

DESCRIBING THE RAIN

SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
airy rain	beads of rain	hissing rain	Amazonian showers
drizzling rain	dewdrops of rain	saturating rain	a biblical deluge
evanescent rain	droplets of rain	seething rain	monsoon rains
mist-like rain	pearls of rain	shredding rain	Noah's-Ark-lavish
mizzling rain	* ploppy drops of	sibilant rain	sluicing rains
pitter-patter of rain	plump drops of	sissing rain	torrential rainfall
showering rain	pregnant drops of	sizzling rain	silver icicles of rain
spraying rain	splattering rain	soaking rain	silver nails of rain
sprinkling sound of rain	the susurrat ion of rain	spitting rain	upside-down rain (so heavy it bounces upwards)
tinkling rain	teardrops of rain	stinging rain	the billion-fold ping

The rain is the white noise of nature. Of course, some people love white noise and others find it off-putting. Maybe it is because we all have a memory buried deep down in our psyches. This memory is of the billion-fold plip and plop of rain dripping just outside of a cave. It is a memory of moss and wet cave floors, the musty smell of bears and the Jurassic-green of ferns. It is also a memory of crackling fires, sooty faces, laughter and safety. Depending on which memory you choose to believe in, you will either love or hate the rain.

The words that are highlighted in bold above are onomatopoeic words. The word *‘ploppy’ is technically not a word, but it sounds so right for raindrops I just had to put it in!

Now that you have your word banks for the seasonal nature of rain, it is time to concentrate more on its sound. All the onomatopoeic words you need to describe rain falling are on the next page.

SOFT RAIN SOUNDS

The rain was:

HEAVY RAIN SOUNDS

The rain was:

burbling (gurgling) into the drains.	boiling the surface of the river.
dripping from the flowers.	buzzing incessantly with noise.
chinking off the windows.	dinging furiously off the tin roof.
clinking off the cars.	drumming off the tarmacadam.
making a lovely, lilting sound.	fizzing against the top of the bus.
murmuring like white noise.	hammering off their leather jackets.
plinking off the puddles.	ker-plunking off the swollen pools.
strumming against the roof tops.	pinging angrily against the glass.
suspiring (sighing) through the air.	plunking onto the muddy earth.
swishing off my skin.	smashing onto the heads of the crowd.
thrumming off the cobble stones.	*swooshing onto the flooded fields.
weaving (moving side to side) with the wind.	tapping madly off the door.
whirring (a rapid buzz) off the leaves.	thunking the tops of the trees.
gently whisking (stirring) the lake's surface.	whizzing from the sky.
whispering in the air.	whooshing as the heavens opened.

‘Swooshing’ is not a word either, although it should be! The next step is to think up of a scene or situation where you can use the words and sentences above. A simple example might look like the paragraphs on the next page.

LEVEL 1

I looked out the window. The sky was tar-black and the large clouds were moving towards me. I heard a tapping on the window and then it became a pitter-patter. People ran for cover outside and umbrellas were opened as the clouds spat out their beads of water. Puddles began plinking as the rainfall became heavier. The roofs of the cars danced with spray and I could hear the murmuring of the rain through the window. It sounded like the buzzing of angry bees.

For a Level 2 assignment, more detail should be added. Imagine the effect of the rain on the trees and include more detail on the sky and clouds. At the end of the paragraph, try to write something about the sun coming out. This will vary your writing style.

LEVEL 2

I quickened my pace as the clouds began to gather in the sky. Up to now, the sky had been postcard-perfect, but it was changing. The beautiful cocktail-blue shade was beginning to darken into gravel-grey. Large pillows of cloud were forming, blotting out the old-gold colour of the sun.

I got the first splatter of rain when I was halfway across the meadow. I took shelter under an old oak, hoping that I could see out the shower. Droplets of moisture began to drip from the leaves. They were sprinkling onto the grass like a gardener's hose. Then the rainfall became more intense. A wall of rain moved over the oak and the drops were drumming against the canopy. So much rain was falling that the sound blurred into one long, whirring noise. It reminded me of the rotor blades on a helicopter. Eventually, the noise lessened and the drops faded into a musical chime.

