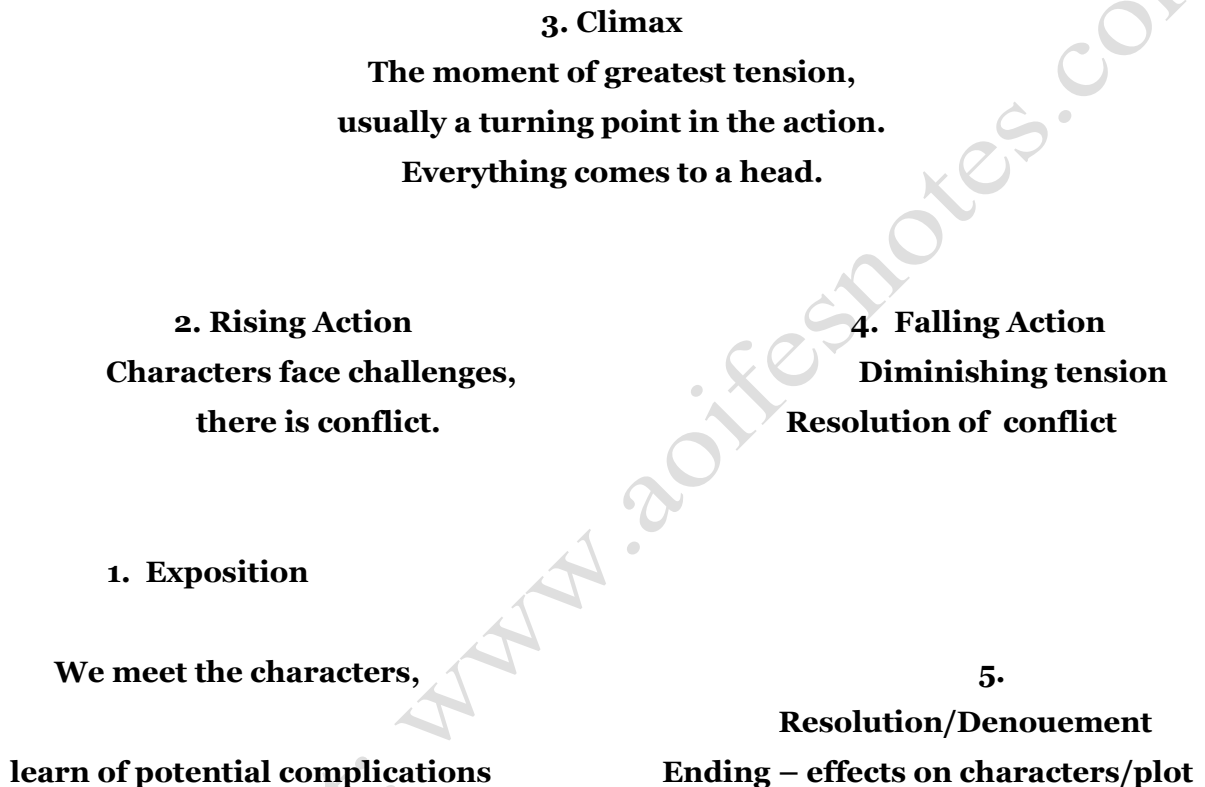
The Short Story

This is one of the most popular compositions on the Leaving Cert Paper but it is very rarely written correctly. It is vital to use a proper narrative shape: that is, a well-structured plot with a strong beginning, middle and end. You have studied the five stages of a plot in your preparation for Paper 2; now is your chance to use that knowledge to help you in your composition.

- It is absolutely essential to write a plan for your short story. If you don't know where the plot is going, you will write a weak, unconvincing story that will be unbalanced and will not engage the reader. A sure sign of an unplanned essay is one which ends: "Suddenly I woke up. It had all been a dream." This is the worst possible ending you could write. Imagine how frustrated and irritated you would be if a film ended this way? Expect a D or below if you finish your short story by waking from a dream.
- Decide on the point of view. Are you writing in the first person or from the point of view of another person, perhaps a young child or an old woman? A first person narrator is unreliable but you can use this to your advantage to create tension. An omniscient narrator can do the same thing by showing snippets from all the characters' lives. Whichever point of view you choose, use it wisely.
- Decide on the time frame. It is best if the action in your story takes place over a reasonably short period of time as you don't have the time or the space to cover many years of a person's life in your composition. It can be done but it is very difficult. Your story will cover approximately four or five pages of the answer booklet. It is far better to describe a short time frame in detail rather than to attempt to span months or years. Think of the TV series "24". The writers managed to make eight days stretch over one hundred and ninety two episodes!
- Write in a style that comes naturally to you. If you try to impress the examiner with jargon or complicated sentence structure, the chances are that you'll make mistakes. If you aren't certain what a word means, don't use it.
- Keep your sentences clear and simple but vary your language as much as possible. This may seem like a contradiction but it's not. Avoid repetition and stale, clichéd expressions.

