



Literacy booklet for AS and A-Level Students

The jump from GCSE to A Level:

One of the first things you might notice is the increasingly high expectations of you as an A Level student; the quality of your writing, debating skills and independence are of high importance. At this level of study you are required to develop a mature attitude and take responsibility for your development in your education. Teachers of course will support you through this development, but the focus is really on you and your motivation.

This short guide will provide you with some information on effective ways of studying, planning, will define key vocabulary terms and will help you think about what certain skills actually mean and require of you.

-Planning and preparing to write essays:

This guide is designed to help you develop your strategies for planning extended writing and essays.

-Where to study:

The environment in which you chose to work is absolutely vital, you want to ensure you are comfortable, have the relevant materials to hand and are not going to become distracted.



Areas such as the study room in the 6th form block, the library (school, local or the British Library), your bedroom/kitchen/study room at home or a cafe can provide you with a suitable spaces to work.

It is important however to ensure distractions from friends, family, mobile phones (switch it off!), social networking sites, etc are avoided.



Other elements to consider once you have established a comfortable working area:

A desk? Do you have a suitable area that allows you enough space for all your materials and is clutter free?

- A chair? Is your chair suitable to support you? Sometimes you can be working for hours, comfort and support is important.
- Light? Is there enough light or do you need a lamp/light to ensure you are not straining your eyes.
- Ventilation-do not work in a stuffy room; ensure the room is well aired.
- -Noise and sound? Sometimes working with background noise can help students with their studying. Do what works for you.

What time to study?

What time of the day do you study best? Think about how long you think the task might require. Manage your time effectively; producing a timetable, especially nearer exam time, can be very useful. Consider the consequences of beginning to study late at night.



What does the question actually mean?

Much of the time essay questions can include process words such as 'analyse', 'discuss' and 'review' but what do they actually mean? Below is a list of words with their definitions in order to help you approach the questions.

Process word(s)	Meaning
Account for	Explain, clarify, give the reasons for. This is quite different from 'give an account of'...which is more like 'describe in detail'.
Analyse	Break an issue down into its various parts, discuss them and show how they connect.
Argue	Make a case, based on appropriate evidence and logically structured for and/or against some point of view.
Assess	Consider the value or importance of something, paying attention to positive, negative and questionable aspects, use evidence from official documents (newspapers, government reports,

	critics) to help you assess.
Comment on	This term asks for a combination of the criteria found in "analyse" and "assess". Although it sounds as if it would be similar to "describe" or "summarise" it is asking you to be critical and evaluative in your approach.
Compare	Identify and discuss the characteristics or qualities two or more things have in common; you will probably need to point out their differences as well. Quite often an essay will ask you to 'compare' and 'contrast'.
Contrast	Point out and discuss the differences between two things. You will probably need to identify their similarities as well. Quite often an essay will ask you to 'compare' and 'contrast'.
Criticise	Spell out your judgement as to the value or truth of something, indicating the criteria on which you base your judgement and citing specific instances and arguments as to how the criteria apply in this case. Use supporting material from critics, newspapers, reports or articles to offer value to

	your judgement.
Define	Make a statement as to the meaning or interpretation of something, giving enough detail as to allow it to be distinguished from other similar things.
Describe	Spell out the main aspects of an idea or topic, or the sequence in which a series of things happened.
Discuss	Probably the most common word to appear in essay titles and usually requiring analysis and evaluation of evidence as well as weighing up arguments and drawing conclusions.
Evaluate	Similar to 'assess' in that you need to consider the value and importance of something and weigh up its different aspects, citing evidence and argument in support of your case.
Explain	Tell clearly how things work or how they came to be the way they are, including perhaps some need to 'describe' and to 'analyse'.

To what extent	Explore the case for a stated idea or explanation, much in the manner of 'assess' and 'criticise'. How far do you agree or find evidence for....?
Identify	Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use in doing so.
Illustrate	Similar to 'explain' but requesting you give specific examples or statistics to support your case.
Interpret	Clarify something or explain it, perhaps indicating how the thing relates to something else, or explaining a particular way of looking at it.
Justify	Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, probably including the need to argue a case.
Outline	Indicate the main features of a topic or sequence of events, possibly setting them within a clear structure or framework to show how they interrelate.
Paraphrasing	Rewriting something in your own words-

	be careful- this can often lead to plagiarising.
Review	Survey a topic with the emphasis on 'assess' rather than 'describe'.
Summarise	Give the main points briefly, omitting details and illustrations.
Trace	Describe in narrative form the progress, development or sequence of events from some particular point.