The sun came out again, casting slanted beams of light across the meadow. Steam rose slowly from the grass. It rose up eerily and drifted mist-like towards the molten-gold sun. The image was so vivid that it stayed with me all the way home.

Level 3 should conjure up a scene where the rain's effect can be explored in more detail. The words should get more complex also. An idea might be to visualise a forest scene in autumn, for example. Transport yourself there and describe the colours, the sensations and the sounds of the rain.

LEVEL 3

It began as a whispering in the air. The day had been beautiful and the sky was like a dome of plasma-blue. The clouds had looked like airy anvils drifting under the gleaming disc of sun. We had put our tent up just before the Reaper's moon of autumn appeared over the trees. The moon seemed to turn the leaves into a flaming patchwork of colours: scorching-yellows, lava-reds and burnished-browns. It added an alien glamour to a perfect scene. We heard a greedy thrush, snail a-tapping on rock; he finished his supper before fluttering into the owl-light of the forest. The mournful cry of a lonely fox echoed through the vault-still silence of the trees. A huffing wind rose up then, stirring the flaps of our tent. A tinkling sound came to our ears as the first pearls of rain dropped onto the leaves. The sound was like the glassy clinking of a champagne flute, lilting and clear. A sheet of rain passed over us and the sound intensified. The noise on the tent was like the phut-phut-phut that ripened nuts make when they hit the ground. It wasn't the soft, sodden, swollen drops of spring we were hearing; it was like ball-bearings were hitting the canvas roof with force. We could also hear an occasional ker-plunking sound. It was caused by the rainwater gathered on the tent falling to the ground in a great swash of release.

The thermometer plunged as we huddled together and shivered in the tent. For a brief moment, we thought that we might be doomed adventurers, destined to get swept away in a mighty flood. We needn't have worried. The curtain of rain passed over by the time dawn arrived. An explosion of birdsong erupted from the dripping trees and it was as if the rain had never been.

A Level 4 assignment might involve a degree of philosophy. You can discuss how the rain is both life giving and life threatening. The metaphors should be more creative and the turn of phrase made more enriching.

LEVEL 4

'The sun enables life. The rain grants it safe passage'.

The winter sky is a widow's sky, bedarkened and weeping. The clouds are churlish and kraken-cruel. They cough out great gouts of water and thumping balloons of sopping moisture. It teems down in a biblical deluge, flooding the rivers, drowning the fields and overflowing the dams. It is a Noah's-Ark cataclysm of rain, an unending cataract of water sluicing from the sky. Trees are uprooted, cars go bobbing by and entire villages disappear under a frothy lather of suds. Cities are overwhelmed and electricity blackouts have people

living in fear of the unknown. The rain is incessant. It snaps and crackles like bracken pods in a bush fire. The flood-gates in the sky have been opened and no-one is there to close them back up, it seems.

Is this the scene from a sci-fi movie? Is it a terrifying vision of a future world? Indeed it is not. It is the new reality for people from Missouri to Manchester, from Mumbai to Melbourne. The rain is man's new enemy, according to news reports. It is public enemy number one. It has betrayed man and is now the most destructive arrow in nature's quiver. The rain has a bad 'rep' at the moment. Is this how it should be viewed? Maybe we are forgetting the gifts it bestows upon us.

The spring sky is a fragile, pellucid-blue. The clouds are frail and angel-white. They are carried on a light, ruffling breeze. The soil of Mother Earth is titanium hard and in need of nourishment. A misty rain falls down. It is as frail as a Scottish smirr and its misty dew feels like warm butter melting on a face. As it falls, it unlocks the glassy fingers of winter's frosty fist, one by one. Flowers slowly unfurl in the meadows and ripple like coral arms at low tide. The rivers exhale with a murmurous purr of satisfaction. The spring rains are here and they are as sinless and glistening as an angel's tears.