Structure

Most plots can be divided into the stages seen below:



This is only your starting point, however. If you tell a simple story, you will not get an A or a B. To get the highest possible grade, you need to realise that the short story is an opportunity to explore your character's inner life through a single incident, and see how he or she copes with **conflict**. The character may be reminded of moments from his or her past and this may have an impact or add a poignancy to the current situation.

Creating character

It is worth spending some time between now and the Leaving Cert thinking of a character or characters you might use in your short story. The better your character, the more realistic

your story will be. If you are interested in writing the short story, then you would be well advised to work on character sketches long before the exam. The more varied your characters are, the more potential there is for conflict and the more believable your writing will be. If you get to know your own character, then you will be able to imagine just how he or she would react to events.

If you are creating a character, the following questions may be helpful:

- ◆ Where does your character live? What is the social setting?
- ◆ Did your character always live here? If it is a city, did he or she grow up in the country or vice versa? Background can be extremely influential in forming your character's opinions and outlook.
- ◆ How old is your character? Think about this in order to get the details right. An elderly person might be unlikely to have a mobile phone, for example.
- ◆ Think of a name for your character. This may reflect their age, background and social class.
- ◆ What does your character look like? Are they attractive or not? Do they have confidence or low self-esteem?
- ◆ What does your character do for a living? Is he or she a professional, a student or unemployed? This will affect their view of the world.
- ◆ How does your character handle conflict or change? These are important issues in a story.
- ◆ Is your character married, in a relationship or part of a family? How does he or she interact with those closest to him or her?

You can, of course, base your characters on people you know, but use your discretion here.

Setting

Think of the words of the writer Elmore Leonard here: "I try to leave out the parts that people skip." Too much description will bore your reader, but too little will make your story unconvincing. It is best, if you can, to work the descriptions of the setting into the fabric of the story rather than give them a paragraph or two of their own.

When you are describing the setting, think of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. You won't be able to use all of these, but they can be very evocative. The main thing to remember here is not to labour your point.

Read the example below, which incorporates many of the features of excellent writing which we have been discussing so far. It is taken from the opening lines of Tracy Chevalier's "Girl With A Pearl Earring".

<p>My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.</p> <p>I was chopping vegetables in the kitchen when I heard voices outside the front door – a woman's, bright as polished brass, and a man's, <u>low and dark like the wood of the table I was working on</u>. They were the kind of voices we heard rarely in our house. I could hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur.</p> <p>I was glad that earlier I had scrubbed the front step so hard.</p> <p><u>My mother's voice – a cooking pot, a flagon</u> – approached from the front room. They were coming to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I had been chopping into place, then set my knife on the table, wiped my hands on my apron, and pressed my lips together to smooth them.</p> <p>My mother appeared in the doorway, <u>her eyes two warnings</u>. Behind her the woman had to duck her head because she was so tall, taller than the man following her.</p>	<p><i>Who are "they"?</i></p> <p><i>Tension is introduced by the mention of "nervous". Why should she be nervous?</i></p> <p><i>Descriptions of the setting are woven into the action.</i></p> <p><i>The girl's social class is established by the contrast of the voices.</i></p> <p><i>Mood established in a few words.</i></p>
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Sample Short Stories

Saki- The Open Window

"My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady.

"Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window - "

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn't it?"

—She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic, he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention - but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with a dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window, they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window, "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of goodby or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

His Word Was Law

“Where’s my lunch?” demanded Charles.

“I’m just getting it ready now” replied Carol.

“Well hurry up, I’m starving” he snapped.

The poor girl wiped her floury hand across her brow, whitening further her already washed out complexion. Head bowed, her mousey un-brushed hair hanging limply to her shoulders, she shuffled tiredly around the kitchen as if each trip from counter to press to counter was a half-marathon.

“Finally” he snapped as she carried his meal into the dining room and placed it before him at the head of the table. “If that’s all you want I’ll just go” she broached timidly. “Umph” he muttered not even hearing her. Sighing with relief she slowly made her way back to the kitchen and flopped into the nearest chair. Ravenous, but too exhausted to move, the aroma of Charles’ food was almost torture. Eventually she summoned the energy to rise and fixed herself a simple sandwich. “What was I thinking?” she wondered aloud. Not that she could really complain. She’d gladly taken the job and it did pay quite well. It was just that she never anticipated how gruelling it would be.