These guidance notes were produced by the Student Study Support Unit at Canterbury Christchurch College.

Note taking:

Note taking is important to help you understand your subjects and also for revision purposes. Students who write effective notes are providing themselves with valuable revision material for an essay or piece of coursework and for their exams.

Using highlighters or underlining key words in relation to the lesson's objective will help you when you come to revisit your notes.

Avoid copying every single word and writing huge chunks of factual information. Ensure you listen to what the teacher is saying first then make notes which summarise the key points they have said.

Ensure your notes are neat and logical; use headings and numbered points to organise your work.

If a book or report is cited, make note of the author, date and publisher so you can access the information easily.

Conclusions:

Many students find writing a conclusion difficult and tend to rewrite what they have already included in the main body of their essay. Follow these simple steps to write an effective conclusion:

- Briefly recap some of the main issues/ideas
- Summarise your main argument/findings/ideas
- Using the words from your essay title show how you have answered the question
- Reference the counter argument or opposing views to what you have found out/ your viewpoint.
- End your conclusion by highlighting the most important aspect of your findings/argument/viewpoint.

Planning:

Planning will always form a vital step in any assignment writing. It is important you are clear on what you are expected to write and how to structure your writing. Planning can help you think through your ideas, develop ideas and structure your work.

Different types of planning:

Plan in a way that suits you; mindmaps, bullet points, tables, lists, planning by paragraph.

If you find that you are struggling to plan do not worry. Perhaps you need to read around the subject a little more and make notes on what you feel is relevant.

Learning to think and write critically:



One of the most important steps from GCSE to A Level is the skill of thinking critically.

Writing will usually require you to deal with:

* What? - factual and/or descriptive information e.g. what, who, when, where

or can include giving examples and supporting these with quotes or summarising/paraphrasing source material in your own words (do not forget to still provide a reference to a source as evidence)

* How? - identifying processes and methods (again, can include giving examples to illustrate how something is/was done)

***But the most important aspect is

* **Significance** - this is the most important as it deals with 'why?' or 'what if?'

o What are the consequences of accepting a point of view or idea?

o What is the impact of a theory or concept or an event or an action?

o What is the relative importance of a piece of evidence (e.g. a point of view, an interpretation etc)?

o Why do viewpoints or researchers disagree/agree/change opinions over time?

o What is the weight of evidence - how and why is the evidence convincing? Are there enough examples to illustrate this point?

o Look for connections between points

The University of Nottingham, Academic support services, 2014

Writing style

When producing academic writing you must always ensure you write formally;

-avoid using slang or chatty expressions for example 'kind of' or 'sort of'.

-always write words in their full form for example 'should have', 'might have', 'do not'. (Please note the phrase 'might of' or 'should of' does not exist!)

-Words such as 'stuff' should never feature, try to be specific- what 'stuff' are you referring to?

-Avoid writing 'In this essay I will be...'

Proofreading and editing

Always make sure you have proofread your work. Often you will find that if you revisit your essay a few hours or days later you are able to identify errors and edit your work. You could always ask a friend or a family member to proofread your work too- often this will help with identifying whether or not you have been clear and to the point. Never submit an essay that you have not proofread.

How to present your writing

Ensure you are clear on the expectations of how your writing should be presented. Some students are required to include referencing and bibliographies; this can be a complicated process but is vital to ensure you avoid plagiarising* work.

*to take and use ideas, passages or copy work without referencing the original source and author. This is illegal and holds serious consequences.

In some writing you are expected to double space your work, include a word count or structure it in a certain way using headings. If you are not entirely clear on the expectations, ask your teacher.

Useful Websites:

-The University of Hertfordshire offers a great resource for revision and even creating your own revision timetable.

<http://www.revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision>

-Revise Smart is a website which offers a range of support from essay writing, personal statements and revision in subject areas.

<http://revisesmart.co.uk/>

-A useful revision website, you need to register but it's free!

<http://www.s-cool.co.uk/>

Connectives

Emphasising

Above all	Especially
In particular	Significantly
Notably	Indeed

Adding

Also	And
As well as	moreover
Too	

Sequencing

Firstly	Then
Secondly	Next
Eventually	Since
afterwards	Meanwhile

Cause and effect

Because	So
Therefore	Thus
Consequently	As a result

Contrasting

Whereas	On the other hand
Alternatively	Otherwise
Unlike	But

Illustrating

For example	Such as
For instance	In the case of
As revealed by	

Comparing

Equally	Likewise
Similarly	As with
Like	In the same way

Qualifying

Although	However
Unless	Except
Apart from	As long as