The summer sky is neon-blue and vibrant. The sun-crisped flowers of the meadow are wilting. They gape at the tufty clouds and beg for their parched petals to be given one more shot of insulin. The clouds oblige and rain descends in little gleam-drops of silver. If you were to stand in the meadow, the drops would feel as sparkly and effervescent as champagne bubbles hitting your skin. The sound of the rain is a harmonic thrumming, nature's white noise. Silver trickles of water seep into the soil, renewing the life-roots of the plants beneath. A homely, baked-earth smell rises from the land as it is washed and cleansed by the dewy tears of summer rain. Petrichor, the smell of the first rains after a dry spell, rises like a miasma. It is a jasmine-and-gingerbread fragrance, warm and fresh, and it laves the land with sweetness. The farmer is happy. The rain has giveth what the sun would taketh away.

The autumn sky is dark and vengeful. Steaming shrouds of cloud coil and writhe. Then an unearthly caterwauling sound fills the air. The wind whips up into frenzy. It is a shrieking, keening omen of the carnage to follow. The clouds race across the sky, thrumming with the charged energy they are desperate to release. It starts with big, sopping drops of moisture. They are wild and indiscriminate, plump missiles of mass destruction that splatter onto the soft soil. The topsoil turns into slushy goo, but it doesn't matter. The harvest has been taken in and the farmer stokes the glowing coals with a poker and a sigh of contentment. The rain is sissing and hissing off the roof, teeming onto the spongy earth. The farmer thinks about how

most gifts come with a cost. He shudders at the thought of another winter, but counts his blessings that the rain has once again ensured his livelihood.

To him, the rain is the nectar of the gods and the serum of the sky. He is neither philosopher nor ancient mariner, neither writer nor jungle adventurer, yet he understands the importance of nature's bounty.

If beauty is God's signature, then rain is his final flourish.

A Level 5 passage may include the rain only as an incidental event in the story. It could have a central hero or anti-hero (a man/woman with bad characteristics doing some good or vice versa). The plot should contain a theme or moral and the use of metaphor/simile/pathetic fallacy should be advanced. Above all, it should be enjoyable to read.

Level 5: The Crime o' the Ancient Mariner

"The water, like a witch's oils,

Burnt green, and blue, and white."

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Samuel Coleridge.

An ancient mariner was, in times of yore, a sea-gazer. That, at least, is the common perception.

Many people today, however, see the mariner from a snuff-induced perspective. They envision him as a doughty lad, his hand clasped to the tiller, his far-seeing eyes scanning the horizon for signs which mere mortals could not fathom. His hair is windswept and hobbit-curled, his skin is a healthy, kelp-brown and he has eyes of the deepest, Atlantis-blue. He carries himself with an easy grace and he is ruminating on fate and empires. Tacking gently into the nuzzling breeze, his nostrils inhale the mesh of pelagic scents. Moon glades appear on the sea every so often. When the rickety clouds disappear, their bright, pearly pools of glow make his soul rejoice. The sea itself is a winding-sheet of silver and the opaline light of the moon makes it shimmer with a tightened beauty. Stars fizz and shoot across the night sky like the faerie-fire mentioned in dusty tomes. Oh to be an ancient mariner.

The truth, unfortunately, is somewhat different. The mariner, you see, was not quite the romantic we think of him today. He was not so much a seafarer as a sea-fearer.

His hand is gripping the tiller with abject terror. His sea roving eyes spy a whirlpool developing and churning beneath his feet. He fears it is the doom-crack of the world and that he will fall over and into it. His little boat bucks and bobs. It is a strain to keep it from being cloven asunder by the white fangs of the vortex and the sanded teeth of the reefs. His feet slip and slide on the deck made slick by fish guts and spilled rum. The moon is carbuncle-red, the blood moon of October, and it leers down at him over the shocking clap of the waves. The stars do not register because he wears the stunned, slack-jawed expression of a mooncalf. His eyes slowly widen and gaze down into the boundless depths of his doom. His eyes are sprat-wide with terror.

This ancient mariner is a bootlegger and the sea is his enemy. For many years now, he has taken to describing the sea in terms normally applied to the accursed.

To him, the sea is a heaving salt coffin made by the ark wright of the Gods. The spray washes over him like a sea-spectre's breath. The rain is as hot as a hellcat's spit, bitter and stinging. The air itself is a burning brine-shroud, making his eyes bleed with salt. Thunder booms out like a dragon's cough, high and rumbling. The lightning is as splayed as mandrake roots and the foam-flecked waves are like a madman's slobber. The mist is the devil's milk, clotting his mind and clawing at the air. To him, shooting stars are the sizzling sparks from sprite-fire. He has to take care not to be hit by one. The fog is Lucifer's grog, chafing and cutting his skin. He is mindful not to inhale too much of it. The clouds are necromancer-black and wear the garb of the damned. He is wary of becoming like them, drifting into infinity, nameless and valueless.