“Carol” came the summons from the other room. Slowly she rose from her chair, praying that her fatigued feet would support her weight, slight as it was. “Yes” she sighed wearily when she reached the door of the dining room. “I’m finished” was all he said, not even looking at her, let alone saying thanks. Then again, he probably doesn’t even know how much I’d appreciate it, she mused miserably. Caught in her reverie, she didn’t notice the proximity of her sleeve to the glass until it was too late. Luckily the crash of breaking glass drowned out her obscenity. “My drink! Clean it up” he shouted angrily before storming from the room. Not that she needed telling. The red liquid was spreading quickly across the carpet leaving a painfully obvious mark.

Squeezing out her cloth over the sink, she gazed absent-mindedly out the window to observe a landscape which aptly reflected her mood. Heavy grey clouds loomed menacingly overhead, deadening everything, even managing to overshadow the jubilation of nature in early spring. Only the golden daffodils swaying rhythmically in the slight breeze lifted the atmosphere of gloom and dejection. Yet they could do little for Carol’s frame of mind.

As she passed the door to her basement quarters her body told her to go to bed, but her head knew she couldn't risk it in case Charles called her. Instead she moved slowly from room to room, absent-mindedly cleaning up after him. If she'd had the energy she would almost have found it funny that one person could make this much mess.

A noise made her look up and there he was, framed in the doorway, hands on hips, a furious expression etching deep furrows on his forehead, the quintessential 'master of the house' pose.

"What did you do with my books?" he demanded.

"I thought you were finished with them, I put them in the drawer".

"Well I wasn't. Don't touch my things unless I tell you" he ranted before storming from the room yet again.

Shocked by the abruptness of the outburst, she stopped dead for a minute before continuing on as before. She couldn't wait until the housekeeper got here, at least then she might have a rest. She began to prepare dinner, watching as the weather got gradually worse. A gale was now blowing, tossing even the huge sycamore as if it were a mere sapling. A light drizzle had begun to fall and nightfall was closing in swiftly. Carol supposed she should light a fire but then she only had two hands. "It'll have to wait" she said aloud, if only to break the eerie silence. Just then the back door opened and the housekeeper entered and dumped her shopping bags on the floor. Carol heaved a sigh of relief. "Oh Mum, thank God you're home. I never realised what a tyrant a five year old could be!

From the website leavingcertenglish.net

Speech Writing

Note: Rather than say 'he or she' the whole way through the notes, I will say 'he' when referring to the writer.

- The writer presents a viewpoint and tries to win the reader over to his or her opinion. This can be done by appealing to the reader's logic and/or the reader's emotion. If the writer wishes to appeal to the reader's logic, he does not use emotionally charged language. Instead, the tone is quite calm and reasonable. The evidence is presented and the reader is encouraged to make up his or her own mind.
- Both argument (appealing to the person's logic) and persuasion (appealing to the reader's emotion) share many features, but for the purposes of these notes, I have divided them into two sections.

ARGUMENT

- **Analogy** is a useful tool here, (a comparison between two things which are otherwise dissimilar).
- **Rhetorical questions** (questions to which an answer is not expected or an argument phrased in the form of a question to which there is only one possible answer) are commonly used to engage the reader and to try to make him or her believe that there is a conversation taking place between the writer and the reader. Using rhetorical questions cleverly avoids giving the reader the impression that he or she is on the receiving end of a lecture. If people feel they are being lectured to, they may decide that the writer is arrogant, and the writer may lose their support. 'Why should we allow our parents to rule every aspect of our lives?' (Answer expected – we shouldn't.)

- **Facts and figures are given**, but they are carefully chosen to support the point the writer is making. Using statistics can make the writer's case seem well-researched and therefore more credible.
- **Acknowledging that there are other viewpoints can be helpful**, if it is done correctly. The writer may anticipate and briefly respond to the reader's possible objections to the argument, but he does not weaken his case by giving both sides of the argument equal weight. This can be an effective technique, as it makes the writer appear rational and fair-minded. It implies the the writer has approached this argument in a balanced way.

‘What about all the important breakthroughs, as a result of animal research, that have aided human health? The animal research industry cites many examples of treatments or cures for illness that have been found using animals. They claim that if animal research is discontinued, it will be at the expense of human health and life. Industry groups, such as Americans for Medical Progress credit animal research with advances such as the development of the polio vaccine, anaesthesia, and the discovery of insulin. But a close examination of medical history clearly disputes these claims.’

The writer of this piece went on to argue strongly against animal testing, giving statistics and quotes to support his point.

- **Quotations** can give the impression that the writer is just one of many people who feels this way. Quoting can prove that the writer's opinion is shared by independent, learned individuals. A quote can be a good way to begin or end a piece of discursive writing.
- **The word 'We'** is often used instead of 'I' to draw the reader in and make him or her feel on the same side as the writer.
- **'Persuader'** words and phrases can be used to good effect:
 - *Clearly*
 - *Plainly*
 - *Surely*

- *Undoubtedly*
- *Obviously*
- *As we all know...*
- *Everybody is fully aware that...*

These words and phrases make the reader feel that they, and everybody else, has always agreed with the statement being made. The information now takes on the appearance of being an well-known, established fact. The reader feels that if he or she does not agree with the statement, then he or she is in a minority.