And yet, there was a time when this bootlegger was a future mariner. When he was a little boy, his father used to take him seafaring in his one-mast cutter. There he would huddle amongst the cargo, gazing up at the stars, with the hull creaking raw, the rigging rippling and the rum casks heaving. Under the light of a moon bow, the ocean became as still and flat as a tarn and it burned blue and green and white, burning with the brightness of an alchemist's oils. The barnacles on the boat used to shine like bucklers and the smell of tar and rope, of teak and rum was like snuff for the soul. The elemental hymn of sea and boat was pleasant, a harmonic rhapsody of swell, jingle and creak. Then, when the wind was low, the waves hushed and the water lulled, he would learn the ways of the sea from his father.

Everything was expressed in minimalist English, with neither ornament nor gloss. Everything was made simple. Thus, the waves we now call rollers, whitecaps, breakers and combers

were given simple names. He learned of scroll-waves and barrel-waves, curlicues and tubes. There were wave-billows and bellows, wave-furrows and hollows, all of them designed to send you to a watery perdition of no return. He learned of the sky, how there were woolpacks and thunderheads, wolf moons and cloudbursts. He learned how the fool-strewn sea floor had been scooped out by Neptune's leviathan hand and that now it stretched down into infinity. He learned of the haunting emptiness of the sea and how it could never leave the soul once it had navigated its way in. Finally, everything was caulked down into one oath, one vow; never to sail under a blood moon. For the blood moon is no honey moon; the sea under it is a cruel bride.

Then his father had died. It was from a locker of reasons, not just one, but chiefly the lung rot. The chink of coin had died with him, the windfall ripeness of life turned to fester, and the family slowly starved. He and his brothers fell on hard times and turned to brigandage, plundering up and down the King's highway. Two of them had been caught and were forced to dance the Tyburn jig down London way, the day before Cromwell was disinterred and danced his. The image of them dangling and swaying from the gallows had driven him back to the bosom of the sea, where a man could make a dishonest living in peace. Now he was here, dancing under a blood moon himself, with a mistress and unborn child awaiting him at the shingled cove and the hole from hell at his feet.

Many years later, a black-clad lady would go into the village inn of a blood moon. Men with woollen hats and cruel laughs would mutter into their glasses and curse her name when she entered. She would sit in the corner 'till the clock chimed 10 to midnight, defying them with her presence. Then, when the tallow burned dull and the frothy mugs low; when darkness shut mouths and the fire dim glowed; a lone voice rose from among the shadows. She would sing a mournful sea shanty in a plaintive voice, pregnant with anguish and longing. She always started it with an exclamation: "o!" and their hackles rose as their souls froze. A few of the men would get up and leave.

"The wind howled long, the sea growled wrong,

The night that my Jack cried.

No aid came from within the inn

The night that my Jack died."

"That's enough of that, now, Mary," said the innkeeper. "He's not coming back and neither should you."

"A pox on all of ye," she hissed and left the same way she came in.

Jack knew it would be a rough passage home. The sea was too placid for a sanguine moon. There was a storm a-brewing.

The boat began to roll from side to side and the temperature dipped all of a sudden. Dark clouds obscured the moon. They churned grimly in the night sky, as black as a witch's Sabbath. The moon's mercury flush was painted silver by the thunderheads, casting down shivers of light with a ghostly glow. Underneath the moon, the rain moved towards him like a wraith's veil of sorrow. A winnowing wind fermented and sighed, rippling the surface of the corpse calm sea. Thunder clapped. It boomed out, leaving a concussed silence after it. The sea itself was tomb silent. Then the rising wind rasped his sails and made them flap jaggedly. Kinked lightning wriggled from the sky and fizzled with a golden sheen. A yowling sound rolled across the arch of heaven, tumbling out like the rocky echo of a cavern. His boat heaved and tossed in the rising swell and he gripped the tiller with his naked fingers. He could just make out the figure of his wife standing on the shingled beach, lamp raised aloft to guide him home. Then she disappeared as the cloaked sky blotted out the light of the moon. The rain-shroud passed by, spitting at him with its Undead tears. It wrung his hobbit curls into a mop and soaked his jerkin through. He could smell his own fear as the fumes rose from his clothes, a mixture of sea mongrel and must. A monster's cough bellowed in the sky and it sounded like all the hunting hounds of hell were unleashed together to kill him. War trumpets followed in their wake, blaring out like the clarion call of the condemned. The rain whipped down like crystal nails and streaky lightning emblazoned the sky. The sea swells rose and his beard rime froze as the north wind blew and sped him to his doom. Lacerating rain stung his bare arms like ice burn and the sea throbbed grey with woe. His boat bobbed like a cork upon the capacious sea and for the first time ever, he felt his own mortality. The brine hissed and sissed, lashing his face, and he felt a fever in his eyes. His little boat keeled and tilted like the death flop of a mackerel. The timber planks buckled and bulged, then screamed and shuddered, but the boat righted herself once more.

The bedlam of the sea caused a hectic in his blood, but he could swear that an old man's, spectral face was fixed in the sky where the moon should be. It wore a mask of hatred and longing and it transfixed Jack utterly. He looked at it aghast, like a mooncalf would stare at the night sky. The old man's eyes seemed to glare at the sea on his starboard side. Jack's own eyes followed and slowly widened as he gazed down into a whirlpool opening and spinning beneath the boat. The words of his father came to him unbidden then: "There's nothing worse than the dreadful curse lodged in a dead man's eye."

Jack became angry, trying to remember the rest of the advice. He knew it was important, but he couldn't think with the tumult and the tempest. A few lines of poesy his father had taught him sprang up instead. He clenched the tiller tighter with his numb left hand, straining with all his might to defy the whirlpool, and shook his fist at the old man with the other, crying out above the wind:

**Ochon, ochon, o! o! ochon,
Ochon on a wide, wide sea;
But that's a song she'll never sing,
'till I'm in perfidy."**

The whirlpool spun faster and wider, sucking Jack into the doom-crack of the world. The old man's eyes burned brighter, hypnotising Jack with their intensity. He shook his head, as if casting off a glamour. Jack let go of the tiller, raising both his fists in defiance of his fate and screamed up at the apparition:

**"I know thee, Ancient Mariner,
I know thy skinny hand,
(And know thee too, thy grey-beard loon)
Come oath or curse or vow or Hell,
I'll make the shingled sand."**

The sea boiled and churned like a cannibal's cauldron. It heaved and bulged, pushing up giant waves from the fathomless gullet of its depths. The wind screamed like a banshee's wail and whipped at his face. Jack's two hands gripped the tiller and refused to let go. His father's words came back unbidden; "A true mariner never deserts a sinking ship." He gripped on tighter. A mountainous wave rose up before him, blotting out the sky. The wind howled out his doom, the whirlpool spun faster and whiter and the old man's face leered down in triumph. The boat rose with the swell, inclining upwards to its destruction. It was propelled up onto the lip and hovered there, a fly-speck on the cobwebbed lines of the wave. Time seemed suspended. The whirlpool gaped under him with dire-white jaws. It roiled and spun, inviting Jack in. Then the boat plummeted down into its milky depths, swallowed whole in a final, terrible, squeak of timber.

The waves subsided and the sea stilled. A terrible silence followed, and then a head rose from the surf. Jack swam towards his wife with steady strokes, following the light all the way to the shingled cove.

"I ran to the inn for help but no-one would come," she said.

“That’s all right, Mary,” he said. “I never liked the Mariners Inn anyway.”

“How did you survive *that*?” she asked, looking at the timbers washing up on the slurpy shore.

“Promise me one thing first, Mary. Don’t go back to the inn again.”

“We’ll see,” she said doubtfully. “Answer my question.”

“There’s only one thing worse than the dreadful curse lodged in a dead man’s eye,” he said.

“And that’s taking bad advice.” He paused and then for effect, he added. “Mariners be damned. I jumped.”