- **Distancing phrases** can be used to make the writing seem more formal and less personal. ‘There are those who claim that...’ ‘It is often said that...’
- **Repetition** can add emphasis.
- **Antithesis** can be an elegant way to contrast ideas using parallel arrangements of words or phrases. It might sound complicated, but all it means is using the same words in a slightly different order to create a completely contrasting idea. Look at this example from John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech: ‘Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.’ Or think of Benjamin Franklin's ‘By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.’ And, of course, there is the famous, ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.’ Such sentences are memorable, which is exactly what you want when you are trying to win someone over to your point of view.
- **The rule of three** Using the Rule of Three allows you to express concepts more completely, emphasise your points, and make your message more memorable.

That’s the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Barack Obama, Inaugural Speech:

‘We must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America’

Sample Speech

Break the Chain! Taken from a website

Introduction would depend on audience. Fill in as necessary

Did you know that if you're being forced to withdraw money from ATM at gunpoint, you can inform the police by entering your pin in reverse?

Or that Coca-cola logo is a secret message directed against a particular religion and the blasphemous message is clear if you hold the logo in front of a mirror?

I'm sure you also know that Bill Gates is sharing his fortune and you can be a beneficiary if you choose to forward a certain mail?

All of these seemingly unrelated examples appear at first glance to be appealing, interesting and informative but the biggest connection is that the source of all of these is a number of different chain-mails and each of them is untrue.

My fellow students, I come before you today to urge you to break the chain and to help put a stop to this irritating phenomenon. My main grudge is against the mails that seek to lure or threaten the recipient into forcefully continuing the chain: the ones which are meant to spread hatred, superstitions or misinformation or simply to continue the chain. Yes, I've even seen a chain saying, 'Let's see how far it can get; just add your name to the list and forward it to your friends'. Can it get any more absurd than this?

At this juncture, many of you may be wondering what harm an innocuous forwarded mail can do even if it's factually incorrect? This is what many of my friends argue. But believe me, it's more dangerous than it looks.

To start with, it can make you look like an idiot. Recently, I got a mail from one of my friends asking me to forward it to ten others and then press F6 five times. The mail claimed that after this, the name of my secret admirer would appear on the screen. I couldn't believe that such nonsense could come from a seemingly intelligent student! I stopped reading his mails after that.

Many of us, who normally do not forward unsolicited mails, often give in to the emotional appeals and consider our job to the society done after forwarding such mails. I believe that most of us must have at some time received a mail regarding Red-Cross donating a cent for a

cancer-struck child or for some 9/11 victim. What we don't realize is the fact that we're in fact causing more harm to the reputation and work of such organizations by forwarding unverified information about them. And then, they need to spend hundreds of man-hours refuting the contents of the mail.

Remember: often the original context of the mail is often lost in a chain and if some legal issue crops up and the mail is traced back to you, then you can be considered the author of that mail. Are you prepared to take that risk? Let us take a fictional scenario of Mr X, working for Microsoft in Dublin, who gets a hoax-mail regarding a new virus attacking Windows XP. Mr. X forwards it to some of his friends thinking, 'What's wrong with being cautious?' His friends forward it claiming, 'This comes from one of friends, who is working for Microsoft'. It won't take more than two-three steps of the chain for that to become, 'This is an official email from Microsoft'. Very soon, Microsoft is contacted for verification and when they trace the mail to their own employee, do you think it's going to be easy for Mr X to explain himself? I've read about employees losing their jobs on similar grounds.

Things can get worse for people who fall for such imaginary ideas. Think what can happen if you try the ATM trick and the tech-savvy robber gets to know that you were actually trying to inform the police.

Now that I believe I've managed to convince you against the dangers that this menace poses, here are some ideas to counter it.

The minimum we can do is not to be the source of any such message. A two minute search can reveal its falsehood. There are sites like Break-the-chain and Hoax-slayer dedicated to the cause and they will give you scientific reasons why the particular message is hoax. But don't stop at just ignoring the mail. If you're able to establish that the mail is fake, do attack the source. Reply to the sender, mention the links and request him to write a damage control mail to recipients of this mail as well as the person from whom he got the mail. I know this may create a kind of reverse-chain, but this surely is worth it.

Furthermore, if you really want to forward something, ask yourself if you're ready to be identified as the original source of message. Simply by taking these few simple steps, we can all do our bit against this menace.

The e-mail is one of the best innovations in the field of communication. Let's be responsible users and not abuse this wonderful communication tool. We just need to use some common sense and follow some simple steps to break the chain.